



From theory to practice: TVET college students' challenges in search of experiential training

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Abstract – The placement of Technical Vocational Education and Training college students on experiential training is a site of intense conversation. These debates have exposed serious challenges related to student experiential training. Issues such as the availability of placements, workplace-based exposure, and experiential training are recurrent themes embodied in these debates. Experiential training has not been insulated from the impact of uncertainties such as pandemics, economic depressions, civil unrest, etc., leading to the associated challenges; hence, it is a topical issue. The challenges confronting the N6 National Accredited Technical Education Diploma graduates searching for places to undergo the 18 months' experiential training are particularly interesting. According to the study this paper draws, many N6 graduates struggled to get experiential training places. Guided by the Experiential Learning Theory, applying a qualitative research design and using interviews to gather data from the purposively sampled students and staff, the study, whose objective was to identify the challenges encountered by TVET college learners in South Africa, identified a) the training institutions, b) funding of the experiential training, c) limited places for experiential training and d) a reluctance by the employers to host the learners as the major challenges. These findings underline the importance of shifting from the current approaches to student experiential training and pursuing perspectives that present student experiential training as a critical component of the education and training processes in South Africa.

Keywords: Experiential training, In-service training, Placement, Training, TVET College

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I. INTRODUCTION

THE search to secure places for experiential training has exposed the challenges encountered by the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) N6 Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) certificate graduate students in South Africa. There are serious challenges encountered by the N6 certificate graduates as they search for places where they can engage in the mandatory 18-month experiential training period, a pathway to a diploma qualification. The situation becomes dire for students from colleges in former rural Bantustan areas of South Africa. Many TVET college students, especially those from TVET colleges in former rural Bantustan-homelands areas of South Africa, encountered many challenges as they searched for experiential training places. This is not in line with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) policy, which requires that an N6 graduate must undergo 18 months of experiential training to graduate with a National Diploma (The Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework [HEQSF], 2012). The original NATED programmes were designed to support the artisan development system in the Department of Labour as required by the Manpower Training Act of 1981 (Education, Training and Development Practices-Sector Education and Training Authority [ETDP SETA], 2021). The advent of the national qualifications' framework led to the introduction and registration of the NATED programmes, and their implementation was confined to internal Department of Education processes (ETDP SETA, 2021). For more than 30 years, the N4-6 Report 191 courses have been the base for theoretical qualification for the training of students (DHET, 2018). The minimum requirement for entry into N4 courses would be one of the following: a Matric Certificate, or a National Certificate (N3), or a Level 4 National Certificate (Vocational);

candidates had to be 16 years old and above and be able to read and write in English (HEQSF, 2012). The N4 – N6 theoretical component takes 18 months to complete, and there is a mandatory 18-month experiential training to obtain the National Diploma. The NSFAS provides funding mostly to learners studying the theoretical component, N4 to N6.

In contrast, SETAs provide data on sector needs, engage with the industry, and help place learners for experiential training as part of skills development (DHET, 2017). The mandatory 18-month experiential training has proved to be a nightmare for N6 certificate graduates. The N6 certificate graduates struggle to finish their studies due to many factors (Kis & Field, 2009; Van Staden, 2015), and the placement for experiential training has been identified as one of those factors.

Although the placement of the N6 TVET graduates for experiential training is relatively new in South Africa, a considerable body of literature covers mostly the implementation and benefits of experiential training and, to a lesser extent, the challenges encountered by the learner's seeking placement. This paper argues that the placement challenges encountered by the N6 certificate graduates are mere symptoms of the underlying problems rooted in the political economy, and that rushing to label these challenges' placement problems' is a diversion that seeks solutions to placement problems instead of dealing with the problems rooted in the political economy. Firstly, the paper will give a cursory glance at experiential training from a South African perspective and then outline the framework that guided the study, which informs this paper to contextualise the argument that will ensue after the presentation of the study findings.

