Eradicating a Culture of Public Mistrust in TVET College Education in South Africa: A Manifesto for the Sector's Sustainability Ahead of 4IR

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ABSTRACT

The consumption of technical and vocational education and training has increased exponentially over the past two decades. In terms of inclusion, it is without a doubt that today's TVET sector is a far cry from what it was before the democratic government took over the baton from the apartheid government. TVET has become a refuge to many hopefuls from the historically disadvantaged sectors of society who, due to a range of apparent reasons, would ordinarily not have managed to partake in tertiary education. To many South African youth, TVET presents an avenue for the acquisition of a skill that will give them a fighting chance at escaping the harsh recurrence of poverty, economic inactivity and resource deprivation they are subjected to almost on a daily basis. However, beneath this silver lining lies a growing public disgruntlement over the TVET system's inability to steadfastly deliver quality education and transform the lives of students, by instilling in them agency for self-regulated and collaborative innovation that will turn them into formidable and assertive role players in the knowledge societies, come the fourth industrial revolution (4IR). To understand the crux of public mistrust in TVET college education in South Africa, an extensive body of literature was reviewed. The findings of the paper point to strategic factors (which in the main are attributed to a lack of effective leadership and managerial skills) and contextual factors that occur at a campus level, as major causes of public mistrust in TVET education. The paper concludes by tabling a manifesto for changing the status quo ahead of the advent of 4IR.

KEYWORDS

Fourth industrial revolution; manifesto; public mistrust; sustainable development; technical and vocational education and training.

INTRODUCTION

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges have a significant role to play in eradicating skills disparities and ensuring participation parities in higher education. Formerly known as technical colleges, in the post-apartheid era TVET colleges went through a series of reforms spanning 14 years (Buthelezi, 2018), which were envisaged to strengthen the training of young people in an array of skills, knowledge values and practices, for them to enter the labour market and stimulate the economy whilst at the same time earning a living. TVET colleges do this through two flagship academic offerings, namely National Certificate Vocational (NCV) programmes which take three years to complete, and National Accredited Technical Education Diplomas (NATEDs) which (in record time) take 18 months to complete, both of which cut across different streams such as engineering, entrepreneurship and business management, hospitality studies, utility studies, information and communication technology (ICT), early childhood development, and public safety studies. Through these offerings, the sector has transformed the lives of the youth who ordinarily would not have had the opportunity to acquire higher education due to their socio-economic circumstances, as evidenced in the increased enrolment intake which sky-rocketed from 345 000 in 2010 (Department of Higher Education and Training ([DHET], 2014) to 705 397 in 2016 (DHET, 2019). In keeping with the National Development Plan (NDP)(National Planning Commission [NPC], 2012), this increase is expected to reach a peak of 2.5 million by 2030 (DHET, 2014).

However, underneath this silver lining lies public mistrust in TVET education (Essel et al., 2014) that has, for the longest time, created the impression that TVET-acquired qualifications are of inferior quality, when compared to university qualifications (Branson, 2018). This impression is compounded by a twitter poll conducted by the South African Broadcasting Authority (SABC), whose results pointed to 24.1% of the respondents showing preference for TVET education, with 43% showing preference for university education, while 27% showed preference for both systems and 4.5% said neither (Kagiso Trust, 2023). This was further illustrated in recent data which approximates TVET enrolment at about 780 000, in comparison to the 970 000 university enrolment (Branson, 2018).

Skeptics of TVET education grapple to see its potential for reducing youth unemployment and producing the right caliber of skills that the labour market will find hard to resist (Krueger & Kumar, 2004). Much of it stems from the abnormally high unemployment rate among South African TVET graduates (Sibiya et al., 2021). According to the 2017 statistics, 33% of youth with TVET qualifications were unemployed whereas the unemployment rate among youth who acquired other forms of tertiary qualifications hovered around 7% (Statistics South Africa [SSA], 2017). In light of this skepticism on the ability of the sector in producing an employable caliber of graduates (Blom, 2016; Branson, 2018; Essel et al., 2014; Raheem & Ayika, 2019), Shi and Bangpan (2022) suggest that it is necessary to identify the root cause of what TVET education fails to achieve through research, so that based on the findings, researchers can table strategies

of restoring the value of TVET in championing skills development. It is within this latitude of thinking that the study was guided by the following objectives:

- To understand strategic and contextual factors that contribute to public mistrust in TVET college education in South Africa.
- To propose solutions that would lead to the sector's sustainable development, ahead of the fourth industrial revolution (4IR).
- To that end, the following research question drove this undertaking:
- Which strategic and contextual factors contribute to public mistrust in TVET college education in South Africa?

In terms of the layout, the paper is framed around four sections, each serving a different purpose. Presented are a theoretical overview, the research methods employed, the results and discussion, as well as a conclusion and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of TVET in the Epoch of the Fourth Industrial Revolution

As the world readies itself for the advent of 4IR, it is imperative that the TVET systems do the same. This statement reflects the view of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA, 2020, p. 11), as spelled out in its report entitled *Rethinking the role of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in future work and lifelong learning, in light of digitalisation and the Fourth Industrial Revolution*. The crux of the report is that it highlights the challenges confronting TVET in Africa, concluding, inter alia, that the unprecedented unemployment rate is a reflection of the "skills mismatch" stemming from industry and colleges' failure to consult one another. To demonstrate this impasse, Raheem and Ayika (2019) use the civil engineering sector as a typical example of how disjointed regional and provincial TVET educational planning systems are, in terms of addressing skills deficits in the local economy. A case in point is that, in Nigeria, "expatriates engineers" – who themselves trained through the TVET system (in their respective countries) – negotiate lucrative contracts in exchange for their scarce skills, despite Nigeria having multiple TVET colleges and scores of technically trained unemployed youth.

