



Cape Peninsula  
University of Technology

Factors contributing toward attrition of engineering students at public vocational colleges in the Western Cape.

by

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**Master of Education**

**in the Faculty of Education**

**at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology**

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**Date submitted 19 September 2016**

## **DECLARATION**

I, Mark N. Lawrence, declare that the contents of this dissertation/thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation/thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

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**Editing of Masters' thesis for Mr Mark Lawrence**

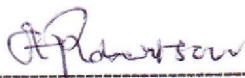

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I confirm that I have edited the following document submitted by **Mr Mark N Lawrence** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MTech at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Cape Town, South Africa.

Research title	What are the factors that contribute to the high attrition rate of engineering students at one of the six public technical and vocational education and training colleges in the Western Cape?
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Yours faithfully



C A ROBERTSON

## **ABSTRACT**

Currently, there is a high attrition rate amongst students who are registered at public technical and vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in the Western Cape. In this sector, attrition rate has also been referred to as 'through-put rate' which both mean that there is a reduction in the number of students completing a programme for a variety of reasons. This study focuses on the reasons why these students are leaving the colleges before completing the programme.

Perspectives of students who registered at a technical vocational education and training (TVET) college are analysed. As a result of students dropping out of their studies, emphasis is being placed on what students are experiencing at the TVET colleges, which eventually influences their decision to drop out and become part of the TVET attrition statistics. This study provides information based specifically on the students' experience in the National Certificate Vocational [NC(V)] civil engineering programme at the TVET college where they were registered. Reasons are provided which will clearly indicate that attrition is not only the result of the students' inability to cope academically but that student attrition can also be the result of other factors.

The topic to be addressed in this study is: Factors contributing toward attrition of engineering students at public vocational colleges in the Western Cape.

This study is situated within a critical research paradigm which will allow an analysis of the reasons for attrition in civil engineering programmes at one of the TVET colleges with the ultimate aim of contributing towards social change. This study will apply a qualitative data collection approach and will make use of interviews. This study makes continual reference to the work of Vincent Tinto as he has done much research on the topic of attrition in education.

The contribution made by this study is to gain an understanding of attrition in general, attrition in TVET colleges and attrition in South Africa's NC(V) programme for civil engineering studies in particular. The findings of this study hope to assist in the reduction of high attrition rates at TVET colleges. Findings of the study could also be used to amend existing policy, which currently makes relative reference to attrition.

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- ❖ The students, who were willing to engage with me and to share what they experienced at the TVET college.

## GLOSSARY

<b>Acronyms</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
NC(V)	National Certificate Vocational
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SACPO	South African College Principals' Organisation
SACHE	South African Commission on Higher Education
NSFAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
ICASS	Integrated Cumulative Assessment
ISAT	Integrated Summative Assessment Task
PAT	Practical Assessment Task

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## **CHAPTER ONE ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY**

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### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

In South Africa, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges cater primarily for people 'who have left school; whether they have completed secondary school or not' (South Africa, 2013:11). The focus of TVET colleges is to 'educate and train young school leavers, providing them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market' (South Africa, 2013:11). TVET colleges 'mainly provide education and training for the mid-level skills required to develop the South African economy and tend to concentrate on occupations in the engineering and construction industries, tourism and hospitality, and general business and management studies' (South Africa, 2013:11).

In 2006, a new curriculum was introduced, with the roll out of eleven programmes called the National Certificate Vocational [NC(V)], at levels 2, 3 and 4 of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). First, level 2 was introduced in 2007, followed by level 3 in 2008 and level 4 in 2009. According to the report on the National Review of Academic and Professional Programmes in South Africa (South Africa, 2010:41), the NC(V) programme was introduced to 'solve the problems of poor quality programmes, the lack of relevance to the economy, as well as the low technical and cognitive skills of TVET graduates.' However, the NC(V) programmes, the report continued, did not meet all the intended needs and did not enjoy universal support in the industry. Success and completion or attrition rates, of the NC(V) the report acknowledged, were inadequately understood but generally regarded as poor.

Papier (2009) reported that the results of examinations of the new curriculum indicated that the majority of learners performed poorly. This occurred during 2007

and 2008. According to Papier (2009:5), 'during the preparation and implementation of the new curricula, systemic problems came to light and were conveyed to the relevant authorities.' These contributory factors, Papier (2009) continues, were voiced clearly by respondents, with 'a high degree of convergence in the views of both' the learners and college staff, indicating that these difficulties contributed to the poor performance and the high attrition rate of the learners.

Therefore the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) commissioned a project to evaluate and establish baselines, differentiate across subject ranges and localities, as well as the development of intervention mechanisms.' (South Africa, 2010:41). This research study does not form part of the DHET study but has compatible aims in that this study investigates the reasons for premature student attrition in the NC(V) programmes.

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (2004) describes attrition as leaving a course of study without completing it. Factors that contribute towards attrition are discussed in Chapter 2, and include detail on the match or mismatch between student, programme and institution. While a significant amount of knowledge exists on attrition at the equivalent of TVET colleges in the United States (US), namely community colleges, very little has been researched on the topic at public TVET colleges in South Africa with particular reference to NC(V).

## **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

In 2006, the Minister of Education, Grace Naledi Pandor, approved the NC(V) level 2 to level 4 programmes to be introduced at what at the time was called public Further Education and Training (FET) Colleges<sup>1</sup> and made it public through a government

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<sup>1</sup> In 2013 (RSA, 2013:2) the Department of Higher Education and Training changed the collective title of Further Educating and Training colleges (FET) to Technical and Vocational Education and Training

notice (South Africa, 2006). This promulgation (South Africa, 2006) was noted by the Minister as a major achievement, as the NC(V) programmes were to enable students to acquire the necessary knowledge, practical skills, applied competence and understanding which is a fundamental requirement for finding employment at the basic level of a particular trade or occupation. NC(V) level 2 to 4 qualifications replaced the old National Education Department's (NATED) N1 to N3 certificate programmes as listed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). On the other hand, the replacement of NATED programmes with NC(V) programmes has since been repealed, resulting in the two programmes running concurrently at some colleges

The South African College Principals' Organisation (SACPO, 2007) listed the introduction of the eleven NC(V) programmes as a major achievement of this sector. The programmes, which included over fifty qualifications, were intended to serve as the colleges' response towards the skills scarcities identified as binding restraints to growth by the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA).

As stated in the Government Gazette No. 28677 (South Africa, 2006), the duration of each of the three NC(V) levels (L2 to L4) is completed in no less than one year. In other words, it will take the average committed student three years to complete all three levels. The Gazette notes further that the NC(V) programmes have been formulated in such a manner that it should be completed over a three-year period. On successful completion of the third year, registered as a SAQA level 4 qualification, a learner will have completed seven subjects, all of which have also to be taken on levels 2 and 3. According to the Curriculum Statement, (South Africa, 2006:1) the

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(TVET). As official documents used in this study predate and postdate this announcement the terms FET and TVET with reference to colleges must be regarded as synonymous references.

NC(V) (Civil Engineering Construction) qualification is supported by the following principles:

- An outcomes-based approach to education
- High knowledge and high skills
- Integrated and applied competence
- Progression, articulation and portability
- Social transformation, human rights, inclusivity, environmental and social justice
- Credibility, quality and efficiency

Despite the Minister's intention and legislative implementation, the NC(V) programme was not widely accepted. Papier (2009) points out that the most pivotal role players in the college sector had expressed disappointment. She argues that a common cause for the lack of acceptance of the new NC(V) curricula throughout the preparation and implementation phase was as a result of systemic difficulties that had come to light and this had to be conveyed to the relevant authorities.

Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, unwanted pregnancies, drug abuse commonly appear to steer the thinking of some of these young minds in a negative direction, resulting in unreasonable decisions, which take them away from the college, thus contributing towards student attrition. The programme's student success rate has not broadly met the expectations of the stakeholders. A preliminary evaluation of statistics supplied at an academic board meeting at the participating college (2009) revealed a notable concern that of the 261 level 2 learners enrolled in 2008, only 132 of these learners came back to enroll for level 3 in 2009.

The college participating further revealed that in January 2014 the NC(V) level 2 Civil and Construction programme had 414 full-time registered students. Of the registered

number of students, only 171 sat for the final examination. This left a notable 58.7% attrition rate for the group. These statistical figures thus supports Papier's (2009) findings.

In the same academic year, the Civil and Construction programme registered 112 full-time students in level 3. At the sitting for the final examination only 79 students participated, consequently providing an attrition rate of 29.8%.

The level 4 students that were registered for the 2014 academic year amounted to 141. The number sitting for the final examination totaled 135, leaving a lower attrition percentage of 4.3%.

### **1.3 AN EMERGING TVET COLLEGES' ATTRITION PATTERN**

Papier's (2009) analysis of the electrical infrastructure construction programme at six colleges indicates that of the 849 students who registered for level 2 programmes in 2008 only 640 wrote the final examination and only 68 students passed and were certificated.

Papier (2009) also produced a statistical analysis comparing the total number of learners in all the NC(V) programmes who wrote the 2008 examinations to the number of learners who were eventually certificated. Of the 3102 students who wrote the final examination, only 20% were certificated in level 2. Papier (2009) confirms that 140 level 3 students were enrolled for the electrical infrastructure construction NC(V) programme in 2008 and 124 wrote the final examination that year. This produced an implausible result in that only 9 students passed all seven subjects resulting in their being certificated.

Papier (2009:7) indicates that a factor contributing towards the poor performance of TVET college students was a bad learner/programme match. She 'argues that respondents agreed that the NC(V) programmes were high-quality curricula aimed at a specific niche market, but that students who had been enrolled, particularly in 2007, had not been the most appropriate students for these programmes.'

In her paper Papier (2009:10), refers to Tinto's (1993) sociological model in which he defines 'pre-entry attributes, goals and commitments, institutional experiences, integration and outcome as issues arising in a linear fashion with every factor consequently affecting the next.' Papier (2009) concludes that at the initial stage, appropriate recruitment and selection should be strong aspects that will add to the success of students at TVET colleges, implying that student attrition is at least partly the result of a student/programme mismatch.

Maharaj (2008) produced a study on retention and dropout rates of students in the mechanical engineering programme at a TVET college in South Africa that is remarkably similar to Papier's (2009). Maharaj (2008) argues in favour of a perspective that contrasts with the seemingly dominant perspective that regards student failure as an inability to meet the academic and societal standards of the institute where they are studying. According to Maharaj (2008), student and lecturer interaction in the class is of vital importance. He argues that lecturer/student communication occurs mainly when students have to discuss technical mechanical challenges and then only on a formal basis within the classroom. Maharaj (2008) points out that social interaction between diverse cultures and races, was not evident. Whilst Maharaja's (2008) research focuses on retention, he also states that 'whereas attrition could create the perception that an individual has failed to meet the academic and social standards of the institution, the institution could also partially be



responsible for the individual's failure to stay' (Maharaj, 2008:13). Like Papier (2009), Maharaj (2008) makes repeated reference to the work of Tinto (1993), supporting the view that Tinto's sociological approach dominates the social analysis of attrition, in not only higher education but also vocational and further education.

In 2011, the South African Commission on Higher Education (SACHE) (SACHE, 2011) provided an analysis of both retention and attrition. SACHE notes that retention and attrition have been viewed from various perspectives. SACHE also notes that a conclusion commonly reached is that attrition results from the interactions between students and institutions, which implies that an understanding of attrition involves an understanding of interaction. The 'characteristics therefore of interaction, not the student or institution alone, affect a student's decision to stay or to drop out'. SACHE (2011) concludes that students who complete their studies represents a fit with the particular student and the environment based on a variety of factors.

The view expressed by SACHE (2011) is not unique or new. It mirrors those of both Papier (2009) and Maharaj (2008) and associated international research. Astin (1975:30) critiqued what he called a 'traditional approach' to failure and attrition. He noted further that a significant body of research has evidently shown that the student's academic performance in a secondary school is a major predictor of college attrition. A similar argument is expressed by Cook and Rushton (2009:156). They indicate that a lack of contact prior to entry has resulted in students failing to enrol and increased student attrition rates during the programme. Thus, even though a student may select an appropriate programme in a suitable institution, they can still be inadequately prepared to undertake the study involved. All of these factors affect

students personally and academically during the first academic year, the year which, according to Cook and Rushton (2009), is the critical period for student retention.

Tinto (1993:11) identifies sociological attributes like race and gender as well as personal ability as reasons for student attrition. In his sociological model, Tinto (1993: 49) describes most departures<sup>2</sup> 'as voluntary in the sense that they occur without any formal compulsion on the part of the institution.' He adds that rather than mirroring academic difficulties, 'these attributes reflect the character of the individual's social and intellectual experience within the institution.' Generally, according to Tinto (1993), 'the more satisfying those experiences are felt to be, the more likely students tend to stay and complete their studies.' On the contrary, 'the less integrative they are, the more likely are individuals to withdraw voluntarily prior to completing their course of study'.

Student retention is therefore more complex than that of a lack of achievement or academic competence. Retention is connected to a variety of aspects, including cognitive, psychological, social as well as environmental factors.

This study analysed the perspectives of the students who were registered at a TVET college. Because students drop out, emphasis must be placed on what students are experiencing at the TVET college, which eventually influences their decision to drop out. This study provided information based on the students experience in the NC(V) civil engineering course at the TVET college where they are or were registered. The study provided reasons which will clearly indicate that attrition is not only the result of the students' inability to cope academically but can also be the result of other factors.

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<sup>2</sup> Departure is described as the act of leaving something or a programme at a particular time without completing it (Bullon, 2004:491).

#### **1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND TOPIC**

The problem addressed by this study was to find reasons for the current high attrition rate amongst students who are registered at public TVET colleges in the Western Cape, thus focusing on the dynamics that influences students who drop out. At a diagnostic level, it concentrates on the manner in which lecturers and public TVET institutions contribute towards the growing challenge of attrition.

This study therefore addressed the following topic: *Factors contributing toward attrition of engineering students at public vocational colleges in the Western Cape.*

#### **1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE**

This study identifies and accounts for reasons that influence the high attrition rate amongst civil and construction students in the NC(V) programme at a TVET college in the Western Cape. This research study was geared towards the following:

- To explore challenges that students were presented with within the NC(V) programme that influenced their decision to leave before completing the programme and thus increasing the attrition rate at the TVET college.
- To identify reasons that contributed to their early departure from the NC(V) programme.

## **1.6 METHODOLOGY**

This study applied a qualitative data collection approach and made use of interviews. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2000:637), 'qualitative research involves the collection of empirical materials that describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individual's lives.' Interviewing is a tool most commonly associated with both qualitative and critical research (Henning, 2004). Interviews allow for probing and clarifying concepts by the participant. It is accepted that individual interviews offer a closer look in terms of control, stemming from closer communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. Delamont (2012), however, states that more positively, or at least pragmatically, research interviews provide an opportunity for creating and capturing insights of a depth and level of focus rarely achieved through surveys, observational studies or the majority of casual conversations held with fellow human beings.

Interviews were conducted orally and transcribed. Transcribed data were analysed by means of content analysis. 'Content analysis is a technique for a systemic quantitative description of the manifest of content communication. The meaning making of categorised codes make it possible to calculate how regularly particular themes are addressed, and the frequency of themes can then be compared and correlated with other measures' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009:203).

### **1.6.1 Research Design**

This study is situated within a critical research paradigm which has enabled an analysis of aspects of attrition in Civil Engineering at TVET colleges with the ultimate aim of finding answers that contribute towards social change. Furthermore, this study embraces the ethical concerns of those responding to the interview questions. Social research, according to Henning (2004) serves various purposes.

The aim of critical research, according to Babbie and Mouton (2011:36), is 'to emancipate people from their state of seduction by self-reflecting on a constant basis'. This indicates that the intention is to transform or change the human condition through a critique of those alienating or repressing factors which sustains their alienation or self-deception. By searching for and identifying broad social factors contributing towards attrition at public TVET colleges, this study will contribute towards liberating individual failure by placing its causes in the social milieu, where, at least partly, it belongs.

Babbie and Mouton (2011:35) cite Fay's (1975) work in stating that 'critical social science is one that recognizes that several of the actions people perform are caused by social conditions over which they have no control and that a great deal of what people do to one another is not the result of conscious knowledge and choice.' In other words, critical social research attempts to expose the systems of social relations which determine the actions of people and the unexpected, though not accidental, consequences of those actions. Therefore, exposing the systems of social relations is what this study attempts to do with regard to attrition at TVET colleges in the Western Cape.

### **1.6.2 Data Collection**

This study targeted students who have dropped out of the Civil Engineering Programme as well as current level 3 and 4 students at one of the public TVET colleges in the Western Cape offering the Civil Engineering NC(V) programme. The students, who have dropped out of the college, were traced from past student records which are available from the college's administrative system. This study also targeted students who have not dropped out, but remained in the NC(V) Civil and Construction programme until its completion.

## **1.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

Participants were given written assurance that their names have not been disclosed and care will be exercised to guarantee that all information will remain confidential. Permission was obtained from DHET and the deputy principal of the TVET college to conduct the interviews. Permission was also obtained from the campus manager to conduct interviews with lecturers and current students. All participation was voluntary. Respondents were given a short description of the study and were requested to sign a consent form. The consent form can be found in the appendix.

