

## Lecturers' Professional Occupational Competences Development at Selected Public TVET Colleges in Gauteng Province, South Africa

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**Abstract** – This study investigated the professional occupational competences of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) lecturers in Gauteng Province, South Africa. Specifically, the study examined the management and support intervention systems for lecturer development in five colleges. A multi-case study design was adopted for this qualitative research study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select fifteen participants. Semi-structured interviews were utilized to gather data, whilst thematic analysis was applied for data analysis. The findings reveal that colleges have inadequate professional occupational competence interventions in place, and that they lack the necessary management and administrative skills to facilitate effective professional occupational competence development for their lecturers. The study recommends that TVET college managers be trained appropriately to champion and model organizational learning in their institutions.

**Keywords** – Communities of Practice, Motivational Orientation, Professional Occupational Competence, Self-Regulation

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## 1 Introduction

Despite progress, the Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, globally, still faces a myriad of challenges. Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, and countries such as Sudan, Nigeria, Ghana and Malaysia reported stakeholder disengagement, inadequate infrastructure and disparities in access to resources and skilled workers (Akinyele & Bolarinwa, 2018; OECD, 2021; Owusu-Agyeman & Fourie-Malherbe, 2021; Ramadan & Xiaohui, 2019; Yeap et al., 2021). Regardless of these challenges, TVET lecturers are expected to deliver quality education and training to students. This expectation leaves lecturers distressed, disengaged, and exasperated (Amoo & Adam, 2022; Meiring, 2019).

The TVET sector capacitates its graduates with skills and competences which allow for the graduates to contribute meaningfully to the economy and the realization of the National Development Plan of 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011). TVET lecturers facilitate the skills development and training of students and should therefore be receiving the highest level of training and development themselves (Makgato, 2020). Unfortunately, TVET lecturers have inadequate levels of skills, knowledge and competences and a substantial number of them do not possess necessary qualifications (SASSETA Research Department, 2019; Zinn et al., 2019). The ineptitude has implications on the professionalization of lecturers and student outcomes in TVET colleges (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018; Ngubane-Mokiwa & Khoza, 2016).

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Conceptualizing Professional Occupational Competence

Professional occupational competence is a term used by Zinn et al. (2019) to describe a set of competences that are necessary for one to effectively and judiciously administer or facilitate their work. Zinn et al. further explain that professional occupational competence comprises of four elements, expressly, vocational knowledge, self-regulation, motivational orientation, and beliefs and values.

### 2.2 Vocational Knowledge

Vocational knowledge involves content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, pedagogical psychological knowledge as well as counselling knowledge (Zinn et al., 2019). Each concept is described below.

Content knowledge refers to a lecturer's comprehension of the concepts and principles within their subject area (Oztay & Boz, 2022). Pedagogical content knowledge encompasses knowing the most effective methods for presenting information in a way that is understandable to students; it also involves awareness of subject-specific challenges that students may encounter (Mulder, 2017). The knowledge needed to support teaching and learning, in

particular areas, is known as pedagogical psychological knowledge. This knowledge includes understanding student diversity, classroom management, and teaching and assessment techniques (Voss & Kunter, 2011). A lecturer's ability to impart skills like emotional intelligence, mentoring, psychosocial support, and sponsorship demonstrates his or her expertise in counseling. These attributes aim to encourage cognitive and behavioral changes in students (Moses & Anyi, 2015).

### 2.3 Self-Regulation

The capacity to successfully manage and control one's emotions, cognition, and actions in a range of diverse social contexts is known as self-regulation (Inzlicht et al., 2021). TVET lecturers were found to possess lower levels of impulse control and self-management, according to Rudman and Meiring (2018). Their behavior was worsened by the challenging conditions in which they worked. Self-regulation is a significant aspect of emotional intelligence which is essential for professional relationship and community management (Nopiah & Sattar, 2018). TVET lecturers have been shown to lack the necessary emotional intelligence and self-regulation to moderate their work and well-being (Meiring, 2019).

### 2.4 Motivational Orientation

The source of incentive for an individual to carry out a specific action is known as their motivational orientation. Motivational orientation stems from either external rewards (extrinsic motivation) or internal wants and needs (intrinsic motivation) (Noels et al., 2019). Leaders in the TVET sector must recognize the need for the management of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of lecturers to ensure that they remain encouraged and determined to perform their duties (Nzembe, 2017).