Another example to prove the ineffectiveness of the TVET systems in fulfilling the mandate of generating critical skills to the economy (Human Resource Development Council of South Africa, 2014; NDP, 2012) is drawn from South Africa, where for about a decade, during the first phases of the construction of the Kusile power station in Mpumalanga province, a significant number of expatriate artisans from different corners of the globe were lucratively employed to implement their technical and industrial expertise. They deployed a range of technical skills in their individual capacities as millwrights, electricians, plumbers, boilermakers, mechanics, fitters and turners, tool makers, riggers, and pattern makers/injection moulders (Centre for Development and Enterprise ([CDE], 2007). The fact that Kusile is situated a stone's throw from Emalahleni, Pretoria and Johannesburg– which collectively are home to no fewer

than ten TVET college campuses – exposes the extent to which, on its own, South Africa's construction industry does not have a sufficient supply of the much-needed artisanal skills to stay afloat. This is supported by data which explicates that, more than a decade ago, occupational trade centres (OTCs) certified an average of 3 000 artisans per annum, while at the time the ideal production target was 12 500 artisans per annum (Jordan & Barry, 2009). The Department of Science and Innovation (DSI, 2021) reports that the demand placed on the TVET sector, to produce artisans, has soared to at least 30 000 artisans per year by 2030. Presently, the country produces between 19 000 and 20 000 artisans per annum (Kagiso Trust, 2023). This data exposes the need for the TVET sector to self-innovate for the sake of its own sustainable development, and that of the national skills development project. Sustainable development in the TVET context speaks to the need for transformation of the sector, by coming up with innovative ways of ensuring that leadership, management, curriculum design, instructional and administrative processes, student support and funding move in tandem with trends and patterns that accommodate the dawning of 4IR.

To heed growing calls to transform the TVET sector in line with the dictates of 4IR, the South African government, through the NDP (NPC, 2012), instructed those institutions to deliver no fewer than 2.5 million graduates endowed with the necessary skills to help the country acclimatise to 4IR by 2030 (DHET, 2014). The NDP (NPC, 2012) further stipulates that, to respond to the all-encompassing demands of 4IR, the envisaged skills should not be limited to the existing occupational streams, but should also encompass a new mixture of 4IR-responsive skills that have implications for the future outlook of the economy. This viewpoint is consistent with that of Manamela (2022), who cites World Bank data reporting that 65% of children entering primary school today are ultimately destined to take up jobs that are yet to be conceptualised. The paper considers Manamela's (2022) remark as a plea for the country's TVET colleges to not only rely on the guidance of the government, but also go further in terms of harnessing the contribution of the sector in advancing the youth development agenda by rethinking the ways in which it can produce graduates endowed with a plethora of context-specific skills that will stimulate economic growth ahead of 4IR.

Understanding the Concept and Architecture of the "Public"

The word "public" is widely used in people's daily communication. It generally relates to a collective group. However, in civic education, the conceptual underpinning of the word is informed by people's activism and awareness (or lack thereof). The concept borrows from Dewey's ideology of the public being that of society which, in a situation perceived to be hazardous to its preferred order of doing things, may either apply resistance, remain oblivious or accept the status quo. In his situational theory of publics, James Grunig (1983 cited in Rawlins & Bowen, 2005) talks about non-publics, as well as latent, aware and active publics. Non-publics are those members of the public which do not really recognise a problem that other members do, and as a result they have no agenda to advance (Rawlins & Bowen, 2005). Latent publics are dismayed by the problem, but are only partially interested in proactively attending to it (Toth,

2006). Aware publics fully understand the magnitude of the problem confronting them, and are very prepared to act on it (Toth, 2006). Active publics are those who, upon realising the problem, take resolute action to implement processes to address it with their full might (Rawlins & Bowen, 2005). Active and aware publics often highlight the plight of the broader structure of the public, and include politicians, public commentators, activists, journalists, student representative councils, churches and other lobby groups whose affinity lies with a shared agenda.

Based on these definitions on the structuring of the public, a particularly apt definition by Vasquez (1993, cited in Vasquez & Taylor, 2001, p. 140) is of it being a collection of "individuals that develop a group of consciousness around the problematic situation". Therefore, the genesis of this discussion is that in democratic nations such as South Africa, whether or not one of the above public groupings decides to institute action is purely dependent on their degree of consciousness around the problematic situation as well as their personal and collective agency to mobilise support and coalesce with others.

Theorising the Consequential Effect of Public Mistrust in Education

To theorise the issue of public mistrust in the domain of education, the paper foregrounds its narrative on Gibbs' *Trust, Openness, Respect, and Interdependence (TORI) Theory of Trust Formation* (Gibb & Gibb, 1968). Developed between 1950 and 1960 by Jack and Loraine Gibb, the theory depicts the fine line between trust, mistrust and distrust, and makes a case for preserving the relationship of trust with the hindsight of averting the possibility of it escalating into mistrust. Fundamentally, the theory links unabated progression of mistrust to the conception of the atmosphere or feeling of distrust whose effects can permanently ravage the ambience of trust in a relationship (Gibb & Gibb, 1968). While the theory restricts its definition of the concept of trust to a layman's cognitive level, it does however go deeper in conceptualising how the structure of trust dissipates in a relationship. It effectively expounds that the erosion of trust happens at a gradual rather than a rapid pace, and often happens as a reactionary impulse to a spate of incidents perceived to be contrary to the established order and common norms and standards that apply in a particular context or world view. This implies that, in a relationship, distrust not only signifies a broken relationship of trust, but also constitutes the penultimate degree of withdrawal from the relationship. Contrary to distrust, mistrust is about skepticism that emanates from the actor's fear of something, and as such, does not mark a total collapse of a relationship of trust between parties concerned. Furthermore, the theory explicitly states that to alleviate the intensification of mistrust there is a need for considering a series of remedial actions that appear to be in tandem with the normative culture and socially just standards of a group of people in communal, national or global settings. As pointed out by Gibb and Gibb (1996), this will eventually precipitate an atmosphere where the degree of fear is decreased, and the feeling of trust is increased (1968), albeit at a gradual pace until a point at which fear, and skepticism become a thing of the past, and the relationship is restored.

According to Kramer and Tyler (1996, pp. 3–4), in the education milieu, mistrust evokes a feeling of anxiety among actors – a factor which then renders them uneasy about the credibility of the academy in serving their best interests. They become "increasingly unwilling to take risks, demand greater protections against the possibility of betrayal and increasingly insist on costly sanctioning mechanisms to defend their interests" (Kramer & Tyler, 1996, pp. 3–4). As a result, the effectiveness of "actions and potential actions" taken (or to be taken) by the academy to extend a service to sections of the public is often treated with skepticism (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 1998). However, through corrective actions mistrust can be reversed. Such corrective actions can present an opportunity for a review of the actions that may have to be avoided by the liable party, system or institution to ensure that the root cause of the issues in question (or the impasse) are dealt with effectively (Citrin & Stoker, 2018) going forward into the future. In borrowing from this theory, an attempt is made to illustrate how a culture of public mistrust in educational institutions develops, and how its restoration requires radical actions and consistency to lower the degree of fear among members of the public who expect those institutions to have their best interests – or at least those of others – at heart.