Putting theory into practice: Unpacking experiential training and benefits

Experience is a key element in the education and training processes because it complements education and training, which is why it is central to all education and training processes. The Council on Higher

Education posited that experiential training was a matter of curriculum, pedagogy, and directed training since it is a phase where students practice the theory they learned in class, from theory to practice (Winberg et al., 2011). According to the DHET policy, an N6 certificate graduate must undergo 18 months of experiential training to graduate with a National Diploma (HEQSF, 2012)

Experiential training: A cursory glance

The inclusion of the world of work into tertiary students' education and training lies at the heart of the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system in South Africa. Experiential training in technical and vocational education and training occurs in real work environments through participation in authentic work activities and interactions, producing goods and services (Winberg et al., 2011). Experiential training is a subset of workplace-based learning (Van Staden, 2015). It is distinguished from learning in enterprise-based training workshops and learning classrooms. It is a central tenet of the TVET curriculum because it emphasises learning through practice in the workplace (Gewe & Akoobhai, 2013). Experiential training content is hewn from the TVET curricula fodder, the country's, and the industry's skills needs. There are different models of experiential training in the tertiary education sector. In some models, the learner is an employee stationed in the workplace for longer periods than at college, which differs from other models where learners are students in education and training institutions most of the time (Atkinson, 2016).

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Experiential training models

There are several approaches to experiential training, including apprenticeships and traineeships, simulations, placements, and *inter alia*. This paper will focus on the placement model since this is the model adopted by the DHET.

Placement model

Placements immerse students in a workplace for a period to gain experience related to their field of study (Moyo & McKenna, 2021). Placement is also known by other terms such as in-service, attachment, experiential training, work-integrated learning, and workplace-based learning. Placements vary in length depending on the requirements of the course. The learners are placed in the industry to practice the theory they learned from N4 to N6. The justification is that the learners will benefit from experiential training (Gewe & Akoobhai, 2013). A student must pass all the subjects at N4, N5, and N6 levels and undertake mandatory 18-month experiential training to graduate with a National Diploma in specialisation (DHET, 2014). The placement experiential training model must be implemented in terms of training outcomes under the guidance of an expert in the skills area (Winberg et al., 2011). According to the study informing this article, the placed learners must record every daily activity related to the study area they experience in a logbook. They undertake these activities under the tutelage of an experienced worker at the hosting company or institution. The attached students will use the logbook to apply for a diploma after completing 18 months.

Experiential training: The benefits

The case for experiential training is commonly made regarding the accrued benefits. This paper will give some of the many benefits as snippets since the article focuses on the challenges encountered. Experiential training is a powerful form of pedagogy (Chardymova, 2019). It is fundamental to helping students develop learning skills (ibid., 2019). Learning these skills occurs best through real-life experiences that have actual effects (Winberg et al., 2011). Experiential training leads to career development as young people sharpen and clarify their career plans. The learners can engage in research projects, work visits, and real work tasks, amplifying their career decision-making (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training [CEDEFOP], 2023). The other benefit of experiential training is that of youth transitions. Sweet (2013) refers to the opportunities for young people to combine learning and work as one of the key features of

successful transition systems. Experiential training also improves the quality of TVET education. Experiential training is another method of staff development. Staff members supervising or training the learner can be supervisors or trainers (Sweet, 2013). The next part of the paper outlines the framework that guided the study.

Experiential learning theory

The Experiential Learning Theory guided the study from which this article draws. This article will apply this theory as a framework to illuminate the challenges encountered by the learners due to experiential training. The Experiential Learning Theory originates from Dewey's (1938) ideas (McCarthy, 2020). The theory interprets experiential training as an interplay between what the learner brings and what happens at the workplace (Cherry, 2022). The theory posits that knowledge is best understood and useful when applied. The theory seeks to understand the nature of experiential training, what happens when learners are engaged in workplace learning, and the challenges experienced (Cherry, 2022). The theory also seeks to understand how educators track learners on experiential learning (McCarthy, 2020). Experiential Learning Theory identifies experience as a key element in the educational processes, a key tenet of Dewey's (1938) propositions. The study chose this theory because it presents a distinct and realistic understanding of experiential training by interpreting it as a critical component of education and training processes. The theory allows a deeper understanding of the TVET college's experiential training challenges.

III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify the challenges encountered by the TVET college N6 graduates in search of experiential training
2. Suggest solutions that could help address the challenges encountered by the N6 graduates searching for experiential training.

IV. METHODS

Research approach

This study used the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research methods centre on non-numerical and non-statistical techniques for collecting, analysing, and producing information, using language to convey ideas (Bhangu et al., 2023). The study opted to use the qualitative approach instead of the quantitative and mixed methods because it was going to centre on non-numerical and non-statistical techniques for collecting, analysing, and producing information. It was also going to use language to convey ideas.