Henning (2004:73) states that it is important for respondents to know exactly what the information generated by the interviews is going to be used for and that their confidentiality will be respected at all times. All interviewees were informed about the research process, what was required of them and about their rights.

### **1.7.1 Ensuring credibility**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the work of Flick (2002:227) 'propagate that the use of credibility and trustworthiness are excellent criteria for qualitative research.' King and Horrocks (2010:160) asserts that 'credibility in place of validity refers to the extent to which the researcher's interpretation is endorsed by those with whom the interview was done.' Schwandt (2007:299) states, that 'credibility addresses the issue of the inquirer providing assurance of the fit between respondents' view and the inquirers' reconstruction and representation.' To ensure credibility in this study students were interviewed individually and at different times. A concerted effort was made to ensure that there were no external influences or disturbances.

A note was placed on the door to indicate that interviews were in progress. In using King and Horrocks *et al* in this study it relied on using the responses of the interviews

directly giving evidence of truth and credibility and not interpretations based on the view of the researcher.

### **1.7.2 Ensuring trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) in the work of Babbie and Mouton (2011:276) states that 'the key criterion of good qualitative research is found in the notion of trustworthiness.'

To guarantee trustworthiness I made sure that no one entered the room during the interviews, ensuring that the students could answer the questions with ease. On completion of each interview, and in support of Babbie and Moutons' approach to trustworthiness, the researcher thanked the interviewees and gave them the assurance that answers they gave would be transcribed verbatim.

## **1.8 CHAPTER OUTLINE**

A general overview of the study is discussed in chapter one. This chapter introduces some of the reasons why learners drop out of college. It also identifies some of the factors that could have an influence on the high attrition rate at public TVET colleges.

Chapter Two reviews literature on the concept of attrition as well as contributions to institutional experiences and goals of warding off the growing threat of attrition.

Chapter Three provides the methodology followed whilst the study was conducted

Chapter Four makes provision for presenting the findings of the research conducted.

Chapter Five, in conclusion, will deal with the findings of the research in conjunction with the literature reviewed. The chapter also makes provision for presenting

recommendations that could influence the reduction of attrition at TVET colleges in South Africa.

## **1.9 CONCLUSION**

The intent of this chapter is to provide a précis of the high attrition rate at TVET colleges in South Africa. It presents a foretaste of why students drop out as well as what lecturing staff and managers at TVET colleges have to contend with on a daily basis regarding the attrition problem

The chapter also provides information sourced from an international perspective, thus proving that attrition is a global challenge. This is an arena worth entering, as it will assist with exploring the complexities and contradictions faced by TVET learners and the TVET institutions.

The following chapter presents a review of literature around attrition and the negative impact that it has on various educational institutions.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter one presented the nature and objectives of this study, as well as the methods that will be used. Chapter two therefore provides an analysis of the context and issues surrounding the high attrition rate at TVET colleges. In this chapter, accounts of the reasons for high attrition have been presented with the purpose of getting a much better understanding of the student and the impact that it has on his/her completion of the course for which he/she enrolled for at a TVET college. This chapter also focused on TVET colleges in South Africa and how the NC(V) and its funding model are part thereof. The chapter has further focused on the profile of the students registered at TVET colleges and considered the statistical background of students who have left the TVET sector.

Section 2.2 discusses the post 1994 transformation of the education system in South Africa as well as the formation of TVET colleges. It has also considered the NC(V) curriculum, the financing thereof as well as the student population. This section provided an overview of the challenges and shortcomings of the TVET colleges.

Section 2.3 provides an explanation of attrition as well as the factors contributing to attrition. Section 2.4 gave insight into Tinto's attrition theory. Section 2.5 discusses the continued and current use of Tinto. Section 2.6 discusses some criticisms of the work of Tinto and Section 2.7 gave insight into the purpose and use of Tinto in this study.

Section 2.8 provides some statistical information on NC(V) and one other programme offered by TVET colleges.

Section 2.9 looked at some critique of NC(V) in TVET and finally in section 2.10 some insight has been given on the attitude of students in vocational education.

## **2.2 TRANSFORMATION FROM TECHNICAL TO TVET COLLEGES**

Reform in education has been a priority in South Africa since the establishment of the Government of National Unity in 1994 and has played a key role in redressing the injustice of apartheid. A great deal of progress has been made in education legislation, policy development, curriculum reform and the implementation of new ways of delivering education. The government has worked on transforming every facet of the education and training system. The fragmented and racially-duplicated institutions of the apartheid era were replaced by a single national system. The main purpose of all these efforts was to make education accessible to all who had been previously denied it or who had had limited access to it (South Africa, 2008:38). A policy framework was introduced that provides a vision for higher education and a foundation on which the new, transformed education can be built.

Within the TVET sector, students also have access to Recognition of Prior Learning, (RPL). A recent policy framework that can assist students who drop out states that the TVET colleges are responsible for vocational programme delivery leading to experiential work, trade testing and an artisan qualification (South Africa, 2015). Candidates not meeting this requirement will be required to undergo elementary knowledge gap closure at a TVET college (South Africa, 2015:12).

### **2.2.1 Formation of TVET colleges and the introduction of the NC(V) curriculum**

In 1994, 'the vocational and technical component of the South African education system consisted of 152 technical colleges located in numerous education departments, each department with its own system of government, management and

funding mechanisms' (South Africa, 2013). The period from 2002 to 2006 saw the consolidation of the merger process, where 152 technical colleges were merged to form 50 overarching TVET<sup>3</sup> college administrations, dispersed across approximately 254 college campuses. In addition, the completion of this process brought about the development and training of college councils, the appointment of principals at each of the 50 colleges and the development of common administration and management systems across the various sites of the colleges (South Africa, 2013).

The main objective of the various TVET colleges is to provide education and training for the type of students who left the mainstream schooling system without completing it. This kind of education system endorses aforementioned students the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are pivotal for a labour-related market for various occupations. The colleges mainly provide education and training for mid-level skills in the engineering and other related industries in order to develop the economy of South Africa (South Africa, 2013).

The National Certificate Vocational [NC(V)] level 2 to 4 programmes were approved in 2006. These NC(V) programmes were intended to provide the kind of skills that are needed by industry to TVET college graduates (South Africa, 2006). NC(V) was initially intended to replace the vocational and technical system known as NATED programmes or Report 191 belonging to the National Education Department. NATED was purposely set up in 1935 to meet the requirements of the labour forces of the South African harbours and railways systems (South Africa, 2008). 'The NATED course consists mainly of theory-based curricula which is predominantly organised into a two-year cycle of trimesters or semesters which envelops the N1-N6. This is in contrast to the origin of the NATED courses where its mandate was largely practical' (South Africa, 2008:4).

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<sup>3</sup> At the time called FET colleges.

### **2.2.2 Financing of TVET students**

Students in the previous education system in South Africa who desired to embark on an educational journey, after leaving school, would have had to fund the course of preference by themselves. This might have stifled an educational journey for many.

Students could however go to financial institutions and apply for a student loan. However, prior to the inception of NC(V), the education authorities had little input into TVET student funding. Funding was regarded as a student responsibility. 'The financial aid to students at TVET colleges has been granted by NSFAS in order to expand their responsibilities' (South Africa, 2009:13). As part of the vision for TVET colleges, they were transferred from a regional competency to a national function which was accompanied by expectations of a number of anticipated changes that were to ensure that the colleges became institutions of choice for many young people and adults (South Africa, 2009).

The report further stated that the Minister of Higher Education and Training would commit his administration to actively pursue collaborative relationships between the NSFAS, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), universities, especially universities of technology, and TVET colleges to seek ways to release funds to grow the skills base. These strategic interventions intend to focus on SETA and TVET college partnerships (South Africa, 2009:16). The report also confirmed that the annual budget of NSFAS had been increased substantially to provide the resources for the additional activities required by the TVET colleges (South Africa, 2009).

The introduction of NC(V) was therefore accompanied by a systematic infusion of student funding.

### **2.2.3 Students at TVET Colleges**

Ebrahim (2013:29) argues that students who enrol at TVET colleges do so out of a desire to improve their standard of living, by obtaining a good and reliable job, thereby fulfilling their future vision of making a success of their future by working on their careers to become 'something in life'.

The Green Paper on Post School Education (2012), expressing the State's TVET vision, has a more social view of the TVET student population. The Green Paper (2012) notes that in 2007, there were more than 2, 8 million people between the ages of 18 and 24 who were not employed, not in some form of education and training<sup>4</sup> and not severely disabled, which could threaten the social stability of South Africa. These are the young people, according to the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, that TVET colleges should be targeting (South Africa, 2009).

NC(V) students are younger than those who enrolled for NATED programmes (Papier, 2009). These students appear to be emotionally less mature and more difficult to manage by the lecturers compared to those with whom lecturers were accustomed to working. Ebrahim (2013) maintains that NC(V) students, whether at college by choice or social circumstance, require support. This support takes various forms, including career guidance and support in selecting the correct courses, along with student support such as remedial intervention and general life skills development in terms of developing their sense of responsibility and accountability.

### **2.2.4 Challenges at TVET Colleges**

'Since 2006, the TVET college sector have seen a major restructuring by means of massive government involvement and investment to improve infrastructure, introduce

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<sup>4</sup> The term NEET (not in employment, education or training) has become commonly used.

more relevant curriculum, re-train staff and assist college learners financially to access learning programmes' (Papier, 2009). State investment has not, however, resulted in the desired student performance. Student pass rates, retention and throughput rates since its inception in 2007 have been poor (Papier, 2009).

According to Papier (2009), colleges' main focus is on the improvement of facilities, the employment of good lecturing staff, along with the recruitment of appropriate learners, widespread marketing of the college, disciplinary measures and procedures as well as the means for making the college fun and exciting. The Provincial Summary Report (South Africa, 2010) states in contrast 'that managers of TVET colleges have been too focused on developing partnerships and attended to construction activities and therefore have not fully concentrated on the core business of teaching, training, learning, assessment and performance reviews. The development of the educators and meeting their educational needs has not been the main focus of managers in a way that would enable them to effectively deliver the curricula.'

### **2.3 ATTRITION**

In the TVET college sector when reference is made to attrition, it can be viewed as "drop out". Therefore when students fall prey to attrition and drop out, they decrease the throughput rate of the college. College success rate is generally measured by the number of registered students that they keep in the system ultimately affecting their pass and throughput rate.

Tinto (1987:3) argues that studies on attrition have regularly been 'portrayed as having a unique personality profile or as lacking in a particularly important attribute needed for college completion.'

Attrition, according to Tinto (1993:55-56), 'arises from individual isolation, specifically from the absence of contact between the individual and fellow members of the social and academic communities of the institution.' It is therefore important for students to be part and to feel part of their newly found friends and institution. If institutions enroll any student who registers to apply, the possibility of having the wrong person in a particular programme will strongly exist. This could very well influence the college attrition rate as well as affect their throughput rate. In reality when these students fall prey to attrition they are regarded as the guilty ones and are labelled as "drop outs". Tinto (1993:140) says it is little wonder that the concern over student retention is so widespread and the tendency to view all departures as drop outs is common. Tinto (1993) further suggests that the common usage of the label 'attrition' leads one to believe that 'all student departures are the primary consequence of failure of the individual to meet the demands of college life.'

In a further study, Astin (1975) indicates that there might be factors that could assist those with a vested interest in preventing students from dropping out. Although students clearly have an interest in improving their chance of completing college, these students are seldom, if ever, in a position to influence institutional practices that could help them, Astin (1975) continues.

Sefa, Dei, Mazzuca, Mclsaac and Zine (1997) further note that various perspectives which have emerged emanate from specific ideologies and world-views, including some which challenge the conventional wisdom regarding attrition or drop out and others which reinforce standard misconceptions.

It is understood that internationalist theories regard society as the product of individual interactions. Therefore from the interactionist perspective that underlies the Tinto model, Braxton (2002) indicates that a persistence of student departure

despite administrative efforts to blend individual and college attributes may reflect an adaptive effort as that has yet failed to come to fruition.

Notably, Guiffrida (2006:451) also states that a significant ‘cultural limitation of the theory<sup>5</sup> that is well established in higher education literature relates to Tinto’s assertion that students need to ‘break away’ from past relations and customs to become integrated into the college societal and academic realms.’ With reference to Tinto, Guiffrida (2006:452) adds ‘the more that students are academically and or socially integrated into the institute, the greater their commitment to completing their studies are.’

In a recent study, Pather (2015:30) argues that ‘Tinto’s model suggests that students’ initial commitment to an institution and goal to graduate consecutively influence their degree of integration into the social and academic domain of the institution.’ ‘Academic integration, according to Pather (2015:30), refers to students’ formal interactions with lecturers, students and support staff, which could be defined under two dimensions: structural and normal.’

Pather (2015) indicates that researchers have applied Tinto’s integration model to a wide range of different contexts within the higher education institutions which helps to identify the factors that influence college experience, student performance and persistence.

### **2.3.1 Factors contributing to attrition**

According to Sefa, *et al.* (1997:56), lecturers with conservative views tend to conceptualise dropping out as a choice made solely by students who choose not to be focused. Such lecturers point to several factors, such as becoming pregnant,

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<sup>5</sup> Cultural limitations in this context refers to the ethnic minorities in their cultural background



acting out generalized adolescent alienation, frustration as the result of not being taught the basics earlier on in school, lack of motivation, lack of belief in the possibility of success, unstable family homes and an absence of certain attitudes needed in order to succeed. In particular, these lecturers saw attrition as related to a social attitude, taking the easy way out or not taking responsibility. Lecturers commonly refer to the lack of work ethic in students, how students want instant gratification and don't realize that they have to work hard to be successful (Sefa, *et al.*, 1997).

Savage (2001:41), in contrast to the conservative lecturer view expressed in Sefa *et al.* (1997), makes a note of reasons for attrition and classifies them as involuntary departure due to academic dismissal and as voluntary departure where students leave in spite of achieving satisfactory results. A failure by students to mobilize adequate coping strategies according to Savage (2001) results in problems adjusting to the institution and in social isolation. Social isolation therefore 'results in students having limited contact with other students and staff members that leads to a lack of the necessary emotional support to help with the adjustment process' (Savage, 2001:42).

Apart from isolation, departure is also caused by various Isolation social factors that causes student drop out. These may include unrealistic expectations, deficiency of initial support, inappropriate placement, a lack of satisfaction and inappropriate retention strategies on the part of educational institutions.

Students who think about leaving the NC(V) programme 'are far less satisfied with their college experience and appear to be less engaged with their peers and the institution. Alternatively, students that do not consider leaving appear to have a better understanding of the college processes and are more likely to have more positive

relationships with lecturing staff and students' (Thomas, 2012:12). In other words, students who are dedicated to completing the NC(V) programme are more likely to get along with their peers as well as their lecturers. On the other hand, the students who seem to be in limbo about their life-making decisions tend to be in isolation and eventually lose interest in their education and training. Consequently, they become drop outs.

These factors, Thomas (2012) continues, are associated with two important elements, namely a 'sense of belonging' and 'engagement'. A sense of belonging, refers to concepts of academic and social engagement (Thomas: 2012). At the student's level, belonging recognizes students' subjective feelings of relatedness or connectedness to the institution.' This approach of belonging, according to Thomas (2012:13), 'can be seen as taking an individualistic view of student retention and success.' Students whose social structure 'is at odds with that of their higher education institution may feel that they do not fit in, that their social and cultural practices are inappropriate and that their tacit knowledge is undervalued and, therefore, may become more inclined to withdraw early' (Thomas, 2012:13).

People who have a lower need to belong are generally satisfied with a few contacts whereas others with a greater need to belong need to have more contacts. This kind of engagement develops different relationships with others and at the same time it promotes connectedness with others (Thomas, 2012:13).

Social engagement 'creates a sense of belonging and offers support through interaction with friends and peers. Social interaction takes place in the social sphere of the institution as well as in the student's accommodation and through shared living arrangements. The latter can often contribute to the development of the students' capacity to engage and belong in higher education and beyond. As well as being

engaged in different spheres of the institution, namely social and academic, students can also be engaged at different levels apart from engagement in their own level of learning which could also contribute to their remaining in the institution' (Thomas, 2012:14).

### **2.3.1.1 Unrealistic expectations and initial student support**

Cook and Rushton (2009) say that although attrition rates vary from country to country, the root causes remain a set of unrealistic expectations on behalf of prospective students and inadequate student support in training institutions, especially in the first year. While much effort has been devoted to keeping students in the teaching programmes and institutions that they have joined, less attention is paid to supporting students to make the good choices before entry. Cook and Rushton (2009) indicate that institutions should forewarn prospective students of the changes that they will be expected to make and can make adaptations to their own practice to make the transition easier.

Cook and Rushton (2009:9) make a notable comment when they state that most institutional responses to non-continuance of their programmes have been to adapt the first-year experience to more closely match student expectations, to enhance student support and guidance mechanisms and to train academic staff to teach more professionally. Students, according to Papier (2009:26), also report 'that they find the courses difficult and there are many complaints about lecturers who do not prepare adequately and are unable to explain the subject matter.'

Many students, according to Ebrahim (2013:46), 'struggle particularly with the social aspect of adapting to college life: having to make new friends, taking responsibility for their studies and understanding the college system. Academically, most learners

report problems with the workload at hand.’ Success in assisting students to discover their unique motivations, asserts Ebrahim (2013), is dependent on the educational institutions’ capacity to assist the students to buy into the culture of that institution, with learning itself, with the faculty and with their peers.