The Role of a Manifesto in Fostering Public's Advocacy for Change in Education

Biesta and Safstrom (2011) assert that educational institutions are spaces that are never devoid of politics. Neo-liberalism has effectively transformed educational institutions into political arenas where the existence (or lack) of democratic principles, social justice, appreciation for diverse normative cultures, and the brokering of peace and nation building determine the perceived public outlook or image of the institution. It not only determines how institutions are treated and viewed, but also their productivity outlook. A comprehensive view of the political nature of education is captured in Dewey's 1916 *Democracy and Education*, in which he emphasises that education is a social activity, and that schools should transmit democratic values, social justice and civic activism through their operational philosophies, to ultimately produce politically conscious learners who apply rationality to broker effective changes within their own societies.

Nkambule (2020) seconds Ramphele's (2013) assertion that, in the education sector, political will is needed to harness advocacy for transformative change. In contexts where numerous challenges shield the organisation from achieving productivity, Kotter (1995) points out that transformative change is imperative. Normally, transformative change calls for stakeholder-centered processes to decide on, and implement, a strategy aimed at altering the organisational culture, its norms, systems, communication procedures and policy frameworks, with a view to expanding the feasibility of its prosperity to function productively (Kotter, 1996). Derived from the Latin word *manifestum*, which refers to a list of facts (Intergenerational Foundation [IF], 2016), manifestos differ from recommendations, in that they are not limited to the citing of steps to be taken, but also shed light on how this is to be done to eradicate counter-productive politics in education (Garcia Fernandez & Garcia Marin, 2022) that obstruct efforts to deliver quality education (Biesta & Safstrom, 2011). Similarly, the manifesto proposed here,

tables steps and the strategic direction TVET colleges ought to follow, if they are to act as catalysts for quality education and sustainable development of the sector and the restoration of public trust in the sector ahead of the era of 4IR.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Approach

The paper was premised on a desktop research design which, according to Jackson (1994 cited in Zhou & Nunes, 2016), entails a review of a wide range of secondary data embedded in a collection of documents and literature deemed to be relevant to the topic under investigation. Desktop research affords researchers the opportunity "to study a particular area that simply would not be accessible otherwise and also makes such things as comparison of settings possible including ones at home and abroad" (Bassot, 2022). Zhou and Nunes (2016) point out that desktop research can manifest in different research methods. In the context of this paper, since researchers were interested in understanding factors contributing to public mistrust in TVET college education in South Africa, they relied on the interpretive element of qualitative research to draw a rich account of the factors giving rise to the phenomena.

Data Sources

Essentially, data were gathered from different sources of literature, namely empirical, anecdotal and policy-derived documentary sources. Empirical literature was extracted from book chapters, research articles, theses and dissertations, and institutional reports. "Institutional memoranda and reports, census publications, government pronouncements and proceedings, diaries and innumerable other written sources" (Ahmed, 2010, p.2) constituted a body of documentary evidence that was used in the study. Documentary literature particularly the *Post-school Education & Training Monitor: Macro-indicator trends and the 2013 Statistics on Post-school Education and Training in South Africa* (DHET, 2015) provided a perspective in terms of which the researchers were able to develop a summative opinion on current happenings, in so far as the erosion of public mistrust in TVET college education was concerned. These were fortified with the evidence drawn from the *White Paper for Post-school Education and Training* (DHET, 2014), the *Revised Norms and Standards of TVET Colleges* (DHET, 2019), and the *Green Paper on Post-school Education and Training* (RSA, 2012).

In addition to documentary literature, a body of anecdotal literature (Cobitt, 2013) which included "written statements prepared by individuals or an agency for the purpose of attesting to an event or providing an accounting" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981, p. 228). Newspaper articles by a newspaper columnist who is also a public TVET practitioner, a special report compiled by a non-governmental organisation (NGO) that focuses on educational development, and media statements by senior politicians and government representatives were analysed and used to supplement and cross-check some of the empirical perspective from existing emperical literature. Considering that the study aimed to highlight strategic and contextual factors contributing to the misalignment between TVET college education (Sibiya et al., 2021) and 4IR

skills (Denhere & Moloi, 2021; Makgatho, 2019) and to find possible solutions to eradicate the identified sectorial challenges (Shi & Bangpan, 2022), the inclusion of anecdotal sources of literature diversified the contextual texture of the study and the general outlook of the primary findings (Cubitt, 2013). Online print media outlets, namely the Mail and Guardian Newspaper and the South African Government News Agency, both of which are known for their extensive coverage of the socio-political aspects of education, constituted the platforms where anecdotal literature sources were retrieved. The following table details the anecdotal data sources, its authors and their role in the public education system.

Table 1.

Anecdotal data sources(see Appendix).

Overall, the integration of literature, anecdotal, case studies (Davis & Khazanchi, 2007) and documentary data sources (Ahmed, 2010) situated the study on varied empirical perspectives while also shining a spotlight on the political and government position relative to the challenges confronting the sector as well as field practitioners' first-hand observations and experiences of factors contributing to public mistrust in the sector. In a methodological sense, a combination of these sources served as a data crystallisation, triangulation or cross-checking exercise (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023).

Data Analysis

Naturally, a qualitative data analysis involves the unbundling of scattered and diverse data sources. Specifically, in this paper, the researchers applied an inductive approach to consolidate data from documentary and literature data sources, in terms of which they immersed themselves in the processes of interrogating different sets of data, to understand the meaningfulness thereof and their implication for the investigation at hand. This gradually culminated in the discovery of convergent and divergent patterns of data, and their reconstruction into themes that were congruent with the envisaged objectives and research questions of the study (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Essentially, the data analysis took a three-legged approach, namely "data reduction, data presentation, and [the] drawing of conclusions" (Tamon, 2023, p. 232). Data reduction was necessary as it enabled the researchers to condense the findings of the paper into a comprehensive body of evidence through which they managed to draw out results that addressed the research question/objective. Subsequently data presentation entailed the arrangement of results and conclusions, as thematically demonstrated below.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper offers a thematic presentation of the results. The authors also put forward a manifesto to harness the sector's sustainable development agenda and reverse the severity of the degree of public mistrust towards it.