Research paradigm

The study used the interpretive paradigm out of the three paradigms, which include positivism and critical theory. The interpretivism paradigm views truth and realities as socially constructed (William, 2024). The study opted for this paradigm because it dealt with the challenges encountered by students in the education and training institutions, and the socially constructed truth and reality in the TVET terrain.

Research design

This article draws on a case study from July 2023 to February 2024. Applying a qualitative research design, the study sought to identify the challenges encountered by the Technical and Vocational Education and Training N6 graduate students in search of experiential training. It also sought to find solutions to mitigate these challenges. For the study, fifty (25 males and 25 females) N6 Report 191 graduates due for experiential training and five staff members from the public TVET college under study were purposively sampled. In sampling the participants, the focus was on N6 graduates searching for experiential training, and the college staff concerned with the placement of these graduates. The study did not consider the biography of the participants during sampling because it would have less bearing on the research findings. This non-probability

sampling technique was applied across the 11 diploma courses of the seven public college campuses under study.

Table 1: Sample distribution of student participants

No	Courses	Number learner
1	Business Management	4
2	Civil Engineering	6
3	Electrical Engineering	6
4	Financial Management	4
5	Hospitality	4
6	Human Resource Management	6
7	Legal Secretary	4
8	Marketing Management	4
9	Public Management	4
10	Public Relations Management	4
11	Tourism Management	4
Total		50

The study did not consider students who graduated in December 2020 or before because this would widen the scope of the study. Most students were not placed for experiential training, while others were engaged in menial jobs not related to their fields of study. Three staff members were from the placement office, and two other participants were from the senior management. The study ensured that the rights and welfare of each participant were protected through informed consent, ongoing respect for the participants, right to confidentiality and privacy, and right to anonymity.

Data collection methods

The study used face-to-face and telephone (where face-to-face was impossible) semi-structured interview methods to collect participant data. This paper also used the college's placement database to elicit the statistical data of the placed and unplaced learners and to get their contact details (email and mobile numbers) to conduct interviews. The research sought permission from the college authorities to access and use the college database information. A total of 20 N6 graduates were interviewed over the phone, while 30 were interviewed face to face. The other participants were interviewed face-to-face.

Data analysis

Data analysis is a process that the researcher adopts to examine and interpret participants' data. The method systematically analyses the meaning of collected information (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002). Thematic analysis was then employed to analyse data from interviews with the study participants. The analysis process was thematic to generate themes from the data through open coding. Six steps of the thematic analysis followed during the analysis process: familiarisation with data, coding, searching for themes, reviewing, defining and naming, and writing up themes. Of central interest were the core themes that the participants referred to – the information or message that they wanted to pass on. Some methods used included simple counting of the interview responses and finding patterns in the qualitative data where many participants referred to similar trends of the challenges. An inductive approach (Creswell, 2014) was used to derive categories of constructs from the interview data. Themes were generated using open coding, allowing for intensive interview data analysis and creating multiple meanings from this data source. The data generated textually describes the data findings, summarising results and providing context. In presenting the findings of the study, pseudonyms are used to protect the identity of the participants and the institution where necessary. The study tested the validity and reliability of the research findings, recommendations, and conclusions by applying data source triangulation, where interviews from students, college staff, and the college database were used as data sources. It was believed that this approach would ensure that the research design, methods, and conclusions are robust, transparent, and free from bias, ultimately enhancing the accuracy and trustworthiness of the results.

V. RESULTS

TVET college students' challenges in search of experiential training

The study that informs this article found that the learners could not

secure experiential training because of 1) the training institutions' approaches to experiential training, 2) lack of funding, 3) limited places for experiential training, and 4) unwillingness by some employers to host the learners for experiential training. Besides the named challenges, this paper made some worrisome findings: some N6 lacked the knowledge on procedures to follow when searching for experiential training, some N6 graduates had spent two or more years without being placed for experiential training, and there seemed to be some underplaying on how difficult it was; to find placements for experiential training in the TVET colleges that had huge scars of apartheid atrocities. Despite all these adversities, the strategic policymakers seemed to have naive optimism even when it was objectively less likely that there could be good outcomes. Although these findings could have been recorded in some studies, these worrisome findings could be a silver lining as they could lead to clues and cues to finding lasting solutions to the identified challenges. These worrisome but interesting findings will provide a point of departure for the article's discussion.

