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2014-03-26
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The Alignment and Responsiveness of Further Education and Training Colleges towards the Skills Needed by Local Businesses

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Research report presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Development Studies in the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand

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2014

DECLARATION

I, Zakhele Hopewell Dlamini declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author and the reproduction and publication thereof by the University of the Witwatersrand will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted this work for obtaining any qualification.

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ABSTRACT

This report examines the responsiveness of Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges towards the skills needed by local businesses. According to the then Department of Education (1998) the performance of FET Colleges worldwide is judged by the responsiveness and alignment of the learning and training offered at the colleges in relations to the skills needed by local businesses and industries, and the extent to which learners are offered meaningful access to lifelong learning opportunities. However, in the South African context this seem not to be happening as reports from the business sector, skills development experts and researchers in the skills development field indicate that FET Colleges in the country appear not to be responsive to the skills needed by local businesses. This has continued despite the recapitalisation intervention by the government which involved a R1.9 Billion injection between 2005 and 2007 aimed at enhancing the functioning of all public FET Colleges in the country.

In pursuing the study, a research project was carried out in the Nelspruit Central Business District (CBD) and Kanyamazane community of the Mbombela Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province, focusing on intermediate engineering and related skills, such as, artisan skills acquired through FET College National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) programmes. The NCV programmes were introduced in 2007 by the then Department of Education working together with the Department of Labour with the intention of integrating theoretical learning and practical training within FET Colleges in order to enable FET Colleges to produce graduates that were not only practical and technical skills oriented but were also knowledgeable in their chosen fields and were academically oriented as well.

The sample of the study involved FET College staff members, FET College learners, local businesses and a Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Public Works officer, using qualitatively data collection techniques such as interviewing, observation and content analysis.

The findings of the study revealed that FET Colleges were perceived by businesses not to be responsive to the skills needs of local businesses. The views expressed by the businesses in the study were that FET College learners appeared to possess good theoretical knowledge of their chosen fields but demonstrated poor quality in the execution of practical and technical tasks such as the use of basic tools and other equipments, leading to most college graduates requiring intensive practical training after graduation before they can be competent to work independently. Nevertheless, the study demonstrated that FET Colleges faced various challenges that influenced negatively the practical training segment of learners, one of which being fewer opportunities for learners to access workplace-based training placements within businesses to acquire practical and technical skills. The lack of workplace-based training opportunities for learners emerged as the major contributor to the disjuncture between the good display of theoretical knowledge and the poor practical skills possessed and demonstrated by college learners.

Finally, the study presents some recommendations highlighting the need for FET colleges to transform the structure and delivery of the NCV programmes to enhance the synergy of the theory-practice combination, and the need for collaboration between FET colleges and local businesses guided by information sharing, material, financial and training support between the two sectors.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to sincerely thank the FET College and its two campuses and the businesses that were involved in the study for opening their doors for me, without their contribution this study would not have been possible.

I would also like to thank my supervisor, Professor David Dickinson for all the wealth of advice and academic input he gave me which made this research report what it is.

Also, I would like to thank my entire family, especially my parents, Esther and Gift Dlamini, and my sisters Lindelwa and Xoliswa for their emotional and financial support when I needed them most during the research process.

Finally, I would like to thank God Almighty and my Ancestors (AboDlamini Abahle) for being with me and guiding me this far.

LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABET	: Adult Basic Education and Training
CHE	: South African Council of Higher Education
DoE	: Department of Education
DoBE	: Department of Basic Education
DoL	: Department of Labour
DoHE	: Department of Higher Education
ETQA	: Education and Training Quality Assurance
FET	: Further Education and Training
HE	: Higher Education
HEQC	: Higher Education Quality Committee
HRD	: Human Resource Development
HRDS	: Human Resource Development Strategy
HRM	: Human Resource Management
HRDSSA	: Human Resource Development Strategy South Africa
HSRC	: Human Science Research Council
IDP	: Integrated Development Plan
NATED	: National Technical Diploma (N1-N6)
NCV	: National Certificate: Vocational
NSD	: National Skills Development
NQF	: National Qualifications Framework
merSETA	: Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services SETA
RSA	: Republic of South Africa
SAQA	: South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	: Sector Education and Training Authority
TVET	: Technical Vocational Education and Training

Table of Contents

Chapter one: Introduction and Background

1.1 Introduction ……. 10

1.2 Problem Statement …… 11

1.3 Research Question…… 12

1.4 Background Information…… 13

1.5 Methodology……. 14

1.6 Chapter Outline…… 14

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction …….. 16

2.2 Background to Vocational and Technical Training in South Africa…… 16

2.3 The Transformation of Vocation and Technical Training in South Africa…… 19

2.4 Private FET Colleges in the Changing South African Learning and Training Environment…… 22

2.5 The Role of FET Colleges towards Skills Development……. 24

2.6 Relationship between Education, Training and Employment……. 26

2.7 Influence of Technological Advancements on FET Colleges……. 27

2.8 Conceptual Framework…… 30

2.9 Conclusion……..……... 32

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction …….. 33

3.2 Research Design and Approach ……. 33

3.3 Sampling Technique……. 35

3.4 Data analysis…… 36

3.5 Ethical Consideration…… 37

3.6 Limitations to the Study…… 38

3.7 Summary…….. 39

Chapter Four: Context and Descriptive Background

4.1 Introduction…….. 40

4.2 Contextual Background of the Mbombela Municipality……. 40

4.3 The College and the Programmes Offered …… 41

4.4 Workplace-Based training…… 43

4.5 Apprenticeships and Learnerships…… 44

4.6 Assessment of Learners…… 45

4.7 Summary…….. 46

Chapter Five: Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction ……... 48

5.2 The alignment and responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the

Skills Needed by Businesses…… …… 48

5.3 Workplace-Based Training: The Promise of FET College

Training in Relation to the Reality…….. 55

5.4 The Role of FET College Lecturers in the Learner Workplace-Based

Training……. 62

5.5 The Need for FET Colleges to Prepare Learners for Work……. 66

5.6 Summary…… 68

Chapter six: Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction …… 69

6.2 The Integration of Theoretical and Practical Training for a Responsive Skills Base…….……. 69

6.3 The Cost of Insufficient Workplace-Based Training opportunities For Learners…….……. 71

6.4 The Relationship between Learning, Training and Employment…… 72

6.5 Recommendations…… 73

6.5 Summary…… 74

6.6 Bibliography…….. 75

Appendices

Appendix 1: Letter Granting Permission to Conduct Research at an FET College…. 82

Appendix 2: Copy of the Ethics Approval Letter…….. 83

Appendix 3: Copy of the Consent Form used in the study…… 84

Appendix 4: List of the Programmes Offered to Learners…… 85

Appendix 5: Example of the Logbook Comment section for Mentors ……... 87

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION and BACKGROUND

1.1 Introduction:

Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges in South Africa were identified by the democratically elected government which came into power in 1994 as one of the institutions that should play a central role in the process of skilling and re-skilling of the people of South Africa. The mandate that was given to FET Colleges by the government was to equip the South African society with the relevant and responsive skills to those needed by local businesses and industries, especially in the intermediate phase, such as, artisan and other vocational skills. Yet, over 15 years later FET Colleges are reported to be struggling to fulfil their mandate.

According to Gewer (2010) feedback from businesses and skills development experts in South Africa, FET College learners appear not to possess the relevant and responsive skills when compared to those needed by local businesses. Further, continued learning opportunities for FET College graduates at higher learning institutions such as universities and universities of technology appear to be limited. This has continued despite efforts by the government's turnaround strategy on FET Colleges which involved a R1.9 billion recapitalisation fund to restructure and reform the functioning of the colleges. In light of this, the study then examined the alignment and responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the knowledge and skills needed by local businesses and learners in the intermediate phase with a focus on engineering and related fields such as artisan skills within the Nelspruit Central Business District and the Kanyamazane community of the Mbombela Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province.

1.2 Problem Statement

The discourse around post-school learning and training in relation to the skills needs of businesses tends to revolve around the idea of the dependency and the autonomy of post-school learning and training institutions against the skills needs of businesses. According to Sala et al (2007) the dependency model assumes a correspondence between the training profiles of graduates and the occupation they fill, whereas, the autonomy model questions the existence of a presupposed correspondence between the two sectors (post-school institutions and the workplace) and proposes for a post-school learning and training sector that is characterised by intellectualism, innovation and unconstrained learning and training from the skills needs of businesses.

The dependency model views the relationship between post-school training institutions and businesses as characterised by the need and necessity for post-school training institutions to supply businesses and industries with the necessary and relevant skills. This presents post-school training institutions as lacking a directive of their own and as existing solely to supply businesses and industries with the skills they need. Further, the dependency model assumes a corresponding relationship between the level of training of an individual and their ability to perform in the workplace. This consigns the responsibility to equip individuals with relevant and responsive skills that match those needed by businesses on post-school learning and training institutions and not anywhere else such as within businesses and industries where the practical application of skills occurs.

The autonomy model, on the other hand, problematizes the presumption of the existence of a correspondence between learning and training and the expected performance of a graduate. Sala et al (2007) writes that the autonomy model proposes a dynamic directive guided by flexible and successive adjustment between the education and training provided and the type of workplace

that adapts to the available labour supply at that particular period within a given context rather than the need for post-school training institutions to supply businesses with specific skills at every production cycle. The implication, thereof, being that learning and training institutions should not be restricted to offering learning and training that is directed at producing certain or specific skills but rather should offer learning and training that aims to improve the minds of learners and promote intellectualism that is guided by academic freedom. Also, Harvey (2010) suggests that by proposing that post-school learning and training should be about training graduates for jobs rather than improving their minds is proposing for the erosion of academic freedom and being apologists for anti-intellectualism. Hence, the study was approached examining the notion of dependency against that of the autonomy of learning and training institutions, FET Colleges in this case, and businesses in relations to human capital development in the form of knowledge and skills development at FET Colleges.

1.3 Research Question

The study asks the following research question:

"How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses". Guiding the research question are the following sub-questions:

- How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needed by local businesses?
- How do FET Colleges facilitate the training of practical and technical skills for learners and what is the role played by businesses in the process?
- What is the role played by college lecturers in the learning and training of learners?
- How do FET Colleges prepare learners for the world of work in terms of balancing "hard skills" and "soft skills"?

1.4 Background Information

FET Colleges resulted from the amalgamation of the former Technical and Vocational Colleges of South Africa in the year 2000 (DoE, 2006), streamlining them from a total of 152 public institutions to 52 public FET Colleges with a varying number of campuses under each college. The 52 colleges that resulted from the merger were designed and mandated to support the integration of the theory-practice approach towards learning and training offered at FET Colleges. This signalled a new direction for FET Colleges that took the sector from focusing on skills development for employment purposes only but also for academic or lifelong learning, self-employment and socio-economic participation. The new direction moved FET Colleges towards the autonomy model presented above in that the learning and training that was offered to learners became flexible, involved intellectual stimulus and afforded college's academic freedom regarding the structure and delivery of the programmes they offered.

Currently, the programmes offered at FET Colleges are National Technical Diploma (NATED) Level N1 to N6 with each level completed over a period of a trimester, and the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) offered at National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Level 2 to Level 4 with each level completed on an annual basis. NATED programmes are not equal to and not at the same levels as NCV programmes. NATED programmes are unit standard programmes, meaning that they are not full qualifications but rather part qualifications and do not offer any access to learning and training beyond NATED Level N6. The NCV programmes, on the other hand, are not part qualifications but rather full qualifications offered over a period of a year and are meant to grant access to learning beyond NQF Level 4 such as continued learning at universities and universities of technology within South Africa and outside the country. The NCV programmes were introduced in 2007, replacing the NATED programmes in order to enhance the learning and training offered at FET Colleges by combining theoretical and practical training in a manner that promotes lifelong learning while producing skilled graduates. However,

in 2009 the NATED programmes were reintroduced again after businesses expressed being unhappy with the methods and structure of training in the NCV programmes, displaying a preference for the skills focused, NATED programmes.

NATED programmes are technical and practical skills oriented programmes and are linked to apprenticeships, while, NCV programmes are a collection of learning and training programmes that aim to equip learners with practical skills, theoretical learning and academic knowledge. The phasing out of NATED programmes at FET Colleges, replacing them with NCV programmes, followed by their reinstatement after a series of protests by businesses raises a number of questions and concerns regarding the position of FET Colleges in relations to the dependency-autonomy discourse. Central to the discourse being the question whether FET College exists primarily to supply businesses with responsive and relevant skills or to transform individuals by enhancing their knowledge, skills, attitudes and abilities while simultaneously empowering them to be critical and reflective thinkers. Nevertheless, currently the view from businesses seems to be that skills production remains the main purpose of FET Colleges.