Strategic Factors Contributing to Public Mistrust in TVET Education

a.   Ineffective strategic leadership practices

The current institutional culture generally does not allow for both vertical and horizontal communication to ensure that leaders, managers and staff act in unison and are driven by a common purpose (Luvalo, 2017). This is evidenced in how managers fail to comply with their job descriptions, to ensure that subordinate staff perform their assigned duties accordingly (Beharry-Ramraj, 2016). Under the watch of managers, quality assurance occurs at irregular intervals, and often does not reflect the accuracy of the performance (Essel et al., 2014). Currently, due to leaders' inability to perform effective leadership, college-based and head office-based administrators constitute the worst-performing staff component of the TVET workforce, and are equally complicit in driving TVET colleges further away from productivity and best practices (Parliamentary Monitoring Group [PMG], 2019).

This is purported to be due to a leadership skills gap among the majority of TVET leaders (DHET, 2018). This gap emanates from the leaders not having undergone high impact leadership training during their time as classroom-based educators (Worku, 2019), or while serving in non-leadership ranks in different sectors of the economy. This often results in them experiencing an uphill battle in catalysing high-impact leadership (Robertson & Frick, 2018). Thus, ineffective approaches in leading TVET college personnel have exacerbated anarchy and underperformance amongst employees, and resulted in the production of graduates who are shunned by industry (Dlamini, 2015; Sithole, 2020; Sithole et al., 2022; Tadle et al., 2021). Overall, it is apparent that TVET leaders' lack of "will and gut" to exercise responsive or effective strategic leadership practices (Ahmad, 2015, p.147) are directly linked to poor quality assurance and questionable intergrity of examinations, poor teaching and poor middle management skills (Thobejane & Singh, 2016).

b.   *Partial enforcement of compliance regulation and employee engagement*

Sithole et al (2022) refer to poor culture of consequence management as a precursor for the lack of cooperation across the spectrums of most TVET college campuses. This happens mainly in the curriculum delivery chain, whereby lecturers do not always honestly commit to quality teaching (Essel et al., 2014), while administrative staff do not feel morally obligated to carry out their duties in line with institutional protocols and time frames (HRDCSA, 2014). They do this knowing that the worst-case scenario for their incompetence would be punishable by inform verbal warnings, and that the trade unions would intervene in the event of serious offences being levelled against them. Situations like these show that managers do not make time to continuously engage with employees (Mmako, 2015) to influence or regulate their "emotional, cognitive, and behavioural state towards organisational outcomes" (Shuck & Wollard, 2010, p. 103). Ahmad's (2015) study concluded that ineffective strategic leadership practices of leaders (senior managers) of TVET institutions in Malaysia contributed to low staff morale and ethical behaviour. The evidence presented in Ahamad's study is corroborated by Nundkumar and Subban (2020) whose study indicated that South African TVET leaders do not implement risk management and strategic interventions to improve relationships.

c.   *Underfunding of TVET colleges*

Underfunding appears to be the biggest concern across the sector. Currently, four per cent of the higher education budget goes towards the upkeep of the country's 50 TVET colleges and subsidiary entities, while 11% percent is spread across 26 public universities (DHET, 2019). In numerical terms, this implies that in 2019, R12 billion was set aside for TVET colleges versus R78 billion for universities (PMG, 2019). This is a clear case of double standards, where one higher education sector benefits more than the other. This does not auger well for attempts to inspire public confidence in the ability of the underfunded TVET sector to meet its objectives. This finding comes amid a pronouncement made by the Association for the Development of Education in Africa [ADE], 2021), that funding inadequacy is a phenomenon that affects the TVET sector across the length and breadth of the continent. It is almost as if TVET colleges are destined to struggle to perform optimally (ADE, 2021). It is worth noting that [a decade prior] the *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (RSA, 2012) identified poor coordination of funding of the TVET sector as a threat to the production of a range of skills that are urgently needed to scale up the economy and turn the sector into an inclusive learning space and skills production hubs.

d.   Lack of political oversight

Although the TVET sector is severely underfunded, from time to time, government does "make provision for substantial resources to be awarded to TVET colleges" to capacitate their infrastructure and actualize programmes (Nawi et al., 2020). However, due to government's failure as a key stakeholder in exercising regular oversight of processes and resource allocation and expenditure in TVET colleges, resources are often misused – irregularities occur, while managers often do not accept accountability (Berharry-Ramraj, 2016; Sithole et al., 2022). Resultabtly, corruption and flouting of procurement processes have become a regular feature. Most recently, this was demonstrated in the wasteful expenditure of the R1.9 billion recapitalization grant, that was spread across all 50 TVET colleges, for them to procure technological equipment and invest in ICT skills development interventions (Buthelezi, 2018) to resuscitate academic operations of colleges (Department of Education, [DoE], 2004) and train academic staff (Gewer, 2016). Essop's (2020) report pointed to regulatory frameworks that are not backed by strong political and institutional leadership as a factor that compromises the quality, growth and stability of the TVET sector. After assessing the magnitude of such occurences, Ramphele (2013a) concluded that the ruling political party does not have the political will to transform the quality of education and training.

e.   Low student academic performance and high student unemployment rate

Dating back to 1997, when TVET colleges were still called technical colleges, among the dominant or rather common findings drawn from studies on a wide range of topics involving the sector, students' poor academic results took precedence (e.g., Abrahams, 1997; Buthelezi, 2018; Makgatho, 2019; Ncobela, 2022a; Sithole, 2020; van der Bijl & Taylor, 2016). Cohen (2019) and Makgatho (2019) concede that TVET low academic achievement levels of the sector create a cloud of doubt around the potential of the students who went through the system, which –

according to recent statistics – is said to be at 30%. According to Wedekind (2016), such low levels of achievemnt reveal that while a policy on professional qualifications for TVET college lecturers now exists, lecturers' capacity to successfully deliver qualifications on offer is not adequate. Poor academic performance is also an indication that by virtue of being understaffed (Wadekend, 2016), TVET lecturers are unable to allocate enough time for remedial work to be done extensively to ensure that every student is adequately prepared for examinations (Singh, 2020).