### 2.5 Values and Beliefs

The TVET sector is renowned for being siloed and non-collaborative; a culture and reputation that is reinforced by blame culture, low trust, and lack of confidence between stakeholders (Mtshali, 2021). The leader-lecturer relationship is marred by feelings of resentment, distrust, skepticism, with lecturers believing that their leaders are disinterested in lecturers' growth and development (Sithole et al., 2022). Lecturers choose to focus on classroom activities and student-lecturer interaction, whilst ignoring other stakeholders and factors within their college (Amoo & Adam, 2022). Lecturers value their students, and their prosocial motivation is connected to the difference they make in the lives of their students (Dahri et al., 2018).

Lecturers' professional development requires supportive and inclusive environments that will encourage and reward initiative and self-directedness. TVET colleges ought to inspire common vision, a sense of belonging and

common identity, shared meaning, and social learning (Taylor & Van der Bijl, 2018).

Notably, the underdevelopment of lecturers and their lack of preparation, which stems from a lack of competence development, are issues facing the TVET sector (Boka et al., 2016; Rudman & Meiring, 2018; Seameo Voctech, 2018). Incompetent lecturers contribute to the unemployability of TVET students, further making urgent the need for stakeholders to develop strategies and programmes that will correct these competence deficiencies (Nopiah & Sattar, 2018). Incompetent TVET lecturers are a global problem; many lecturers lack the necessary qualifications to teach TVET, and those that do frequently lack relevant work experience. Unfortunately, lecturers are often under-prepared for the task of teaching and training (UNESCO, 2021; Van Der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019; Yeap et al., 2021).

This study aimed to address the following research question: What are the development interventions that support and manage the professional occupational competences of TVET lecturers in selected colleges within the province of Gauteng?

### 3 Theoretical Framework

This study was underpinned by Wenger's theory of social learning, which is premised on the concept of communities of practice. This theory presents social learning at a communal level wherein learning is facilitated in a setting where meaning, belonging, identity and common practice are prioritized, thus leading to the building of what Wenger terms communities of practice (Wenger, 2000). Without a concerted effort to create a conducive environment for social learning, then professional occupational competences will continue to be at subpar levels in TVET colleges (Nyembe, 2022). Central to Wenger's theory is the idea that learning is a social process that takes place within communities of individuals who share a common domain of interests (Ordonez & Serrat, 2017). This theory provided an appropriate lens to examine how Gauteng TVET lecturers perceive social learning experiences and knowledge-sharing practices. Through the application of Wenger's theory of social learning, the interactions of TVET lecturers within their communities of practice were analyzed, including how such interactions influenced the acquisition and development of their professional occupational competences.

Wenger's theory of social learning qualified the investigation of how lecturers participate in their communities and how they define their professional identities (South African Qualifications Authority, 2016). Wenger asserts that engaging in a community of practice entails negotiating social identities in addition to gaining and sharing knowledge and skills (Rienties et al., 2021). An understanding of how identity formation and belonging impact the development of professional occupational competence is provided by this study, which looks at how Gauteng TVET lecturers interact with their professional duties and how they see themselves in the educational community.

Furthermore, an analysis of the concept of communities of practice in this study offered an opportunity for a deeper understanding of how lecturers

collaboratively learn, share knowledge, and shape their professional identities within the TVET context. This theoretical lens shaped the researcher's understanding of how the social interactions and collective engagements contribute to the development of professional occupational competences among TVET lecturers, which impact the teaching and learning in their respective colleges.

## **4 Ethics statement**

The Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment and the University of South Africa's (UNISA) Policy on Research Ethics were followed in the conduct of this study. The Unisa HRM Ethics Review Committee granted approval for the research ethics clearance application. The Ethics Certificate Reference Number 2020\_HRM\_011 was granted on the 08th of October 2020.

## **5 Research Methodology**

### **5.1 Research Approach and Design**

The study was grounded within an interpretivist paradigm. In this paradigm, participants are actively involved in all stages of the research process by providing context for their understanding and interpretation of a social phenomenon (Dudovskiy, 2018; Shah, 2021). To access each participant's lived experiences at work, a qualitative research methodology was utilized. A multi-case study design was adopted, enabling a comprehensive examination and analysis of the phenomena of lecturer professional occupational competence in the TVET context (Tkachenko et al., 2022). A multi-case study design was deemed appropriate to explain the phenomenon under inquiry, inclusive of a series of interpersonal interactions among participants and the actual context in which they take place (Dudovskiy, 2018).