College as an obstacle to experiential training

The study findings showed that the college can hinder experiential training. Participants alleged that the challenges related to experiential training began at the college level. They alleged that the college did not educate the students about experiential training. They wanted the college to educate the students and staff about experiential training. The participants believed experiential training advocacy would make learners aware of the procedures and processes that ensued after passing N6. Lusanda had this to say:

"The other frustrating thing is that of knocking door to door, asking for assistance on experiential training, only to discover that the staff has little or no information on the subject. As if that is not enough, it is a challenge to get a logbook in some instances. No wonder our lecturers dump us after passing N6 as if we are done with our diploma, and why do some students think that after finishing N6, they are done with their diploma studies? The college lecturers forget about us once we pass N6" (Lusanda).

This finding resonates well with the finding of Atkinson (2020), who found that learning institutions were not doing enough to market experiential training and engage employers. It was suggested that colleges do more to assist in experiential training matters. The college needed a vibrant and robust experiential training organ to drive the experiential training programmes.

Funding challenge

The findings revealed that funding could be a challenge in the search for experiential training at the TVET colleges. Participants in the study indicated that in some cases, they found places to undertake their experiential training, but the college did not have money for a stipend. In this paper, most learner participants identified the lack of funding as the reason they were not placed for experiential training. Most participants said that some of the workplaces they approached wanted assurance that the college would pay a stipend for them. Unfortunately, the college could not promise because there were no stipend funds. Zezethu said:

"The biggest challenge is failure to get a placement for experiential training due to a lack of stipend money. The workplaces I approached asked for a commitment letter from my college stating that it would pay me a stipend during my experiential training. My college said it could not write such a letter because it did not have the money to pay my stipend. The companies do not want me to do experiential training without citing the legal repercussions that they were experiencing. It has been two years of waiting for experiential training, which frustrates me" (Zezethu).

An interview confirmed Zezethu's challenge, which this researcher had with one of the staff members from the placement office. The staff member indicated that funding for learners' placement was a big challenge. Mali had this to say:

"Funding is a huge challenge when it comes to student placement. The money we get from the SETAs is just a drop in the ocean; it does not even meet a quarter of the money we need to fund the number of students in our placement database. We have tried to identify other potential funders, but they are scarce. We just must rely on the allocation from the SETAs, and we understand the

concerns of the students" (Mali).

The identified challenge resonates well with Yende's (2021) finding that the funding of experiential experience was a challenge. In this paper, some participants indicated they had found jobs, doubling as experiential training. However, some learners had unsuccessfully tried that route, an indication that these learners were desperate to finish their courses. Similarly, Van Staden (2015) supports that the learner participants were panicking, indicating that time was running out.

Limited places for absorbing the students for experiential training

The findings indicated that limited places for absorbing students for experiential training could be challenging at the TVET College. Participants said a lack of places to accommodate them for experiential training was challenging. This challenge was a direct result of the small size of their local industry base, which was too small to accommodate the students for experiential training. The situation worsened when the nature of courses offered by the colleges was factored in. It seems the courses offered by the college did not speak to what the local industry was offering. The participants pointed out that some workplaces did not have vacancies for the skills they wanted to experience. As Buhle put it:

"Our towns are so small, and so is the industry, a situation that translates into a few places for experiential training. Besides, most of the skills we want to experience are not found in our towns. I must go to bigger cities to hunt for experiential training, which costs a lot of money I cannot afford" (Buhle).

The study found that most students struggled to get a place for experiential training because of a mismatch of skills or a small base of industries. Many students wanted human resources management skills and public management skills, but could not absorb them because there was little or no space for such skills. This finding is in line with Chardymova (2019), who found that the space for experiential training was shrinking at an alarming pace, and that of the World Bank (2019), which observed that there was already a shortage of spaces to place learners for WBE, In-service training, Internships, and experiential training.

Lack of employers in hosting students for experiential training

The study findings suggested that the lack of employers to host students for experiential training could be challenging at TVET College. Participants indicated that some employers were unwilling to host students for experiential training. The study participants, especially those from the placement office, indicated that the employers were unwilling to take their learners for experiential training for various reasons. The reasons varied from insufficient resources, costs associated with hosting the students, and lack of time to invest in supervision and guidance, inter alia. Noxolo from the placement office said:

"There is a challenge of some employers who do not want to host our students. Some employers indicate that they do not have the workforce to guide and train our learners, and some say they do not have the resources for programme monitoring and quality control. Some employers indicated they had financial challenges and could not meet the costs of hosting our students for experiential training" (Noxolo).