### **2.3.1.2 Inappropriate placement**

Sefa, *et al.* (1997) assert that lecturers see the attrition dilemma as a direct result of inappropriate placement. They argue that students with a history of failure are frustrated when they come up against the reality of their failure. Some teachers, according to Sefa, *et al.* (1997), view the family as the key to a student’s dropping out. The ability of a single-parent household to provide the necessary support to students is seen as problematic. It is often believed that single parents have less time and often lack the necessary education and that children in these environments often take advantage of their parent’s ignorance (Sefa, *et al.* 1997). For most teachers, the absence of discipline and respect for the institution is presented as a problem contributing to attrition. Interestingly, this is the view also held by other students. Yet the feeling is prevalent among those teachers defined as conservative that there are plenty of support services from which students may choose to take advantage (Sefa, *et al.* 1997:58).

### **2.3.1.3 Involuntary departure**

Savage (2001) describes the reasons for attrition and classifies them as ‘involuntary’ departure due to academic dismissal in the first place and voluntary departure where students leave in spite of achieving satisfactory grades. According to Savage (2001), ‘an important conclusion resulted from Tinto’s research, namely, the concept of incongruence’. ‘Incongruence can be described as the mismatch between the needs,

interests and preferences of the individual and those of the institution.’ The model therefore, proposed by Tinto, emphasizes the importance of the interaction between the individual and the institution (Savage, 2001).

Thomas, (2012:10) notes that ‘it has become increasingly clear that success means helping all students to become more engaged and more effective learners in higher education, thus improving their academic outcomes and their opportunities.’ It can be difficult, Thomas (2012:10) continues, ‘to identify which students are most likely to withdraw on the basis of student-entry characteristics alone; mainstream approaches reach all students, particularly those who are considering withdrawing.’ This can be supplemented, asserts Thomas (2012:10), ‘by paying attention to the ways in which students integrate, behave and perform once they are in higher education.’ Therefore the adjustment from mainstream schooling into higher education is vital right from the beginning.

‘To be successful in higher education, belonging is critical to student retention. In the case where other strategies are employed with the intention of increasing student engagement, the focus is normally on narrow groups of students and situated outside of the academic domain. Failing to meet the needs of the much larger number of students may put them at risk of withdrawal’ (Thomas, 2012:11).

‘To be successful in college environments that provide opportunities for them to satisfy intrinsic needs for autonomy and competence as well as to obtain prosperous careers, students have to internalise individualist cultural norms.’ (Guiffrida, 2006:466).

#### **2.3.1.4 Personal satisfaction**

The degree of the student's personal satisfaction with his college experience is an important retention factor. The 'level of student commitment to the institution is affected by the degree of integration into the institution's academic and social systems. The amount of interaction is dependent on the meaning attached to or the value placed on the quality of the relationship with the institution' (Savage, 2001).

Stronger normative institutional guidelines are required in order to regulate interactions as well as the provision of a dual frame of accountability for academics and students. Koen (2007) pointed out that theoretical accounts in South Africa are 'limited to identifying structural sociological aspects that play a part in student attrition. This scaffold list of general societal factors is of limited value. At best, it provides a one-dimensional view of factors that shape retention, because it directs attention to factors that do not speak to cultural practices within universities, universities of technology and TVET colleges.' Koen (2007:9) therefore asserts that the attrition rate is most acute, as it is in other countries, at the first-year level.

Koen (2007), like Savage (2009), also claims that 'students dropping out comprise of two categories, forced exclusions and voluntary departure. Forced exclusions relate to students excluded by an admissions committee consisting of academics, institutional managers and student representatives. The purpose of the committee is to examine whether students, earmarked for exclusion, is based on their financial debt that is possibly too high or because they have failed too many subjects.'

#### **2.3.1.5 Retention strategies**

Cook and Rushton (2009) indicate that most institutions attempt to retain the students that they recruit. The privileged few institutions, Cook and Rushton (2009) claim, only

recruit the students that they are most likely to retain. It is for this reason, say Cook and Rushton (2009:12), that some institutions are engaging with potential students more closely so that applicants are better informed about the 'make-up' of higher education and/or TVET colleges and what these institutions may expect from them.

Cates (2012:55) lists the following as retentions, challenges and trepidations 'encountered in elementary and secondary education which may be echoed in TVET colleges too:'

- (a) Student characteristics (e.g. low self-confidence, poor academic preparation),
- (b) Family characteristics (e.g. socio-economic status, parental involvement, cultural values), and
- (c) Institutional factors. (e.g. levels of instruction, learning opportunities, educational technology).

'Aggravating these issues further are challenges encountered at the postsecondary level, such as being recruited into the demanding curricula and the non-provision of sufficient guidance and support which included the lack of an appropriate support system that may have been detrimental for some who place primary value on people and groups over grades and status and the lack of familial and societal role models' (Cates, 2012:55). The American Institute of Research (2012) asserts that for many, but particularly for students from lower income backgrounds, 'leaving prior to completing a degree or qualification is a missed opportunity and a lost investment.'

According to the American Institution of Research (2012), 'despite considerable attention to the importance of the college completion agenda, a surprising paucity of language or measures exist around attrition. Most institutional, state and national

data systems currently used by policymakers are set up to provide information about students who complete degrees, graduation rates, award levels, race/ethnicity, gender, detailed major, and so on. The systems do not, however, provide a similar level of detail about students who fail to complete degrees. As a result, conversations about the causes, costs and consequences of attrition tend to rely heavily on anecdotes or assumptions.'

## **2.4 TINTO'S ATTRITION THEORIES**

Tinto (1993) argues that the path to enhanced student retention is not an easy or a smooth one. 'Effective retention efforts are tough to surmount, because of the variable character of student attrition. Consequently, an opinionated view on attrition based on believe that students who drop out are different or deviate from the rest of the student population still exist. Stereotypes like these are reinforced by language classified as a way of talking about student attrition, labelling individuals as failures for not having completed their course of study in an institution.' Tinto (1993) recognizes that past limitations in the study of attrition have led researches to focus primarily on the movements of those students who enter higher education and via continuous enrolment, complete their college degrees in the 'standard' four-year period.

Tinto (1993:92) makes reference to Arnold Van Gennep (1960) and his research on the 'rites of passage in tribal societies'. Van Gennep's (1960) anthropological study as described in his book, *The Rites of Passage* (1960), is used as a framework by Tinto to develop his theory of student departure (Tinto, 1993:91). Tinto (1993:91) describes Van Gennep's (1960) envisioned life as 'being comprised of a series of passages leading individuals from birth to death and membership from one group to another.' These so-called rites of passages are referred to as the 'stages of



separation, transition and incorporation' (Tinto, 1993:92). Tinto describes each of the stages: 'Separation (stage one) refers to the separation of the individual from past associations. Transition (stage two) occurs when the student seeks membership from the new group by interacting with them. Incorporation (stage three) encompasses new patterns of interactions with the aforementioned members and establishing membership as an active participant.' (Tinto, 1993:93).

The 'point of referring to the work of Van Gennep (1960) is not that the college student career is always visibly marked by ceremonies and symbolic rites of passages. Many college students are, after all, moving from one community or set of communities, most typically those of the family and local high school, to another, that of the college' (Tinto, 1993). 'Vincent Tinto's Student Integration Model (SIM) remains the most significant model of dropout from tertiary education' (McCubbin, 2003:1). According to McCubbin (2003), Tinto's (1975) 'SIM of attrition was designed to offer a longitudinal model which would explain all of the aspects and processes that influenced an individual's decision to leave college, and how these processes interact to ultimately produce attrition.' At the heart of the SIM, McCubbin (2003) continues, 'is the degree to which the individual is integrated into the social and academic aspects of the college.' It is believed that Tinto uses Van Gennep's (1960) anthropological study of rituals to describe his Student Integration Model (SIM). The three stages as described by Tinto will now be considered:

### **Stage 1: Separation**

'The first stage, separation, requires that the individual disassociate himself in various degrees: membership in a community, family, high school and local area of residence' (Tinto, 1993:94). 'For nearly all students, separation from the past is at least somewhat isolating and stressful. This may be especially true of those persons

who move away from their local high school communities and families to live at a distant college' (Tinto, 1993:96). Not being in familiar surroundings with familiar people can cause a new student anxiety which can effectively lead to the student dropping out.

This is not so true of people who attend a local, nonresidential college. They need to separate themselves from former relationships in order to establish membership in the newly-met communities or college. 'In a very real sense, a person's ability to leave one setting, whether physical, social or intellectual, may be a necessary condition for subsequent persistence in another setting,' (Tinto, 1993:96). Tinto (1993) refers to Bean and Vesper's (1992) work, noting the persistence to separate themselves, for some young students, particularly those fresh from high school, would need to be positively influenced by parental support and encouragement.

It has been discovered by Tinto (1993) that students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds where their family members have not had the means to attend college themselves, will probably suffer from separation issues. This is in complete contrast to students whose families come from a college educated background. These students are better able to college transitioning.

## **Stage 2: Transition**

The second stage, transition, comes during and after that of separation. 'This is the period of passage between the old and the new, before the full adoption of new norms and patterns and after the onset of separation from old ones' (Tinto, 1993:97). 'The scope of the transition stage, that is the degree of change that it entails, Tinto (1993:97) continues, depends on a number of factors, among them the degree of difference between norms and patterns associated with membership in past

communities and those required for integration into the life of the college.’ ‘Though they may have been successful in meeting the demands of past situations, they may not have acquired the social and intellectual skill needed for successful participation in the new college.’ The scope of transition hinges upon the degree to which the individual has already begun the process of transition prior to his entering the college (Tinto, 1993:97). Their desire to ‘fit in’ says Tinto (1993:97), moves them to emulate the life of the institution by ‘getting ready’ well in advance of entry. ‘Virtually all students experience some kind of struggle in making the change to college.’ For some, the isolation, if not desolation, can pose serious problems.

‘Although most students are able to cope with the problem of transition, many voluntarily withdraw from college very early in their first academic year, less from an inability to become incorporated in the social and academic communities of the college than from an inability to withstand the stress that such transitions commonly induce’ (Tinto, 1993:98). The difficulties linked with separation and transition to college, says Tinto (1993:98), ‘are conditions that, though stressful, need not in themselves lead to departure. It is the individual’s response to those conditions that finally determines staying or leaving. Though external assistance may make a difference, it cannot do so without the individual’s willingness to see the adjustments through.’

### **Stage 3: Incorporation**

Tinto identifies the third stage as incorporation. ‘After passing through the stages of separation and transition, both of which tend to happen very early in the individual’s academic career, the individual is faced with the task of becoming integrated or, using Van Gennep’s (1960) terminology, incorporated into the community of the college’ (Tinto, 1993:98). ‘Unlike those being incorporated into the traditional

societies which were of interest to Van Gennep (1960), individuals in college are rarely provided with the formal rituals and ceremonies whereby such connectedness is ratified.' Of course, some institutions, especially residential ones do provide a variety of formal and informal mechanisms for the purpose of incorporation (Tinto, 1993). Not all individuals, especially those recently removed from the familiar confines of the family and local high school communities, are capable of making the needed personal acquaintances on their own. 'As a result, not all new students come to be incorporated into the life of the institution and without external assistance; many students will eventually leave the institution because they have been unable to establish satisfying intellectual and social membership' (Tinto, 1993:99).

## **2.5 CONTINUED AND CURRENT USE OF TINTO**

Researchers make use of the work of Tinto even though his work is at times critiqued and his theories not readily accepted.

Even though student departure is considered a studied phenomenon, there is a dearth in the research field as unknown (Tinto, 1993:35). 'Though we have been able to map out the dimensions of the patterning of the rates of departure among student population generally and have come to associate certain individual attributes with differences in rates of departure, we are only beginning to understand the complex process of interaction among people within institutions that give rise to the pattern of attrition' (Tinto, 1993, 35).

Braxton (2002:2) has taken note of Tinto's work and believes that 'Tinto's internationalist theory enjoys near paradigmatic stature in the study of college student departure.' With reference to Tinto's work, Braxton (2002:2) continues by saying that 'students enter college with various individual characteristics that play a role in the

college student departure process.’ Braxton (2002:3) elaborates by saying ‘the greater the student’s level of academic integration, the greater the level of subsequent commitment to the goal of college graduation. Moreover, the greater the student’s level of social integration, the greater the level of succeeding in the college.’

In his research on student departure, Metz (2002) makes repeated reference to the work of Tinto. Focusing on the college student, Metz (2002:5) says Tinto’s ‘departure theory incorporates the six components derived from his collaboration with Cullen (1973) into his research on the influence of student persistence.’ Metz (2002:5) continues by saying that ‘Tinto’s theory suggests that students arrive at the college with certain expectations and aspirations but the integration or the lack thereof into the college environment, affects the students’ degree of academic attainment. The influence of institutional variables, such as faculty-student interaction, peer group interaction and extracurricular involvement helps shape the students’ progression through college. An individual’s failure to acclimatize to an environmental setting continues to be a focus of Tinto’s studies identifying reasons for student departure from college’ (Metz, 2002:4).

‘Horstmanshof and Zimitat (2007:704) argue that, in general, the participation, completion and retention rates of the several demographic groups of students vary in many countries. In Australia, the US and the United Kingdom (UK), a greater proportion of mature entrants other than young entrants do not continue in higher education after their first year.’ Horstmanshof and Zimitat (2007:704) add that ‘much emphasis has been placed on the first year at university as a useful point for study since discontinuing rates are highest at the first year, according to Tinto’s (1993) research work’.

The understanding of what exactly affects the student dropout and persistence has been contributed by Tinto's student integration model (SIM). In a recent study Pather (2015), say that researchers have applied 'Tinto's integration model to a range of different contexts within higher education institutions to identify the factors that influence university experience, student performance and persistence.' When a student's goal and commitments do not align with their university experience Pather (2015) continues, may cause the student to become academically disconnected, which will most probably lead to the student's dropping out. Thus Tinto's (1983) model suggests that students assign the following reasons to their dropping out of higher education, namely, personal attributes, educational goals and their commitment to the institution (Pather, 2015).

Therefore, there is good reason to reflect on the work of Tinto (1983) along with the work of other researchers who make use of the work of Tinto. Those that quote Tinto, refer favorably to his SIM model, giving the reader a clear understanding of the importance of integration in the college environment

## **2.6 CRITICISM OF TINTO'S THEORY**

Tinto's (1983) research on attrition has not gone without any criticism. One such criticism is from Karp, Hughes and O'Gara (2008) who finds that 'Tinto's integration model is often assumed to be inapplicable to the study of student persistence at community colleges in the United States because one of the linchpins of the framework, social integration, is considered unlikely to occur for students at these institutions. The main reason behind this argument is that community college students are thought to lack the time to participate in activities, such as clubs, that would facilitate integration.'

Tinto's (1983) integration model 'has been applied to a number of studies of student persistence in postsecondary education. The usefulness of Tinto's model has been questioned when dealing with community colleges. It is assumed that community colleges provide students with fewer opportunities for social integration and that social aspects of postsecondary education may be less appealing to students attending two-year institutions to which they commute on a daily basis. Tinto himself has questioned whether the mechanisms that encourage social-integration in particular are relevant to community college and commuter students' (Karp, 2008:3).

Another researcher, (Tierney 2002), cited in the work of (Braxton 2002), critiques Tinto's model by saying that it fulcrums on concepts which relate to 'rituals of academic and social assimilation which merge into the mainstream of college lifetime' (Tierney, 2002:1). The purpose of his criticism is 'not to repeat concerns raised in previous work nor to offer another interpretation on the scaffolding of critical theory and postmodernism.' Rather, he lists three objectives. 'His objectives consider the idea of culture and how it influences our conceptions of student departure. Secondly, he hypothesizes a model based on critical notions of power and community and thirdly, examines how such a model might be employed as an intervention for those who are at risk of early departure from the institution. The interactions that students, teachers, parents and families have and how the definitions of these interactions are approached, is key to an individual's success, failure, leave-taking or completion' (Tierney, 2002:8). 'Rather than a model that assumes that students must fit into what is often an alien culture and that they leave their own culture,' Tierney (2002:8) concludes by saying, 'he argues the opposite'.

Cabrera, Nora and Castañeda (1993) critique much of the research done by Tinto. Tinto's theory, according to them, asserts that 'the match between the student's

motivation and academic ability and the institution's academic and social characteristics help shape two underlying commitments, namely, commitment to education and commitment to stay with the institution.' The Student Integration Model (SIM) according to Cabrera, Nora and Castañeda (1993) 'has been subjected to considerable testing, and research findings have largely supported the predictive validity of the model as far as the role of precollege variables is concerned.'

The criticism of Tinto's work helps to identify the rewards and limitations of the SIM model. It does however clearly identify that if the model is applied in the correct setting and college environment, it could render positive results and minimize the continued threat of attrition.