### **5.2 Research Setting**

The Republic of South Africa's National Development Plan (NDP) has identified the TVET sector as a viable tool for achieving national goals (National Planning Commission, 2011). In South Africa, there are fifty public TVET colleges spread throughout the country's nine provinces. There are nine TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal, eight in Gauteng, eight in the Eastern Cape, seven in Limpopo, six in the Western Cape, four in the Free State, three in Mpumalanga, three in the North-West Province, and two in the Northern Cape (DHET, 2021). The primary focus of this study is the province of Gauteng, which has the second-highest number of TVET colleges in South Africa. The province is the most populous, has the highest GDP contribution and is more industrialized, thus making it the most suitable location to conduct this study.

### **5.3 Establishing Researcher Roles**

For this study, the researcher took on the role of interview-process facilitator and manager, establishing the data collection and analysis tools and ensuring that participants and their supervisors were adequately informed regarding the semi-structured interviews (Slembrouck, 2015). In conducting this study, the researcher, being an internal role player, relied on his familiarity with the TVET sector to arrange and manage the interview process.

### **5.4 Research Participants and Sampling Method**

Participants in this study were Gauteng public TVET Post Level 1 lecturers. These lecturers were appropriate for this study because they are lecturers who teach in classrooms and/or workshops and interact often with students, the college setting, and college administration. To choose individuals who had pertinent and/or expert knowledge of the topic of interest, purposeful sampling was used (Campbell et al., 2020).

### **5.5 Data Collection Method**

Semi-structured interviews were utilized in this study as a means of data collection due to their high efficacy in eliciting interpretations, opinions, attitudes, and case descriptions (Kallio et al., 2016; Ruslin et al., 2022).

### **5.6 Data Collection Procedure and Data Management**

To adhere to COVID-19 pandemic regulations, online semi-structured interviews were conducted. These online interview sessions were executed and recorded using the Zoom platform. The recordings were later transcribed into written text and further analyzed using the software ATLAS.ti (Version 9.0.20). The use of computer assisted data analysis facilitated and ensured a safe, systematic, and methodical approach towards data analysis (Silver & Lewins, 2020). Fieldnotes were kept by the researcher, and they contained reflections on the course and direction of the study (Trainor & Bundon, 2021).

### **5.7 Strategies Employed to Ensure Data Quality and Integrity**

The researcher placed a high priority on ensuring that the study's purpose was clear; that the case study design was in line with the research question and sampling methodology. The researcher ensured that the data collection method was appropriate, and that the analysis framework was sound. All these measures helped to ensure that the study attained credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017).

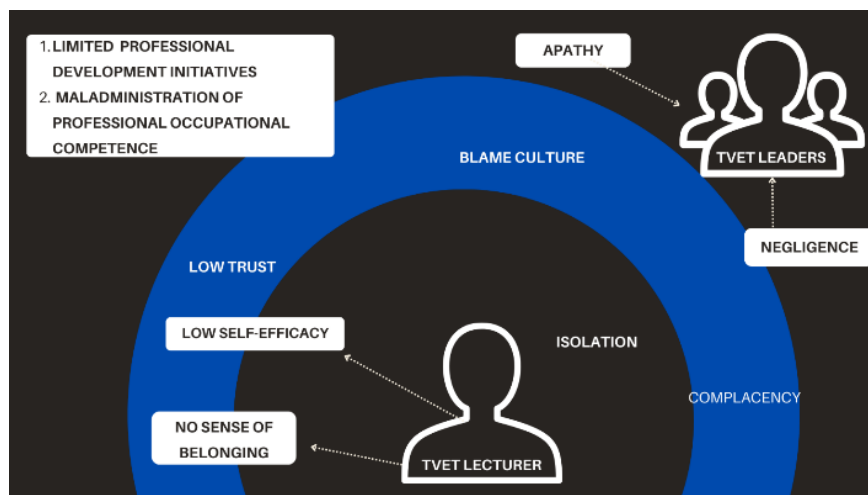
## 6 Data Analysis

For data analysis to be facilitated, an interview guide was compiled. This interview guide served as a structured tool to collect relevant data aligned with the research question (Roberts, 2020). It facilitated both data collection and categorization for reflexive thematic analysis, thus establishing initial categories for data organization. Moreover, it enabled the creation of themes. The interview guide anchored thematic analysis in the collected data, shedding light on how TVET lecturers' professional competences were developed and how the development interventions were managed and supported.