1.5 Research Design and Methodology

The study was conducted by means of a qualitative approach using data collected through interviews with FET College staff members, business representatives, FET College learners, government representatives and various Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) representatives. Further, observations and content analysis on FET Colleges (example, learner progress records) and the labour market were conducted.

1.6 Chapter outline

- *Chapter One*: Introduction and background to the study.

- *Chapter two*: Literature review and conceptual framework: The chapter outlines the technical and vocational training systems in South Africa with a focus on FET Colleges and their history in relations to human capital and skills development. Also, the chapter provides a discussion on the conceptual framework underpinning the study.

- *Chapter three: Methodology*: This chapter will explain and justify the use of a qualitative approach in addressing the goals of the study. Also, it will show how data was collected together with the limitations and the ethical considerations that were taken into consideration during the study.

- *Chapter four: Context and descriptive background***:** This chapter provides an outline of the research context and provides a descriptive background of the study.

- *Chapter Five: Evaluation and analysis of findings:* This chapter is threefold in that it provides a descriptive background of the context of the study, follows with an in-depth discussion of the themes that arose during the collection and sorting of data and finally the analysis and evaluation of the themes identified.

- *Chapter six: Recommendations and conclusion:* this chapter provides specific and general recommendations and conclusions of the study. It will also point out areas of further possible research and investigation.

Chapter Two:

Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a set of key literatures relevant to the Technical and Vocational Training system in South Africa with a focus on Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges and their relationship with businesses. Central to the discussions of the chapter will be the outlook of FET Colleges and the labour market in South Africa before and after the attainment of democracy in 1994 as well as the policy framework that was developed after 1994 that guides the functioning of FET Colleges in the country. Further, the dichotomy between the learning and training offered at FET Colleges and the learning and training offered within workplace areas will be explored to identify the significance, strengths and functioning of each sector. Finally, the chapter will discuss the conceptual framework that guided the study.

2.2 Background to Vocational and Technical Training in South Africa

FET Colleges in South Africa were established during the colonial era under the British system of learning and training with a focus on the provision of theoretical knowledge to apprentices (McGrath, 2003: 13). The main purpose of colleges at the time was to produce a skilled workforce needed by the industrial, manufacturing and mining sectors that were driving the economy of the country at the time. According to Smuts (1937: 97) Technical and Vocational Training in South Africa was established for and linked to manufacturing and industrial pursuit with a focus on the scientific principles underlying the two sectors. A theory-practice combination began to develop years later as industries began to require graduates who possessed certain specific industry related skills linked to theoretical knowledge, leading to technical colleges to provide the theory section of apprenticeship training while workplaces provided

context specific experience for learners. The responsibility of developing a skilled workforce that possessed relevant and responsive skills towards the skills needs of businesses became the responsibility of both, the college and the business sector.

Before 1994, the South African Technical and Vocation Training sector did not escape the racial policies of the country, hence, training opportunities were reserved, characterised and prioritised according to race. This led to the exclusion of Black candidates from opportunities of access to technical education and training while White candidates benefitted from privileged access and were able to enhance their skills through state and private sector funded education and training. According to McGrath (2003: 9) before the 1990's most if not all apprentices registered with colleges in South Africa were automatically employed at the same time because of the links colleges had with businesses through college funding and learner placement schemes. All apprentices who attended colleges did so while based within a workplace environment where they gained practical experience and skills. Learners attended block release classes to allow them the opportunity to attend off-job instruction at a college while under the employ of a business. This set-up contributed positively towards the functioning of colleges since it eliminated certain pressures from colleges, such as:

- *Financial challenges*: colleges did not have to invest much in the procurement of latest and industry specific equipment for the purposes of practical training of learners since this was provided to all learners by the businesses.

- *Practical skills development*: colleges focused on the process of disciplining the mind towards understanding the science behind the learners chosen field rather than the practical application, leaving the responsibility of equipping learners with industry specific skills to the businesses sector (Layton, 1984).

- *Alignment of theory to practice*: prior to 1994, colleges had a close relationship with businesses which gave colleges access to information on the type of training and skills businesses expected from learners while businesses knew precisely the programmes colleges offered and how the programmes were delivered. This ensured that the courses offered at colleges were not only aligned to industry skills needs but were also responsive and effective.

However, the mid 1990's saw a decline in the number of apprentices and candidates who went on to qualify as artisans, something that has continued to date. According to Kahn (2013: 19) South Africa had about 13, 500 artisans who graduated in 1985, but by 2004 the number had fallen to 2, 548. Several accounts have been presented in an effort to explain this decline such as the analysis that the services sector began to overtake the mining, agriculture and manufacturing sectors as the major component of the Gross Domestic Production (GDP) of the country thereby providing South African people with other viable employment options that did not require them to qualify as artisans or attend a Technical and Vocational Training College (Kahn, 2013). Also, according McGrath (2003: 9) the de-racialisation by statute of the apprentice system and the vocation and technical training sector resulted or coincided with the withdrawal of a number of businesses of their financial and practical training support for apprentices at colleges.

This left college candidates with fewer opportunities of gaining workplace based experience and funding for their studies at colleges. Further, the late 1990's saw the reformulation and restructuring of the education and training system in South Africa which led to the establishment of a number of private training institutions and the establishment of registered and accredited in-house training centres within certain businesses, which may have contributed to the decline in the relationship between businesses and colleges since businesses no longer relied heavily on colleges for the supply of skills but had in-house training centres for staff members.

2.3 The Transformation of Vocation and Technical Training in South Africa

The transformation and restructuring of Technical and Vocational Training Colleges in South Africa took place in the late 1990's and led to the renaming of all Technical and Vocational Training Colleges in the country as Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges. Prior to 1994, the Technical and Vocational training system in South Africa consisted of 152 colleges that were located within the various homeland education departments under the South African education system of racial segregation. Each college was funded and administrated individually and differently. This impacted on the performance of some of the colleges since there were no coherent structures linking the functioning and management of the colleges and each college had its own curriculum and training approach. Nevertheless, according to Cosser et al (2003) there were some colleges that offered good quality programmes that were relevant and responsive to the skills needed by businesses and industries at the time such as the range of engineering programmes used to develop artisan skills. In the wake of democracy in 1994, the new government was faced with the challenging task of transforming the racially divided education and training system of the country into a coherent and responsive system that would address the skills needs of the 21st century (DoE, 2008: 9).

A number of White Papers and Acts were introduced by the new government in an attempt to transform the FET College sector and to ensure that the skills development of the previously marginalised and disadvantaged people of the country took place. Some of the relevant White Papers and Acts include:

- The White Paper on Education and Training of 1995 which focuses on the promotion of governments initiated programme that are aimed at redefining the state of education and training in the country through transformation (DoE, 1995).

- The Further Education and Training Acts of 1998 and 2006 which focuses on bringing about a distinct and synchronized education and training system in South Africa. This policy saw the cluster of 152 FET Colleges around the country being brought down to 50 and no longer referred to as Vocational and Technical Training Colleges but rather FET Colleges (DoE, 1998b and DoE, 2006).

- The Skills Development Act No 97 of 1998 which introduced a system in which vital resources could be strategically channelled to institutions that provide technical skills training, especially those required by the South African Economy (RSA, 1998).

- Skills Development Levies Act No 9 of 1999. This Act regulates a compulsory levy scheme in which certain businesses are supposed to pay a percentage of their payroll to a fund created to fund training and education, and also foster a relationship between businesses and training institutions (RSA, 1999).

Through the above mentioned White Papers and Acts the government hoped that the much needed inclusive transformation of the training and education sector would be realised and would lead to the alleviation of poverty through increased employment and promotion of economic growth (DoE, 2008). The FET College sector was then identified by the government as one of the mediums through which the skilling and re-skilling of the people of South Africa would be achieved. Below is a figure of three structures that represents the fundamental composition of FET Colleges, what FET Colleges seek to achieve and the fundamental composition and aim of the programmes offered.

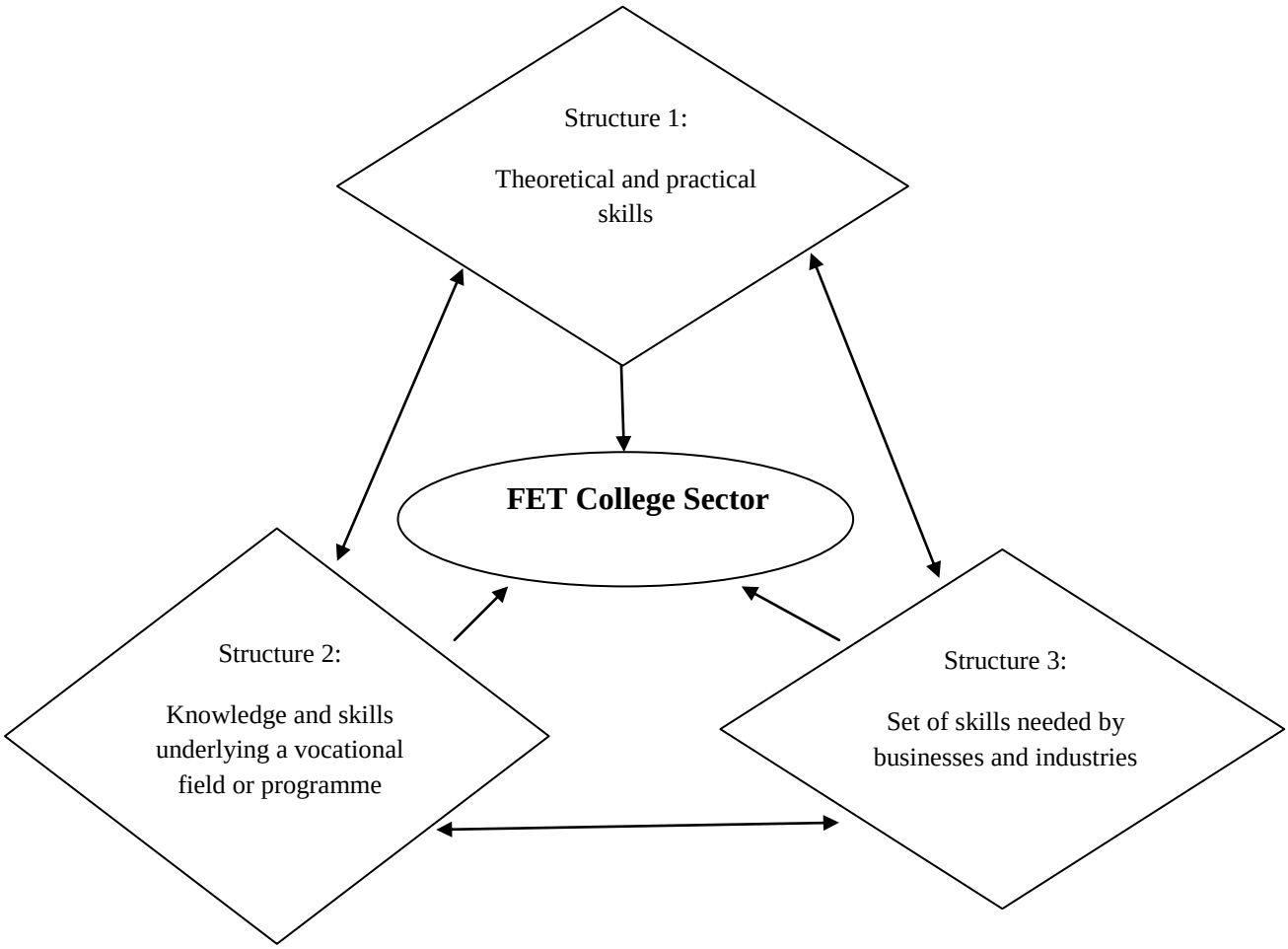


Figure 2.1: Three pillars representing the functioning of FET Colleges (Source: Author 2013)

The first structure represents the learning and training programmes offered at FET Colleges in accordance to the Human Resources Development Strategy of South Africa (DHET, 2008), which identifies the national skills development strategies, skills priorities and educational model that should be followed by colleges. This refers to the universality of the learning and training programmes offered by colleges to learners with regards to the doctrine, values of knowledge and their practical application as oppose to the previous system where colleges were administrated individually. In practice this mean that all learners in all colleges will be open and exposed to similar elements and materials that are required to achieve competency in their chosen field, for example, electrical engineering learners will be exposed to learning and training material that teaches them the calculation of percentages of volumes and the measurement of

mechanical units or system as well as safety and environmental awareness at the same time, across all colleges.