## **2.7 THE PURPOSE OF TINTO IN THIS STUDY**

Tinto has done much research over the years and it constantly or in most instances relates to attrition. Attrition has become a common term in the TVET college sector. College principals and other senior managers have become aware of the growing threat of attrition. Tinto (1993) makes reference to the commonalities experienced by the students at community colleges and therefore it has relevance to the current TVET student population. A large number of students find it difficult to integrate into college life immediately or very soon after registration, particularly in the first year. Far too many students allow too much time for this integration to take place and others just do not allow it to take place at all. The absence of integration, argues Tinto (1993:50), 'appears to arise from two sources referred to as incongruence and isolation. Incongruence, or what is sometimes referred to as lack of institutional fit, refers to that state where individuals perceive themselves as being substantially at odds with the institution.' 'The point of making these observations goes beyond the mere noting of the understandable shortcomings of past assessments of the extent of



departure from higher education' (Tinto, 1993). The intent of these observations, Tinto (1993) continues, 'is rather to suggest that in thinking about the character and causes of student departure and the sorts of actions which might constitute effective institutional policy for student retention, we should not underestimate the ability of people to obtain college degrees'.

These and a number of other pivotal reasons serve as a motivating factor for me to use Tinto as a vehicle of reference for this study, which is based on the attrition rate at TVET colleges.

## **2.8 ATTRITION STATISTICS OF NC(V)**

An investigation into students' expressions framed within Tinto's SIM, provides insights into attrition that colleges could use to bridge the gap between attrition goals and statistics. Such an investigation will also contribute towards knowledge on attrition. The following statistics reveal what has transpired since the inception of NC(V). These statistics will be looked at comparatively along with statistics of the NATED or Report 191 programme.

### **2.8.1 NC(V) Collective statistics in Civil and Construction Programmes**

NC(V) attrition statistics of previous years shows that the level 2 Civil and Construction students had a 38% attrition rate in 2010, 42% in 2011, 16% in 2012, 37% in 2013 and 38% in 2014. The attrition statistics of the level 3 NC(V) students for the same programme shows that the figure in 2010 was 29%, 18% in 2011, 14% in 2012, 10% in 2013 and 8% in 2014. The NC(V) level 4 Civil and Construction attrition statistics presents the following: in 2010 the attrition rate was 9%, 26% in 2011, 5% in 2012, 5% in 2013 and in 2014, 0%.

### **2.8.2 Attrition statistics in an engineering NATED programme**

To gain an understanding of students dropping out of NATED programmes at TVET colleges, Maharaj (2008) chooses to research students studying mechanical engineering. Enrolment statistics indicated a growth in the NATED programme. He argues that colleges were showing growth in student numbers. His concern, however, was on college retention of this growing number of students (Maharaj, 2008:5).

During his research the following statistics presented itself. The first enrolment in mechanical engineering for 2005 was 31 students in N4, from which only 11 progressed to N5 and no one registering in N6. In the same year there was a new second trimester enrolment of 15 students for N4, from which only eight progressed to N5 and again with no enrolments for N6. The third and last new enrolment for 2005 showed a 12 student enrolment for N4 from which no students progressed to the higher levels, namely N5 and N6. In the same way, the process was repeated in 2006 and 2007. In 2006, the first enrolment commenced with 29 students in N4 whilst in 2007, N4 started with 31 students (Maharaj, 2008).

These statistics focus on the total number of students enrolled versus the total number of students who had completed their studies in the various programmes prior to their proposed parting date. When these statistics are compared, it can be concluded that a great number of students are still dropping out. These figures are indicative of the fact that the challenge of attrition is still at the forefront of TVET colleges' academic challenges.

## 2.9 CRITIQUE OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN TVET INSTITUTIONS

TVET colleges can only be considered as viable education options, if the standard of teaching and learning is considerably raised (Munakandafa, 2014). Focus should be placed on the 'inputs towards formulating learning environments that are conducive to learners fully engaging with the learning process which will eventually contribute to an improvement in learning outcomes. Given the low pass rates that have characterized the TVET sector, it is critical that academic guidance and support units be established and maintained at each TVET college. Early warning programmes should be designed to identify students at risk of dropping out. It can also be effective tools to improve persistence and graduation rates' (Munakandafa, 2014).

'The early warning system is based on mid-term results and, students identified as having failed two or more subjects, are viewed as being more likely to drop out. The early warning system should therefore be implemented with alternative strategies such as supplementary instruction and mentorship ensuring a lower dropout rate' (Munakandafa, 2014).

The younger students that enter college are reportedly developmentally immature and then released into the college environment where they have to cope with certain factors totally new to them. These factors include historical, student, institutional and curriculum-related issues that seem to be the reason for students not being successful in the NC(V) programmes (Fryer, 2014). The average pass rate for the NC(V) courses was 39% for 2012, a decline from 42% in 2011, giving a clear picture that there could be factors influencing the progression rate (Fryer, 2014).

Fryer (2014) asserts that while it is not possible to make a direct comparison between TVET colleges and the schooling sector, it is nevertheless instructive to compare the

throughput rates of students enrolled for NC(V) with that of students enrolled for grade 12. Such a comparison reveals that while the throughput rate of TVET college students enrolled for NC(V) in 2012 was 39%, the throughput rate of those enrolled in grade 12 in the school sector was 58%. Therefore for every 100 students enrolled in the NC(V) programmes, a worrying 60 students fail or drop out (Fryer, 2014).

Fryer (2014) reports that students who enter the college environment 'are not properly prepared for post-school education, adding to their struggle to adapt to the college environment.' Many of the NC(V) students have entered the college after they have completed grade 9 since 2007. They are young and still expect the college to be like school, leaving them with a faulty perception of TVET colleges (Fryer, 2014).

## **2.10 STUDENT ATTITUDE TOWARD VOCATIONAL EDUCATION**

'An assessment of literature reveals that though there is extensive international literature dealing with students' attitudes to vocational education, there is limited research on this subject in South Africa. There are, however, studies reflecting on general student attitudes at higher education institutions, which may find relevance in vocational education' (Needham & Papier, 2011). The article states that 'a number of studies on learner attitudes to vocational education have been conducted, although their distinct concerns, approaches and explanations differ.' (Needham & Papier, 2011).

A number of comments emerged from the students registered at vocational institutions in the research done by Needham and Papier (2011). Some of the comments highlighted the confusion on the part of the student as well as a misconception about what the programme that they had enrolled for was about. It

would be good to note some of these responses as they have an impact on the decision of some students to leave or stay in the vocational programme.

Needham and Papier (2011) interviewed students in the different provinces in South Africa. They found that South African TVET college students considers vocational education as a benefit by preparing them for the working environment. Several students, however, anticipated continuing their studies at higher education institutions, 'despite the fact that having done mathematical literacy, rather than pure mathematics, might preclude their entry into higher education or limit their choice of subjects' (Needham & Papier, 2011).

'They found that students had varying conceptions of what vocational education is. A number of students did not understand the term vocational education and consequently did not respond, because they could not think of a word to define the term' (Needham and Papier, 2011).

With regard to the availability of guidance, Needham and Papier (2011) state that 'a number of students lamented the fact that there was limited guidance offered in certain courses to the point that parents and friends helped them to choose a course. Evidence from school and TVET college student interviews reveals a wide range of perceptions about what constitutes vocational training. These perceptions are not necessarily related to their immediate experience or knowledge of vocational training' (Needham & Papier, 2011:39).

## **2.11 CONCLUSION**

The aim of this review was to highlight the reasons that influence students' decisions to drop out of the TVET college prior to completing the course that they are enrolled in.

The literature reviewed reveals that close collaboration between the student and the institution must be developed from the initial time of enrolment and, in some cases, even prior to the enrolment date. Based on the comments found in the literature, significant interaction and cooperation must exist between TVET colleges and the students, ensuring that the students will remain in the programme that they have registered for.

Socioeconomic challenges feature strongly in the literature reviewed and play a pivotal role in their decision to drop out. Attrition, however, is also influenced by the mismatch of the student and the college. Inappropriate student selection and guidance also feature as being part of the decisions of students to leave before they complete their course.

In the next chapter, the research methodology used in this study is discussed.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

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#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter two provided detail on the context and issues surrounding the high attrition rate at TVET colleges. Chapter three will presents information on the research methodology highlighting the means by which information was acquired.

Section 3.2 discusses the research paradigm, highlighting factors contributing to attrition. Section 3.3 provides information on the student population and sample.

The following section, 3.4 gives some insight into the interviews, the reasons for the interview questions and the questions themselves.

The data which was analysed is discussed in section 3.5.

An explanation on quality, trustworthiness, credibility and the importance thereof follows in 3.6. The ethical considerations, which includes the confidentiality aspects, is considered in section 3.7, followed by the conclusion in 3.8.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

This study is situated within a critical research paradigm. Babbie and Mouton (2011:34) say 'that the single most distinct feature of a critical paradigm, which they call a metatheory, is its insistence on science becoming an emancipatory and transforming force in society.' Fay (1975) (cited in Babbie & Mouton, 2011:35) states that 'critical social science is one that recognizes that a great many of the actions people perform are caused by social conditions over which they have no control, and that a great deal of what people do to one another is not the result of conscious

knowledge and choice.’ The core concept of the critical paradigm, according to Babbie and Mouton (2011), is therefore to be found in the idea of transformation. The effect of this transformational metaphor is also seen in the strange epistemology and methodology of the critical paradigm.

By searching for and identifying broad social factors contributing towards attrition at TVET colleges, this research study has contributed towards liberating individual failure by placing its causes in the social milieu where it, at least partly, belongs. In other words, critical social research seeks ways to expose the structures of social relationships which determine the activities of people and the unanticipated, though not accidental, consequences of those actions, which this research study attempts to do with reference to attrition at TVET colleges.

This study is set within a critical research paradigm because it has analysed deep-rooted and multidimensional aspects of attrition at TVET colleges with the ultimate aim of contributing towards social change. This study has, furthermore, embraced within its milieu the ethical concerns of those responding to the interview questions. Babbie and Mouton (2011:36) appropriately state that the intention of critical inquiry is to liberate people from their state of alienation through the process of self-reflection. ‘This indicates that the intention is to transform or change the human condition through a critique of those alienating or repressing factors which sustain their alienation or self-deception.’

Henning (2004:23) reasons that researchers using a critical theory, aim at promoting critical consciousness and breaking down the institutional structures and arrangements that produce oppressive ideologies, and social inequalities that are produced, maintained and reproduced by these social structures and ideologies.



Critical theory examines the process of gaining, maintaining and circulating existing power relationships.'

The purpose of this study was to find reasons for attrition. Students interviewed are those who have left the TVET college prematurely and those who have remained and completed levels 2 to 4 in the civil engineering construction NC(V) programme. Delamont (2012:129) states that 'much has been written about how researchers can develop an enhanced research relationship with research participants through the use of in-depth, semi-structured interviews as conversations rather than through surveys or structured interviews.' In this way, Delamont (2012:129) continue to say that 'these authors suggest that interviews can cultivate a reciprocal, dialogic relationship established on mutual trust, openness and engagement where self-discourse, personal investment and equality are promoted. A more maximal approach would involve research participants in a collaborative effort to build empirical, rooted theory and this would allow for a deeper probing of research concerns by the route of returning to topics raised in former interviews.'

### **3.3 STUDENT POPULATION AND SAMPLE**

The study has drawn a sample from six students made up of three who have left the programme before completion and three who have successfully completed the NC(V) Civil and Construction programme. In the logic of sampling based on a theoretical or purposive strategy, Schwandt (2007:269) says that 'units are chosen not for their representativeness, but for their relevance to the research questions, analytical framework and explanation or account being developed in the research.'

Schwandt (2007:272) further asserts that 'there are two critical issues in the logic of theoretical or purposive sampling. First is the explicit establishment of relevant

criteria on the basis of which the selection of the units were made. Second, was by the use of a strategy to check that the units chosen were not simply done because they supported the developing account.'

Students were selected from one of the TVET colleges in the Western Cape where the majority of building and construction students were registered. The reason for selecting this particular college was influenced by the fact that the researcher is employed at the college in the capacity of Head of Department (HOD): Building Civil Construction which made accessibility to the students who were still at the college easy. The students who had already left were contacted by means of contact details found in their personal record files which was obtained from the administration office.

All the students volunteered to be interviewed and the sample derived from the interviews proved to be valuable for the study.

### **3.4 METHODOLOGY**

Data was collected by means of interviews. DHET granted permission to conduct the study at one the colleges in the Western Cape (Appendix A). Permission to conduct the research on campus at the identified college was given by the Deputy Principal (Appendix B). On receipt of the above permission, interviews were conducted. Students were given a consent form (Appendix C) which they needed to sign and hand back to me. This was done before the interviews began.

The data was obtained from two different categories of participants. The first category was that of the students who had left the college prior to completing their course. The second was that of the students who had remained at the college and completed their course.

### **3.4.1 Interviews**

Kvale and Brinkman (2009:1) indicate that interviews 'attempt to understand the world from the subjects' points of view, to unfold the meaning of their experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations.'

The setting of the interview stage, state Kvale and Brinkman (2009:128), 'should encourage the respondents to describe their points of view on their lives and worlds.' Delamont (2012:364) says that 'interviews are done in order to find the unknown, something one cannot know otherwise.'

The first few minutes of an interview are crucial. The respondents were given some time to compose themselves before they began to talk and expose their experiences and feelings to the interviewer freely. The interview session was introduced with a briefing in which the researcher described the topic and briefly talked about the purpose of the interview.

These interviews proved to be advantageous in that they produced much valued information. The interviews were also recorded to retain the valued information for future reference, when needed.

### **3.4.2 Interview questions**

The questions used in this study were used to ascertain why students had left or had remained in the NC(V) civil and construction programme. Questions were therefore developed independently for those who had completed the programme successfully and those who had left without completing the programme. According to Kvale and Brinkman (2009), the researchers' questions ought to be brief and simple. This would require knowledge of and interest in the research theme and the human interaction of

the interview, as well as the modes of questioning, in order for the researcher to devote his attention to the interview subject and the interview topic. As detailed by Ebrahim (2013:66), qualitative research interviews are in essence 'attempts to understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to explore the meaning of peoples' experiences and to delve into their lived world.'

The interview questions for both groups were formulated with Tinto's three stages in mind. The purpose of the questions was not to solicit the emotional feelings of the students, but rather to find logical reasons for their departure from the NC(V) programme or their reason for completion. The three stages that Tinto elaborates on coincide well with the questions that the researcher used during the interviews.

A total number of ten questions were asked of students who had completed the programme and the same number of questions were asked of those who had left the NC(V) civil and construction programme prior to completion. All the questions presented to the candidates were indicative of an attempt to gain information on their decision to stay or to leave the programme. These are the questions that the participating candidates were asked:

#### **3.4.2.1 Interview questions for students who left the college prior to completion**

- 1) Tell me about your decision to leave the NC(V) programme.
- 2) Tell me about your experience at the college.
- 3) Tell me about the people you met while you were at the college.
- 4) Tell me about the extent to which your experience at college matches what you thought you would need to learn.
- 5) Tell me about the support that you received while being at the college.
- 6) Tell me about your experience with the lecturing staff prior to your departure.
- 7) Tell me about your extracurricular activities while you were at the college.
- 8) Tell me how you personally benefitted from the programme while you were at the college.

- 9) How and when did you receive feedback regarding your progress as an NC(V) student?
- 10) If you were given an opportunity to go back to complete the programme, would you do so. Why?

### **3.4.2.2 Interview questions for students who had completed their programme at college**

- 1) Tell me about your decision to remain in the NC(V) programme.
- 2) Tell me about your experience whilst you were at the college.
- 3) Tell me about the people you met while you were in the NC(V) programme.
- 4) Tell me about the extent to which experience whilst at the college matched what you thought you would need to learn.
- 5) Tell me about the support that you received while at the college.
- 6) Tell me about your experience with the current lecturing staff.
- 7) Tell me about your extracurricular activities at the college.
- 8) Tell me how you benefitted personally from the programme while you were at the college.
- 9) How regularly did you receive feedback regarding your progress as an NC(V) student?
- 10) If you were given the opportunity to leave the programme, would you do so? Why?

The setting during the interviews was tranquil and the questions that were posed were conversational, allowing the students to feel at ease. A non-biased approach prevailed during the interviews and the language that was used was understandable to all participating parties.

The interviews took place in the researcher's office over a period of 12 inconsecutive months. Students were interviewed one at a time and at times that did not negatively affect their class contact time. Each student was given an opportunity to read through the questions prior to the interview. Whilst the student read the questions he/she also had an opportunity to pencil in a brief response which helped to get a more thorough reply during the actual interview session. All the interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

### 3.5 DATA ANALYSIS

The task of 'data collection and analysis is recursive and dynamic. The practical goal of data analysis is to find answers to research questions. These answers are called categories, themes or findings,' according to Merriam (2009). The process of analysis is one of breaking down data into bits of information and then assigning these bits to categories which will bring these bits together again. During this process discrimination can clearly be noted between the criteria for allocating data to one category or another (Merriam, 2009). Category construction, says Merriam (2009), is data analysis, 'which is done in conjunction with data collection. Once all the data are in, there is a period of intensive analysis when tentative findings are substantiated, revised and reconfigured.'

Social research makes allowance for numerous purposes. Exploration, description and explanation are some of the most common purposes (Henning, 2004). 'A large portion of social research, as stated by Henning, (2004) is conducted to explore a topic or to provide a basic familiarity with that topic.' According to Henning, (2004), 'exploratory studies are quite valuable in social research and they are essential whenever a researcher breaks new ground and this can almost always yield new insights into a topic for research.'

Henning, (2004:80) asserts that 'a general purpose of social scientific studies is to describe situations and events and therefore the researcher observes and then describes'. The general purpose of 'social scientific research, is to clarify things' (Henning, 2004:81). 'The major aim of explanatory studies,' Henning (2004:81) says, 'is to indicate causality between variables or events.'