The finding aligned with Van Staden's (2015) study, which found that some employers were unwilling to host learners for experiential training due to limited financial and human resources. Mthembu, the Vice Chancellor of Durban University of Technology, bemoaned that employers were unwilling to place students in the work environment (Naidoo, 2022). The Department of Higher Education and Training Minister bemoaned the same challenge, saying he had visited many workplaces, including those closer to TVET college campuses, and found that no single TVET student was placed there (Pillay, 2023).

These were the challenges the N6 certificate graduates encountered in public TVET colleges pursuing experiential training. The ferreted data indicated that most but a few graduates in the public TVET college under study had challenges securing placements for experiential training. Some students waited up to two years without securing a place for experiential training.

VI. DISCUSSION

The discussion is set against the backdrop of high numbers of N6 certificate graduates failing to secure placements for experiential training due to the identified challenges. This article illuminated N6 graduates' challenges in seeking experiential training placement. The challenges presented by the article insinuate that there is more to the placement problems encountered by the N6 graduates from the TVET college under study. This article argues that the country could identify the challenges encountered as placement problems when underlying problems could be rooted in the political economy. This notion stems from the seemingly naive optimism (a belief that good outcomes are more likely and bad outcomes less likely in any situation) deduced from the directives made by the DHET regarding placing N6 graduates for experiential training, a common belief in political economies. The DHET's mandatory 18 months of experiential training gives the impression that there are readily available placement spaces and assumptions that there is a seamless movement of students from N6 to experiential training (from theory to practice). Such impressions and assumptions can be described as naive pessimism at best because it expect successful and seamless placement of students from N6 to experiential training. It must be highlighted that saying these sentiments does not mean that the placement of students for experiential training is failing, but that success is limited to certain areas.

Regarding the findings, the major challenge encountered by the TVET colleges was the lack of places to engage in experiential training because there were no well-established industries in the areas where the college under study was located. The TVET College in this paper is in the former Bantustan homeland area (Transkei) and can be identified as a rural, former Bantustan college. The Bantustans were often overcrowded, lacked resources, and had poor infrastructure, with no meaningful industrial activities leading to widespread poverty and marginalisation, which still negatively impacted their ability to make meaningful transformation (Mutereko & Wedekind, 2016; Powell, 2012). This socio-economic discrimination endured by the Bantustan people cascaded into learning institutions, with the Further Education and Training (FET) colleges failing to get placements due to the lack of industries, in stark contrast to the white-only privileged FET colleges established during highly developed industries. It becomes naive optimism to imagine that TVET colleges located in the previously Bantustan areas can easily get placements for experiential training. For the sake of this argument (HEQSF, 2012), which declares that:

The N6 certificate graduates must undergo an 18-month experiential training to graduate with a National Diploma.

The HEQSF (2012) seems to underplay the difficulty of getting placements for WBE, WIL, In-service training, and Internships in the former Bantustan areas. The policy makes serious assumptions about the ability of colleges to decide on placements with employers who hardly exist because of a very thin industrial base. Even if the colleges were in a relatively low industrial base like the college under study, the student population and industrial base are not proportional, with too many students chasing very few placements' spaces. This case demonstrates that the failure to get placement for experiential training is a symptom of the underlying apartheid legacy of a discriminatory and marginalisation policy of underdeveloping industries in the Bantustan areas and not a placement challenge.

The HEQSF (2012), which seems to be grounded on the prescriptions of human capital theory, underestimates the difficulties of finding placements in liberal market economies, a prediction already made long before it happened (Allais & Nathan, 2014). The human market theory assumes that placements for skills development are readily available in free market economies and that once students are empowered through skills training, they can easily get jobs (Allais & Nathan, 2014). Contrary to this assertion, it is already known that colleges cannot find placements or are struggling to find placements in these free-market economies. This was all entirely predicted by the Revisionist theorists (Allais & Nathan, 2014) and observed by the World Bank (2019). It is

surprising that scholars and strategic stakeholders in education and training are surprised and worried that TVET colleges have placement challenges, when predictions have already been made. The rush to label these "placement problems" might be a diversion seeking technical solutions for problems rooted in the political economy. The HEQSF (2012) shows how the naive optimist (human capital) position is still prevalent regarding the placement of students for experiential training; to simply believe that successful placements were more likely in all public TVET colleges regardless of the apartheid legacies, the poor market economies, times of uncertainties, etc. This argument is so, taking on the colleges' accounts at their word, that in some cases, it appears that the experiential training route is failing despite the best efforts of the colleges and DHET. Experiential training is a social relation that is difficult to achieve in disadvantaged and less privileged colleges, not a technical one. It requires epistemological raptures such as bridging and bonding capital and focusing on creating conditions necessary for placements.