Structure 2 refers to and is defined by the underlying elements and materials of the learning and training programmes offered together with the demands of the particular vocational sphere of influence. Structure 2 forms a major part of the study since it represents the interaction FET Colleges have with businesses and focuses on the practical part of training. The focus will be on the specific knowledge and practical training offered to learners to determine if the college involved in the study contribute meaningfully to the skills needed by local businesses, and ultimately contributes to the reduction of unemployment through skills development.

In contrast to the other two structures the third structure involves a collection or set of skills rather than individually specific skills needed by local businesses. Mbombela Municipality, for example has a set of four diverse sectors that FET Colleges need to respond to in their training, namely: engineering (mostly for manufacturing), hospitality, agriculture and services (IDP, 1999). The above structures are a representation of what is stated in the Further Education and Training Act 16 of 2006 where it states that FET Colleges must and will develop a relevant and responsive human resource that possesses skills that meet associated demands (DoE, 2006).

2.4 Private FET Colleges in the Changing South African Learning and Training Environment

Though public post-school learning and training in South Africa accounts for the major share of learner enrolment, the country has a compelling private education and training system that has been growing over the past ten to fifteen years. Following the country's first democratic elections in 1994, the private education and training sector expanded rapidly to meet the growing demand for higher education. With the ending of sanctions, a number of foreign-based education and training providers entered the market to take advantage of the growing demand for higher

education. According to Outcomes (2000) a dramatic change took place in the South African post-school and higher education sector in the late 1990's where a number of new entrants providing private education and training established themselves alongside the traditional public education and training system.

The 1997 Higher Education Act made provisions that allowed for more private institutions to offer learning and training programs provided they registered with the South African Council of Higher Education (CHE) and offered programmes accredited by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). According to Outcomes (2000) more than 700 applications for the registration of private post-school education and training providers were received by the CHE and the HEQC by the end of 1999. These applications fell under four categories of private post-school learning and training institutions operating in South Africa, namely:

- Foreign institutions partnering with local institutions offering post-school learning and training.
- Long-distance learning institutions that are either based within the country or are outside the country.
- In-house training centres set up by private companies to train staff members, and
- Private Further Education and Training Colleges that offers training to learners on intermediate skills.

De Villiers (2000) stated that due to the magnitude of interest in accessing post-school learning and training in South Africa after 1994, the public sector was not necessarily in a position to provide for everyone due to the low number of public post-school institutions in the country in proportion to the number of individuals that seek post-school learning and training, and private education could fill that gap. According to Akoojee (2007) private FET Colleges accounts for most private post-school learning and training institutions in South

Africa. This could possibly be due to that only public institutions offering higher learning and training in South Africa can be registered and accredited to operate as universities or universities of technology in the country. Therefore, private institutions offering post-school or higher learning and training have only the option of registering as private FET Colleges, thus the substantial number of private institutions registered as private FET Colleges.

According to Akoojee (2007) the sheer size of the private FET College sector of an estimated 700 000 learners, located at 4,178 sites under 864 providers annually from 2001 suggests an important demand-led element and provide a basis for serious considerations for the sector. In a study conducted in 2002, Akoojee (2007) discovered that private FET Colleges were reported by employers to adequately respond to their immediate short-term skills needs. This was so despite that private FET Colleges were found to have fewer linkages with the formal labour market than did public FET Colleges and that they (private FET's) were not necessarily able to secure opportunities for their learners to gain workplace-based training within businesses.

In comparison to public FET Colleges, private FET College costs were not prohibitive and the structure of their programmes allowed adequate flexibility to learners thereby enabling them to move in and out of the system with ease. Nevertheless, according to Akoojee (2007) comprehensive data on the operation and functioning of some if not most private colleges made comparative judgements of throughput, and quality, with public institutions difficult to make.

2.5 The Role of FET Colleges towards Skills Development

According to Badroodien (2003) FET Colleges, pre-1994, used to be effective in producing graduates who possessed skills that matched those required by the labour market. Contributing to

this factor was the role played by businesses in providing relevant and aligned practical training opportunities to college learners, the relationship that existed between colleges and businesses and the interest taken by both party's (colleges and businesses) in understanding the functioning and needs of the other. However, as mentioned above, post-1994 the relationship between colleges and businesses became detached leaving colleges struggling to keep up with the skills demands of the labour market.

According to the DoE (1998c: 9) one of the most contradictory features of the South African labour market has been the claim by employers and labour market experts of acute skills shortage in certain fields at precisely the same time that employers cut back on skills training support. The need for FET Colleges to be responsive to the skills needs of the economy is growing each day and it is of importance that FET Colleges meet these skills needs if South Africa is to achieve economic, social and individual development, hence, the allocation of R1.9 Billion between 2005 to 2007 by the government into the FET Colleges for their recapitalisation.

The views held by the then Department of Education synchronised with those promoted by the South African National Skills Development Strategy III (NSD III), a statutory document which aims to facilitate the process of skills training and skills development of the people of South Africa to enhance their employment opportunities and career mobility for economic, social and personal development (DoE, 2010). Nevertheless, there has been conflicting and concerning reports regarding the role played by FET Colleges in skills development. The concern has been that FET Colleges in their current form offers a narrow range of programmes in relation to the skills needs of business which leads to the production of graduates who possesses a narrow set of skills that are not relevant to the skills required by businesses, a sign that the proposed and implemented reforms within the FET College sector have not been effective (Gewer, 2002).

2.6 Relationship between Education, Training and Employment

Gamble (2003) raises the question with regards to the relationship between education, training and the economy which is a topic that has been debated in various literatures (Shackleton, 1995; Cappelli et al, 1997; Harvey, 2000). Gamble suggests that this debate ignites a secondary debate regarding the need for education and training to be responsive to specific businesses skills needs. The World Bank (2010) is of the view that employment and entrepreneurship should be the basic outcome of education and training for individuals. The views of the World Bank are that education and training should be used as a vehicle for economic growth and development. This can be interpreted as an argument for a greater need for the alignment of education and training programmes to the skills needs of the economy in order for graduates to be effortlessly employable and to contribute to the economy and personal development through the application of the skills acquired from training institutions.

The narrowing of the concept of skill results in skills development being transformed from the opportunity for individuals to gain bargaining power in the labor market, into an opportunity for employers to gain workers whose knowledge and skill is tightly harnessed to the interests of their business. The attempts at narrowing of education and training for the purpose of employment are regularly raised by notions of employability through which education is increasingly being viewed to have value on and only to the extent that it translates into employment, increased production and increased generation of income.

However, there have also been arguments presented by various scholars and authors that there is no single relationship between education, training and the economy and therefore there is no greater need for the alignment of education and training programmes to specific skills needs of the economy but rather call for greater responsiveness of education and training to the needs of society as a whole (Wolf, 2002). The reality is that from an economic perspective it is difficult to

measure accurately the relationship between education, training and the economy due to a variety of contextual factors that come into play such as micro- and macroeconomics, employment prospects and socio-political conditions (Ashton and Green, 1996).

However, skilling and re-skilling of people continues to be the main process through which problems of unemployment, poor production and lack of innovation can best be addressed (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005). In the case of FET Colleges, various debates have been presented regarding a range of perceived or expected outcomes from the college performance such as the development of a quality skilled society (Winch, 2005; Garrat, 1999) addressing youth unemployment (Leney and Green, 2005), contribution to the growth of the economy, and the promotion of equality and social inclusion (RSA, 1998). The diverse positions stated presents various implications for the FET College sector in relations to their expected outcome, especially regarding the improving of employment opportunities by equipping society with relevant and responsive skills. Evidently, the education-training-work relationship cannot be viewed as neutral or value free.

According to Stone (2002) vocational learning and training should be for work, through work and about work, while vocational learning and training as presented in the Green Paper for FET College (DoE, 1998c) is being upgraded and expanded to include general educational components for basic social, economic and political participation. In line with the views promoted by authors such as Hodkinson (2005), Schuetze and Sweet (2003) and Guile and Griffiths (2001) when advocating for a close intra and inter-relationship between FET Colleges as places of learning and training with businesses as practical and technical learning spaces.

2.7 Influence of Technological Advancements on FET Colleges

Technology is a tool that influences most of life's spheres including learning, training and the workplace. According Salomon et al (2011) technology is a tool that extends human capabilities,

the system within which the tools are used and an approach to the management of the environment. Kerka (1994) defines technology as a social process, and technology education as the vehicle for creating awareness of technological social context and implications. An important element that can be derived from the definitions given above is with regards to the direct connection between technology and society. FET Colleges, as agents of change, have the responsibility to equip society with skills for the advances of the world and this includes technological advances. However, there have been concerns regarding the capacity of FET Colleges in effectively preparing and equipping learners competently in such advancements.

According to Malan (1999) there seem to be a discrepancy on the proportionality of technological developments and the curriculum changes within FET Colleges. If FET Colleges are to remain relevant and responsive to the skills needs of businesses it is imperative that they stay abreast of technological development in terms of their curriculum development, lecture expertise and training equipment. Nevertheless, FET Colleges may face certain challenges that could hamper their ability to keeping abreast with technological and other advancements in the field of learning and training. According to the Green Paper on FET Colleges (DoE, 1998c: 9) these challenges may include:

- *A lack of funding coherence*: The funding of programmes is uneven across different sites of provision and creates distorted incentives and disincentives.

- *Poorly articulated programmes*: Different FET programmes and qualifications are poorly articulated and inhibiting student mobility. Programmes differ widely with respect to quality, standards of provision, outcomes and curriculum.

- *Separate education and training tracks*: FET provision reflects rigid and outmoded distinctions between `academic' education and `vocational' training. Consequently, technical and vocational education lacks parity of esteem with traditional mainstream

education. Yet, the quality of the general `academic' education provided to the majority of South Africans is poor and there are few second-chance opportunities for those who have been failed by the system. New entrants into the labour market generally lack appropriate knowledge and skills. Opportunities for the employed are limited, while the needs of those who do not have formal jobs, and whose main hope of making a living lies in the informal sector and in small and medium enterprises, are largely neglected.

- *Weak linkages with industry*: Employers argue that many programmes offered by technical colleges and regional training centres are irrelevant and outdated, and the equipment used to train learners is antiquated.

- *The legacy of apartheid*: Among the most devastating consequences of apartheid were its effects on the education system. Black secondary schools bore the brunt of the apartheid assault upon young people. The discriminatory character of apartheid education was all too visible in the limited range, lack of relevance and poor quality of learning programmes and qualifications.

- *Organisational ethos and the culture of learning, teaching and service*: Adverse working conditions and a breakdown in the culture of learning, teaching and service are reflected in poor morale, a poor work ethic and low professional self-esteem amongst many educators. An authoritarian management culture still pervades many institutions, which accentuates race and gender inequality within the sector.

- *A distorted labour market*: A distorted labour market is perhaps the most visible legacy of apartheid. While the key social institutions and practices of the past (job reservation, pass laws, influx control, segregated townships and low-wage labour) have been legally abolished, their effects live on. This is particularly evident in the poor articulation between education, training and work, in the phenomena of jobless growth and mass

unemployment, in continuing racial obstacles to occupational mobility, in the paradox of continuing skills shortages at a time of declining investments in training, and, most devastatingly, in the collapse of the youth labour market. These problems are exacerbated by low enrolments in science, engineering and technology - fields essential to the achievement of higher levels of technological innovation and productivity.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in this study draws from the literature review presented above and the discourses that manifest around debates involving FET Colleges and Technical and Vocational Training in intermediate skills that are responsive and aligned to the skills needs of businesses.

The study was approached from the angle which examines the notion of dependency and autonomy of training institutions and businesses from the point of human capital development in relations to the role played by FET colleges in the production of skills that are relevant and responsive to those needed by businesses and learners. According to Sala et al (2007) the dependency model assumes a corresponding relationship between the level of training, the position a graduate fills in the workplace and their ability to perform in their respective duties, provided they are placed in positions that are in line with their post-school training. While on the other hand the autonomy model problematizes the presumption of the existence of a correspondence between the level of training and the expected performance of a graduate. The autonomy model proposes a dynamic directive guided by flexible and successive adjustment between the education and training provided and a type of workplace that adapts to the available labour supply at that particular period, within a given context (Sala et al, 2007). In relations to FET College training, the relative autonomy model aligns itself with the views of educational economists such as Thurow (1972: 68) stating that education and training has no business in supplying vital work skills to businesses but rather is a mechanism which allows employers to

separate the “chaff from the wheat” when selecting applicants for entry level positions and the implication being that FET Colleges should not strive to align their training to the skills needs of businesses but rather to certify the trainability of their graduates.