The researcher reviewed all the data captured to become more familiar with the responses. What both groups mentioned was relevant to this research and could be refined to make coherent sense. All the comments were organized prior to being analysed. Finally, the data could be integrated to complete the analysis process. The data that were obtained clearly indicated that definite guidance would need to be given to the students to ensure their success at the TVET college.

### **3.6 QUALITY**

Kvale and Brinkman (2009) state that epistemological issues affecting the quality of interview-produced knowledge are treated in relation to some standard external objections to interview quality and exemplified by the question of leading questions. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) suggest that semi-structured interviews should comprise the following six important points, namely:

- The extent of 'spontaneous, rich, specific and relevant answers from the interviewee'.
- The extent of short interviewer questions and longer interviewee answers.
- The degree to which the interviewer follows up and clarifies the meanings of the relevant aspects of the answers.
- To a large extent, the interview being interpreted throughout the interview.
- The interviewer attempting to verify his or her interpretations of the subject's answers over the course of the interview.
- The interview being self-reported, a self-reliant story that hardly requires additional explanations.

'The demands and craftsmanship and expertise presuppose that the interviewer knows what he or she is interviewing about, as well as why and how. Although such

quality criteria might seem unattainable ideas, they can serve as guidelines for good interview practice' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009:164).

According to Mertens and Ginsburg (2009), the knower is the researcher and the would-be-known is the participant of the study. Methodologically, Mertens and Ginsberg (2009:88) therefore, go beyond quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods to show how to 'collect data about the reality of a concept in such a way that one feels confident that one has indeed captured the reality and done so in an ethical manner.' Ethical concerns form an integral part of this research study.

Trustworthiness and credibility, enriches the strength and the transferability of knowledge which are commonly discussed in social sciences particularly in qualitative research (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

### **3.6.1 Trustworthiness**

Some 'qualitative researchers like Lincoln and Guba (1985) have gone beyond the relativism of a rampant antipositivism and have reclaimed ordinary language terms to discuss the truth value of their findings, introducing concepts such as trustworthiness and credibility to qualitative research' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009:244).

Kvale and Brinkman (2009:245) asserts that 'consistency and trustworthiness of research findings is often treated in relation to the issue of whether a finding is reproducible at other times and by other researchers.'

The participants that were interviewed knew me well. I did not want that to influence their responses to the questions that I directed at them. To ensure trustworthiness, the following was done:



- The intended purpose of the research was clarified and a background to the study was provided.
- Their honesty in responses was requested.

### **3.6.2 Credibility**

‘Credibility must have as a goal, reason to demonstrate that the enquiry was conducted in such a manner so as to ensure that the subject was appropriately identified and transcribed’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2006:201).

‘In seeking ways to understand the way ordinary people conceptualize and make sense of their worlds, ethno-methodologists have urged all social scientists to pay more respect to their scientific processes. Social researchers should look both to their colleagues and their subject as sources of agreement on the most useful meanings and measurements of the concepts they study’ (Babbie & Mouton, 2009:124). During the interviews, participants were encouraged to be calm and relaxed. The gravity of the interviews was explained and the value of their input into the research was stressed.

## **3.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

None of the students interviewed was subjected to any sort of negativity and a professional approach was maintained between the interviewer and the interviewees. Kvale and Brinkman (2009:67) explain that Phronesis or a wisdom relevant to practical things can be said to involve what we call the skill of ‘thick ethical description, the ability to see and describe events and their value-laden contexts and to judge accordingly. Qualitative researchers should primarily cultivate their ability to perceive and to judge thickly in order to be ethically proficient, rather than mechanically following universal rules.’ Consent forms were given to all the

participants to complete prior to the interviews conducted with them. These forms gave detail to the research and the purpose thereof.

### **3.7.1 Confidentiality**

Openness and intimacy of qualitative research can be alluring and may lead participants to disclose information that they might later regret sharing. Confidentiality in research, according to Kvale and Brinkman (2009:72), 'implies that private data identifying the participants will not be disclosed.' Qualitative methods using interviews 'involve different ethical issues than questionnaire surveys, where confidentiality is assured by the computed averages of survey responses. In a qualitative research study, where participants' statements from a private interview setting may appear in public reports, precautions need to be taken to protect participants' privacy. Confidentiality as an ethical field of uncertainty, relates to the issue that, on the one hand, anonymity can protect the participants and is thus an ethical demand, but, on the other hand, it can serve as an alibi for the researcher, potentially enabling him to interpret the participants' statements without being gainsaid,' (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009:73).

## **3.8 CONCLUSION**

Chapter Three discusses the qualitative methods used during the process of gathering the data. By means of the dialogues and the thematic analysis of the material found during the interviews, the researcher will do his best to produce descriptive data which should give an understanding of the reasons why students leave the NC(V) programme at the TVET colleges early.

Chapter Four will present a thorough explanation and analysis of the data which was produced by means of the methods applied in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

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#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter will present a discussion of information derived from one-on-one interviews conducted with NC(V) civil and construction students. As indicated in the previous chapter, ten questions were prepared for the students who had left the college prematurely and the same number for the students who had remained at the college to complete the programme. All the questions were responded to by the interviewees which resulted in data that could be used to give an overall pattern of similarities as well as dissimilarities.

Section 4.2 presents an overview of the data-capturing process which was formulated during the interview process. Section 4.3 provides a background of the participants interviewed. Section 4.4 presents the responses of the students who had left the college early. In section 4.5, the responses of the students who had remained at the college to complete the programme will be presented. Section 4.6 presents the themes that materialized from the interview responses. Section 4.7 gives the conclusion.

#### **4.2 OVERVIEW OF DATA CAPTURING**

Of the six TVET colleges in the Western Cape, five offer the civil and construction programme in NC(V). Only one of the five colleges was chosen as it has the largest number of students on the NC(V) construction programme and therefore serves adequately as a sample. Being based at the college, I was allowed easy access to

the students' past records and immediate contact with the students who were completing the NC(V) programme. Students were chosen based on the time that they had spent at the college prior to their departure and a similar approach was taken with those who were at the end of the NC(V) programme. All interviewees consented to the process before interviews took place and were recorded by means of the signed consent forms which were returned to the interviewer.

With only one TVET college participating, there was no need to give the college a significant name but it is referred to simply as 'the TVET college'. Those interviewed, however, were given an identification name. Two different groups were interviewed, namely three in total of the group who had left the college prematurely and three in the group who had stayed to complete the programme. The three who had left early were numbered interviewees D1 to D3. The group of students who were completing the programme were numbered interviewees S1 to S3.

When the data was compiled for both groups, it became more apparent to group the responses of each individual question of the ten questions together. This was due to similarities in the responses of all the interviewees.

From the data collected, themes could be identified with which to interpret the responses from the interviews more effectively.

## **4.3 DATA GATHERING**

### **4.3.1 Background of the interviewees who had left the NC(V) programme**

Interviewee D1 had enrolled at the college for NC(V) level 2. He successfully completed level 2 and then subsequently level 3 the following year. On completion of level 3, interviewee D1 enrolled for the final year of NC(V), but did not remain in the

programme to complete it. Interviewee D2 had enrolled for the NC(V) programme at the same time as D1 and successfully completed level 2. He then enrolled for the next level, level 3, but during that year, he had dropped out. Interviewee D3 had enrolled for the NC(V) level 2 programme but did not stay for the entire year to sit for the final external examination. He therefore became a victim of attrition in his very first year of enrolment for the NC(V) programme.

#### **4.3.2 Background of the interviewees who had stayed in the NC(V) programme**

These interviewees, S1, S2 and S3 enrolled for the level 2 NC(V) programme at the beginning of the same academic year. They stayed in the programme for the entire three years, successfully completing NC(V) level 2, 3 and 4. Some of them have found work in the construction industry and one of them has made arrangements with his employer to return to further his studies. This student is now back on the campus doing the (NATED) N4 programme. Once the interview had been completed and we discussed his future plans, he stressed the urgency of completing N6 and then pursuing a civil and construction course at a higher education institution.

### **4.4 DATA DESCRIPTION**

#### **4.4.1 Responses of interviewees who had left the programme**

##### **Question1**

**(Tell me about your decision to leave the NC(V) programme)**

Interviewee D1 stated that he had not yet received his level 3 results. This resulted in him not being able to apply and qualify for the NSFAS student bursary for the next academic year. He added that he did not have the required amount of money to register as a private student. According to DHET, bursary recipients who failed to

progress to the next level of their studies, may not be awarded a bursary to repeat a level that they had failed (South Africa, 2014). At the time of registration in the new academic year, D1 had not received his results. He was thus unable to apply for a further bursary as he was unsure whether he had passed the examination of the previous academic year or not.

When interviewee D2 received his results for level 2, he was very excited to learn that he had passed all his subjects. The following year, he applied for a bursary and registered for level 3. When classes started, however, he became despondent. The class started with a lot of theoretical work as it had at level 2 *again* (his emphasis). He thought that level 3 would give him more opportunity to be exposed to the practical workshop. To his dismay, the first term was filled with a great deal of theoretical work. This was something he did not want to experience again as he considered practical work to be more enjoyable and more appropriate.

Interviewee D3 had enjoyed all his subjects and worked hard in all of them. He did, however, have serious difficulty with mathematics. He explained:

*'Ever since I was at school I could never fully understand mathematics.'*

When he came to the college and was told that he needed to do mathematics, he really started to panic. But he promised his mother that he would give it another try. At the end of the first term, he received good marks in six of his seven subjects, but not for mathematics. Expressing himself further, he said:

*'This became a very huge burden for me and it was kinda the big reason why I left the college.'*

Interviewee D1 therefore regarded finance as the primary factor causing him to drop out, while for D2 it was the excessive theoretical nature of the programme and for D3, it was failing mathematics.

## **Question 2**

### **(Tell me about your experience at the college)**

Responding to the second question, interviewee D1 stated that he had enjoyed the company of the other students as well as the assistance and encouragement of the lecturers. He did, however, feel that the structures of the NC(V) programme at that time were not properly in place. He then raised a concern in that a number of students as well as lecturers had behaved as though they were not fully prepared for the start of the academic year.

Interviewee D2 had a friendly demeanour during the interview. He, at the outset of the interview, stated that he had become friends with a number of students and that he had enjoyed the time at the college whilst he was in level 2. His experience at the college however, had given him the idea that he was back at school due to the amount of theoretical work and he had not wanted that.

Interviewee D3 was very honest with himself and said the programme was good. He had enjoyed what he was doing and it was a great learning experience for him. In his words:

*'I did not stay long at the college as I left during the second term of that year... I benefitted greatly by what I learned in the NC(V) programme even though my stay was very short.'*

Therefore interviewees D1 and D2 enjoyed the company of the other students, but D1 felt that the structures of the NC(V) programme were not properly in place. Interviewee D2 also felt that he was back at school, something he wanted to be away from. Interviewee D3 enjoyed the programme and enjoyed his learning experience.

### **Question 3**

#### **(Tell me about the people you met while you were at the college)**

Interviewee D1 became good friends with a number of his classmates and they inspired one another to compete academically. He said:

*'Yoh!<sup>6</sup> To see who would be the best and, Sir, this created a good atmosphere amongst ourselves and allowed for the development of good student relationships. ... I don't know if can say this but I was the top in class because of this competitive approach.'*

Interviewee D2 felt that the people were friendly and most of the lecturers were very helpful. He did, however, not like the manner in which the campus manager dealt with them at times. In his response to the third question he said that the campus manager would be impolite when he found them outside of the class.

*'The campus manager would never first ask us why we were out of the class so that we could give a reason. After all, Sir, sometimes a lecturer would be absent and if another lecturer did not come to our classroom we would go and sit near the cafeteria and talk about the work we covered the previous day but he would still loudly tell us to go to class.'*

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<sup>6</sup> In this context 'yoh' refers to being surprized or amazed about something



Interviewee D3 was quite candid in his response saying that he had met wonderful people who were always eager to assist and willing to help him. His classmates were fun to be with and he had liked his lecturers, especially his plumbing trade lecturer.

In this regard, all three interviewees became good friends with classmates and lecturers. Interviewee D2, however, felt that the campus manager was not always polite, something he did not like.

#### **Question 4**

**(Tell me about the extent to which experience at college matched what you thought you would need to learn)**

Interviewee D1 was frank with his response to question four. He said that his experience at the college did not match what he had expected to learn. Even though he thought that NC(V) was a good programme, he still felt that it was based on too much theory and not enough practical work. Interviewee D1 also felt that there was always an issue with the use of the workshop and this made many of his fellow students despondent. What this interviewee personally enjoyed at the college, was to go to the computer literacy and life orientation classes.

Interviewee D2 responded to question four with much frustration saying that there had been absolutely no match.

*'As I said to Sir earlier, I came to the college with the expectation of much more practical in the NC(V) programme. But my experience with so much theory and so little practical was not such a nice experience.'*

Remarkably, interviewee D3 felt exactly the same as the previous interviewee. He said that it had absolutely no match. He had not expected the programme to have so much theory.

*'As I already said, I struggled with mathematics when I was at school and that is why I left school after I completed grade 9. So now I get to the college thinking that I am going to be taught practical things, but to my dismay I again found myself back in a school situation. Most, if not all the work is theory, and then Sir, yoh! There is the mathematics, my greatest battle.'*

Therefore all three interviewees felt that the programme did not match what they expected from it, leading to much frustration for interviewee D2

## **Question 5**

### **(Tell me about the support that you received while at the college)**

Interviewee D1 indicated that financial support was given to him in the form of a bursary for level 2 as well as level 3 by the college. Lecturers were very supportive as well. One lecturer in particular gave him a lift to and from the college which allowed him more time in the afternoon to attend to his homework and assignments. But not only that, it assisted him financially, something he needed at the time. He also got to college early each morning, which meant he was never late for the first period, as were most of the other students due to travelling difficulties.

During the interview, interviewee D2 became very emotional. He said that he had received a bursary for which he was grateful. He was even able to utilise the student support service. He needed this support because during the year while he was in

level 2, the household that he stayed with had some domestic challenges, since there was no steady income due to unemployment while some of the family members also used drugs. These negative influences almost prevented him from coping with his work. In contrast, the support he received from fellow students and lecturers was, in his words 'great'.

Interviewee D3 said that the support was very good. Fellow students supported him well especially when they got to the mathematics class. Even the mathematics lecturer supported him because he would spend additional time with him at the end of the lecture while the rest of the class worked independently.

Therefore, interviewees D1 and D2 indicated that they appreciated the financial support that they had received. All three interviewees felt that they had received the necessary support from the lecturers as well as fellow students.

## **Question 6**

**(Tell me about your experience with the lecturing staff prior to your departure)**

Responding to question six, Interviewee D1 felt that he had had a good student/lecturer relationship. He said that this was not only because of the financial support the college had given him, but because of the lecturers going out of their way to call him to remind him of an upcoming examination or test. This happened when he could not be at the college for reasons beyond his control. There would be times when he did not have money to travel to and from the college.

When I listened to interviewee D2, I could understand the disappointment that overwhelmed the lecturers when the student had informed them that he was going to leave the college. In his own words:

*'All my lecturers made an attempt to persuade me to stay so that I could complete the NC(V) programme. So I can truly say that we had a very good student and lecturer relationship. My experience with the lecturing staff was also good because they would many times go out of their way to help me with my college work, especially when I did not immediately understand. The assistance they gave after normal class time, I think was a great sacrifice on their part.'*

Interviewee D3 felt that the lecturers were kind and helpful. He enjoyed going to all his classes except mathematics and that, he says, was not because he did not like the lecturer. The lecturer was kind and helpful in the mathematics class. He explained further:

*'During the life orientation (LO) classes we would talk about life experiences and in the computer literacy classes we got to work on the computer and I enjoyed that a lot.'*

He was of the opinion that the mathematics lecturer had tried his best to assist him, but he was the one that lacked serious understanding and interpretation of mathematics. He added:

*'Sometimes I would become embarrassed in the mathematics class when all the other students understood the work and I did not. I do strongly believe that the embarrassment of not understanding mathematics is what influenced my decision to leave the NC(V) programme.'*

In this instance, all three interviewees felt that they had a good connection with lecturers and other students and interviewee D3 in particular felt that the lecturers were kind and helpful.

### **Question 7**

**(Tell me about your extracurricular activities while you were at the college)**

Interviewee D1 confirmed that there were very little extracurricular activities at the campus. During 2010, when South Africa was the host for the soccer world cup, the college had arranged some sporting activities. But besides that, there was nothing more exciting that he could comment on regarding extracurricular activities at the campus. He therefore used the interview as an opportunity to suggest that the college should consider arranging sporting activities on the campus as he felt it would serve as a motivation for students.

Interviewee D2 expressed a view similar to D1. There were no extracurricular activities that he was aware of:

*'As students we would play a bit of soccer or rugby during our breaks. But I personally was not aware of any extracurricular activities that was arranged by the campus. It could be that we were not fully aware of any extracurricular activities.'*

Interviewee D3 simply stated he was not sure if there had been any extracurricular activities. He had not been aware of any events at the time that he was at the campus. He could not recall any notices about any extracurricular activities. He said,

*'I do know that if there were any extracurricular activities and if there were I personally would not have participated as I was concerned with the mathematics that I was struggling with.'*

Therefore, all three interviewees confirmed that there were no extracurricular activities. Interviewee D3 also indicated that he had not been aware of any extracurricular events while he was at the campus.