Much of what has been discussed makes the industry question the caliber of the graduates that the sector produces (Raheem & Ayika, 2019). According to Papier (2017), the training of these students lacks elements that are crucial to job creation and employability, including exposure to problem based technical learning and industry based experiential learning. Hence in South Africa, it is common for TVET college graduates to remain unemployed for a long time (Nkosi, 2017). Based on the current situation, stakeholders must beggin to reform the rolling out in service training of lecturers, procurement of learning resources, equipment for practical training and infrastructure, particularly workshops for practical or technical skills training for students (Blom, 2016; HRDCSA, 2014; NDP, 2012; Wedekind, 2016, 2017; Papier, 2017; RSA, 2012).

Beyond the institutional level, there are several factors that prevent TVET graduates from gaining access to the world of work or new venture creation. Sibiya et al (2021) point to the government's lack of willingness to fund the development of SMMEs to enable TVET graduates to explore self-employment.

f.   Slow-paced approach to producing skills needed by the economy

The NDP (NPC, 2012) labels all artisanal trades as crucial to the development of the economy, yet it there is an indication that the TVET sector underperforms when it comes to producing skills that are needed to stimulate the economy. Special reference is made to the country's occupational trade centres (OTCs) which continue to produce far fewer than the required number of certified artisans (Jordan & Barry, 2009). As such, there is a 294 603 student production deficit. Evidently, the current number which as of 2016, was estimated at the range of 705 395 (DHET, 2019) demonstrates that TVET colleges have failed to fulfil their initial mandate, in line with the NDP (NPC, 2012), of producing a target of 1 000 000 students by 2015 (DHET, 2019) which is expected to peak at 2.5 million by 2030 (DHET, 2014).

To contextualise reasons behind the decline in student production, Ncobela (2022c) cited both the Covid-19 pandemic and increased number of matriculants who passed with university entrance, as factors that contributed to a decline in student intakes for the 2020 and 2021 academic years. Meanwhile, Gewer (2016) identified the "generally weak relationships between colleges and industry" as one of the stumbing blocks (p.28) to slow production of graduates with skills needed to galvanise the economy. Yende's (2021) study problematised the fallibility of the national higher education student funding model and the monitoring of the inflow and out flow of funds for widening access to many more pools of prospective TVET students. Recent analysis

of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) policy, showed that it favours academically inclined students while it discriminates against their counterparts who are more inclined to kinaesthetic or practical learning (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023). It excludes the so called "doers" or learners who are inclined to practical learning (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023) to whom the sector "is the [only] viable option to acquire practical skills to create their own jobs in order to reduce unemployment and speed up the socio-economic development of the country" (Quan-Baffour & Akpey-Mensah, 2022, p.109). The absence of dialogue between the industry and TVET institutions is another factor that cannot be ignored. Sibiya et al (2021) noted that both the industry and TVET colleges do not explore issues of re-designing and creating additional learning programmes that address the needs of the industry. In the bigger scheme of things, it can be said that these challenges are partially caused by political symbolism—which Jansen (2002) defines as the post-apartheid government stance of putting in place sound educational policies whose implementation is either not pragmatic or backed by commitment to realising the ideal of providing quality education for all.

g.   *Outdated curriculum, constricting credit system, and unattractive qualifications*

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is a statutory body that oversees processes of aligning higher education qualification under the umbrella of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) based on:

The creation of a pathway or articulation of formal and informal agreements within the educational and training system, mostly between two or more education and training sub-systems, between specific institutional types, and guided by guidelines, policies and accreditation principles. Specific articulation also refers to institutional accommodation of individual needs (Gov. Gazette No. 37775, p. 23).

Guided by this legislation, a series of extensive consultations took place to plan around forging specific articulation of qualifications through inter- or intra- institutional agreements, such as memoranda of understanding, credit accumulation and transfer and other mechanisms (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2023). However, evidence suggests that more than a decade later, government keeps ignoring calls for the NATED stream to be scrapped and replaced with a more viable and industry-aligned stream that will allow students access into the same stream at a university level, by ensuring that they obtain credits to further their studies (Ncobela, 2022b). Several studies (i.e., Buthelezi, 2018; Cohen, 2019; Makgatho, 2019; Ncobela, 2022b) came to a conclusion that presently there is a disconnect between some of the newly developed NCV curricula, the old NATED curricula, and the demands of the national economy. This situation is further worsened by the unease around the lack of willpower on the part of the Department of Higher Education and Training to restructure the outdated curricula, which inhibits employability among TVET graduates (Cohen, 2019) and the creation of a pathway to ensure that TVET acquired qualifications can facilitate access to further training within the university system. Needham (2018) concluded that despite amendments to the structure of the NQF, it still falls short of creating favourable conditions for both systemic and specific

articulation to occur. Consequently, the fruition of a fully articulated post-school education and training system in South Africa, remains a pipeline dream (Themane et al., 2023).

h.   TVET lecturers are wrongfully regulated by a professional body for educators

Before migrating in 2014 to DHET (Department of Higher Education and Training), TVET colleges fell under the Department of Basic of Education (DBE), and were run at the provincial level of basic education (Sithole, 2020). After the promulgation of the Continuing Education Act 16 of 2006 (RSA, 2006), TVET colleges stopped using the title "educator" and adopted the use of "lecturer" (Ncobela, 2022b), changing "FET (Further Education and Training) college" to "TVET college". Ideally, following the move to DHET, the renaming of academic staff and institutional titles would have meant that the DBE no longer had the prerogative to control any area of the functionality of TVET colleges. However, till this day, TVET lecturers remain under the regulatory statue and oversight of the South African Council for Educators (SACE), which is legislated under the ambit of DBE to regulate educators' professional affairs at the general education and training (GET) level of operation.