The dependency model echoes the sentiments of the World Bank (2010) which promotes the idea that employment and entrepreneurship should be the basic outcome of education and training for individuals. The views of the World Bank are basically that education and training should be used as a vehicle for economic growth and development which can be interpreted as an argument for a greater need for the alignment of education and training programmes to the skills needs of the economy so that graduates can be easily employable and should contribute to the economy and their own development through the application of the skills they acquired from training institutions. However, considering the intricacies of foreseeing the evolution of the economy and technology it seem rather impossible and makes it difficult to expect education and training institution to be directly responsive to each and every skill needed by businesses.

The South African government through the then Department of Education (1998c) together with various researchers such as Ashton and Green (1996) and Gewer (2002) position FET Colleges exactly where the dilemma of the relationship between education, training and the skills needed by businesses can be properly addressed due to the college’s perceived accessibility and their incorporation of theoretical learning with mandatory practical training which equips graduates not only with theoretical knowledge but also with the relevant practical skills. This view has much of its roots in the dependency model in that it envisage the major outcome of education and training as being the supply of a skilled labour force who possesses matching skills to those required in the labour market. The World Bank (2010) is of the view that economically this is beneficial insofar as that greater supply of certain specific and needed skills may result in improved employment opportunities and better working conditions due to the increased level of innovation and competitiveness that comes with having a skilled labour force. Also, as pointed

out by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) skilling and re-skilling of people continues to be the main process through which problems of unemployment are being best addressed.

2.9 Summary

In exploring the research question of the study "How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses" the chapter gave a historical overview of the Technical and Vocational Training Sector in South Africa focusing on Further Education and Training Colleges in order to situate the study within a historical and current framework. From the above discussion it can be argued that FET Colleges in South Africa prior to 1994 produced graduates who possessed skills that were directly aligned and responsive to the skills that were needed by businesses in the intermediate level such as artisan skills. This created a situation described by the dependency model as a lack of directive for learning and training institutions that existed solely to supply businesses with the skills they need rather than providing learning and training that aim to discipline the mind and promote lifelong learning among learners. This explanation defined the functioning of FET Colleges in South Africa at the time.

Post-1994 saw the reform and restructuring of FET Colleges that was accompanied by the introduction of the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) which aimed to provide learners with practical skills while disciplining their mind in the science behind their chosen fields through theoretical and fundamental learning. This signalled a move towards the autonomy of FET Colleges and the training provided thereof. However, the chapter above indicated that businesses have not been receptive of the new direction which involves the NCV programmes and has left the quality and responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the skills needs of businesses in question, which links directly to the research question of the study "How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses". The next chapter discusses the methodology employed in the study.

Chapter three:

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains and justifies the use of the qualitative research method and techniques in pursuing the study together with the sampling techniques that came into play during fieldwork. Also, the chapter provides an extended discussion on how the data that was collected was analysed and evaluated, and outlines the limitations that influenced and affected the study.

3.2 Research Design and Approach

In order to derive scientific findings and conclusions, it was imperative that the study implemented a scientific research approach. According to Wagenaar and Babbie (1992) a scientific research approach entails the development of strategies that are to be implemented when carrying out a scientific enquiry which involves putting together a set of preconceived actions and techniques aimed at gathering data. This refers to what Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999) explains as stipulating precisely what, where, when and who needs to be explored and how it ought to be done in order to solicit and collect meaningful data, carefully selecting the most efficient and effective techniques and strategies for the task at hand.

To achieve the objectives of the study as guided by the research question "How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses?" a qualitative approach was employed. It was necessary that the study was approached using a qualitative approach for the reason that qualitative techniques facilitate a process of deeper understanding of a context that is studied (Punch, 2005). Leedy & Ormrod (2010:93) define a qualitative research approach as a research approach that does not rely on numerical process or findings to explain a phenomenon but rather relies on the deep and thick description of a phenomenon as it occurs in its natural settings. The use of quantitative methods which relies on numerical values to derive scientific conclusion would have not allowed me to gain the potential depth of understanding of the research

context. Data for the study was collected using four qualitative techniques, namely: interviews (structured and semi-structured), focus group meetings, observations and document analysis of both primary and secondary documents related to the study. Semi-structured interviewing differs from structured interviewing in that semi-structured interviewing refers to a situation where a researcher asks pre-determined but not fixed questions and can reconstruct such questions as the interview proceeds while structured interviewing requires that an interviewer sticks to a pre-determined research schedule and does not allow for variation in the process of the interview (Punch, 2005).

The college staff members, learners and Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) representatives of the FET College campuses that were part of the study were interviewed within the campus premises, permission was granted by the college central office prior to the interviews (see *Appendix* 1), and consent was granted by all respondents. The focus groups with learners that formed part of the study were also conducted within the campuses. The interviews involving business representatives were all conducted within the premises of the involved businesses with the consent of all the respondents.

The study was conducted using the grounded theory approach as presented by Strauss and Corbin (1997). Strauss and Corbin (1997) define grounded theory as an approach that inductively derives its theory from engaging with the phenomenon under the study. This suggests that the theory underpinning the study is discovered, developed and continuously verified through systematic data collection and analysis of the findings pertaining to the phenomenon being studied. Strauss and Corbin (1990) state that when applying a grounded theory a researcher does not begin with a theory to prove or disprove such a theory but rather begins with an area of study thereby allowing what is relevant to materialize and influence the direction of the study. Hence, I approached the study willing to engage with any developing theories during the process and was ready to alter or change my views as the study progressed if the need arose.

3.3 Sampling Technique

The study used purposive sampling in selecting respondents and supplemented it with the snowballing technique. Purposive sampling refers to a process where a researcher uses his or her judgement to select members of a sample to form part of a study based on the goals of the study and the contribution that can be made by the sample (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010: 152). Leedy and Ormond continue to state that by using purposive sampling a researcher acquires rich and focused data that will enable him or her to conduct meaningful and thick analysis on the phenomenon of interest. However, important to note is that, in some cases, over the course of data gathering the selection criteria may evolve and the researcher may have to introduce new techniques or methods if the need arises to explore new cases or new perspectives (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007; Whitley, 2002).

Initially the study aimed to involve both public and private Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges, businesses and entities involved in training and skills development within the Mbombela Municipality. However, the scope, time and requirement of the study did not allow for the study to progress in that direction. The study then focused on two campuses of the same FET College, SETA's based within the college campuses, three businesses and one government department based or operating within the Nelspruit Central Business District (CBD) and Kanyamazane community of the Mbombela Municipality in the Mpumalanga Province. Nelspruit and Kanyamazane community are situated 15 kilometres apart from each other. The domain of skill the study focused on was engineering and related field in the intermediate level such as artisan skills.

Table 3.1: The table below represents the sample size and structure.

Institution	Respondents
• Public FET College: Campus A	• 1 Head of Department • 1 Senior Lecture • 2 Student Support Officers • 1 SETA Representative • 2 NCV Level 4 Learners • 2 Focus Groups: Level 4 Learners
• Public FET College: Campus B	• 1 Senior Lecture • 1 Lecture • 2 Student Support Officers • 1 SETA Representative
• Business 1: Vehicle Dealership and Maintenance	• 1 Human Resource Man. (HRM A) • 1Workshop Manager
• Business 2: Electrical Engineering	• 1 Human Resource Man. (HRM B) • 1 Workshop Supervisor
• Business 3: Electrical Engineering	• 1 Workshop Manager • 1 Project Manager
• Mpumalanga Provincial Government: Public Works	• 1 Assistant Manager: Communications
• Total	• 21

3.4 Data Analysis

Interviews that were audio-recorded, with the permission of the respondents, were transcribed fully in order to allow for accurate and precise analysis of the data. Where audio-recording could not be conducted or was not permitted, field notes were taken and fully written-up at the end of each day. Further, where observations were conducted, notes were taken and written-up at the end of each day of the observation. The written notes were then summarised using the thematic content analysis technique and key similarities and themes were noted which led to a set of four key themes that are discussed in the analysis and evaluation section in chapter 5. According to Anderson (2007) the thematic content analysis technique refers to the grouping and distilling of

notes to identify a list of common themes in order to afford communality of expression across all participants.

The four key themes identified were:

- The Alignment and Responsiveness of FET Colleges to Skills the Needed by Local Businesses.
- Workplace-Based Training: The Promise of FET College Training in Relations to Reality.
- The Role of FET College Lecturers in Learner Workplace Based Training.
- The Need for FET Colleges to Prepare Learners for the World of Work.

The key themes mentioned above were identified by firstly summarising the notes written-up in a point form structure. This was followed with a process of identifying key points and quotes that appeared across notes or demonstrated similarities. Next, the identified themes were explored, revised and probed further. Finally, the key themes that emerged as prominent and responded to the research question were discussed in the analyses and evaluation section in order to elaborate and respond to the research question.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Social research largely involves ethical issues and this is due to the fact that social research involves collecting information from people and about people (Punch, 2005:276). Therefore, it was imperative that the researcher took great care in ensuring adherence to the approved ethical considerations in engagement with all research participants. Miles and Huberman (1994) mention eleven ethical considerations that need to be addressed before, during and after any study involving human beings. From the eleven, five were applicable to the study and they were addressed. The five that were addressed are:

- Informed Consent: The consent form that I used with my respondents was approved by the University of the Witwatersrand Research Ethics Committee (see *Appendix* 2). All the

respondents who were interviewed consented to the interviews by signing the consent form (*see Appendix 3*).

- Permission: I was granted to conduct interviews within the college campuses before the interviews were conducted (see *Appendix* 1)
- Honesty and trust: I conducted the study with honesty and will maintain the promises that I made to my respondents that I will provide them with either electronic or hardcopy copies of the report when it is complete.
- Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity: The interviews that I conducted were based on the promise of anonymity and privacy, therefore I intend to keep that promise. Also, I ensured that I conducted all interviews within spaces where the respondents were comfortable and did not feel threatened.
- Data safe keeping: I kept all the notes in a laptop with a password and the hardcopies and written notes I kept in a safe draw provided by the university. Further, I will keep the notes and other data that is involved in the study in a safe for a period over five years as required.

3.6 Limitations to the study

The initial aim of the study was to focus on both public and private FET Colleges operating within the Mbombela Municipality without any limitations to the learning and training programmes offered. However, with the available time, space and scope afforded by the requirements of a long paper it was not possible to explore all my intentions. The study then focused on public FET Colleges in the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane area in the Mbombela Municipality, examining engineering related learning and training programmes. The study required participation from the business sector, however, due to the busy nature of businesses I experienced a substantial number of last minute cancellations which I accepted kindly and moved on.

3.7 Summary

Outlined in the chapter was the methodological approach that was employed in engaging with the study. Further, the use of the qualitative approach on the study was justified explaining that qualitative methods rely on the deep and thick description of a phenomenon as it occurs in its natural settings which gave me the opportunity to explore into detail the research field. This involved the use of techniques such as interviewing, observations and content analysis. Finally, the sampling process, limitations to the study and the ethical considerations that impacted and influenced the study were discussed. The next chapter presents the findings of the research situating it with the responsiveness and alignment of FET Colleges towards businesses in the Mbombela Municipality.

Chapter 4

Context and Descriptive Background

4.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an outline of the context where the study was conducted, the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane areas in the Mbombela Municipality and focuses on the overview of the Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges and businesses operating within the two areas. Central to the chapter is the contextual background of the research context and the influence that skills development through Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges has had in the functioning of local businesses. Also, the types of programmes offered by the local colleges and the demographic composition of the colleges together with the businesses involved in the study will be discussed.

4.2 Contextual Background of the Mbombela Municipality

In a study where the views and experiences of different sectors are examined, it is of importance to understand and to locate the noted views and experiences within the context where they were noted. According to Statistics South Africa (2012b) in 2011 the Mbombela Municipality had a population of 588 794 with an expanded unemployment rate of 36 percent. The significant unemployment rate continued albeit the repositioning and restructuring of learning and training institutions in the country, especially FET Colleges, in order to equip society with relevant and responsive skills for employment and self-employment purposes. Before the restructuring, FET Colleges were reported by the government as offering a set of narrow training programmes aimed at technical and practical skills development with no educational or academic component.

The restructuring of the sector saw FET Colleges introduce new programmes in 2007 that promised to offer learners improved, inclusive and progressive training and education that prepared them for a wide range of activities including employment, self-employment, higher

academic and life-long learning. Yet, the Mbombela Municipality continues to experience a significant rate of unemployment among its citizens.