Following data collection, the recorded interviews were uploaded onto ATLAS.ti version 9.0.20. ATLAS.ti was used to transcribe, clean, and analyze the data (Friese, 2019). The transcribed interviews were coded and reorganized according to thematic categories (Saldaña, 2020). The subsequent evaluation and interpretation of this data were guided by inductive reasoning, as patterns observed in the data were used to derive meaningful insights (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). This approach ensured a rigorous analysis, contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the research question regarding the development interventions for TVET lecturers' professional occupational competences, including the management and support for such interventions.

## 7 Findings

The findings of the study are presented below under each corresponding theme. Figure 1. presents a graphical representation of the findings.



Source: author's compilation

### 7.1 Limited Lecturer Professional Occupational Competence Development Interventions

The study's findings highlight the lack of initiatives designed to support the professional occupational competence of TVET lecturers in the Gauteng Province. The results show a clear deficit in the availability of pertinent training initiatives, both in terms of the quantity and the relevance of programs attended by the participants. Notably, the predominant focus of training initiatives for lecturers was confined to accrediting/qualifying lecturers to be assessors and moderators, with requests for supplementary training frequently met with dismissive neglect. Lecturers uniformly lament the paucity of available training opportunities and expressed their dissatisfaction concerning poor training given by their colleges. The following are some of the responses given by participants elucidating their perspectives on the efficacy of training initiatives provided by the colleges in relation to professional occupational competences.

Participant A2 said, "I am privileged to have somebody close to me, who's also at a TVET environment and comparing their college to others, I will simply say that not enough has been done". From the response above, it was deduced that lecturers compared their working conditions or circumstances against those of their peers. The participant in this case concluded that there is a significant difference in how leaders from different colleges manage their colleges. The participant highlights that in their college, there seems to be a shortfall in terms of professional occupational competence development. Participant A3 also laid the blame of lack of lecturer professional development on college management. The participant said, "The stumbling block would be purely proper training and giving them the proper training in how to handle themselves professionally in the workspace". In as much as the lecturer bemoans the low quality of training that the leaders are availing for lecturers, she also acknowledges that there are challenges with the professional behavior of lecturers and further highlights the challenge that lack of training creates for the professionalization of lecturers. Participant C2 spoke about the irrelevance of 'most' of the training the lecturers received. The participant said, "Most of the workshops or I'll say training we attend are not relevant". The image that is being presented by the participant is that of lecturers being unwilling participants who are expected to attend irrelevant programmes that are of little benefit to their development. There is also a lack of self-directedness that is shown in the way in which the lecturers are recipients in the learning process and not proactive participants.

The comments by the participants unveil an organizational environment characterized by a hierarchical, inflexible, and constrained structure, thereby limiting the scope of both the manner and substance of training accessible to lecturers. TVET lecturers find themselves in a passive and/or subordinate position, lacking autonomy in shaping their own competence development. This deficiency in self-directedness and self-determination, as posited by the self-determination theory (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2006), impacts the desire to engage in learning and development initiatives. Consequently, the diminished motivation among lecturers has repercussions on their collective inclination to

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engage collaboratively, establish connections with peers and management, and partake in the formation of communities of practice (Steyn, 2008).

Participant E1 highlighted the issue of misadministration of the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) which is the primary mode of performance appraisal for TVET lecturers. The participant also alluded to the casual nature with which managers addressed lecturers' training needs. The participant said, "You fill that IQMS, personal development growth plan. You fill in the skills that you literally need to be trained on. You take it to the department, the skills development department, they will never even take you to a single course. They will take you to assessor training only". Despite the effort taken by the lecturer to compile a list of their training needs according to the IQMS requirements, these efforts are met with a lack luster response from leaders.