On one hand, TVET lectures are regulated under the policy framework that was promulgated with educators in mind. On the other hand, they are expected to exude the status of traditional higher education professionals (Sebola, 2022). The reality is, TVET colleges serve a unique purpose to traditional higher education institutions. The "standard of TVET teaching it is too high for basic education and too low for higher education (Anthonie, 2019, p. 1). Sebola (2022, p. 50) reiterates this sentiment, arguing that "[TVET colleges] are indeed self-styled Basic education institutions, operating wrongfully as institutions of higher learning in the South African Higher education band" (Sebola, 2022, p. 50). Therefore, to fulfil the mandate for which they were insituted, TVET educators must have self-determination, bargaining power and a space to influence the sectors' developmental trajectory and ventilate a range of context-specific issues. To start with, they must have their own professional regulatory body; failing which, the so called "aware and active publics" (Rawlins & Bowen, 2005; Toth, 2006), shall not stop raising serious questions around why, of the three tiers comprising the country's education system, both the GET and HET have regulatory bodies, yet TVET does not.

Contextual Factors Contributing to Public Mistrust in TVET Education

a.   Fewer professional development opportunities

The National Policy Framework for FET Lecturer Qualifications (DoE, 2009) promotes the notion of life-long learning for TVET educators through a continuous professional development system. Sadly, legislators and political principals in charge of the sector do not make good on their promise to monitor the institutionalisation and sustanance of a culture of lifelong learning in the sector. Research proves that only a handful of South African TVET college lecturers are adequately qualified (Gewer, 2016; Ncobela, 2022a; Wedekind, 2016). The Green Paper *on Post-school Education and Training* (RSA, 2012) documented that lecturers who teach technical subjects often come from industry armed with technical experience but fail to teach effectively due to lack of pedagogical expertise. Among those with occupational qualifications, only a few

have field or teaching experience (van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019). The issue of the paucity of professional development opportunities also affects TVET leaders who prior to becoming leaders came from diverse occupational backgrounds—some worked in various fields of education and training while some came from various technical and artisanal fields (Robertson & Frick, 2018). "Yet, in South Africa, there [are not many] strategically planned, custom-designed leadership development programmes for leaders in public TVET colleges" (Robertson & Frick, 2018, p. 71). Accross all levels of operations, TVET professionals have competencies that must be harnessed through continuous professional development.

b.   Inadequacy of technological infrastructure and poor ICT policy strategy

The insuffiency of technological infrastructure in TVET classrooms (Denhere & Moloi, 2021) exacerbates the already challenging situation that confronts the personnel within the value of chain of curriculum implementation – i.e. administrators, instructors, and lecturers. In addition, lecturers' below-average ICT skills (Denhere, 2021a), inadequate training and development opportunities (Aigna & Ogegbo, 2022) and weak support structures were found to have a negative effect on their productivity, in modernising teaching and learning in their classrooms. Denhere and Moloi (2021a) problematised the inability of the institutions to adopt a strategy for mitigating the obstructing effects of unstable internet connectivity and to conduct accurate needs assessments to address the scarcity of devices.

    In their respective studies, Aina and Ogbebo (2022) identified the shortage of ICT infrastructure as a factor that that rendered the rolling out of ICT mediated learning a futile exercise. Kanyagale and Sibanda (2021) mentioned poor ICT policy as another cause for outdated computer software and ineffective management of ICT laboratories and scheduling of sessions for students. The vein of this problem cuts deep so much so that the absence of an integrated TVET management information system has historically presented difficulties for planning across different operational ecosystems of the sector (Wedekind, 2016).

c.   Inadequacy of furniture, academic facilities and teaching and learning material

In a large-scale investigation into the state of the country's 50 TVET colleges, the Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority [LGSETA] (Ralushai, 2021) established that challenges associated with access to facilities, ranging from the use of existing campus infrastructure were widespread and inhibited service delivery in almost all the TVET campuses (Ralushai, 2021). More generally, research findings point to a shortage of furniture, stationery, teaching and learning materials, libraries and photocopiers (Buthelezi, 2018), workshop space, tools and machines as having a negative impact on students' academic performance (Abrahams, 1997) and contributing to public mistrust in the sectors' fitness to become 21st century oriented (Ahmad, 2015).

d.   Overcrowded classrooms

Overcrowded classrooms are a common feature in the TVET sector (Rahman & Raihan, 2013). Several years ago, the DHET (2015) problematised the lecturer: student ratio of 70:1. Although presently there is no statistical data projecting the progress made thus far, current research

indicates that, a few years down the line not much has changed, as overcrowding persists (Mtshali, 2020). Many themes in local research indicate that overcrowding in TVET campuses (Blom, 2016; Kraak, 2016; Mtshali, 2016; Wedekind) emanates from the rapid increase of students who join the system (Gamede & Uleanya, 2019), short supply of academic staff (Papier, 2017; Sibiya et al., 2021; Wedekind, 2016) and a shortage of colleges (Gamede & Uleanya, 2019). Teaching and learning under such conditions extend an invitation to "students' poor performance, dropout rate, lack of concentration, and lecture attendance" (Zwane & Makuna, 2023, p.6).

e.   Antagonistic relationship between lecturers and managers

The National Development Plan mandated TVET colleges to produce 4IR responsive technical and vocational skills to ensure that the country can acclimatise to rapid changes of this era (Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023). Research indicates that at campus level of the sector lies problems associated with trust deficit and collegiality between lecturers and their line managers. According to Badenhorst and Radile (2018), TVET curriculum managers (also known as heads of departments) lacked a distributed sense of instructional leadership. Their conduct when conducting instructional leadership often puts them on the opposite side of lecturers. It leaves lecturers with no choice but to navigate the intricate components of the curriculum with minimal curriculum support and guidance. Singh (2020) concluded that by placing an emphasis on adherence to curriculum delivery and on adherence to deadlines, managers created conditions whereby quality plays second fiddle to quantity.

Scholars observed that curriculum managers mount pressure on lecturers because they themselves work under strenuous and stressful conditions, compounded by disrespectful student union representatives, insubordinate staff, heavy workload (see Singh, 2020; Waddington, 2018). In reality, how they treat subordinate staff is a depiction of how they are being treated by their seniors (Waddington, 2018). However, in the absence of recourse (Sithole et al., 2022) and psycho-social support, managers suppress their emotions to appear as though they cope with the demands of their job (Waddington, 2018).

