CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter discusses the research findings presented in the previous chapter, and puts forward recommendations.

In the previous chapter, educators noted that there had been few, if any changes in the curriculum and felt that there was a need for change. They emphasised the absence of practicals as cause for concern. The curriculum developer agreed that there had been no substantial curriculum change. He cited report 190/191 and FET Act of 1998, as contributing to the stagnation in the curriculum.

Employers, on the other hand, continue to recruit learners from the FET college, but do not feel that the college fully equips learners for the workplace. The college provided only the basics, and training continued at the workplace. Colleges play a vital role in qualifying learners for a trade. One of the entry requirements for trade test is that the candidates have N2, which is obtainable only at FET colleges.

Learners were divided on the question of whether or not the FET college empowered them to cope in the world of work. Some felt that they were empowered, but others disagreed. This response was understandable as the electrical field is very broad, and companies often operate in specialized fields.
Are colleges empowering learners?

Learners were divided on the matter of whether or not colleges were empowering. It is the duty of the college to empower learners with skills required in the workplace. Some learners felt that colleges empowered them, while others did not. This could be due to a college curriculum that caters for small portion in the broad electrical field, or that provides a generic curriculum which does not engage in specialisations.

One learner indicated that colleges contributed to joblessness, pointing to the large number of college graduates who were unemployed. This agrees with the Department of Labour’s HRDS (2001), which pointed out that limited capabilities of people are often a restricting factor in the attainment of socio-economic development.

Learners and educators repeatedly referred to the incorporation of a practical component as something that would improve the curriculum. Practicals should be carried out using the latest technology; this would equip learners with relevant skills. Relevant skills development is the kind of development that makes companies interested in the colleges’ products. Learners and educators seem to believe that strengthening the practical component of the curriculum could narrow the gap that currently exists.
On-the-job-training

In the light of the colleges’ lack of capacity to equip learners to cope with specialized equipment and machinery, employers have the task of training learners after graduation from college. This on-the-job training is aimed at reshaping and sharpening skills to suit their companies.

Many companies such as ESKOM have their training centres accredited and registered with South African Quality Authority (SAQA) as service providers. This means they can now offer courses that are accredited and NQF-aligned, and can issue certificates that are nationally recognized. If this route is followed, companies might do their own education, training and development of staff in-house. These developments pose challenges to FET colleges in the future. If colleges do not improve their performance, fewer learners will be sent to colleges for education and training in future.

Nature of the curriculum

FET colleges perceive the curriculum as a document. This approach is rather prescriptive and neglects social influences. It suggests that the College operates on the supply-led model rather than demand-led model of education and training. Instead of communicating with potential employers and identifying local employment prospects, the colleges deliver a curriculum prescribed by the department of education.
Educators were aware of deficiencies in the curriculum, but tended to hold someone else responsible. The educators seemed to think the responsibility lay with the state-appointed curriculum developer. The curriculum developer in turn, blamed government policy for lack of direction. From this it seems as if the state owns the curriculum, and educators are not viewed as partners, but rather merely as tools used to deliver curriculum.

**Why stagnation?**

The curriculum developer pointed out that the curriculum had not changed for many years. National policy does not identify responsibility for curriculum change. In addition to this, the education specialist mentioned incapacity due to a lack of funds. According to the curriculum developer the FET sector recapitalization plan is concerned with funding colleges’ transformation processes, which includes a change in the curriculum and introduction of NQF-aligned programmes. The national Chief Education Specialist pointed out that these new programmes had begun to be offered in some colleges.

Educators did not express confidence in the curriculum offered by FET colleges. They questioned the job prospects of their learners. They believed that only a small number would acquire a job after graduation. These feelings show that there is a problem with the existing curriculum, and this has a negative impact on learners. I think to boost the morale of both the learners and educators, companies should play a greater part in the colleges. Colleges should organize functions such as symposia where companies showcase and give talks to learners on prospective careers. They could also organize
educational tours to various companies, and talk to professionals within companies to motivate aspiring learners.

**The need for change in curriculum**

It was evident that there were shortcomings in the curriculum from educators’ perspective. The curriculum is outdated and requires urgent attention. In addition to the outdated curriculum, learners and educators cited the importance of incorporating practicals in the curriculum to enhance learning. Electrical trade theory N1 and N2 uses extracts of rules and regulations from an outdated SABS code of practice. It is actually dangerous to continue teaching with outdated rules and regulations. Changes in the electrical trade theory N1 and N2 textbook were negligible, and did not address the problem of the relevance of the curriculum in relation to the demands of the workplace.

Educators were aware of what was going on in their environment. Educator 2 said that technology was one of the contributing factors in an unstable environment. Educator 2 believed that even if some changes were made in the curriculum, the basic concepts and principles in the electricity curriculum would remain the same. This raises the possibility of a core generic curriculum, with a number of elective courses to prepare learners for specializations in the electrical field.

In the light of the above, when the new curriculum is designed certain modules can be designed to cut across other areas within the electrical field.
**Curriculum change**

Stenhouse (1975) defined the curriculum as an intention, plan or prescription, an idea about what educators would like to happen in education institutions. FET colleges have adopted curriculum as a prescriptive document. According to Stenhouse (1975), the approach to curriculum change adopted by educators is likely to be document revision. However, the government intends to move away from the technocratic curriculum to a curriculum that is constructed in contextual social process. In the new dispensation, educators and all other involved parties need to be involved in curriculum development, in order to produce a curriculum that reflects reality, and addresses the needs of the society it serves.

**Relationships**

Employers see the main task of FET colleges as educating learners about the basics and preparing them for the trade test. Employers, learners and educators agree that there is a need to develop relationships between companies and FET colleges. There would be a mutual benefit in this type of collaboration. Colleges would be able to align curricula so that they suit the needs of the employer. On the other hand, employers would have a say in the development of the curriculum, so they would benefit from better-prepared graduates. Such interactions are vital to narrow the gaps that exist between the education system and labour.
Stakeholders should function as a system; they should acknowledge their interdependency. To quote Letseka (undated): “any change in one system causes a change in another”. All parties that need to be involved in curriculum changes form this system, with its sub-systems.

**Suggestions for further research**

Perception changes of educators, learners and employers due to the implementation of FET college recapitalization plan.