The findings of this study reveal that mismanagement and lecturer apathy were the main impediment in professional occupational competence development. The findings also show that lecturers are complacent and not self-directed. Participant D2 said, "As long as you are having a person who is not ready and prepared to walk an extra mile, I tell you, this is a person who will simply say as long as I am doing my job. It is okay. You will never achieve much from such kind of a person at the end of the day". This was further confirmed by Participant D3 who said, "It is complacency, relaxing. Like nobody is going to move me. Nobody is going to do anything you know". Deprived of personal agency, lecturers become their own impediments in the journey of lifelong learning and development.

The study found that the participants lacked the enthusiasm and motivation to manage their own personal growth. Participant E3 stated that "there was no proper training from universities or diploma, there's no course that teaches a lecturer to become a TVET lecturer". Participant E3's response puts to light the question of lecturer's identity and efficacy; both of which are crucial factors of social learning (Wenger, 2000).

With lecturers and college management not being able to facilitate their own learning, then colleges cannot capitalize on the benefits of social learning, learning organizations and communities of practice, thus further constraining the growth and impact of TVET colleges.

## 7.2 Maladministration of TVET Lecturers' Professional Occupational Competence

This study found that there was indifference and a lack of enthusiasm on the part of college leaders toward the facilitation of competence development, indicating a lack of prioritization of lecturer competence development. Contrary to the idea of fostering lecturer professional development, the leaders exhibited a pronounced emphasis on control and command management, monitoring, and output-oriented concerns. Lecturers, in turn, expressed a desire for leadership to adopt an empowering, encouraging, and coaching stance to propel them toward competence and professional advancement. Notably, the study identified a deficiency in the efficacy of lecturer competence development measures. Ineffectual preparation preceding these competence

development initiatives emerged as a contributory factor, aligning with the findings articulated by Buthelezi (2018). Furthermore, the courses designated for participant engagement demonstrated a misalignment, disproportionately emphasizing compliance with DHET regulations at the expense of substantive lecturer development objectives. Participant D1 said, “They need to put into practice what they preach because whatever we end up doing or whatever culture we end up settling for within our institutions, I feel it comes from management level”. Participant D1’s response further illuminates the need for college management not only to profess policy measures on professional development but to also action and model self-directed learning (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018). This study found that the training provided was not aimed at TVET lecturers and their development but rather on compliance and students’ needs. The state and the conditions of the lecturers was not prioritized. Participant B3 said: “They focus more on content, investment is not on you, but on improving content, so you can share with students but in terms of you as an individual, are you ok? Are you balanced? Are you surviving in class? You see these are the questions, which you would expect someone to ask me”.

Participant E2 questioned the way administration was done by the college management. The participant said “It boils down to monitoring if proper monitoring is done. Reports are being written; but we know where these things end up. If we can clean up that part and make sure that there's proper monitoring. Planning, we plan, but when it comes to monitoring and implementation, that is where the problem comes in. So that is the biggest challenge”. The participant suggests that leaders are negligent in their handling of monitoring and evaluation and that if this willful disregard were to be remedied then strides would be made in professional occupational competence development.

The findings of this study show that college management is not providing enough support to lecturers, which is increasing the lack of trust that exists between management and TVET lecturers. Lack of trust has a detrimental effect on comradery, belongingness, and common interests. These factors have an impact on commitment, motivation, and information sharing. The management of the college must offer resources and training and development prospects.

## 8 Discussion

The findings pertaining to deficient managerial support from TVET leaders aligns with Ngubane's findings (Ngubane, 2016), who found that lecturers frequently expressed discontent regarding the neglect of their training needs, coupled with a notable absence of proactive measures from college leaders to spearhead meaningful lecturer development initiatives. Within the realm of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), lecturers exhibit deficiencies in vocational knowledge, motivational orientation, and professional identity. It is imperative that all training initiatives are directed toward rectifying these competence deficiencies (Wedekind et al., 2016; Zinn et al., 2019). The void created by mismanagement, misadministration, and inadequate support renders lecturers entrenched in an environment devoid of opportunities for

learning, professional development, collaboration, belonging, and communal engagement. Contextual factors exert a considerable influence on the extent of engagement in educational or developmental pursuits (Andersson & Köpsén, 2015). TVET leaders bear the responsibility of fostering a culture of learning and creating an environment wherein educators can acquire knowledge and exemplify best practices. Consequently, there exists a pressing need for targeted interventions in the professional development of college leaders to equip them with the capacity to establish learning opportunities that advocate for social learning, knowledge sharing, and individual mastery (Anne, 2015).