The other challenge highlighted by the study was funding. This finding is a reality that is continuously being underplayed. The Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education Training Authorities (ETDP-SETAs), whose mandate is to fund students on experiential training, among other tasks, is struggling in that regard due to the lack of funding (Yende, 2021), and according to the placement office of the college under study. This article is not in dispute with the fact that there are TVET institutions, especially in areas where industries are well developed, which have developed partnerships with industries in their localities to place learners in different workplaces for experiential training. The case of the Gauteng province, where most public TVET colleges had established learner placement offices at their head offices to source work placement and had developed partnerships with their local industries where they placed their learners, is a good example (Makole et al., 2023). This article is aware of the government's efforts to address past inequalities and injustice, which may take a long time because of limited resources. The article is aware of the huge resource-deficiency scar left by the apartheid system, the unfavourable micro and macro environment, more social demands against a shrinking economy, economic mismanagement, etc., all of which present a mammoth task for the government to address. The article also acknowledges that funding education and training programmes is expensive but necessary. Most developing countries struggle to fund educational programmes due to financial constraints and heavily rely on donor funding (Moyo & McKenna, 2021). In South Africa, financing experiential training is taking its toll on the fiscus, as found in the study from which this article draws. According to the study, the SETAs and NSF struggled to fund skills development programmes. The purpose of this discussion is to argue that it is naive optimism to think that it is easy to successfully place students for experiential training in TVET colleges located in former Bantustan areas because of the apartheid deficiency legacies left, unlike in areas such as Cape Town, Johannesburg, Durban, Port Elizabeth *etcetera*, where the apartheid policies allowed industrial establishment and growth. Given the enormous demand for funding from the South African treasury, it is also naive optimism that the students will easily get funded for experiential training.

VII. CONCLUSION

This article identified the training institutions' approaches to experiential training, lack of funding, limited places for experiential training, and the unwillingness by some employers to host the students for experiential training as the main challenges encountered by N6 certificate graduates, especially those from the TVET colleges located in former Bantustan areas in South Africa. Other studies supported these findings, indicating that TVET colleges in formerly discriminated and marginalised areas encountered such challenges. Guided by the Experiential Learning Theory, applying a qualitative research design, and using interviews to gather data from the purposively sampled students and staff of a public TVET college in the former Bantustan area,

this paper concluded that the identified placement challenges were just symptoms of the underlying problems generated by the apartheid system and the modern political economies. There is a need to address these underlying problems first if remedial measures are to be found to address the implementation challenges.

Firstly, to address the funding initiatives should focus on supporting the establishment and growth of Small to Medium Business Enterprises (SMEs) in the small towns located in former Bantustan areas. The funding should be coupled with economic policies that are pro-establishment and growth of these SME policies that reverse the legacies of the apartheid system. This approach ensures sustainable outcomes, economic growth, and the development of industry-driven TVET courses as the DHET, the TVET colleges and campuses, and the SMEs industry develop relevant qualifications that respond to the local labour market needs and the employers' needs that meet partnerships for experiential training placements. These partnerships must ensure that curricula are aligned with market needs and create opportunities for experiential training. Secondly, the government should maximise funding utilisation by directing resources towards engaging and supporting SMEs, industry stakeholders, and TVET colleges in these smaller towns. Targeted funding should ensure the availability of stipends for students for experiential training. The government, through NSFAS, should reconsider restructuring the bursary funding model, where NATED students are funded seamlessly from N4 to experiential training. Placing students on experiential training must involve understanding the relationship between the local community and the TVET college, between what is known about experiential training and what needs to be done to improve both for everyone. This endeavour demands a questioning and contrarian mindset that challenges the conventional wisdom about challenges that militate against placements. It needs a festival of ideas that tolerates the diversity of views and approaches, which is becoming a crucible for new solutions and thought leadership. These challenges can be addressed by engaging in informed and innovative approaches enabled by vibrant, ethical, critical, and professional debates that enrich the discourse around the challenges that militate against the placement of N6 graduates for experiential training. At best, the idea of remaining stagnant, poised in the status quo is naive.

VIII. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

There are no conflicts of interest in this paper.

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