The toxicity transcends beyond the boardelines of teaching and learning–between lecturers and academic managers–to infiltrate professional relationships at the granular level, as characterised by tensions between permanent members of staff and those who are employed on contractual basis (Gewer, 2016). In some instances, the power wielded by trade unions and teacher unions in the education sector (Ramphele, 2013b) fuels a culture of anarchy and impunity, all of which have a detrimental effect on the productivity of TVET institutions (Muswaba, 2019). In institutions where their influence is not moderated it aggravates lectuers' questionable work ethos and lack of professional maturity to promote academic exellence (Sebola, 2022). Much of what has been discussed exposes a poor understanding by TVET educators [including curriculum managers who are recognised by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) as office-based educators] of professionalism (DHET, 2012).

CONCLUSSION

The paper investigated strategic and contextual factors contributing to public mistrust in TVET education. Desktop research was used to gather data that was subsequently analysed to generate a range of themes that illuminate and contextualize factors contributing to public mistrust in TVET education. In respect of strategic factors, 1) the poor state of leadership was found to have given rise to ineffective compliance, consequence management and quality assurance; 2) severe under funding of growth and expansion programmes; 3) lack of political oversight; 4) poor academic results and high graduate employment rate; 5) slow production of skills that dovetail with the needs of the economy; 6) outdated curriculum, a constricting credit system, and unattractive qualifications; and 7) wrongful placement of TVET lecturers under a regulatory body for primary and secondary school educators.

At the campus level, contextual factors such as 1) fewer professional development opportunities; 2) the inadequacy of technological infrastructure; 3) poor ICT policy strategies; 4) the inadequacy of facilities and equipment; 5) the overcrowding of classrooms; 6) academic staff shortages; 7) and ineffective instructional leadership skills were all found to be instrumental in undermining public trust in TVET colleges. By highlighting complex challenges that contribute to public mistrust in TVET college education, the paper exposed the need for the government and industry to work together to identify 4IR oriented skills, co-create learning programmes and advice one another on how best to amend existing curriculum such that it can facilitate the production of a crop of graduates endowed with skills that can drive the economy to the next phase of development. Further to that, the findings demonstrate that effective leadership across all strands of operation is the panacea for most of the challenges that confront the sector and public mistruct towards towards it. Lastly, beyond illuminating strategic and contextual aggravators of public mistrust in the sector, the paper tabled a contextually applicable manifesto for its sustainable development, at the dawn of the 4IR era.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A Manifesto for the Sector's Sustainable Development Ahead of 4IR

Recommendations of this paper come in a form of a manifesto. The conception that, in post-apartheid South Africa, educational institutions have become avenues for redressing past inequalities among historically disadvantaged learners/students, and for entrenching and sustaining ecological social cohesion among learners/students of different social, religious, cultural and racial orientations, prompted the Department of Education (DoE, 2001) to concede that a manifesto in the realm of education always has social justice and constitutional connotations attached to it, especially around issues of youth development. It "usually has an orientation to the future, setting out the changes that it wishes to bring into being" (Holmwood, 2011, p. 5) which in the context of the findings that emerged in this paper relates to diminishing the severity of public mistrust in TVET education ahead of 4IR; the proposal is that education

stakeholders adopt this manifesto which is centered around eleven pillars of improvement, as discussed below.

Pillar 1: *Strategic leadership practices*

[Relating to theme 1: subtheme A]

This pillar of the manifesto proposes closing the current leadership skills gap among TVET leaders (DHET, 2018), by:

- promoting leaders' soft-skills acquisition, by coordinating and rolling out a series of ongoing and compulsory problem-based learning programmes on a variety of themes (i.e., emotional intelligence, management by objectives, education and democracy, ethical leadership, *Batho Pele* [people first], project management, the Public Finance Management Act [PMFA] etc.).

Pillar 2: *Improved regulatory environment and employee engagement*

[Relating to theme 1: subtheme B and D]

In light of evidence pointing to sub-standard regulatory processes and a lax consequence management environment in the TVET sector, this pillar of the manifesto proposes:

- retraining staff on their moral obligations towards regulatory processes in their line of duty;
- where external audits are conducted by ministerial task teams, the onus should be on TVET leaders, as trustees, to ensure a healthy regulatory and compliance environment;
- leveraging the expertise of a successful and field-experienced alumni network, to share their expertise during college council committee sessions, to ensure that impartiality underscores compliance and oversight matters. Ideally, they should be assimilated into the colleges' councils.

Pillar 3: *Addressing TVET underfunding issues*

[Relating to theme 1: subtheme C]

To enable TVET colleges to assert themselves in light of limited government funding, this pillar of the manifesto proposes:

- institutionalising labour–industry-partnered factories. This will enable TVET colleges to generate revenue to fund some of their growth and infrastructural programmes, by training industry personnel in a range of tailor-made programmes.
- entering the consultancy space, by selling the skills and expertise of the TVET academic workforce to the market. However, tight regulations must apply to aviod corruption and conflict of interest.

Pillar 5: *Addressing slow paced production of skills needed by the economy and high unemployment among TVET graduates*

[Relating to theme 1: subtheme D and E]

Having noted that TVET graduates rarely consider venturing into the entrepreneurial space (Buthelezi, 2018), this pillar of the manifesto aligns with the recommendations put forward by UNESCO-UNEVOC (2020), to

- embed entrepreneurial footprints across all commercial and non-commercial streams of the TVET curricula, so that students develop an affinity for it as early as possible during their studentship, rather than much later in life, after they have exhausted all job-hunting avenues
- Provide learning programmes that cater for different learning styles so that non-academic students can enjoy the hands-on nature of vocational learning and have a chance to succeed in assessments and acquire a qualification
- Involve key role players in the industry in the design, restructuring and implementation of learning programmes that can deliver skills that respond to the needs of the local economy
- forge partnerships with the corporate sector (as part of its corporate social responsibility programmes) and successful entrepreneurs within the community to workshop students on innovation, self-sustainability, business planning and networking skills.

Pillar 6: *Addressing curriculum, articulation and accreditation obstacles*
[Relating to theme 1: subtheme F]

Given the mix of TVET qualifications which are either outdated or unresponsive to the demands of the national economy, this pillar of the manifesto proposes that

- all qualifications on offer undergo an extensive review process, so that those that are not responsive to the local labour market are discontinued, in favour of qualifications that seek to respond to the demands of the local economy;
- the structure of the entire NATED programme be revised, in line with the National Qualifications Framework's (NQF) regulations, so that it is interlinked with the university system to allow TVET graduates to align credits earned with the university system, and gain access to a concurrent learning stream.