The Mbombela Local Municipality is the most populous local municipality of the five local municipalities under the Ehlanzeni District Municipality of the Mpumalanga Province and accounts for 35 percent of the population in the district (Statistics South Africa, 2012a). Mbombela Municipality hosts Nelspruit which is the provincial capital and economic hub of the Mpumalanga Province and derives its revenue primarily from the manufacturing, agriculture, hospitality and the services sector. The municipality has a Gross Municipal Production (GMP) of R7.3 Billion which makes up 12 percent of the total Gross Provincial Production (GPP) of the Mpumalanga Province. According to Adams and Moila (2012) though the Mbombela Municipality is the economic hub of the Mpumalanga Province, it is characterised by high levels of unemployment, illiteracy and low levels of human capital in the form of skills.

The Integrated Development Plan of Ehlanzeni Municipality (IDP, 2012) suggested that the municipality needs to respond to the unemployment and low income levels faced by its citizens by intensifying skills development initiatives throughout the municipality. FET Colleges are mentioned in the IDP as one of the vital institutions through which such goals will be pursued. According to a list of registered FET Colleges with the Department of Higher Education the Mbombela Municipality has 13 private and one public FET College operating within the municipality offering a range of learning and training programmes involving business studies, agricultural studies, hospitality studies and engineering studies. Both, private and public colleges are mentioned in the IDP and the role they could play in the skilling and re-skilling of the people of the municipality.

4.3 FET Colleges and the Programmes Offered

The public FET College involved in the study has seven campuses across the Ehlanzeni District Municipality. The Mbombela Local Municipality hosts two of the campuses and both were part

of the study. The first campus is situated within the Nelspruit Central Business District (CBD) and will be referred to as Campus A in the study and the second campus is situated within the local township of Kanyamazane and will be referred to as Campus B in the study. A total of 9 National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) programmes are accredited to the college, in which the seven campuses can select a set to offer as part of their curriculum.

The programs offered at each campus are determined by the college central office following recommendations from each campus management council after considering three elements: the campus capacity to deliver the recommended programs, community and learner needs and the level of demand of the skills that will be produced within local businesses (DoE, 1998c).

According to Whitehouse (2006) the role of college management councils is to provide oversight and not management of colleges, and the role there can be defined as monitoring, watching, oversee, supervise and keep track of the functioning of the colleges. Currently Campus A offers three NCV programmes while Campus B offers one NCV programme with six specialisation fields (*Appendix 4* show the list of the NCV programmes and specialisation fields offered by the campuses). The structure of the NCV programmes is such that NCV Level 2 to Level 4 programmes are on the same levels but not comparable to Grade 10 to Grade 12 of the mainstream basic education. This is because in terms of the NQF levels, both NCV level 2 to 4 and Grade 10 to 12 are on NQF Levels 2 to 4. The difference, however, is that mainstream basic education offers only academic learning while FET College NCV programmes offer technical and vocational learning and training together with academic learning.

NCV Programme offers Grade 10 to 12 learners an alternative learning and training option from the mainstream basic education stream by offering industry and skills focused training. The entry requirement to the programmes is either a Grade 9 completion report or an Adult Basic Education Certificate (ABET), both recognised as NQF Level 1 programmes. All NCV programmes are three year programmes with each level offered on an annual basis. However,

learners are not compelled to complete the three levels to get a qualification since each level offers an exit certificate. Nevertheless, for a learner to receive an NCV Diploma they need to complete all three levels of the programme.

4.4 Workplace-Based Training

The delivery of NCV programmes is divided into two sections, theory and practice. The theoretical section is delivered in a classroom set-up while the practical section is conducted within a workplace set-up through a workplace-based training programme or within a simulated workplace area based within a college. Workplace-based training is the provision of practical workplace training and experience to FET College learners either through placements within businesses or use of a simulated workplace area (merSETA, 2009). The placement of learners in workplace-based training programmes is the responsibility of colleges and campuses. But, learners are not prohibited from being proactive in seeking workplace training opportunities in businesses, with the approval of the college. In fact, Campus A and Campus B encouraged learners to seek workplace-based training opportunities above what the college offered.

Practical training conducted in the simulated areas is facilitated by college lecturers or facilitators. While workplace-based training conducted through the placement of learners in actual businesses is facilitated by mentors. Mentors within businesses are employees of the businesses and are tasked with the responsibility to provide mentorship or supervision to learners for the duration of the placement. Each learner is assigned a logbook at the beginning of a programme to be completed by workplace mentors at the end of each day during the placement of learners indicating the activities completed and the progress achieved by the learner. Logbooks of learners who only engage in practical training at the simulated workplace area are completed by lecturers or the facilitators.

The purpose of logbooks is to serve as proof that a learner has been exposed to a workplace-based training for the specified and required period and is able to apply the skills learnt in the

classroom and also serves as an indicator for areas of improvement for learners and colleges. The logbooks are audited by the quality assuring body for basic education of South Africa called Umalusi and Sector Education and Training Authorities to assess the progress of learners and to verify if the levels and criteria used to assess learners were in line with the accepted standards.

4.5 Apprenticeships and Learnerships

Apprenticeships

Within an FET College context, an apprenticeship is a practical and technical oriented training plan linked to a NATED programme offered in the form of unit standards (merSETA, 2009). Over 75 percent of apprenticeship training revolves around practical and technical training within a workplace while the remaining time is reserved for theoretical learning within a classroom set-up. Successful completion of the programme leads to accreditation and registration as an artisan which comes into effect after completing all college theoretical components and displaying competency in a trade test assessed by a quality assuring body regulating the apprentice programme. For example, an electrical engineering candidate would write an assessment on a theoretical component at a college and take a trade test assessed by a quality assuring body for electrical engineering in South Africa.

Learnerships

According to merSETA (2009) a learnership is a structured process of learning which involves experiential exposure and theoretical learning, leading to a qualification registered with the NQF Levels. Successful completion of a learnership does not lead to registration as an artisan but rather a qualification linked to NQF Levels from Level 2 up to Level 5. The assessment of learnership candidates involves a written examination from a college on theoretical learning and a testimonial of competency from a workplace mentor or supervisor. Further, learnership

candidates should complete the duration of the learnership hours as designated to acquire an NQF qualification.

Apprenticeships differ from learnerships in that apprenticeships are limited to technical trades involving engineering related fields in the intermediate phase while learnerships accommodates a variety of careers such as tour operating, financial planning and sports administrators. Learnerships candidates do not need to demonstrate competency through a trade test to acquire a qualification but rather are required to write a theoretical assessment and obtain a testimonial of competency form a workplace mentor while apprenticeship candidates need to display competency in a Competency Based Modular Training (CBMT) system which involves a theoretical assessment tests as well as a trade test in order to qualify as an artisan.

4.6 Assessment of Learners

The assessment of learners in the NCV programmes is conducted at the end of each module either mid-academic year or at the end of the academic year. The Heads of Department (HOD) moderates the work after assessment and indicate if a learner displayed competency and have mastered the module to satisfactory levels or they should repeat the module or certain sections of the module. Learners are given one opportunity to complete the theory section through written and or oral examination, while in the practical section learners are offered three assessment opportunities to display competency.

Learners who are unable to display competency in the three assessment opportunities of the practical assessment are re-enrolled for the following academic year and are allowed to continue with the next NQF Level of the sections or modules they completed. The records of assessment of both Campus A and Campus B show that learners struggle to complete their practical component on their first attempt. Further, colleges experience low completion rates. Table 4.1

below from Campus A show the levels of completion among learners from Level 2 to Level 4 and the completion rate is evidently low across the different levels.

With regards to Table 4.1 below, certification rate refers to passing all modules required to complete a level and completing the practical training section required in each level in order to receive a certificate of completion stating that a learner meet the specified exit outcome for that level.

Table 4.1: Campus A programme completion rate for the year 2012

Level	No of Learners	Pass%	Certification%
Course: Electrical Infrastructure Construction			
2	120	53%	44%
3	60	85%	60%
4	65	66%	45%
Average	82	68%	50%
Course: Financial Administration			
2	235	49%	21%
3	124	57%	33%
4	89	100%	72%
Average	149	68%	42%
Course: Office Administration			
2	292	67%	31%
3	160	83%	38%
4	155	94%	83%
Average	202	81%	51%

The table presented above regarding the completion rate of Campus A goes to the crux of the study. This is because the low performance of the learners in their college assessments reflects

the quality of the skills they possess. The argument presented by businesses arguing that FET Colleges are not responsive to the skills needs of their businesses may well be considered to be acceptable when evaluating the performance of the learners in the workplace to their college performance as shown in the assessment record above. The poor performance displayed by some of the learners of Campus A reflects learners who will graduate having mastered in average about 50 percent of their work. Nevertheless, poor performance of college learners does not necessarily attest to that FET Colleges are not responsive to the skills needs of businesses but rather speaks directly to the learning capabilities of the learners and the teaching methods used by the college.

4.7 Summary

The chapter above presented an overview of two public FET Colleges, one situated in the Nelspruit Central Business District and the other within the Kanyamazane community where the study was conducted. This helped the researcher to situate the findings of the study that are presented in the next chapter within the research context and also provided the study with an understanding regarding the functioning of FET Colleges within and out-of the economy of the Mbombela Municipality. Reflected in the chapter were the low levels of skills development in the midst of high unemployment rate in the Mbombela Municipality.

The chapter also revealed that the FET Colleges in the study were experiencing low levels of performance among learners and this was displayed in the table above showing the completion rate in the assessment of learners in Campus A. Nevertheless, in no way does the chapter suggest that the low levels of performance of the learners in the college is linked to the view held by businesses that FET Colleges are not responsive to the skills needs of local businesses. The next chapter presents the findings and analysis of the data collected for the study.

Chapter 5

Findings and Analysis

5.1 Introduction

The primary goal of this chapter is to present the findings of the data that was collected from the two campuses of the same public Further Education and Training (FET) College and local businesses that participated in the study from the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane community of the Mbombela Municipality. The findings are linked to and they respond to the research question provided in the first chapter which asks "How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses", and will be presented through a comprised set of four key themes identified using the thematic analysis approach.

The first theme examines the responsiveness of FET College towards the skills needs of local businesses, followed by an analysis of the effectiveness of the workplace-based training programme offered to college learners. The last two themes examines the role played by college lecturers in the placement of learners in workplace-based training programmes and how learners are prepared for the world of work with regards to balancing hard-skills (technical and practical skills) and soft-skills (interpersonal and behavioural skills).

5.2 The Alignment and Responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the Skills Needed by Businesses

The findings presented and analysed in this theme highlights the perceptions and experiences of local businesses against those of FET Colleges regarding the levels of responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses. The theme also establishes if FET Colleges perceive themselves as or are viewed by businesses as institutions that exist to supply businesses

with the relevant skills against the view that colleges should offer learning and training for the value embedded in education and academic knowledge.

The responses provided by the student support officers and lecturers of the two college campuses involved in the study, Campus A and Campus B, when asked about their views regarding the quality and responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the skills needs of businesses were conflicting. All the lecturers interviewed in the study indicated that they believed FET Colleges were responsive to and produced skills that were relevant to those needed by local businesses, though some of the lecturers acknowledged that they were aware of certain isolated cases of unhappiness from the business sector regarding the quality and type of skills possessed by college learners. On the other hand, the student support officers of the two campuses held dissimilar view to those of the lecturing members stating that the current FET College system is not responsive to the skills needs of local businesses and this affects negatively the employability of FET College graduates.

The differences in the views between the student support officers and the lecturers on an issue that is core to the functioning of FET Colleges can be interpreted as a sign of lack of communication and information sharing between the two divisions in the campuses, as well as poor understanding of the local businesses perception regarding the skills possessed by learners of FET Colleges. Further, this brings to question the method used by FET Colleges in determining college's effectiveness towards achieving the mandate given by the government which is to equip society with responsive and relevant skills for employment, self-employment and socio-economic participation.

Between the two campuses visited, Campus A offers three NCV programmes while Campus B offers one NCV programme with six areas of specialisation. In rationalising the choice of programmes offered by the campuses the Head of Department of the Electrical Infrastructure

Construction programme in Campus A stated that the courses offered by the college in all its various campuses have been carefully selected and they address a variety of issues that are stipulated in the Green Paper on FET Colleges (RSA, 1998). The main issues identified in the Green Paper involve the development of skills that are responsive to those needed by businesses and industries to grow the economy of the country and to reduce unemployment. However, a Senior Student Support Officer at the same campus argued against the Head of Department saying that the programmes offered by the college are not in line with the skills needs of businesses.