Additionally, this study found that the Integrated Quality Management System (IQMS) was inaccurately and disorderly managed. Participant D1 claimed that apathy and negligence were displayed in matters pertaining to lecturers' problems, feedback, requests, and suggestions written in the IQMS forms. Participants in this study contended that the execution of their appended personal growth plans was not being prioritized; similar observations were articulated by Chetram (Chetram, 2017). Moreover, there exists a diminished level of trust between participants and TVET leaders, attributable partly to the mishandling and misadministration of professional occupational competence development as well as blame shifting from both college leaders and lecturers (Kayumbu, 2020). The absence of trust precludes the sharing of information, impedes relationship formation, and adversely affects partnerships and communities (Wenger, 2000). In the absence of legitimate peripheral participation, lecturers, in this context, find themselves unable to integrate, learn, progress, collaborate, and grow (Patel, 2018).

Additionally, TVET lecturers were identified as exhibiting complacency, resulting in a dearth of professional development. The study also showed that some lecturers were indifferent toward their personal growth, deflecting responsibility and attributing blame to college management. Lecturers' lack of agency facilitated inaction and incompetence. People, along with processes, culture, and structure, are pivotal contributors to the facilitation of complacency (Harrar et al., 2016). Effective social learning within any organization necessitates the engagement of personal factors and appropriate behavior (Bandura, 1971).

The finding that TVET lecturers view competence development initiatives as irrelevant and ineffectual is consistent with the claims made by Rawkins (2018) and the South African Qualifications Authority (2016). Both sources have emphasized the pervasive issue within the TVET sector, specifically the inadequacy of training and preparation for curriculum delivery. Lecturers are grappling with the intricate process of evolving into effective TVET educators. In the absence of a well-defined professional identity, lecturers encounter challenges in establishing enduring relationships with their leaders and peers. This predicament has far-reaching implications for their sense of belonging, engagement in professional networks, and involvement in social cohesiveness and social learning initiatives (Andersson & Köpsén, 2015).

Furthermore, lecturers express a sentiment of being thrust into a demanding situation, perceiving themselves as overworked and underpaid and insufficiently equipped for the responsibilities associated with instructing TVET

students. The feeling of inadequacy adversely affects their efficacy (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018; Papier, 2021). Rather than thriving, lecturers find themselves lethargic and languishing, a condition attributable to the absence of a shared vision for learning, a deficiency traceable to the low-quality training received at colleges and universities. It is imperative that Higher Education institutions, the DHET, TVET Colleges, and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) collectively exert concerted efforts to fulfill their respective roles in ensuring the actualization of the Policy on Professional Qualifications for Lecturers in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (DHET, 2013).

This study revealed a deficiency, characterized by Participant B2 as "a bit of a gap," in the training of lecturers. Noteworthy was the scarcity of instances wherein effective and pertinent training was reported, with participants citing diversity training, facilitator training, assessor training, and moderator training, as the only types of training they had received thus far. The training requisites for lecturers are inherently subjective, reflecting diverse perceptions of individual lecturers' needs. This highlights the need for a personalized and tailor-made approach towards individual lecturer training needs and not just a generic or blanket approach. There exists a demand for training that encompasses vocational knowledge, self-regulation, values, beliefs, and motivational orientation among lecturers. Proficiency in these domains is posited to enhance both their well-being and the efficacy of curriculum delivery (Meiring, 2019; Naiker, 2017).

When lecturers are deprived of opportunities to address what they perceive as gaps in their learning, repercussions ensue, adversely impacting their self-directedness, self-efficacy, engagement, determination, self-regulation, and overall productivity (Wentzel et al., 2016). Kanyane (2016) similarly observed lecturer discouragement stemming from the misalignment between their identified training needs and the offerings provided by their respective colleges in the realm of training and competence development.

## 9 Conclusion

The study's findings suggest that there are few professional occupational competence interventions occurring at the TVET colleges in the Gauteng Province, and that the professional occupational competence development of TVET lecturers has been poorly managed, supported, and administered. Relationships between TVET lecturers and management as well as the lecturers' independence have been adversely impacted by this circumstance.

It is recommended that TVET college management take cognizance of training and development needs of lecturers when deciding on what interventions to implement, and that adequate and relevant training and development interventions opportunities be provided to lecturer to enhance their professional occupational competences.

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