### **Question 8**

**(Tell me how you personally benefitted from the programme while you were at the college)**

Interviewee D1 responded well to question 8. His response was somewhat different to his previous responses with the other questions. In this instance, his sentence structure was good and coherent. He said that his stay at the college had served as a motivation and encouragement to look forward to a brighter future. Before he had come to the college he had been involved with drugs and friends who did not have pure motives. He said that this could have affected his future endeavours. He continued by saying that he had benefitted greatly by being at the college and in the NC(V) programme even if he had not completed the course.

Interviewee D2 responded to question 8 with disappointment. He felt that they had been given a lot of theoretical information.

*'I do however still think that we should have done much more practical work related to the theory which we covered in class.'*

Something positive emerged when he stated that he had enjoyed and benefitted from attending the computer classes.

*'When we got the computer period, we would actually work on the computer, and I liked that.'*

Interviewee D3 simply stated that he had benefitted a great deal from the programme even though there had been a great deal of theory in all the vocational subjects.

*'I do think, as students, we should have had more practical, then we would have benefitted even more. Many of the lecturers would try their best to help the students to understand the work that they cover during a lesson. If the lecturers knew that there was something in the workshop that they could show us to get a better understanding of the lesson, they would do that, and that benefitted me a lot.'*

Therefore, interviewee D1 had persisted with his studies due to the fact that he had been motivated and encouraged by the college. Interviewee D2 expressed disappointment because he had been exposed to too much theoretical work. Even though interviewee D3 had received more theoretical than practical work he had still enjoyed the programme because he felt that the lecturers had tried their best to assist in any way that they could.

### **Question 9**

**(How and when did you receive feedback regarding your progress as an NC(V) student?)**

Interviewee D1 saw himself en route to success. When the question about results presented itself, a measure of concern could be detected. Interviewee D1 indicated that he had written a test and done an assignment in March and the same in June and September. He claimed that, as NC(V) students:

*'We would receive feedback after each assignment or test during the year. The lecturers would engage with us and help us with the questions that we had difficulty with.'*

His major concern was with the final end of year examination where, on returning to the college in the new academic year to continue with his studies, the results had still not been available for everyone. As he claimed:

*'The examination would be written and our answer sheets would be taken in and then we would go on holiday that was nice to look forward to. But in the New Year when we must register for the next level, some would still not have received results.'*

As the interview continued, interviewee D1 said that he recalled one year when the supplementary examination had already been written, and he still had not received his final results of the previous year.

*'It was very frustrating as we would be in class but not fully registered. So as a student you worry because you are in the next level but you are unsure if you passed the previous level. Fortunately I passed some of the subjects in the previous examination, but felt sorry for those who did not and had to move back to the lower level. As Sir already know, we were allowed to fail one or two but could progress to the next level. This frustrated many and I can assure Sir that this is what made me and many of the others decide to leave the college.'*

Interviewee D2 candidly responded to the question by saying:



*'I received feedback after each assignment or test that I completed. The lecturers would show me where I went wrong and explain to me the correct way that I should have answered the question. I liked that.'*

Having left the college early in his first year, interviewee D3 had a measure of uncertainty about his results. His response to the question was:

*'From what I was told I think the NC(V) programmes have tests in March, June and September prior to the final examination in November. I only wrote the March test, which was when I was rudely awakened with my mathematics result. I received that feedback as soon as the lecturer was finished with the marking so I did not wait long to know the outcome of all the subjects for that term and then I left.'*

Therefore all three interviewees said that they were happy with the turnaround time of the results for the internal tests. All three felt that the time that they had to wait for the external examination results was too long.

#### **Question 10**

**(If you were given an opportunity to go back to complete the programme, would you do so. Why?)**

Without hesitation, interviewee D1 responded with a resounding 'yes', indicating that he would want to go back to complete the NC(V) programme. He thought that the NC(V) programme was a very good programme and it could assist students with finding work in the construction industry. In addition, he said that he was confident that by now the NC(V) programme was receiving some attention and was being

revised. He expressed the opinion that current students probably had much more exposure to the workshop than what they had had, but could not confirm this.

At the time of the interview, it could be established that he still talked regularly to potential NC(V) students when he engaged with youth in his community, especially those who were still at school. He concluded by saying that he had tried to explain to them the value of the NC(V) programme and how it could assist them in finding suitable employment in the construction industry. He ended with an emotional tone saying:

*'Maybe I was too hasty with my departure. Maybe I should have stayed and completed the programme.'*

Interviewee D2's response to the question was a clear and resounding no:

*'No! I don't think I will go back unless I know that I will be doing a lot more practical. I prefer doing practical things than theory things.'*

Interviewee D3's response to the question was positive:

*'Yes I would go back to redo the NC(V) programme, as long as I don't have to do mathematics. I only want to be a plumber and for that I do not think I need all that mathematics just to fix a leaking tap or water pipe. So if the mathematics is taken out of the NC(V) programme and more practical is included, then I would definitely go back.'*

Interviewee D1 had indicated that he would go back to complete the NC(V) programme should he be given the opportunity. Interviewee D2 felt that he would not want to go back unless the NC(V) programme consisted of more practical work. Interviewee D3 stated that he would also go back as long as the programme did not have any mathematics.

#### **4.4.2 Responses of the interviewees who had completed the programme.**

##### **Question 1**

##### **(Tell me about your decision to remain in the NC(V) programme)**

Interviewee S1 spoke confidently, stating that he wanted to have an education. He also believed that when he started something, he had to finish it. When he had started the NC(V) programme, he immediately became very interested in the content and that contributed to his decision to stay and complete the programme.

*‘The NC(V) programme also proved very worthwhile to me.’*

That is what motivated him to complete it.

Interviewee S2 explained that he had always liked learning new things and the information transferred to him during lectures helped him at home when he needed to repair something. He also acknowledged that the work they had done, helped him in such a way that when he was approached for help in the community, he could confidently render assistance. He indicated that he had always wanted to be a construction worker and admired people working on construction sites. This was one of the primary reasons that he had enrolled for the NC(V) construction programme. Interviewee S2 not only wished to work as an artisan on a construction site one day, but hoped to become a site engineer eventually, but for that dream to become a reality, he said:

*‘I needed to start somewhere, and what better programme other than NC(V)?’*

Interviewee S3 confidently responded to question one saying:

*'It is my last year in NC(V) and my plans are to go to N4 next year and I think it was the best decision I have ever made to complete the NC(V) programme. As Sir can see, it would not be wise for me to turn back now when I have come so far.'*

Therefore, interviewees S1, S2 and S3 had personal plans for the future in the construction field, and to achieve that, they needed to finish the programme that they had started.

## **Question 2**

**(Tell me about your experience whilst you were at the college)**

Interviewee S1 mentioned that the lecturers were always very helpful and assisted him whenever they could. He confirmed that his communication with the lecturers had been excellent as well as with the students. He was very happy with what he had been taught and even the little practical work, which he said he would be able to use in the construction industry when he eventually found a job.

There was a level of awareness that prevailed indicating that interviewee S2 was not entirely happy based on what he said. He noted that although he had completed the programme, it had not fully been what he had in mind. He really thought they would do much more hands-on work other than all the theoretical content which was covered in class. In his words:

*'My experience was not that great but I am still positive about completing the programme.'*

Interviewee S3 was expressive and responded to question two saying, that he had had a fun time and that college had been 'cool'<sup>7</sup> from day one. Academically, he

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<sup>7</sup> In this context 'cool' refers to something that is good or excellent.

reasoned, he had had a positive outlook on his studies and could say that some of his lecturers had done their work very well and others could have done better. He noted that this had been a challenge that he needed to learn to accept. He felt that he had done this and successfully completed the NC(V) programme.

Thus, interviewees S1 and S2 indicated that they had enjoyed the positive spirit of the lecturers and concluded that they had been supportive and helpful whenever they could. Interviewee S3, however, thought that they should have done much more practical work, but that had not happened and hence his experience had not been that great.

### **Question 3**

#### **(Tell me about the people you met while you were in the NC(V) programme)**

Interviewee S1 had developed very close relationships with the people that he had met and regarded his fellow students as being friendly and helpful. Occasionally, he would meet someone unfriendly or with a very rude disposition.

*‘Such ones I won’t engage with and stayed away from the areas where they would stand during breaks. I have even found the student support staff to be very helpful, especially if I needed to print something or when I needed to use a computer to get something off the internet.’*

S2 indicated that he had met a lot of ‘crazy’<sup>8</sup> people there who had been ‘funny and exciting’. During his engagement with his new friends, he had noticed that they all had the same goal, which was to complete the NC(V) successfully. He had also met people that had different outlooks on life, something that was quite new to him. His concluding remarks for this question was:

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<sup>8</sup> In this context ‘crazy’ refers to humorous, funny, pleasurable or exciting.

*'We all have different home situations but we relate to another with our future ambitions. I have learned to understand my fellow students and to respect them.'*

Interviewee S3 had met a lot of people his age as well as some older ones. He noted happily:

*'Most of them are my friends now. They are the coolest people ever and the best to be around with'.*

All three interviewees had thus expressed excitement because they had had satisfactory interactions with new, mostly friendly people, most of whom had become their friends.

#### **Question 4**

**(Tell me about the extent to which the experience at college matched what you thought you would need to learn)**

Even though interviewee S1 had stayed and completed the NC(V) civil and construction programme, he still felt that his experience at the college had not fully matched his expectations. He had many positive thoughts about the college and had been told many good things which he had looked forward to, but it still was not what he had expected. Responding further to question four, interviewee S1 said:

*'I think we should do more practical and less theory, especially for the students who will be enrolling in the future. So even though my experience when I was at the college did not match with what I was looking forward to, I still remained determined to complete the programme.'*

Lecturers would, in some instances, teach directly from the text book, but would then incorporate practical examples which they had received from industry. The lecturers would, from time to time, also show a video clip which they had personally recorded when they had visited a construction site.

In his opinion, interviewee S2 had gained very little experience during the time he had spent in NC(V), but was greatly inspired by the additional effort put in by his lecturers. A concluding remark for question four from interviewee S2 was:

*‘The NC(V) programme needs to have more practical incorporated into it, and if that was so when I was in the programme my experience would have been greater and I would have gained much more.’*

Interviewee S3 indicated that he had enjoyed every day at the college. At the same time, he expressed a concern similar to that of the other interviewees in that he had thought that they were going to do much more practical work. He noted that they had spent a lot of time in the class doing work out of the text book, writing tests and so on. He made an important point that he and many others would have liked more practical classes.

He continued:

*‘Only then would I be able to say that my experience matched what I expected to learn at the college.’*

In this instance, all three interviewees’ experiences had not matched what they had expected from the programme. They were of the opinion that they would have done much more practical learning, but instead, the programme focused more on theory.

## Question 5

### (Tell me about the support that you received while at the college)

Interviewee S1 felt that the support he had received at the college had been good. He had applied for a bursary and had received one for level 2 as well as for levels 3 and 4. He had been excited that the bursary had made provision for a travel allowance, as there was only one person supporting his family.

At the beginning of each year, he received text books and some stationery. Before the Integrated Summative Assessment Task (ISAT), he was issued with an overall and a pair of safety shoes and a hard hat. From his response to question five, S1 felt that the assistance that had been provided by the college and the lecturers was good.

With great excitement, interviewee S2 said that the academic support that he had received far exceeded his expectations. He also felt that many of the lecturers would go beyond all expectations. In further response to question five, he said:

*'I would have liked to see a little more support from student support services and the management. On a positive note allow me to say that the financial support was great as I got a bursary and travelling allowance for all three levels. This was a great help because at the beginning of each year I would receive my text books and stationery as well as protective clothing for when we did the ISAT.'*

In a relaxed tone, where appreciation could be detected, interviewee S3, in answer to question five, simply said:

*'A few lecturers supported me well as well as my fellow students. The lecturers would encourage me personally to do better with my work*



*and to pay keen attention when they as lecturers would speak to us. As students we also support one another so that we all could do better.'*

From the above, one could conclude that S1, S2 and S3 had felt good about the financial support given by the college. They were also appreciative with of the support given by the lecturers when there was a need.

## **Question 6**

### **(Tell me about your experience with the current lecturing staff)**

Interviewee S1 was delighted to say that there had been good communication between lecturing staff and students. He was always pleased to know in advance of activities or excursions that would take place due to the lecturer's interaction even though at times he could not be on campus. As far as he can recall, he says:

*'The lecturers would in most cases go out of their way to assist me and other as students, which I think was pretty cool. Some of the lecturers were very innovative and attempted to do things differently in the classroom ... What I also enjoyed was some of the lecturers would actually connect to the internet from their lap tops to find pictures or images of construction terms that we could not immediately understand, and this would be while they were busy teaching us. That was fun.'*

In response to question six, interviewee S2 claimed that his experience with the lecturing staff had been good. They had provided logical explanations and he was always keen to hear the lecturers' responses when some of the other students asked questions.

Interviewee S3 noted that he liked the fundamental subjects as well as the lecturers. He explained that he had enjoyed the work that they covered during these lessons, especially when he got to work on the computer. His concluding remarks to this question were:

*'I do however think that more support can be given by some of the core subject lecturers as that is work that we did not do in school, so it was all very new to me, and I'm sure the other students felt the same.'*

All three interviewees, S1, S2 and S3, were delighted with the good communication that existed between the lecturers as well as the students. Interviewee S2, in particular, appreciated the logical explanations that had been given in class while interviewee S3 expressed appreciation for the work they could do on the computer.

## **Question 7**

### **(Tell me about your extracurricular activities at the college)**

S1 had a passion for sporting activities. In response to question seven, he claimed that there had been very little and, to a large extent, virtually no extracurricular sporting activities at the campus. He indicated that he had not heard of any rugby or soccer matches that had been arranged between his college and other colleges. Unless he had not been showing enough interest in these activities, he added.

*'There was no buzz of any extracurricular activities'.*

When question seven was presented to interviewee S2, he simply replied by saying that extracurricular activities were 'not happening'. He described the situation about extracurricular activities further in the following way:

*'I don't hear of any extracurricular activities and honestly sir, I prefer doing things on my own. I do know that some of the other students*

*have enquired about extracurricular activities but I have seen and heard nothing.'*

S3 responded to the question with amusement:

*'Yoh! Sir, there were no extracurricular activities at the campus. As a young person full of energy I would have liked to participate in some sort of sporting action. The college must really look at starting some sort of extracurricular activities on the campus.'*

All the interviewees thus expressed concern about the lack of extra-curricular activities. They all felt that there could have been more visibility of such activities. Interviewee S3 said that he would have liked to participate in such activities.

### **Question 8**

**(Tell me how you personally benefitted from the programme while you were at the college)**

Interviewee S1 felt that he had benefitted from the NC(V) programme, claiming that it was 'great'. He was, however, concerned about the excessive amount of theoretical work that had been covered in the classroom. Related to this he added:

*'As NC(V) students, we would have benefitted more if we were exposed to more practical. The theory that was covered was enough to give me and the other students content knowledge and I would have liked to put that theoretical information into practice in the workshop or on a construction site.'*

S2 realised that he had gained knowledge and some skill that could assist him in the job that he intended to find soon. Listening to his remarks, I found it easy to detect that he had benefitted from the NC(V) programme even though he had also felt that it

had too much theory. S2 thought that there should have been more practical work associated with the programme. Then he would have benefitted much more. As he spoke, he pointed out the following:

*'This is what one of my friends told me. Because there was so much theory and so little practical some leave the NC(V) programme.'*

Interviewee S3 was clear with his response by saying:

*'I think I learnt a lot and I am sure there is much more to learn. My lifestyle changed and one thing I will never forget which I also learned at the college is to never give up. So I am determined to complete the course [which he did] and then to further my studies so that I can secure for myself a good job in the construction industry.'*

Therefore interviewees S1 and S2 felt that there had been too much theory covered in the NC(V) programme. They would have preferred much more practical work during the programme as this would have assisted them more to become artisans in the construction industry. Interviewee S3 did not express too much concern with the amount of theoretical work that had been covered, as he had focused on his determination to complete the programme.

### **Question 9**

**(How regularly are did you receive feedback regarding your progress as an NC(V) student?)**

Feedback was ongoing. Interviewee S1 asserted:

*'We write tests in March, June, and September with a final examination in November. After each test we would receive feedback from our lecturers.'*

He had found this very helpful as it allowed him to see where he had gone wrong and how he could improve. During the discussion, he also said that he had been able to look at his answer sheet and would laugh at the silly mistakes that he had made in some of the tests.

He continued:

*'This type of feedback, uhm, I think also made me stay in the programme to complete it.'*

Interviewee S2 responded politely by saying:

*'Lecturers are always keen and eager to give feedback on the tests written.'*

He noted that results had been received after each test. When handing tests back, lecturers would give guidance on the things he had done incorrectly. The lecturers would spend time with him showing him the correct way of answering the questions that he had got wrong. This to him was a great inspiration.

Interviewee S3 stated that he had received feedback regularly as he had been given tests and assignments throughout the year. He expressed concern indicating that he thought the test results had been given out too slowly. So, as a student, he would then build up a bit of anxiety but after he had received his results, he would be fine.

Interviewees S1, S2 and S3 confirmed that they had received speedy responses from the lecturers with regard to their internal test results. They also appreciated the manner in which the lecturers dealt with them after the tests had been completed. The lecturers would assist and give guidance with the questions that they had interpreted and answered incorrectly.