> *"Our current FET system is failing the youth and businesses of the country. Employers are not happy out there with the programs we are offering and our graduates are frustrated because they can't find jobs. When we inform the central office about this they tell us that businesses need to get used to the NCV not that we as the college need to re-look our programs."*

The views of the Student Support Officers were supported by the responses supplied by the businesses that were visited for purposes of the study. Responses from the businesses indicated that they were not happy with the type and quality of skills possessed by FET College learners. However, their concerns were with regard to the structure and methods of delivery of the programmes rather than the content of the programmes. A workshop manager in Business 1 expressed being frustrated with learners from Campus B that his business hosts bi-annually on a four week workplace-based training programme. He stated that when he compared what the campus informed him with regards to their training programmes in relations to the knowledge and experience of the learners it was disappointing:

> *"On paper the programs are okay, when the college gave us the description of the programs they have we were very impressed and interested in working with them.*

But when the first group came here about four years back I felt like screaming all the time. Yes, they know concepts but they can't apply them and nothing has changed in the years. If we hire someone from the college we still have to put them on an apprenticeship for three to four years before they can take their Trade Test. This is a waste of time and money."

A Human Resource Manager in Business 2 expressed similar views to those of the workshop manager but went on to state that the FET College learners they host as part of their workplace-based training program displayed a strong theoretical background but struggle with the technical and practical application of their skills such as using tools and other equipment. This was also corroborated by the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) representative based at Campus B when he mentioned that, in most cases where SETA's assess FET College graduates for learnership and apprenticeship purposes, a high number of learners display competency in the theoretical section of the assessment but struggle with practical application. The views of the SETA representatives were of importance in this case due to the regular contact SETA representatives have with local businesses when they assist college graduates access learnership and apprenticeship opportunities.

The SETA representatives in both campuses indicated that SETA's are aware that businesses are not satisfied with the current FET College learning and training system involving NCV programmes, and according the SETA representative in Campus A, this makes their work difficult because SETA's do not necessarily interfere with the academic delivery of FET College programmes. Yet, SETA's are expected to assist the product of the very same system of learning and training they cannot influence.

"Employers complain to us about things related to how lecturers teach the learners and what the learners are being exposed to at the colleges but

unfortunately we don't get involved with that part of college processes because we also don't want colleges to tell us what to do regarding our learnerships and apprenticeships."

The Human Resource Manager of Businesses 1 stated that the current FET College system appear to be teaching learners what to do but not how to do what they are taught, a view that was support by the respondents from the other businesses involved in the study. This goes directly against the directive given to FET Colleges by the government which requires FET Colleges to be at the centre of the development of human capital that is equipped with practical and technical skills that are responsive and match the skills needed by businesses and industries. According to the Human Resource Manager in Business 2, there is a great need for the Department of Higher Education and FET College administrators to engaging with businesses and employers to try and improve the programmes currently offered to learners.

The Senior Student Support Officer in Campus A concurred with the proposition by the Human Resource Manager of Business 2 stating that there is a need for a discussion between businesses, FET Colleges and the Department of Higher Education to either improve the current NCV system or have it replaced. Having the NCV system replaced can result in the single outcome expectation NATED system to become the main system of training offered at FET Colleges once again. From the view point of the autonomy of learning and training institutions, NATED programmes are not desirable because they do not offer any post college or higher learning opportunities with universities or university of technology and do not offer any other knowledge or life skills value other than presenting FET Colleges learners with technical and practical skills for employment purposes, especially artisan related skills.

On the other hand, the NCV programmes are designed to expose learners to both knowledge and practical experience that prepares them for more than employment purposes but also continuous

learning at higher learning institutions and socio-politic-economic participation. According to a lecturer in Campus B, cancelling the current NCV system will be an error and will constitute a non-progressive approach towards learning and training because NATED programmes generally benefit employers only but not learners because the programmes focuses only on workplace-based practical or technical skills training and not continuous learning. Gamble (2003: 5) warns that the increased call for responsiveness of FET Colleges towards the skills needs of businesses may well lead to a focus on the practical and occupational training that overshadows the educational task of formative and cognitive concepts within a theory-practice framework. Nevertheless, the academic staff of Campus A and B believe that their campuses provide learning and training that is responsive and aligned to the skills needed by local businesses despite clear indications from local businesses and skills development researchers indicating the opposite.

The lecturers explain the unhappiness of employers as a result of businesses reluctance to adapt and remodel their expectations regarding the skills possessed by FET College learners and graduates. Since the introduction of the NCV programmes in 2007 which allocates equal focus on practical and theoretical training, businesses have been unhappy saying that FET Colleges are no longer effective in producing competent graduates as they did before. The Lecturers feel that businesses are not being fair on learners by not supporting the NCV programme because the programme is inclusive, progressive and supports life-long learning. A Senior Lecturer in Campus B said:

> *"Employers who are unhappy with us because they want us to stop the NCV programmes are unfair to the learners. NATED programmes require that learners have a host employer to be enrolled so they can do their apprenticeship while studying and this excluded many competent candidates. Employers need to understand that colleges offer competent in-house practical training and theoretical*

learning. By understanding this businesses will know that when they hire an FET College graduate they are hiring a candidate that is highly disciplined as far as the science behind what they are doing is concerned, only they have to sharpen the practical skill side of things."

Further, a Lecturer in Campus A explained that businesses are in fact getting more from FET College graduates now than they did before the introduction of the NCV programmes because the NCV programmes not only produce graduates who are skills focused but graduates who are also innovative, career driven and trained to perform beyond following instructions.

The responses provided by the Student Support Officers in both campuses were influenced by the experiences and interactions the officers have with the currently registered learners and those who have graduated from the college. According to the student support records of Campus A, over 60 percent of learners who completed their studies in Office Administration, Finance Economics and Accounting of the NCV programme the past year reported not having obtaining employment, despite being actively seeking employment for over six months.

Also, learners in the engineering and related programmes face extra years of apprenticeship side by side candidates who do not have similar levels or type of qualification as they do such as Grade 10 to 12 candidates from the mainstream basic education, whereas NATED programme graduates graduate with the skills needed to take a trade test because they have been part of an apprenticeship throughout their training programme. However, the student support records are regarded as unofficial because they are not an official instrument of the college and are not audited but rather they are used by the student support officers and the SETA office in the campuses to help learners with employment opportunities when they arise.

The key outcome highlighted in this section is that FET Colleges in the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane community are not fulfilling their mandate as set out by the government regarding

being responsive to the skills needs of local businesses. Further, the methods used by colleges to inform them of the skills needs of local businesses and the experiences and perception of businesses regarding the nature and quality of skills possessed by their learners are not effective and in some instances nonexistence which leaves colleges unaware of the areas requiring improvement in the programmes they offer to learners. Also, this leave the college unaware of the skills trends taking place within businesses. The next theme presents a discussion on the placement of learners on workplace-based training programmes.

5.3 Workplace-Based Training: The Promise of FET College Training in Relations to Reality

Workplace-based training is an important part of FET College learning and training because of the vocational and practical training element it offers. It contributes towards ensuring that colleges produce learners who possesses the relevant and responsive skills to those needed by businesses. However, this approach strengthens the view that FET Colleges exists to supply businesses with responsive skills and at some point downplay the importance and relevance of the share knowledge gained through theoretical and academic learning. This is evident in situations where employers express dissatisfaction with a candidate from a college who possesses a depth of knowledge within a field but lacks competency in the practical and technical application of skills. Therefore, workplace-based training becomes an important feature of FET College learning to equip learners with practical and technical skills.

However, not all colleges succeed in acquiring workplace-based training opportunities for learners. Both, Campus A and B reported not succeeding to fulfil the promise of a workplace-based training placement within businesses to all the learners in their campuses. The campuses rely on the use of simulated workplace areas within the campuses for practical training of learners. An analysis of the learner placement record at Campus B indicated a consistent number

of placements year on year over the past three years irrespective of the number of learners enrolled in the year which is an average of between 400 and 450 learners annually. The placement records showed that a consistent number of 14 learners were being placed annually on a workplace-based training programme by the campus and the number has remained consistent for the past three years.

The consistency in the number of learners placed has remained because the placements involve the same businesses who have committed to host 14 learners annually in their motor vehicle maintenance workshops. This picture raises concerns on various levels and highlights the meagre commitment from both the college and businesses in the area towards ensuring that learners are afforded the opportunity to gain access to workplace-based training opportunities. The meagre commitment towards affording learners workplace-based training opportunities was also discovered at Campus A. Campus A had four electrical engineering businesses that placed a fluctuating number of learners each year since the year 2006 to 2011. However, in the year 2012 the campus was unable to place any learners out of a total of 1, 278 learners registered for various programmes. Further, according to the Head of Department of the Electrical Infrastructure Construction programme in the campus there are signs that a similar experience was going to be experienced the current year because their requests to businesses to place learners have either not been responded to while others have been declined.

Two of the businesses that the campus usually places learners in have indicated that they will not be hosting any learners this year, similar to the previous year. The attention given to this challenge by the heads of department and leadership of the two campuses did not resemble that of being highly concerned and eager to bring about remedy to the situation. This is because both campuses had not made any attempts to engage with the businesses they had relationships with to strengthen the relationship they had with them or approach new businesses to maximise networking possibilities. Further, both Campus A and B could not state categorically if there

were any plans to remedy the situation and the campuses were unaware of the reasons why businesses were not eager to accommodate their learners on workplace-based training programmes except for a few guesses and suspicions. The Head of Department in Campus A suspected that the challenge faced by his campus in placing learners was fuelled by the high number of Sector Education and Training (SETA) sponsored learnerships. This is because learnerships place candidates within businesses on a full-time basis on a year-long fully funded programme while FET Colleges place learners on a short-term term period of four to six weeks.

> *"The challenge is that all the businesses that we use to place our learners with are now working with SETA's on their learnership programs, remember SETA's have targets too so even if we complain that they are targeting the same businesses as us, it is the employers choice on who they want in their businesses. SETA programs come with a stipend and a yearlong commitment and we don't. Plus we can't expect these businesses to run two training programs at the same time, learnerships on the one hand and a workplace-based training for our learners on the other, it's impossible. Businesses are here to make money."*

The incentive of a stipend from SETA's towards learnership candidates mean that businesses make use of labour that is not paid for by them for a year-long learnership programme while training a candidate on the specific set of skills their business require, an approach a Senior Lecture at Campus B condemned and referred to as a way businesses are trying to recoup the Skills Tax Levy they pay, saying that:

> *"It's as if businesses are simply trying to recoup the money they pay for the Skills Tax Levy they pay to the government which is then given to the SETA's to run learnership programmes. It's their money that pays the stipend"*

Since both campuses have challenges in placing their learners on workplace-based training programmes the campuses make use of the simulated workplace area in the campuses to offer learners the training and experience of a workplace. However, there are conflicting views expressed by businesses, SETA's and the college with regards to the impact of, the efficiency and effectiveness of simulated workplace training areas.

A Workshop Supervisor in Business 3 expressed dissatisfaction and opposition to equating the experience and training gained in a simulated workplace of a college to the experience and training that occurs in real life workplaces. The supervisor continued to state that this is because the quality of training, the facilities used and the technology used in colleges is either outdated or incomplete in comparison to the situation within other businesses and the workshop at his business. Taking from the observation conducted during a simulated training of an electrical engineering training session at Campus A as compared to the operations of the workshop in Business 3, the simulated area at Campus A appeared under-resourced. This appraisal was validated by a learner from the campus who stated that the equipment and material used in the simulated areas do not offer learners the necessary exposure, is not of modern technology and limited in relation to the number of learners in the college.

The simulated area had ten training stations, however, three were scheduled for maintenance at the time of the observation and were not used. Up to six learners' used one training station designed to accommodate four learners, learners did not wear any protective gear which is a requirement in the workplace and the sessions were conducted similar to a class room lecture with a facilitator giving instructions, opposite to the system used in a workplace set-up where learners execute tasks under the supervision of a mentor instead of following instructions. The proceedings of the practical training session in the simulated workplace involved a teacher demonstrating to learners and giving instructions on what the session is about. Learners follow the instructions of the lecture and take notes of the instructions given to them.

The demonstration of an activity that should take at least 15 minutes can take twice the time due to learners asking repeated questions due to not paying attention during the demonstration. In contrast to the simulated workplace areas, the actual workplace placements of learners involve working on actual assignment meaning that there is no room for errors. Learners do not follow instructions from an instructor but rather work on assignments with mentees executing tasks that the mentor assigns to them.

The Head of Department in Campus B admitted that things are done differently in the simulated workplace areas than in actual workplaces, but was convinced that the foundation laid in the simulated areas was relevant and equipped learners with the necessary practical skills to be effective in their chosen fields. The simulated workplace training sessions are relaxed and highly controlled while actual workplaces are target and deadline driven and requires alertness. The Workshop Supervisor in Business 3 went on to question the technical workplace experience of some of the facilitators and lecturers of FET Colleges stating that:

> *"Some of the people in charge of conducting practical training in the colleges were last in the field more than five or ten years ago while others have never ever been in the field their entire life."*

The SETA representative based in Campus A indicated that SETA's are also not entirely happy with the current training system involving simulated workplace training, hence, they offer learnerships to graduates to engage on a yearlong supervised workplace-based training to supplement the training received from colleges. Further, SETA's hope that learnerships for FET College graduates will enlighten employers towards understand that though FET College graduates may no longer be the ideal candidates they hoped for and used to receive before the introduction of the NCV programmes, college learners currently actually have more to offer in the workplace and have an advantage over candidates with inferior or no qualifications.