Pillar 7: *Establishment of a professional body for TVET academic professionals*
[Relating to theme 1: subtheme G]

Despite TVET having being moved from the DBE to DHET, its academic staff are still regulated by SACE, which is meant to exclusively regulate school and office-based educators. This pillar of the manifesto proposes that a new regulatory body for TVET academic professionals be established, to grant the sector self-determination and context-specific bargaining power.

Pillar 8: *Entrenching comprehensive capacity development and lifelong learning [Relating to theme 2: subtheme A]*

This pillar of the manifesto pertains to positioning in-service lecturers to continuously improve their skills and partake in life-long learning (van Eekelen et al., 2006), while preparing a new generation of lecturers to infuse innovation in the system, by

- enrolling in-service lecturers who already possess a teaching qualification in a postgraduate diploma in TVET teaching identifying interested and academically deserving youth to undergo fulltime undergraduate studies in TVET teaching with a view of preparing them for a TVET teaching career in the foreseeable future.

It is envisaged that this approach to capacity building will address certain themes (i.e., contextual factors), as illuminated in this paper, concerning the shortage of lecturers, poor student academic achievement, ineffective teaching methods and instructional management practices.

Pillar 9: *Developing an ICT policy strategy and 4IR mindset*
[Relating to theme 2: subtheme B]

To succeed in developing an ICT policy strategy and 4IR mindset, this pillar puts the emphasis on

- lobbying DHET to make good on its promise of opening 4IR centres of excellence in all nine provinces (See Manamela, 2022 and Nzimande (2022).
- customising certain learning units from the newly established NCV: Information and Communication Technology and Computer Science Programme (such as coding and robotics, and artificial intelligence modules) and teaching them to all students, irrespective of their specialisation, albeit at a basic level
- instilling a mindset of internalisation, which will not only locate the local TVET sector within the global 4IR prescripts, but can potentially also open up doors for bilateral cooperation among partnering TVET institutions, in the form of staff and student exchange programmes, and recapitalisation sponsorships.

Pillar 10: *Improvement of lecturer: student ratio and overcrowding*
[Relating to theme 2: subtheme C and D]

In addressing the problem of overcrowding, this pillar advocates for

- petitioning DHET to provide mobile classrooms and academic staff, while long-term plans are being made to mitigate spatial and infrastructural problems
- migrating the non-practical component of the curricula to mobile-friendly digital platforms, in addition to making available an option for students who prefer face-to-face contact learning.
- The sourcing of funds from the private sector to infuse life into the expansion of the sector by filling the human and physical resource gaps.

Pillar 11: *Restoring a culture of collegiality between lecturers and their line managers*
[Relating to theme 2: subtheme E]

This pillar calls for the restoration of a culture of collegiality between lecturers and curriculum managers. It also extends an invitation to TVET leaders and managers to be attuned with the principles of Ubuntu when interfacing with affairs of interest to subordinate staff and be cognizant of how teamwork is the only antecedent for the institutions' effectiveness (Khambula, 2015). This may require them to embrace two-way communication to ensure that in case of a stalemate or clashes all concerned parties (i.e., lecturers, managers, trade unions and leaders) are able to resolve them amicably (Muswaba, 2019).

Limitations

The study was based on a review of literature that was sourced from the internet. The researchers concede that the use of secondary data constituted a methodological limitation. They argue that it would have been more beneficial to also amplify evidence gathered through desktop research with participants' views using a semi-structured interview guide to enable them to contextualise and characterise their experiences of the phenomenon. Further to that, researchers concede that the availability of a plethora of studies that intersect with the topic meant that processes of searching and selecting data for inclusion in the study was far from perfect, as researchers could not manage to exhaust all the relevant data sources. It is therefore recommended that future research must examine this topic through primary qualitative or mixed methods research formats.

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APPENDIX

Table 1.

Anecdotal data sources

Type	Tittle, Date and Year	Print Media Outlet and Website	Author	Occupation
1. Opinion article	"Vocational education in the doldrums" (22 October 2022)	Mail & Guardian https://mg.co.za/education/2022-10-22-vocational-education-in-the-doldrums/	Stanley Ncobela	TVET college lecturer and education columnist
2. Opinion article	"Links between colleges, industry necessary" (11 August 2022)	Mail & Guardian https://mg.co.za/education/2022-08-11-links-between-colleges-industry-vital/	Stanley Ncobela	TVET college lecturer and education columnist
3. Opinion article	"TVET colleges need a complete overhaul to quell	Mail & Guardian	Stanely Ncobela	TVET college lecturer and

	slow growth trajectory" (01 April 2022)	https://mg.co.za/education/2022-07-01-colleges-need-a-professional-council/		education columnist
4. Special report summary	"Taking a different approach through TVET Training"	Mail & Guardian https://mg.co.za/special-reports/2023-02-12-taking-a-different-approach-through-tvet-training/ (01 April 2023)	Kagiso Trust	Education focused Non-governmental Organisation (NGO)
5. Media release statement	"SA forges ahead with 4IR strategy". (11 November 2022)	South African Government News Agency. https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/sa-forges-ahead-4ir-strategy	Buti Manamela	Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training Department, and senior politician
6. Media release statement	"Minister Blade Nzimande pleased with progress on 4IR interventions within the post school education and training sector" (21 April 2022).	South African Government News Agency. https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-nzimande-pleased-progress-4ir-interventions-within-post-school-education-and	Dr. Blade Nzimande	National Minister of Higher Education and Training Department
7. Press Interview	"ANC's biggest failure education says Ramphele, proposes solutions" (11 October 213)	Sunday Times https://www.timeslive.co.za/politics/2013-10-11-ancs-biggest-failure-education-says-ramphele-proposes-solutions/	Dr. Mamphela Ramphele	Political Activistactivist and former Vice Chancelor of the University of Cape Town
8. Press Interview	"Ramphele is wrong: education department" (20 June 2013).	Sunday Times https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2013-06-20-ramphele-is-wrong-education-department/	Dr. Mamphela Ramphele	Political activist and former Vice Chancelor of the University of Cape Town