## Question 10

**(If you had been given an opportunity to leave the programme early, would you have done so? Why?)**

Convincingly, interviewee S1 responded to the question by saying that he would not have wanted to leave early:

*'Because then I would not have fulfilled a dream of having an education. I would also not stand a good chance of getting a job in the construction industry. I also think that the NC(V) is a good programme and when one is in it you must do your best to complete it. It is a never to be repeated opportunity.'*

Interviewee S2 was confident when he replied to question ten. He felt that he had gained a great deal from being in the NC(V) programme and having had the opportunity to complete it. Even if there were challenges, he found that he could work around them. He would thus not have dropped out.

He added:

*'Now that I have completed NC(V) levels 2, 3 and 4, I feel proud of myself and cannot think of a good enough reason to not have finished the programme. I will definitely encourage friends who are still at school to do the NC(V) civil and construction programme. ... If I were to still be in the NC(V) programme, I would not want to leave the programme.'*

He claimed that that would mean that he had wasted three years of his life. His concluding remarks to question ten ended in this positive manner:

*'I would personally recommend the programme to students who are currently at school and who are planning to leave when they finish grade 9. There are some minor things that the college can look at as well as the huge amount of theory work that the programme has. If that can be revised and more practical combined into the programme then I am sure many more would remain in the programme as I did.'*

Interviewees S1, S2 and S3 had all had the determination to remain in the NC(V) programme with the intention of completing it. Interviewee S1 said that if he had not completed the programme, he would not have fulfilled a dream that he had. Interviewee S2 felt proud of himself for staying in the NC(V) programme until its completion. Interviewee S3 felt that if he had exited the programme before its completion, he would have wasted three years of his life.

#### **4.5 EXPLANATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA**

Exploration can be regarded as a means of searching, with the intention of finding information or resources. Therefore the questions that were posed to the students were done with the intention of exploring and gaining an understanding of what had influenced their motives to leave or stay in the NC(V) programme.

From the analysis of the data, a number of themes emerged which will be discussed in this section. In the explanation that will follow themes related to the group that left will be discussed as well as themes related to the group that remained and completed the programme. The themes answer questions about the thoughts, perceptions and concerns of the students interviewed.

#### **4.5.1 Themes of students who left the NC(V) programme before completing it.**

##### **4.5.1.1 Results not issued on time**

Out of the students interviewed, interviewee D2 expressed extreme discomfort about his results that had not been available on time. The respondent claimed that he could not register for the next level which would have been level 4, due to the late arrival of the results. This created frustration, ultimately resulting in his departure.

##### **4.5.1.2 Theory versus practical content of programme**

When students were at school, covering theoretical work was of primary importance. Now that they were in a college, they anticipated doing more practical work. This had not been the case. The lack of practical work frustrated both those who had left before completing the programme and those who had completed the qualification. The frustrations festered, resulting in their leaving the programme. Interviewee D2 stated that he had not minded the theory in level 2, but when he got to level 3, he really thought that they were going to do much more practical. D2 was clear about stating that he had struggled with mathematics at school and that that was the reason why he had left school to go to the college, thinking that the work would involve much more practical application. The three that had left the programme prematurely, said that they would not have returned to the programme unless there had been less theoretical and more practical work.

As noted in the comments, all the students would have preferred to do more practical and less theoretical work. They also commented on their frustration when they could not use the workshops due to these being occupied by other students from other programmes.



The same students, however, claimed that they had enjoyed going to the computer literacy and life orientation classes, as this was when they actually did something practical. Computer work was clearly perceived as being practical work, and enjoyed by the students.

#### **4.5.1.3 College experience and meeting new people.**

Comments varied in this section but one commonality prevailed in that the students who had left the NC(V) programme early had derived a reasonable amount of enjoyment from the NC(V).

Interviewee D2 said that his experience at the college did not match what he had expected. Even though he personally thought it was a good programme, he could not over-emphasise the negative results of the amount of theoretical work covered in the programme. Interviewee D3 said that the people he had met were always eager to assist, even though there had been a lot of running around in an attempt to find things.

Interviewee D1 said that he had become good friends with a number of his classmates and they had tried their best to inspire one another by competing academically.

#### **4.5.1.4 College support and lecturing staff.**

All three interviewees felt the same way about the college student support services (SSS), expressing gratitude for their assistance and support. They had all applied for bursaries and the college had supported them very well in this regard. One of the three, interviewee D1, said that he had received financial support in level 2 and in level 3.

The respondents had felt that support from the lecturers had also been good. Lecturers would go out of their way to remind them of an upcoming test or assignment.

The honesty of these students had been remarkable as they had not held back from telling things as they were. They also had not held back from expressing themselves, speaking about their own deficiencies.

#### **4.5.1.5 Benefits from the NC(V) programme.**

The students who had stayed at the college to complete the third and final year of the NC(V) programme, had benefitted greatly from their decision. One student had come from difficult circumstances to benefit from being at the college even though he had not managed to complete the programme.

All the students criticised the amount of theoretical as opposed to practical work, yet they stressed the fact that the lecturers would go out of their way for the students especially if they knew that there was something in the practical workshop that they could show them which could help them understand the work better.

#### **4.5.1.6 Feedback on progress during the NC(V) programme**

In this section students raised concerns about the turnaround time with feedback on examinations. They said that they wrote a March test and did an assignment and the same would take place in June and September. As NC(V) students we would then receive feedback after each assignment and test during the year. Their major concern was with the end of year examination as in the new academic year when we must register for the next level, we would still not have received results. This would present challenges to them and definitely

accelerated their frustration which then influenced their decision to leave prior to the completion of the NCV programme.

#### **4.5.1.7 The decision to return to complete the NC(V) programme.**

To this question two of the respondents said that they would go back to complete the programme if they were given an opportunity to do so. One of them however felt that he would not go back to complete the programme unless they incorporated more practical as he enjoys doing practical things more than theory.

They all expressed concern with finding work in the construction industry and this seem to be the focus of all of them. But not completing the programme could lay even more strain on the process of finding suitable employment in the construction industry, which was a concern that they also raised. .

#### **4.5.1.8 Extracurricular activities not visible during the NC(V) programme.**

The responses all illustrated concerns with not having enough exposure to extracurricular activities. One of the interviewees used this interview as an opportunity to suggest that the college look at arranging much more extracurricular activities as it will serve as a motivation to the students something that could contribute to eliminate their early departure..

### **4.6 Themes of students who stayed at the college to complete the NC(V) programme.**

#### **4.6.1.1 Reasons for staying in the NC(V) programme**

Staying in the NC(V) programme had produced positive results for the students as they had had long-term goals that they wanted to become a reality such as being employed in the industry. This could even mean that there would be further study involved.

#### **4.6.1.2 College experience and the people**

Even though students were successful with the NC(V) programme, the college experience did not always present itself as they had expected it to be. It became apparent that some of the students were not entirely happy with their stay at the college and the experience at the college was not entirely what they had in mind even though they completed the NC(V) programme.

On the other hand some felt that their experience at the college, particularly their relationships with the lecturers, had been very good and that they had been helpful and they had wanted to assist them whenever they could. There was an indication that they had had a fun experience and that it had been good from day one. The people that the students met were good people and in some instances they developed close relationships with these individuals.

It was also noted that not all the individuals on the campus displayed a favourable disposition when engaging with one another. What came to the fore rather strongly was the great support from the SSS. I regarded these responses as positive considering that they had been projected from such young minds.

Many comments had been humorous. One of the respondents, for example said that he met a number of 'crazy people, which was fun and exciting'. One thing was certain, however, and that was that these students all shared a goal, namely successfully completing the NC(V).

#### **4.6.1.3 Positive and negative comments about the programme and lecturers**

All three interviewees commented in a positive manner about the support that they had received which had far exceeded their expectations. They had felt that many of the lecturers had exceeded their expectations. They appreciated the logical

explanations from the lecturers. They also felt that the financial support was good as they had received a bursary and travelling allowance for all their levels. At the beginning of each year they had received their text books and stationery as well as protective clothing for when they had to do the ISAT.

The interviewees confirmed that there had been good communication between the lecturing staff and the students and they felt that they always knew in advance of activities or excursions that would take place because the lecturing staff kept them informed. They continued by saying that some of the staff could be very innovative and attempted to do things differently in the classroom. What they also found pleasant was that some of the lecturers actually connected to the internet from their lap tops in class to find pictures or images of construction terms that they could not understand while they were busy with the lesson.

A negative concern, however, was that they had thought they were going to do much more practical in turn they spent a great deal of time in the class doing work out of the text book, wrote tests and did assignments. But for them, and many others, they would have preferred a much more practical approach.

By and large all expressed concern with doing too much theoretical and very little practical work. This confirmed that their experience did not match their expectations

#### **4.6.1.4 Benefits of completing the NC(V) programme**

During the interviews a measure of excitement and relief was detected. All three interviewees felt good about completing the NC(V) programme and said that the programme had been 'great' and further claimed that they had gained knowledge and skill that could assist them with the work that they intended to find soon. Even though they had learnt a great deal and they were sure that they could still learn much more.

Throughout the interviews, students clearly indicated that they had benefitted from the programme. This indicated that they had an end goal which was to complete the NC(V) programme with the intention of finding suitable employment in the construction industry.

#### **4.6.1.5 Motivation for the decision to stay**

Students liked the idea that they had been given feedback regularly. This greatly influenced their decision to stay in the programme. Some had stayed and completed the programme because they needed to fulfil a dream that they had. That dream was to at least complete one study programme successfully in their lives. If they did not do that, they would not have stood a good chance of getting jobs in future.

There were challenges at the college but they needed to work around them. Now that they had successfully completed the NC(V) programme, they felt proud and could hardly think of reasons not to finish it. It was their intention to encourage friends who are still at school to do the NC(V) civil and construction programme.

## 4.7 Summary of the findings from the interviews

The following table shows the comments which featured at the end of the interviews:

<b>Students who left the NC(V) programme</b>	<b>Students who stayed in the NC(V) programme</b>
1 Results not being issued on time	1 Staying in the NC(V) programme
2 Theory versus practical	2 College experience and the people
3 College experience and meeting new people	3 Positive and negative comments of the programme and lecturers
4 College support and lecturing staff	4 Benefits of completing the programme
5 Benefits from the NC(V) programme and feedback on progress	5 The decision to stay, why?

Students who had enrolled for the three-year civil and construction NC(V) programme do not always complete the qualification. There are numerous factors that contribute to their early departure. The students, that remain to complete the programme however, are always in the minority.

From the consultations with the lecturers who are involved in the programme, it is easy to discern that there are varied opinions and thoughts about the reasons for the student's early departure. Further engagement with the lecturers revealed that the experience of lecturing in the alternative offering of the programme (NATED) in

contrast to the NC(V) programme, is vastly different. As previously noted, the NATED programme was designed to have the students on campus on a trimester basis over a period of a year completing four technical subjects at a given time. The NC(V) programme has seven subjects all of which need to be completed on a yearly basis over a period of three years with an external DHET examination after each year.

The minimum requirement for entry into level 2 of the NC(V) programme is a grade 9 high school certificate. Students are of the opinion when they enroll for the NC(V) programme, that they are going to do more practical work and very little theory as opposed to what they have done at school, but this only becomes apparent during the first term of the academic year.

What will also be new for the student, is that he/she will have to meet the set criteria of an Integrated Cumulative Assessment (ICASS) and a Practical Assessment Task (PAT) mark which forms part of the final examination. Students become frustrated because of all the theoretical content which results in their becoming despondent. It is for this reason that lecturers say that students are not appropriately screened for the NC(V) programme at the time of registration. Potential NC(V) students should undergo a more stringent screening process so that a better selection can be done.

Students show signs of struggling in the NC(V) programme, with most and, in some cases, all their subjects. This implies that the curriculum content could possibly have been set at too high a standard for the students, considering that they enter the programme with only a grade 9. Alternatively, if grade 12 students are enrolled they would be repeating three years of schooling, as NC(V) level 4 is equivalent to grade 12.



As can be noted by the given statistics the major effects of attrition occur with those in their first year, namely level 2, of the NC(V) programme. This trend presents itself after the first term, when students fail to return to class after their first-term break. Those that do return, tend to be absent from class more frequently, ultimately resulting in their dropping out.

Another notable concern is the awarding of the 100% bursary. This feature is welcomed by all in the TVET sector, but along with that there are also a few concerns. Students are encouraged to apply for the bursary, and if they meet the criteria, they are given the opportunity to embark on an educational journey. For them to get their bursary the following year, they need to pass a minimum of five subjects. So, other than passing all their subject or at least five of these subject, they have no other obligation or commitment to those awarding the bursary. Due to this, it is perceived that students are not fully committed to complete the NC(V) programme successfully. Students should be made more accountable to successfully complete the programme, especially when they receive a bursary. Since they have no obligation towards their funder, they do not need to be committed to successfully complete the NC(V) programme, thus they leave when it suits them.

All the respondents indicated that the NC(V) programme should consist of more practical outcomes rather than the predominantly theoretical coverage. Having a more practical approach allows the student an opportunity to work with his hands concentrating on artisanal development. Students should be made aware of their accountability to complete the programme once they receive a bursary. It would also be prudent to have a relook at the curriculum so that it can be more aligned to the level of the student with a grade 9 school qualification.

## **4.8 Conclusion**

The intention of this chapter is to analyse the data retrieved from the interviews. Factors that influenced students to leave or to stay in the NC(V) programme became very apparent in the analysis gathered from the data. From the perspective of the student, it could be clearly seen that they had similar feelings on most matters, particularly their experience at the college.

Students were sincere about the answers that they had given, whether their decision was to leave or to stay in the NC(V) programme.

Comments made during the interviews clearly indicated challenges faced by students enrolled on the NC(V) programme. The comments, however, negative or positive, allow for further research to find suitable answers for the growing occurrence of attrition.

The themes that have emerged capture the thoughts of the students which were also evident during the interviews. These themes will be considered in detail in chapter five, providing an opportunity to interpret and analyse the data which was captured. These themes will also assist with the recommendations which will be discussed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMATIVE CONCLUSIONS, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

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#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

In chapter four, data was gathered by means of interviews and thereafter interpreted and analysed. The analysis was based purely on the responses of the interviewees. Chapter five integrates information gathered from the literature study in chapter two with the findings of the data collected for this study. This chapter discusses the findings and makes recommendations while noting areas of concern.

#### **5.2 Summary of findings**

This section of the chapter will discuss the findings of the interviews which were analysed in the previous chapter and which will be incorporated in the findings of the literature reviewed. The findings for this study were collected from six students at one of the six TVET colleges in the Western Cape. The six students were separated into two groups. The first group, made up of three students, were students who had left the NC(V) programme prior to completion, marking them as drop outs. The second group, also made up of three students, were students who had remained in the NC(V) programme until its completion.

In chapter four, findings from the interviews were presented and analysed. Students who had dropped out, had left as a result of the late issue of examination results. The huge amounts of theoretical and very little practical work that they had been exposed to influenced their early departure further. Their college experience had not fully

matched up to their anticipation of what college life would be and some of the people that they had met did not meet their expectations. The college and lecturer support played an influential part, but was clearly not enough to keep them in the programme. They benefitted from the programme but, noticeably, not sufficiently to make them progress and stay in the programme.

Students staying in the programme was a way of successfully completing something that they had started. The people that they had met were interesting and their college experience influenced their decision to complete the programme. The comments on the programme coming from these students were both positive and negative. The reason for staying in the programme was based on the positive comments which were more dominant than the negative ones. The students who stayed therefore benefitted greatly from the programme, as they learnt things that they could apply in the work environment. Their decision to stay was definitely guided by clear goals and future plans. They were focused on being successful in the future, and for that to be realised, they needed to complete the NC(V) civil and construction programme.

### **5.3 MAIN FINDINGS FROM THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **5.3.1. Transformation**

The national government has been working hard to create a transformed education system. This has been a priority goal since 1994 as noted in section 2.2. A major merger took place between 2002 and 2006 in that 152 technical colleges were combined to form 50 TVET colleges, forming part of the transformation. Within in this merger, was the formation of the NC(V) civil and construction level 2 to 4 programme.

### **5.3.2 TVET students and challenges**

A large number of students with ages ranging between 18 and 24 were found not to be in some form of learning programme as illustrated in section 2.2.3. According to the literature findings, section 2.2.3 further indicated that these were the ones that should be targeted for the TVET colleges. Of the students that were enrolled at a TVET college, the findings in section 2.2.3 also revealed that the students were in some cases not adequately equipped for the programme and emotionally less mature and more difficult for the lecturers to be managed.

Student performance has been highlighted as poor since the inception of the NC(V) programme as stated in section 2.2.4. Lecturers need to be retrained and skilled for the new programmes and managers are not focused on educational needs. Their focus is rather noticeably more on getting facilities ready and developing industry partnerships as illustrated in section 2.2.4.

### **5.3.3 Contributing factors to Attrition**

Attrition, as noted in section 2.3 of chapter two, stems from individual isolation, particularly from the deficiency of adequate contact between the individual and other associates of the social and academic communities of the college. Section 2.3.1 notes that lecturers with conservative views tend to conceptualise dropping out as a choice which is made by students who are not focused. Despite the conservative views of the lecturers, section 2.3.1 further highlights reasons for attrition and classifies them as those who are victims of involuntary departure due to academic dismissal and voluntary departure where students were leaving in spite of achieving satisfying results. Therefore departure can be caused by a number of factors such as unrealistic expectations, lack of initial support, inappropriate placement, lack of

satisfaction and inappropriate retention strategies on the part of the educational institution as stated in section 2.3.1.