In one of the focus group meetings, the learners pointed out that they experience differences in the tasks they complete or engage with at the college to the tasks they complete or engage with during their workplace-based training within businesses. According to the learners, the college simulated workplace area offers them limited exposure whereas when they are placed within businesses they are exposed to various tasks and situations. A motor mechanical engineering learner from Campus B made an example regarding the training they receive from the college against the exposure they receive from workplace placements when:

> *"We learn a lot of things about the functioning of a car in class, but, when we go to the campus training centre we practice one thing and we go home. But, when we are doing our practicals out there in businesses we do everything in one day. One minute you are working on suspensions the next you are learning how to fix an engine block, all in one day"*

The learners further expressed workplace safety training as a section that they covered briefly in class room theoretical training but not addressed when working in the simulated areas. During the observations conducted in both campuses workplace safety was identified to be an element not given much attention, as mentioned above. The Human Resource Managers in Business 2 and Business 3 raised concerns regarding the level of work safety training possessed by the FET learners and graduates. This limits the exposure gained by learners when placed within host businesses because learners are restricted from certain activities due to safety concerns thereby limiting the skills they gain at the end of the placement programme. According to the learners in the focus group conducted in Campus A, the solution could be that lecturers be present and participate in the workplace-based training of learners to monitor the situation so that they can identify areas of improvement rather than relying on the learner logbooks for feedback.

The structure of the logbooks provides supervisors and mentors with limited space for comment on the performance and progress of learners. The logbooks affords workplace mentors and college facilitators two, A4 size lines, to indicate their comments with regards to the day's performance and progress of learners which is insufficient and limiting (see *Appendix 5* for a copy of an example). The Workshop Supervisor in Business 3 made note of this saying that the space given for comment in the logbook is not enough to accommodate comments on the performance of an eight hour shift in the workplace.

The researcher analysed 26 logbooks from Campus B, 10 were for learners that had been placed on a workplace-based training within businesses while 16 were for learners that received training in the campus simulated workplace area. The findings of the logbook analysis revealed that comments made by workplace mentors and those of college facilitators in the simulated workplaces differed in the observations and recommendations made. The comments made by workplace supervisors and mentors ranged from highlighting signs of difficulty in executing basic tasks by learners, poor work performance and poor work ethics such as coming to work late, and the inability of Level 4 learners to work independently. While on the other hand, the logbooks completed by lectures and facilitators in the college simulated areas reflected a group of learners who are competent in their tasks but require extra training and supervision to harness their skills. The differences between the two comments on assessments of the learner performance raises question on the methods used to assess learners between the two environments and the quality of such assessments.

Nevertheless, the significance of the workplace-based training programmes either in actual workplaces or simulated workplace areas cannot be downplayed. Though, effectiveness of the programmes can only be achieved if all the relevant stakeholders such as businesses, learners and colleges play their part effectively. Currently, the situation within the context presented above paints a picture of stakeholders who are unable to achieve this, especially from both the college

and the businesses which ultimately affect the quality of learning and training of learners. In the following section the role of lecturers in workplace-based training programmes is analysed.

5.4 The Role of FET College Lecturers in Learner Workplace-Based Training

Indicated in the descriptive section in chapter 4 was that the primary focus for FET College lecturers is with the delivery of the theoretical component of the NCV programmes and not the practical application of the theoretical concepts, except in the simulated workplace areas. However, what emerged during the course of the study were concerns from learners and businesses regarding lecturer's non-participation in the workplace training of learners. The Human Resource Manager in Business 1 cited that there were missed opportunities over this occurrence such as the exposure for lecturers to the training received by learners in the workplace and the opportunity for the lecturers to enhance their practical experience and knowledge in fieldwork. Currently, the principal area of engagement between FET College lecturers and learners is within the fundamental segment of the NCV programmes which involves teaching languages, mathematics and the theoretical section of the technical and practical segment.

Practical application training has since become the secondary area of lecturers' engagement with learners and should be offered through workplace-based training programmes. Various challenges were indicated by learners and businesses as a result of this set-up. The challenges involve elements such as the non-synchrony of the theoretical learning that takes place in classrooms against the practical training that takes place in workplaces, identification of area of improvement by colleges and proper monitoring and evaluation of learner progress. The Head of Department in Campus A explained that according to the legislative framework which guides the interaction of FET Colleges, businesses and other stakeholders in relations to the workplace-based training of learners, the roles of the parties involved are separated.

According to the framework, colleges are responsible for learning that takes place within the college while the human resource department or training and skills development division of businesses takes the responsibility of the training that takes place within the workplace. The training provided by both parties has to be synchronised by following the logbook assigned to learners at the beginning of a learning program which serves as a monitoring and evaluation tool of the progress of each learner. However, in reality things are not as smooth as the legislative framework intended.

The lecturers interviewed noted a clear separation between their role and the role of host employers in the workplace-based training programme should a learner be placed within a business. Their view is that the moment learners are placed within business workplace-based training programmes the well-being and management of training progress of the learners becomes the responsibility of the employer. A Senior Lecturer in Campus B stated that:

> *"We play our part in the college but the moment a learner is placed with an employer he stops being our responsibility for that duration, we don't have the powers to tell business what to do and make them change their priorities and focus. Businesses need to play their part and learners must find a way of adapting and learn what they can"*

A lecturer in the same campus concurred with the senior lecture but indicated that the separation of roles between colleges and workplaces is working against learners because usually the theoretical learning that takes place in the college is not synchronised to the practical training and exposure that takes place in the workplace. Synchronising the learning and training components between colleges and workplace activities has proven to be a challenge to both colleges and employers. The Senior Lecturer in Campus B went on to give the following example:

"Say we have a learner who is doing fitting and turning, specialising in plumbing and we are still in the installation phase of training then a business contacts us and say they have an opportunity for a workplace-based placement for a learner but they have maintenance assignments only that they are working on. We can't refuse just because we are not yet in that section, we send our learners but inform the employer of the situation because opportunities like these don't come easy and we can't really tell businesses what to do."

The learners in the focused group interview conducted in Campus B indicated that they sometimes experience difficulties in the workplace training, especially when they are exposed to things they did not cover in class. Also, this affects their progress in the college, as one learner explained:

"It is possible that sometimes we go for practical training for three weeks and we don't do any of the things we learnt in class. When we come back to the college the lecturers treat us as if we covered the practical part of what they taught us. When they assess us and we don't know some of the things they fail us but it's really not our fault"

The Senior Lecturer in Campus A indicated that colleges are always left with the option of taking the subservient role in their relationship with businesses because businesses are the dominant partner in the relationship since they have the training site, latest equipment and consequently the power to negotiate their own terms. Also, in some cases it is as though employers are only placing learners within their businesses to recoup the Skills Levy Tax they pay because they tend to select learners who perform well in the theoretical section with the hope that they will place such learners on apprenticeships when they graduate from the college. The separation of roles is a challenge viewed by every stakeholder involved in the placement of

learners in the workplace-based training programme. However, some lecturers feel that businesses refuse to listen to them not because they do not take part in the workplace-based training programme of learners but rather because they expect everyone to do things the way businesses want. The Senior Lecturer in Campus A continued to say:

> *"Employers don't have any problem telling us not to try and influence them in any way in terms of the focus areas we want them to cover with our learners. They follow their own programs that allow them to expose and test our learners according to their needs and expectations. They tell you to let them do things their way and not waste their time because their time is money"*

The information and views presented by the FET College lectures contradicts the position presented by employers that college lecturers do not make any effort to get involved in the workplace-based training of learners and this limits the process of information sharing and skills development of both lecturers and learners. Nevertheless, this highlights the nature of interaction between the two institutions. Businesses ensure that colleges know that which requires responsive and relevant technical skills from colleges while colleges are left with the responsibility to fulfil the skills needs of these businesses.

The current structure of the separation of roles limited limits lecturers' exposure from directing the training that should take place in the workplace. Also, this limits their exposure to the areas of improvement with regards to learner progress and deprives lecturers of the opportunity to build relationships with mentors within businesses. However, the division of responsibilities might not necessarily be a negative influence on the functioning of colleges, especially if colleges seek to provide learning and training that is not restricted to the skills needs of businesses but rather learning and training that responds to the inclusive needs of learners.

By dividing responsibilities FET colleges get to focus on disciplining the mind while businesses sharpen the practical skill.

5.5 The Need for FET Colleges to Prepare Learners for Work

FET Colleges are known to be institutions that specifically focus on the provision of practical and technical skills, however, 'soft-skills' such as the ability to communicate effectively and proficiently, handling of interpersonal relationships and dealing with conflict are skills that require training as well. This section examines the methods used by FET Colleges to prepare learners for entry into the world of work, especially regarding "soft-skills".

The indications made by the college lecturers and student support officers from both campuses revealed that the methods used by colleges to prepare learners for work goes beyond academic or educational instructions and involves an overlap of responsibilities between the college academic staff, administrative staff, student support staff and host employers. The Senior Lecturer in Campus B noted the following:

> *"Part of our responsibility is to help our learners learn and understand professional conduct in the workplace. We teach them how to deal with conflict and how to raise concerns within the workplace. Also, we look at things like time management and issues of communication."*

A Student Support Officer in Campus B noted that their learners undergo an induction program before they are either placed within a business or before graduation. The induction program involves the provision of counselling and guidance to learners, especially those who show signs of learning or attitudinal problems, stating that:

> *"It is no secret that some of our learners enrol with us because they have learning or behaviour problems that affect their progress in the schooling system. We accept*

them and help address those issues so that they can have similar opportunities as everyone else"

Nevertheless, the college does not always directly intervene and solve problems faced by learners when placed within businesses but rather provide learners with information on how to approach the challenges they face in the workplace so they can learn how to manage and deal with such challenges on their own in the future. Further, this is done to afford the internal business process the opportunity to handle challenges faced by learners in accordance to the processes and structures of the business.

According to the Head of Department in Campus A, preparing learners for the world of work is also a major component of the fundamental section of all programs offered at FET Colleges because of the structure of the modules making the learning programmes. He stated that:

"We don't just train our learners and release them to the outside world just like that. Our English module has components of communication in it such as teaching our learners how to handle interviews, job applications and mostly how to handle difficult questions within a business environment"

This section looked at the manner in which lecturers work together with student support officers in preparing learners for the world of work through soft-skills training and highlighted the importance of equipping graduates with work preparation. Soft-skills play a significant role in the functioning of an employee, especially when considering that obtaining and keeping employment sometimes relies on soft-skills. The delivery of soft skills training highlights a move from focusing only on technical skills and offers learners knowledge that goes beyond technical functioning. Further, the section showed that FET Colleges are going beyond focusing on equipping learners with technical and practical skills only but learners are trained on dealing with situations beyond the application of technical skills.

5.6 Summary

The findings of the study revealed that according to businesses, FET College were not responsive enough towards their skills needs. Various challenges and hindrances were identified that influences negatively the maximisation of the learning and training of college learners. This involved lack of workplace training opportunities for learners, poor relationship between colleges and businesses and the continued belief by the college academic staff members that FET Colleges offered learning and training that equipped learners with responsive and relevant skills while businesses and the student support officers disagreed.

Nevertheless, the findings showed that the issue is not necessarily with regards to the programmes offered by FET Colleges but rather with the methods and techniques used by colleges. Important segments such as workplace-based training are not fulfilled in a manner that would offer learners full benefits of the programme which in turn affect their practical and technical skills abilities. The use of simulated training area presented short comings in offering practical training to learners and was viewed by businesses and SETA's as not sufficient to offer quality practical training to learners.

Also, the challenge regarding equipping learners with quality skills was revealed to be the non-participation of lecturers in the workplace-based training programme side by side placed learners which was viewed by businesses and learners as something which limited lecturers exposure to opportunities of identifying areas of improvement, improving their own practical skills and building professional relationships with employers and mentors within businesses. Nevertheless, this does not mean that FET Colleges do not play any role in skills development but rather in the current form, the sector need to reform, restructure and improve.

Chapter six:

Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the research question posed at the beginning of the study, "How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses" in relations to the literature review and conceptual framework presented in Chapter Two, drawing from the findings and analysis section presented in Chapter Five. Also, the chapter offers a set of recommendations for future implementation and direction.

6.2 Lack of FET College Responsiveness towards Skills Needs of Local Businesses

The key discovery of the study relates to the lack of responsiveness of FET Colleges in the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane community towards the skills needed by local businesses. Demonstrated in the literature review section was how FET Colleges in South Africa, since their establishment in the colonial era, functioned as skills focused institutions operating in line with the dependency model which defines learning and training institutions as existing solely to supply the economy with aligned and relevant skills rather than as institutions that offer an alternative route towards post-school learning to society for the intrinsic value of continued learning and training.

Before the restructuring of FET Colleges which began in 1997 and was followed by the introduction of the NCV programmes in 2007, FET Colleges existed exclusively to produce intermediate industry specific skills such as artisan skills without any academic or soft-skills component, thereby, aligning FET Colleges with the dependency model which views the relationship between post-school learning and training and businesses as driven by the need for colleges to supply businesses and industries with the necessary and relevant skills. The

introduction of the NCV programmes brought a shift in the functioning of colleges since NCV programmes were designed to offer learning and training that went beyond the delivery of programmes aimed at supplying businesses and industries with skills but also to offer continued and lifelong learning opportunities to learners, thereby, taking FET Colleges towards being autonomous institutions that are guided by academic freedom rather than skills needs constrains.

Disappointingly, the findings of the study revealed that FET Colleges were struggling to produce learners who possessed the type and quality of practical and technical skills needed by local businesses despite possessing good theoretical knowledge. This suggests a need for colleges to engage in a process of reform that should address the practical and technical training segment of the NCV programmes and should stimulate businesses to provide technical and practical training support to the colleges in order to enhance the practical skills of learners.

Though it appeared in the study that FET Colleges had the autonomy to develop and customise the learning and training programmes they provided to learners, it was also discovered that colleges needed to ensure that the programmes they developed and offered to learners were aligned to the skills needs of local businesses. This can be seen in that one of the requirements for a college campus to offer an NCV programme to learners is that there must be a clear need of the skills that will be produced by the programme. The implication thereof being the need for FET Colleges to offer training that is responsive and aligned to the skills needed by businesses rather than programmes that are free of specific businesses skills needs. Therefore, even with the introduction of the NCV programmes, the existence and relevance of FET Colleges continues to be dependent on and guided by the supply of skills that are needed by the economy.

Central to the dissatisfaction of businesses regarding the skills possessed by FET College learners was the manner through which learning and training was conducted in the National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) programmes rather than the curriculum structure of the

programmes. A Workshop Manager in Business 1 clarified this stating that when his business was approached by a local FET College to discuss the programmes offered by the college, the curriculum structure presented was in line with the skills needed by the business. However, when a group of learners were placed in the business on a workplace-based training programme, the learners demonstrated poor performance on basic skills that should have been covered in accordance with the curriculum structure that was presented during the presentation.

Further, it came out in the study that communication between businesses and colleges was not conducted in an effective manner and this poor communication between the two sectors has been happening without any effective interventions to correct the situation regardless of the acknowledgement of both sectors that this was affecting the learning and training of learners. As a result, there has been no adequate consultation between colleges and businesses regarding the learning and training of the NCV programmes leading to a disjuncture between college skills output against businesses skills needs. Hence, businesses have been expressing signs of dissatisfaction regarding the quality and nature of the skills possessed by college graduates while college academic staff members believed that FET Colleges produce graduates who possesses relevant skills.

6.3 The Cost of Insufficient Workplace-Based Training opportunities for Learners

One of the major challenges faced by the FET College involved in the study was with regards to the placement of learners on workplace-based training programmes. Workplace-based training is a significant segment of FET College training since it offers learners the opportunity to gain practical experience and help learners harness their technical skills. Therefore, in the absence of placement opportunities for the learners the cost becomes poor quality of or lack of technical and practical skills. Various elements came to the fore as an explanation regarding the lack of placement opportunities for learners, such as, poor relationship between colleges and businesses

and a preference for full-time SETA learnership candidates by businesses over full-time college learners. Unfortunately, there were few suggestions from both, the business sector and the college sector on how to address the challenges faced indicating the low levels of commitment from both stakeholders in ensuring the provision of workplace-based training to learners.

The problem regarding the placement of learners within businesses has been a longstanding issue considering that Campus A did not place any learners the previous year out of 1, 278 learners while Campus B has been placing the same number of learners, 14 learners, out of over 400 learners for the past three years. This has resulted to the reliance on simulated workplace areas within the campuses which is an approach that businesses are not in favour of due to the belief that the training offered at simulated areas is of inferior quality and should not be equated to workplace-based training. Without taking away the role played by the simulated workplace areas in the absent of workplace-based training opportunity, the opinions held by businesses regarding the effectiveness of simulated workplace areas cannot be taken lightly since businesses have the opportunity of employing learners who trained in these facilities. Nevertheless, as mentioned by the Senior Lecturer in Campus B, where there are no workplace-based training opportunities for learners, simulated training is better than no practical training at all.

6.4 The Relationship between Learning, Training and Employment

The perceptions held by businesses in the study together with the government policies on FET Colleges regarding the production of skills that are aligned to and responsive to the skills needed by businesses reflect similar assumptions regarding the position of FET Colleges in society. The assumption is that there should be a direct relationship between FET Colleges and the skills needs of businesses, and this relationship should be guided by the supply of skills towards businesses by FET colleges. But, according to Harvey (2010) the assumption of a direct relationship between learning and training with employment and the economy, risks, in some

quarters of academia, taking the position of anti-intellectualism and the erosion of academic freedom with regards to proposing that post-school training should be about training graduates for work rather than improving their minds.

This goes to the crux of the study and conjures up questions relating to the legitimacy of requiring learning and training institution to be responsive to certain specific skill rather than that learning and training institution should be autonomous and should offer flexible educational opportunities that discipline the mind through knowledge. Nevertheless, currently learning and training remains the widely used method of equipping society with skills and this increases individual's chances of employment which therefore means that if FET Colleges need to maintain their relevancy in society and the economy they need to be responsive to the requirement of the economy. The recommendations below discuss some of the steps that can be taken towards aligning the FET Colleges in the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane community towards being responsive to the skills needs of local businesses.

6.5 Recommendations

According to Mouton (2001) recommendations in a research study are given for a variety of reasons including identifying areas requiring further research, implementation of findings and for possible policy proposition. For this study, the first two points (identifying areas requiring further research and implementation of findings) will be of interest with regards to the recommendations. Also, it should be noted that the recommendations in this study are limited to the findings, evaluations and analysis of this study, but can be applied to situations displaying similar characteristics.

The identified recommendations are as follows:

- *Reformulation and reintegration of the practical and technical training segment of the NCV programmes:* The study revealed that businesses experienced FET College learners as possesses a wealth of theoretical knowledge but lacked practical skills such as the use

of tools. Thus, colleges need to reform and restructure the delivery of the practical training segment of the programmes offered.

- *An increase in workplace-based training opportunities for learners as offered by businesses:* Businesses need to increase the opportunities they give to FET College learners for workplace-based training and FET Colleges need to approach more businesses and build collaborations that involve offering learners workplace-based training.

6.6 Summary

The data collected from the respondents involved in the study afforded the researcher with valuable data to formulate conclusions regarding the research question of the study, "How relevant and responsive are FET Colleges towards the skills needs of local businesses". The conclusion reached revealed that local businesses in the Nelspruit and Kanyamazane community in the Mbombela Municipality experienced and perceived FET Colleges as not responsive to local business skills needs. However, this was expressed by the businesses as not necessarily due to non-alignment of the learning and training programmes offered but rather the manner in which the programmes were delivered to learners. The study established that should colleges and businesses work collaboratively through information sharing and the provision of workplace-based training opportunities to learners by businesses the quality and nature of skills acquired by FET College learners can be responsive and aligned to those needed by the local businesses.

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Appendix 1: Fieldwork Permission or Approval Letter

EhlanzeniFETCollege
Central Office

29 Bell Street, NELSPRUIT.

Private Bag X11297 NELSPRUIT 1200

Tel: 013-752-7105/5817/7527/5070/4752 Fax: 013-752-4902

ISO 9001: 2008 Certificated **EFETC**

Enq: D Masuku 22 July 2013

Professor D Dickinson

Private Bag 3

Wits

2050

Dear Prof Dickinson

REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

The college hereby acknowledges receipt of your letter dated 24 June 2013, written on behalf of a student (Mr Z. Dlamini) requesting to conduct research on the "**Alignment of Further Education and Training Colleges towards the Skills Needs of Businesses in the Mbombela Municipality**".

The college grants Mr. Dlamini permission to conduct research as stated in your letter on condition that:

a) He provides a copy of his research proposal to the college; and

b) Upon completion of his research, he will give a copy of his thesis to the college.

Yours Faithfully

Dr S
Acting

Appendix 2: Ethics Clearance Letter

Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Dlamini

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE	**PROTOCOL NUMBER H13/07/30**
PROJECT TITLE	The alignment of further education and training colleges towards the skills needs of businesses in the Mbombela Municipality
INVESTIGATOR(S)	Mr ZH Dlamini
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	Social Sciences/Sociology
DATE CONSIDERED	19/07/2013
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved Unconditionally
EXPIRY DATE	15/08/2015

DATE 16/08/2013 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor T Milani)

cc: Supervisor : Prof D Dickinson

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10003, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

_____ _____/_____/_____
Signature **Date**

PLEASE QUOTE THE PROTOCOL NUMBER ON ALL ENQUIRIES

Appendix 3: Consent Form: Consent Form for Participation in an Interview for Research Purposes

1. I …….. (Name and Surname) give my consent to participate in the research project conducted by Mr. Zakhele Dlamini from the University of the Witwatersrand which is under the title "The alignment of further education and training colleges towards the skills needs of businesses in the Mbombela Municipality". I understand that the project is designed to gather information for academic purposes and the information collected will be used in Mr Zakhele Dlamini's Master's Degree in Development Studies Research Report.

2. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. I may withdraw and/or discontinue participation at any time without any penalty. Should I choose to participate in this study I have a right to decline to answer any question(s) or to end the interview.

3. Participation involves being interviewed by a researcher in an interview that should last approximately 30-45 minutes.

4. I understand that with my permission, the interview will be recorded to accurately capture the information that I provide.

   I consent to the audiotaping of the interview: YES NO

5. I understand that with my permission, the researcher may use direct quotes from me in the final report resulting from this interview.

   I consent to the use of direct quotes from the interview: YES NO

6. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain confidential.

7. No other person other than the researcher and the researcher's supervisor from the University of the Witwatersrand will have access to raw notes and/or transcripts of the interview(s).

8. I understand that this research study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Humanities and the Human Research Ethics Committee (non-medical) of the University of the Witwatersrand.

9. I have read and I understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

10. I have been given a copy of this consent form.

_____ _____

My Printed Name and Date My Signature Date

_____ _____

Name of the Researcher and date Signature of the researcher

For further information or query, please feel free to contact the following persons at any time:

The researcher Mr. Zakhele Dlamini on: Email. u10033981@tuks.co.za or Cell: 079 841 0121.

The research supervisor Professor David Dickinson on: Email. david.dickinson@wits.ac.za or Office: 011 717 4438/1000.

Appendix 4: List of National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) offered at Campus A and Campus B

Campus A

NCV Programme Title	**Field (s) of alignment and Responsiveness**
1. Finance, Economics and Accounting	• Private and public accounting • Banking • Financial Services • Insurance Services • Bookkeeping
2. Electrical Infrastructure Construction	• Electrical Engineering • Industrial Engineering • Sound Technology • Process Level Control • Digital Electronics • Instrumentation
3. Office Administration	• Bookkeeping • Office Management • Office Administration • Private Secretary • Front Line Reception • Personal and General • Secretarial Services

Appendix 4: Continues

Campus B

NCV Programme Title	**Field (s) of alignment and Responsiveness**
1. Engineering and Related Design	• Chemical Engineering • Civil Engineering • Coal Technology • Geology • Mechanical Engineering • Metallurgical Engineering • Mining Metallurgy • Petroleum Engineering • Car Manufacturing • Architectural Technology • Welding • Tool Making • Building Management • Automotive Repairing • Motor Mechanics • Panel Beating • Refrigeration • Air-Conditioning

Appendix 5: Example of a Logbook Comment Section

Journal: Day 1 **Date……**

Time in…… Time out……..

Department(s)/section(s) you visited or worked in ……...

……

Names and job titles of the people you worked with during the day

Name	Job title

……

……...

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

……

To be completed by employer representative responsible for the student for the day

Name	Job title	Signature

Comment, if any……..

……