#### **5.4 MAIN FINDINGS – WHY STUDENTS LEFT**

Section 2.3.1.3 of chapter two highlights reasons for attrition and classifies them as involuntary departure due to academic dismissal and voluntary departure where students leave even though they are achieving satisfactory results. Students feel that they need to have personal satisfaction as this is important in their decision to leave or to stay in the college, according to the comments in section 2.3.1.4. Focus will now shift to the reasons why students left the NC(V) programme in this study as illustrated in the following comments.

##### **5.4.1 Results not issued on time**

Students say they wait too long for results. These were of the final external results not forthcoming from the department. In some instances, students were unable to register for the next level due to their not knowing their results. The NC(V) programme has, as a supporting mechanism, a supplementary examination earmarked for those who were unsuccessful in the final end-of-year examination. Students pointed out that some of them were still waiting for their previous year's final results after the supplementary examinations had been written. Therefore, this created frustration amongst the students, influencing their decision to depart prior to their completing their programme

#### **5.4.2 Theory versus practical work**

The fact that there was too much theoretical content in the programme featured in all the interviews. Students felt that they had left school, where they had done enough theory. As indicated previously some of these students had academic challenges when they were at school, so coming to a TVET college made them think that they would be exposed to much more practical work when they enrolled in the NC(V) programme. These students had a good idea of what was happening in the practical workshops situated on the campus and they wanted to be part of that. This resulted in the students becoming frustrated, contributing to attrition.

#### **5.4.3 College experience and meeting new people**

There is no doubt that the students enjoyed the NC(V) programme. However, the experience of some did not match what they had expected from the programme. Based on their understanding the NC(V), students say the programme was designed to create artisans who are practical people. But in their opinion, they were covering more theoretical work than the practical work which they were looking forward to. They had not enjoyed this experience. They were, however, positive about the people that they had met. Many of them claimed that these people were friendly, polite and most times very helpful. The reason therefore for the students' early departure had nothing to do with their college experience but with the emphasis on theoretical rather than practical content.

#### **5.4.4 College support and lecturing staff**

The students were very appreciative of the bursary that they had received. They were very grateful for the assistance as they felt that this had been the college's way of supporting them. There had been a lot of paper work involved with the application of

the bursary. This they did not mind as the support from the college staff was there. The students also expressed gratitude for the SSS. These are the staff members who assist with matters of a very personal nature at times. The lecturing staff, some students said, would actually go out of their way to assist when the need was there. In some instances, the lecturing staff would teach them outside of normal class time and this happened mostly when they did not understand the work the first time.

Notably then, the students enjoyed support from the college as well as the lecturing staff. Due to factors beyond their control, such as not regularly attending class, not understanding mathematics as well as some domestic challenges, contributed largely to their early departure from college rather than an unhappiness with the staff.

#### **5.4.5 Benefits from the NC(V) programme and feedback on progress**

Due to social and economic challenges some students became involved with negative activities and this could have easily put them on the wrong path. But the students felt that they could benefit from the programme even though the practical component had been minimal. They were however very impressed with the way that they received feedback on their June and September examinations. Their concern at that time was with the results of the final examination. Despite the positive benefits from the NC(V) programme, students still left prior to completion and this could have been due to their social and economic circumstances..

If the listed concerns and expectations of the students had been met, while they were at the college, the chances of their leaving may have been reduced. The desired expectations had not been realised and this had led to their making the decision to leave the college, ultimately becoming an attrition statistic.



## **5.5 MAIN FINDINGS – WHY STUDENTS STAYED**

In chapter two, comments are made on the recruitment of students. In particular section 2.3.1.5 highlights an interesting facet in that institutions who are privileged enough, only recruit students that they know they will most likely retain. It is for this reason that some institutions engage with potential students prior to their enrolment at the college so that the students are more informed about the nature of the institution and most likely better understand what would be expected of them. In section 4.6.1 of chapter four, however, students made positive comments about their decision to stay in the programme. Some of the decisions were based on future accomplishments, which focused on commitment and success. Other reasons which influenced their decision to stay were the new things that they had been exposed to during the learning process. Determination to become something was a dream that needed to start somewhere, said the students who stayed in the programme.

### **5.5.1 Staying in the NC(V) programme**

The students who had stayed in the programme had a determined focus. They wanted to successfully complete the programme. Interest in the programme had been developed right from the start, for these students. With the passing of time they got involved in the programme and thus developed an increased interest. Commitment together with conviction played a huge role in their determination to stay in the programme. The new things that they learned, the students claimed, created further awareness and an aspiration to stay in the programme. These students also watched the people working on construction sites and literally saw themselves working in these trade capacities in the future. It is for this reason that they wanted to remain in the programme to its completion.

### **5.5.2 College experience and the people**

There were isolated moments of unhappiness for students who remained in the programme. Doing more theoretical than practical work was a concern that the students had. For some, the experience was not that great at the college but they remained positive about the programme as they thought they would do more practical work because it was a construction campus. Most students were very satisfied with the help and assistance from lecturing staff. They said they had enjoyed the time spent at the college and would not forget their interactive experience with the lecturers soon. With regard to the student population, it seemed there had been some of the students who were keen to assist their fellow-students, but others who would not. These were the ones they would stay away from as they did not want their positive outlook blurred by such negativity. The goal of the students in this section was to complete the NC(V) programme. It is for this reason that they came to realise that all people have different outlooks on life and they needed to respect that. Understanding one another became paramount so that completion of the programme could be realised.

### **5.5.3 Positives and negatives of the programme and lecturers**

Students' perception of expectations were exceeded by far by the support that they received from the staff. They felt that many of the lecturing staff went beyond the call of duty. Apart from the bursary that they had received annually, the students said that they had also received text books and stationery.

The lecturers played a pivotal role in their development. The students therefore acknowledged the hard work that they did. But one negative aspect that was highlighted by the students was that in isolation a lecturer would occasionally teach

or read from the text book and not fully explain the work covered. A further negative indicator was the limited amount of practical work in relation to the huge amount of theoretical work that was covered. So while the experience at the college did not match that which the students were expecting, they recalled the positive impact the college and lecturers had on them and that had influenced their decision to stay in the NC(V) programme and complete it.

#### **5.5.4 Benefits of completing the NC(V) programme.**

Great excitement abounded regarding the completion of the programme. This became evident during the engagement with the students. They had benefitted from the programme in that they were now in a position to at least do minimal work in their related field based on what they had been taught during the three years in NC(V). So, the goal of completing the programme had been realised. The benefit of this had been that these students were in the forefront of possibly getting a job in the construction field. Even though they had gained more theoretical knowledge and a limited amount of practical knowledge, they still felt that they had benefitted from completing the NC(V) civil and construction programme.

#### **5.5.5 The reason for the decision to stay on the programme**

Regular feedback of internal tests and assignments influenced the decision of some to stay and complete the programme. Others had fulfilled a dream. Education is not always advocated in communities where the parents and others do not personally engage in educational programmes. So, to achieve what these students achieved, completing the three-year NC(V) programme was to them a remarkable achievement. The concern of finding suitable employment was also highlighted by the students. They saw how many of their peers, who had matric, were sitting at home,

unemployed. The fact that they also did not do much practical work was a concern but that had no real negative influence on them. They were determined to complete the programme.

### **5.6 Too much theoretical coverage**

The students interviewed felt that too much theory was being covered in the NC(V) programme. They wanted the programme to incorporate more practical than theoretical outcomes and I support this view as it is an artisanal training programme. It has become evident that the students wanted to spend much more time in the actual workshop doing more practical tasks. The NC(V) subject guidelines (South Africa, 2008:3) confirm that the theoretical component is 40% and the practical component is 60%. The 60% practical is made up of an ISAT and two practical tasks to be completed during the course of the academic year. When these totals have been combined, students should attain an ICASS mark of 50%. But in principle, this does not give the student an actual 60% of contact time in the workshop, and that is what the students are seriously lacking.

### **5.7 Limited practical exposure**

The NC(V) student population is desperate for more institutional practical workshop activities to be incorporated in the syllabi. They would furthermore enjoy more exposure in industry where they can formally be part of the work integrated learning (WIL) experience. The students have a strong desire to become artisans and to achieve this goal they need to spend much more time in the actual training workshop. It is believed that when the students know that they are going to do practical work, they remain for the entire day. It is also believed that when they know that they will be doing class work, they would leave at the first opportunity that they get. Class teachers confirm this by means of the daily registers.

## 5.8 RECOMMENDATIONS

TVET colleges cannot randomly change the NC(V) curriculum. The research done in this study revealed that the curriculum for NC(V) could possibly have been set at too high a standard for the students as stated in section 1.3 of chapter one. It is therefore recommended that colleges make recommendations to DHET to review and possibly revise the current curriculum of NC(V) so that it can be more aligned for the targeted student population. Students interviewed indicated that they were struggling with mathematics and they are of the opinion that there is too much theory and not enough practical application in the programme. With this finding, it is further recommended that the mathematics component of the NC(V) programme also be refined so that it can be re-developed for the targeted NC(V) student.

The college, along with the lecturers, have a huge responsibility to ensure that the students who enrol, remain for the entire programme. The recommendation to be strongly considered therefore, is the screening of students in a more stringent manner as noted from the findings in chapter four, section 4.7. Following a more stringent selection and screening process, could possibly ensure a more capable student for the NC(V) programme. In this study, it became evident that the students who leave far exceed the number of students who stay. To avoid this from possibly happening in the future, care must be taken to ensure that the students who are enrolled, remain to complete the entire three years of the NC(V) programme. Chapter four also revealed that students drop out in their first year of college life. Apart from the huge amount of theory as prescribed in the curriculum, students are also challenged with their own personal and socioeconomic difficulties. These are definite factors that need consideration when students are selected.

There is another perception that students are not entirely obligated to the bursary that is given to them. This study provides details which indicate that students leave the college with no hesitation while they have been awarded a full bursary. It is therefore recommended that the state apply a more rigid requirement which students have to comply with when they are awarded a bursary for the NC(V) programme. The literature review in chapter two discusses the attitude of students which influences whether they stay or depart from the local TVET colleges. In his research, Tinto (1993) claimed that the absence of integration into the college life also plays a pivotal role in alleviating the growing threat of attrition.

In chapter two, reference is made to Tinto, a committed researcher who has presented much reference work on the topic of attrition. Tinto highlights the variable character of student attrition highlighting the mistaken view that students who drop out do so because they are different from the rest of the student population as discussed in section 2.4 of the literature review. Tinto, in section 2.4 of the literature review highlights the work of Arnold Van Gennep's (1960) anthropological study which was used as a framework by Tinto to develop his theory of student departure. This had a remarkable impact on Tinto's work which contributed to his development of the (SIM) model which remains the most significant model regarding the reasons for attrition in tertiary education. The use of Tinto in this study gives remarkable clarity and assistance in understanding the reasons why students drop out of programmes.

The intention of this study was to find reasons for the attrition rate in TVET. This study analysed deep-rooted and multidimensional aspects of attrition in TVET colleges and it is for this reason that the study is situated within a critical research paradigm. Section 3.4 of chapter three indicate that the data that were obtained were drawn from two different categories of participants by means of interviews. These

interviews proved valuable, bringing forth much valued information that could be used in the future to alleviate the growing threat of attrition in TVET colleges.

## **5.9 CONCLUSION**

This research study highlighted reasons why students leave the NC(V) civil and construction programme or stay and finish. This research also provided insight into the reasons why students drop out of TVET colleges with particular reference to NC(V). With the inception of the NC(V) programme in TVET colleges, it was intended to get the projected number of trained artisans in the construction industry but to date this has not yet been fully realised.

Our role therefore as leaders, and educators at all levels in the TVET sector has become the focal point in the lives of the students that enrol, ensuring that they gain this artisanal status that they aspire towards. Our primary concern is to ensure that the students who enrol stay in the programme. We need to keep them in the system and focus on their success as NC(V) students, improving the college retention, throughput and pass rate.

As educators we have a responsibility to ensure that our students get the best of our time and our knowledge. We do, however, understand that there are issues that will require our rigorous and continuous attention in the TVET sector along with a strong determination to attend to the growing threat of attrition.

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## APPENDIX A: Letter of approval from the Department of Higher Education to conduct research



### higher education & training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

Private Bag X174, PRETORIA, 0001, 123 Schoeman Street, PRETORIA, 0002, South Africa  
Tel: (012) 312 5911, Fax: (012) 321 6770  
Private Bag X9192, CAPE TOWN, 8000, 103 Plein Street, CAPE TOWN, 8001, South Africa  
Tel: (021) 469 5175, Fax: (021) 461 4761

Enquiries: Mmaphake Ramasodi

Email: [Ramasodi.m@dhet.gov.za](mailto:Ramasodi.m@dhet.gov.za)

Telephone: 012 312 5345

Mr Mark Lawrence  
48 Montana Road  
Colorado Park  
MITCHELLS PLAIN  
7785

Fax: 0214478402

Dear Mr Lawrence

#### REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN AN FET COLLEGE


I acknowledge receipt of your request for permission to conduct research in an FET College as part of your studies towards a Masters degree in Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology in the faculty of Education.

The Department has evaluated your request and grants you permission to undertake the research. You are advised to obtain further permission from the Principal of the FET College concerned before commencing any research activities.

You are reminded to provide the approved research report to the Department as soon as it is available.

I wish you all of the best in your studies.

Yours sincerely

  
**Mr GF Qonde**  
**Director- General**  
Date: 15/11/2012

Higher Education and Training • Hoër Onderwys en Opleiding • Imfundvo Lophakeme Nekucecasha • Ifundo Ephakemeko Nebandulo  
Imfundo Ephakeme Nokuqeqesha • Imfundo ePhakamileyo noQeqesho • Dyondzo ya le Henhla na Vuleteri • Pfunzo ya Njha na Vhugudisi  
Thuto ya Godimo le Tihahlo • Thuto e Phahameng le Thupelo • Thuto e Kgotwane le Katiso

## APPENDIX B: Letter of approval from the TVET college to conduct research.



Central Office: 80 Voortrekker Road, Bellville 7530  
Tel: 021 970 9000 • Fax: 021 970 9063  
Private Bag X1, Panorama 7506  
info@northlink.co.za • www.northlink.co.za  
Enquiries: 08600 NLINK (65465)

24 January 2013

Mr Mark Lawrence

Northlink College herewith gives clearance to Mr Mark Lawrence to obtain data from the Institution with reference to his thesis.

Yours faithfully

  
Mr CJ Coetzee  
Deputy CEO: Academic

• **Belhar Campus**  
Tel: 021 952 2113 • Fax: 021 952 6694

• **Bellville Campus**  
Tel: 021 951 2231 • Fax: 021 951 3967

• **Goodwood Campus**  
Tel: 021 591 3181 • Fax: 021 592 2493

• **Parow Campus**  
Tel: 021 931 8238 • Fax: 021 931 8244

• **Protea Campus**  
Tel: 021 946 2250 • Fax: 021 949 0886

• **Tygerberg Campus**  
Tel: 021 524 2200 • Fax: 021 524 2300

• **Wingfield Campus**  
Tel: 021 591 9207 • Fax: 021 592 3923

**SABS**  
ISO 9001

**APPENDIX C: Consent form**



**Faculty of Education  
Ethics informed consent form**

**CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY**

**Category of Participants (tick as appropriate):**

<i>Principals</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Teachers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Parents</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Lecturers</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>Students</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Other (specify)</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>								

You are kindly invited to participate in a research study being conducted by ..... from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The findings of this study will contribute towards (tick as appropriate):

<i>An undergraduate project</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>A conference paper</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>An Honours project</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>A published journal article</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>A Masters/doctoral thesis</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<i>A published report</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Selection criteria**

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because (give reason why candidate has been chosen):

.....  
 .....  
 .....

The information below gives details about the study to help you decide whether you would want to participate.

**Title of the research:**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**A brief explanation of what the research involves:**

.....  
 .....  
 .....

**Procedures**

If you volunteer to participate in this study you will be asked to do the following things: (The researcher must complete the section below. For example: 'Each research participant will be interviewed by the

researcher or his/her assistants or collaborators [provide names of interviewers]. Briefly explain how many interviews, the duration of the interviews, place, date, etc.)

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

**Potential risks, discomforts or inconveniences**

(Researcher please briefly describe any foreseeable risks, discomforts or inconveniences likely to affect research participants)

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

You are invited to contact the researchers should you have any questions about the research before or during the study. You will be free to withdraw your participation at any time without having to give a reason.

Kindly complete the table below before participating in the research.

Statement	Tick the appropriate column	
	Yes	No
1. I understand the purpose of the research.		
2. I understand what the research requires of me.		
3. I volunteer to take part in the research.		
4. I know that I can withdraw at any time.		
5. I understand that there will not be any form of discrimination against me as a result of my participation or non-participation.		
6. Comment:		

Please sign the consent form. You will be given a copy of this form on request.

Signature of participant	Date

**Researchers**

	Name:	Surname:	Contact details:
1.			
2.			
3.			

Contact person:	
Contact number:	Email: