



**Social Geographies of Participation and Success:  
Narratives of six students in a Technical Vocational  
and Educational Training (TVET) College in  
Northern KwaZulu-Natal**

**By**

**Alois Nzembe**

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Education  
(Social Justice Education)**

**Pietermaritzburg**

**6 March 2019**

## Declaration

I, Alois Nzembe, declare that this dissertation entitled:

**Social Geographies of Participation and Success: Narratives of Six Students in a Technical Vocational and Educational Training (TVET) College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal**, is my own work and that all sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.

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Alois Nzembe

213570841

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Saajidha Bibi Sader (PhD)

(Supervisor)

Date: 30 November 2018

## **Dedication**

This work is dedicated to my wife, Nyembezi Reason Nzembe, my in-laws, Mr. and Mrs. Pilime, my late parents Mr and Mrs Nzembe, my sibling Simbisayi Ndige, who has always motivated me to go a step further in my academic career. I also dedicate this study to a model, mentor and coach par excellence Professor Rungano Jonasi Zvobgo, who has always been a torch-bearer, consistently reminding all his protégés that education is a tool which we can use to solve today and tomorrow's socio-economic challenges. You all have been a source of motivation even when I seemed to be throwing away the towel. Your words of inspiration continued to ring in my sub-conscious mind, helped me to pull up my socks and focus on my mission of finishing this research project.

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to express my genuine indebtedness to my guide, instructor and supervisor Dr. S. B. Sader who has the assertiveness and the material of a guru: she persistently and influentially conveyed a spirit of adventure with regard to investigation and studentship. Without her supervision and persistent support, this thesis would not have been successful.

Many words of appreciation go to the College Management team at Mnambithi TVET College, particularly Ms D. M. Dlamini, the outgoing Rector, for granting me the permission to generate data in one of the college campuses.

I would like to thank Gedion Rambakora, who as a friend and a brother was always willing to share ideas and give his finest recommendations. It would have been a solitary adventure without him.

To Faheem Gaffer, Mzwandile P. Zuma and Vinodhani Govender, I say thank you my colleagues and true friends for helping me to format my research report according to the academic dictates of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I also would like to thank Tendayi Isaac Mawango who edited the entire draft and whose language skills and knowledge had a final touch on the linguistic and logical quality of this research.

Many thanks go to my NCV level 2 students, which include Education and Development, Financial Management and Information Technology cohorts of 2015 for their participation in this study. My inquiry would not have been successful without their cooperation.

I would also like to thank my elder sister, Vongai Mavengere and my elder brother, Godwin Nzembe. They buttressed and invigorated me with their words of encouragement.

Finally, I would like to thank my wife, Nyembezi Reason Nzembe. She was always there cheering me up and stood by me through the trying times. To my daughters, Ruth and Rutendo and my sons Alois (Jnr) and Emmanuel I say this research is yours because you stood by me when the research journey seemed impossible.

## **Abstract**

Challenges pertaining to social geographies of participation and success among students from low socio-economic backgrounds have been a bone of contention and areas of intense academic contestation in post-apartheid and democratic South Africa. Academics have tried to unravel variables, which impede or promote participation and success among students from low socio-economic backgrounds, with a special focus on constructing policy models, which cater for a socio-legal and academic needs of disadvantaged students. It is against this background that a study of social geographies of participation and success in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal was conducted.

This was a qualitative study, located in the critical paradigm, which aimed at analysing students' social geographies of access, participation and success in a public College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The study was undertaken through the development and understanding of the experiences of six students in a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal province. Research data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed, coded and finally categorised into themes, which the researcher used during the process of data analysis. Document analysis was also used to find out students' participation and success rates in the TVET College. To establish students' level of involvement and achievement in the TVET College, the researcher used attendance registers to find out the number of students who enrolled for Information Technology, Education and Development and Financial Management cohorts at levels NCV level 2, 3 and 4. An analysis of the number of students who enrolled for NCV level 2, 3 and 4 revealed that there was a marked difference between the number of students who registered for education and training programmes at NCV level 2 and those who registered for the same programmes at level 3 and 4. In short, the number of students who registered for NCV level 2 programmes was higher than the number of returning students at NCV level 3 and 4.

A comparative analysis of the reasons why students experience reduced and extraordinary academic outcomes at NCV level 2 showed that the students' lack of preparation for the NCV programme, attitudes of scholars towards their college work, poor attendance by both students and lecturers, lack of inspiration in the majority of students who register for NCV level 2, pleasant relationships between the students and lecturers, a good educational context in the relevant curriculum subjects, self-inspiration on the part of the student all contributed to either reduced or higher academic outcomes by students in the TVET college under study.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABREVEATIONS

ANC	African National Congress
CMT	College Management Team
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DOE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
ICASS	Internal Continuous Assessment
ILO	International Labour Organisation
ISAT	Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NDS	National Development Strategy
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSFAS	National Students Financial Aid Scheme
REAP	Rural Education Assistance Programme
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SSO	Student Support Office
TELSA	Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa
TVET	Technical Vocational Education and Training
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation

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## **CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

### **1.1 Introduction**

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) refers to instruction and preparation that organizes students for useful contribution in the national economy (Finch and Crunkilton 2007). By implication, TVET refers to thoughtful intercessions to bring about knowledge and skills, which would make graduates more fruitful in selected areas of economic activity (Finch and Crunkilton 2007). It is upon this background that the African National Congress (ANC) government came up with the concept of technical and vocational education and training to increase access to high quality and relevant education and training and skills development opportunities, including workplace learning and experience, to enable effective participation in the economy and society by all South Africans and reduce inequalities (National Development Strategy 111, 2009). It is also for this reason that the South African Department of Higher Education and Training's uppermost focus is to reinforce and develop the public TVET colleges and turn them into high-quality institutions of choice for school leavers (Department of Higher Education and Training 2012). Despite this policy thrust, participation and success rates in TVET colleges remain a challenge for students, educators, college management, policy makers as well as national leadership of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

### **1.2 Rationale and Significance of the Study**

The reasons for carrying out this research were based on the observations by the researcher at a public college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. From the investigator's observations, the number of students who registered and participated in the college's training and education programmes has been higher than the number of students who succeeded in getting qualifications, which would assist them in competing in the job market. For example, a very high number of students registered to study with the college in January of every year since 2011 but by the end of every year between 2011 and 2017 a disproportionately high number of students did not write examinations, or failed to pass all seven subjects at National Certificate (Vocational) (NCV) level two. One of the challenges which the researcher observed is that most of the students did not write examinations or failed to pass all seven subjects are at NCV level 2, which is regarded as the first year class in the TVET system. This observation tallied with Lau (2003) who argues that institutions with extraordinary first year retention rates tend to have greater percentages of students graduating within four years.

This view is also corroborated by Noel, Levitz and Saluri (1985) cited in Lau (2003) who comment that research has consistently indicated that college students who dropped out ordinarily did so by the time they finished their first year of study. Ezeala-Harrison (2014) encapsulates the challenge of graduation rates in higher education by saying that the notion of marginalized student retention in tertiary instruction is not unrelated with their social standing of being underprivileged and therefore calls for a deeper study and understanding of the issues of marginalized student retention in post-school instructional contexts.

At a personal level, I have observed that the College Management Team (CMT), comprising the Campus Manager, Head of Department, Student Support Managers, and Senior Lecturers did not have a proactive approach in addressing the problem of student participation and success especially during the first year of study. Students joined the college with very little information pertaining to different education and training programmes offered at the college due to poor interaction between the college and the prospective students. It was important for the CMT to design and implement communication media directed at first year students because according to Lau (2003) first year students are overawed with the movement from high school to college life and they could become excessively strained by the melodramatic modifications even before they finished their first year of college. It is for these reasons that there was a need for carrying out research on why there was a high participation rate and a low success rate in the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

### **1.3 Focus and Purpose of the Study**

The emphasis of this research was to scrutinize factors, which facilitated or impeded participation, access to the curriculum and success of low socio-economic groups in a public college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. According to Smith (2010), social geographies refer to the study of people and their environment with particular emphasis on social factors. For the purposes of this study social class, as a socio-geographical factor was examined with a view to analyse factors which promoted or impeded participation and success in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. According to the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) (2008), the Australian geographers of education have long been concerned with analysing and critiquing the spatial inequalities in education between young people of different social classes, genders, and ethnicities.

The problem of involvement and achievement rates in public colleges in South Africa has been and is still a challenge to college management, policy makers and the national

leadership of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). According to DHET (2012), public colleges were mandated to offer industry and business related instructional and preparation programmes to students who dropped out of school before completing Grade 12, those who finished Grade 12, but did not succeed to be enrolled in universities, as well as working persons who desired to improve their abilities and understandings, and at the same time improve their quality of life. Nevertheless, there is, however, a scarcity of existing research on the socio-cultural and economic issues, which contributed to low involvement and achievement rates (DHET 2012) among NCV students in TVET colleges in South Africa. It is, therefore, against this context that there was a need to carry out an investigation on the reasons why there was a low involvement and achievement rate at a public college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, especially at NCV level 2.

Statistics from DHET (2012) show that a total of 17 769 students in the province of KwaZulu-Natal alone participated in the NCV level 2 programmes but only 9788 sat for the 2012 NCV level 2 examinations, representing a drop-out rate of 45%. This implies that only 55% of the total number of students who enrolled for the NCV level 2 wrote the 2012 examinations. Although figures for pass rates for KwaZulu-Natal as a province were not available, the TVET Colleges Technical Task Team (2014) reported that nationally, the pass rate for 2012 was at 39% for students who enrolled for the NCV Level 4 qualification. By implication, 61% of the NCV students did not graduate in the 2012 academic year. This painted a very bleak picture in terms of participation and success rates in the TVET system.

A study of six TVET Colleges in Western Cape province by Papier (2009) showed that out of a total of 4896 NCV level 2 students enrolled in Electrical Engineering, Office Administration, Information Technology and Tourism 1254 (26%) dropped-out, 853 (17%) were certificated and 2789 (57%) were not certificated. These statistics pointed to a very bleak scenario considering that only a mere 17% of the total number of students enrolled in 2008 at NCV level 2 managed to obtain certificates. The other issue that was of concern is that when figures for students who dropped out and those who were not certificated were put together a total of 4043 (83%) were not able to complete their first year in the TVET colleges. These figures tallied with the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) study that reported that the South African graduation rate of 15% was the lowest in the world. Letseka and Maile (2008) also commented that this was of particular distress given the changes that had taken place in the occupational distribution and the shortage of critical skills in the employment market. In combination, these variables were likely to act as chief barriers to

accomplishing the central government's economic development goals. The Department of Education (2001), therefore, identified the need to escalate both the involvement and completion rates of black students in general and African students in particular with simultaneous increases in the representation of blacks and women in educational, administrative, managerial and executive positions, especially at senior levels. A DHET Research and Policy Report (2016) found out that of students who entered higher education in 2007, only 20% completed within three years, 34.4% in four years, and 42.8% in five years. When looking at this by race, the report shows that more White students graduated within regulation time (42%) than Indian (26%), coloured (23%), and African (19%). The DHET study went further to indicate that white females were most likely to graduate within regulation time (61.4%) and that the graduation rate for African females was slightly higher than African males. However, there was not such a significant difference in the dropout rate within the first three years for this cohort, with white students having a dropout rate of 32% compared to Indian (36%), African students (38% and coloured students 41%. In the American higher education system Blacks also suffered from racial disparities (Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba 2011) since a research by the National Center for Education Statistics (2007) found out that about 42% of Afro-American students who matriculated at a four –year post-secondary institution completed a bachelor's degree within six years, which is approximately 18% lower than their White peers. Because of these shocking statistics, there was, therefore, a need to investigate causes of low participation and success rates in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

It is important to note that a low success rate at NCV level 2 had a very huge negative impact on enrolments at NCV Levels 3 and 4 since NCV level 2 is regarded as the first year class in the TVET instructional and preparation system. It is therefore, imperative for college management, policy makers and the national leadership and management of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) to work towards retaining TVET students at NCV level 2 so that the student numbers at levels 3 and 4 are kept at reasonably higher levels. This is important, because retaining students at NCV level 2 will also ensure a reasonable number of students will acquire the necessary skills and knowledge and therefore graduate from the TVET sector and participate in the successful socio-economic development and transformation of South Africa.

## **1.4 Background to the Study**

South Africa's accomplishment rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). This is of great distress since this may be a main contributor to a scarcity of critical abilities in the South African employment, industrial and socio-economic market. Because of this situation in TVET Colleges, this state of affairs is likely to act as a principal obstacle to realising the central government's economic development goals. The Department of Higher Education and Training (2013) also noted wide discrepancies in the participation and success proportions, with the average achievement rate for white students more than double that of black students. To bring about parity, the department identified a need to increase both the involvement and success rates of black students in general, and African students in particular, with associated increases in the representation of blacks and women in academic and administrative positions, especially at senior levels. Because of the lower success and participation rates in higher education, improving graduation rates remained a priority, to the extent that the new funding framework linked funding to the number of graduates and institution produced (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013). It is against this background that there is need to carry out research on factors, which contribute to poor participation and success rates at a public college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

## **1.5 Review of Related Literature**

### **1.5.1 Introduction**

South African TVET colleges have been the target of intensive policy reform since 1998 when the first FET Act was passed (REAP, 2009) and amended in 2006. This implies that for these policy reforms to have a positive impact in the South African economy the TVET system needs to be strengthened in order provide access to high quality technical and vocational education for all without losing sight of the TVET's special relationship with the worlds-of-work (McGrath, 2012). To achieve this, the theoretical grounding of the TVET policy in South Africa needs to shift from the human capital approach, and broadened to include the human capability and sustainable development approaches (Rasool and Mahembe 2014). Research by Jones, Coetzee, Bailey and Wickham (2008) shows that South African students from low social and economic backgrounds failed to participate successfully in TVET Colleges because of the following factors: financial, academic, institutional and socio-cultural factors.

### **1.5.2 Financial factors which influence participation and success in TVET colleges**

Studies, which have been carried out, emphasise that the uppermost reason for students' failure to participate and succeed in tertiary education programmes are economic difficulties (Jones et al (2008). Thomas (2002) also notes that the significant ways in which economic pressures influence on underprivileged students in the United Kingdom are total lack of money, liabilities, and fear of liabilities, relative lack of money in comparison to previous financial levels, in relation to peers and part-time work which interferes with time and energy for studies. While financial challenges may cut across all socio-economic levels, Jones et al (2008) note that students from low social and economic levels were mostly affected. Students from low social and economic level were affected, firstly in terms of admission, that is, the application fees charged by TVET institutions were a barrier to many disadvantaged students, which may have excluded them from post-school education or precluded them from applying to more than one institution.

Furthermore, registration and educational fees were even bigger economic barriers (Krause, Vick and Boon 2009). Within the South African situation, Jones et al (2008) noted that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) loan may have covered registration and educational fees but if students applied late, they would not be able to access financial aid for the first semester. Failure to pay these costs at the end of the first year resulted in students being disqualified from registering. The other barrier which Jones et al (2008) highlighted was the fact that since these students came from disadvantaged backgrounds, they did not have access to information about official processes regarding registration and application for financial aid, because so very often first year students apply late.

Thirdly, a research by Jones et al (2008) found out that the majority of students from the countryside did not have kinfolk or networks near the college with whom they could stay or offer them any social and economic support. These students, therefore, may have come from the security of a small village, arrived in strange town environment, often having to find and finance their own lodgings, food and means of transport, and to some extent, textbooks and equipment, with very limited resources or awareness of how to manage their finances.

### **1.5.3 Academic Factors which affect participation and success in TVET colleges**

The other factor, which influenced students' successful participation in tertiary institutions, is related to academic challenges. A report in the Mail and Guardian dated 16 to 27 2007

highlighted the fact that a major factor in poor participation and hence low success rates was their inadequate educational preparation for tertiary instruction in high school, and inadequate academic teaching and sustenance services in tertiary institutions. This report also noted that other major factors that disadvantaged students experienced related to having to study in a foreign language, to which rural students may have had little contact, and being the first generation in their family structures to enter TVET institutions. This implied that in this development, their families did not have the educational capital to offer assistance to the students' integration in their academic adventures.

Jones et al (2008) argued that students from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially in their first year found it problematic to adjust to the TVET College environment; in particular, the change from the disciplined school environment which was usually characterised by imposed self-restraint and supervision, to TVET environment which was characterised by greater freedom, free time and self-discipline. Because of the poor quality of schooling the students acquired, disadvantaged students tended to lack the range of academic skills, for example, study skills, time management, self-discipline, which were important ingredients in tertiary education. Thomas (2002) concluded that students from low social and economic backgrounds were less successful, not because they are of lower intelligence, but because the education and training programme was prejudiced in favour of those things with which middle-class students were already acquainted.

#### **1.5.4 Socio-cultural factors affecting participation and success in TVET colleges**

Social and cultural factors were also found to influence students' chances of successful participation in tertiary education. Jones et al (2008) found out that the socio-cultural backgrounds of underprivileged, rural students did not prepare them for the considerably different post-school education context and, for students from low socio-economic backgrounds; the change into post-school education was even more challenging than middle-class students. There is, therefore, a need to provide an integrated and coherent support system to maximise students' success in tertiary institutions (Jones et al 2008). Students from low socio-economic backgrounds, especially disadvantaged rural areas have been found to have poor participation and success rates because they are different from their urban counterparts and to those from economically privileged backgrounds. Reay, David and Ball (2001) affirmed that it was only the more advantaged of the middle-class students who experienced the different contexts affecting choice as almost seamless. They went on to say

that while the middle class students were operating within domains where the miscellaneous influences were principally strengthening rather than in competition with each other, for the socio-economically underprivileged rural students, there was less of a fit between educational institution, family and friends. Jones et al (2008) concluded that feelings of segregation and lonesomeness could contribute significantly to a student's decision to pull out of the learning programme.

## **1.6 Research Design and Methodology**

In this study, a qualitative research strategy was used in classifying and evaluating the direction of the study. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2003), qualitative research is carried out in an ordinary setting and includes a development of a multifaceted and all-inclusive representation of the spectacle of interest. Atieno (2009) also stated that qualitative research design could use either the critical or the interpretive paradigm because it captured the life understandings of contributors and its aim was to comprehend the communal or social problem from multiple viewpoints. I, therefore, used the qualitative research design, as this was the most convenient for this study. Meir, Newell and Pazer (1989) cited in Greco, Baidissin and Nonino (2013) qualitative approach to research is concerned with the investigator's evaluation of attitudes, feelings and conduct. Using data generation methods such as in-depth interviews, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of issues, which influence involvement and accomplishment rates in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

In this research, a narrative of six college students at a TVET institution was used as a study method. According to Creswell (2006), a narrative is a style of investigation in qualitative research with a specific emphasis on the stories told by persons. Clandinin and Connolly (2000) also state that narrative inquiry is an all-encompassing term that captures individual and social scopes of information over time, and take account of the association between personal experience and social context. Riley and Hawe (2005) summarised the main focus of narrative inquiry as a way of conveying an appreciation to the investigator of how individuals talked about events and whose perspectives they drew on to make sense of such events. This may have revealed itself in how and when particular events were introduced, how tension was portrayed and how judgements were carried out.

It is against this context that the researcher recorded stories from six students with the goal of locating their experiences of partaking in instructional and preparation programmes at a

TVET college as well as aspects, which led to them to prosper or pull out from the college system. This was important because the stories from students helped the investigator to have an appreciation of students' individual involvements in the college structure and also be able to draw from these experiences a sense of why some students participate successfully in the TVET college while, on the other hand, other students failed to make it through the college programmes.

### **1.6.1 Research paradigm**

According to Bertram and Christensen (2014), a research paradigm represents a specific perception that defines, for the investigator who hold this view, what is tolerable to investigate and how this should be done. In this research, a critical research paradigm was used. This was significant because the critical research paradigm focused on the imbalanced and biased ways in which the world is organised (Bertram and Christensen 2014). For example, literature for this study pointed to an unequal distribution of opportunities between the students from low socio-economic backgrounds and middle class students. There was, therefore, a need to examine factors, which contributed to this discrepancy between participation and success rates for students from low socio-economic backgrounds and middle class students. Having identified the issues which promote or hinder participation and success between these social classes, the investigator planned to draw up a list of recommendations which the TVET college could use to increase the involvement and achievement probabilities of the underprivileged group of students because according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) the aim of using the critical paradigm in qualitative investigation was not just to define or comprehend, but to transform society to become more fair.

### **1.6.2 The research sample**

A research sample is a collection on which evidence is acquired (Fraenkel and Wallen 2008). In this research, the researcher used a purposive research sample, because he did not propose to generalise the outcomes beyond the group sampled. Patton (2006) is of the view that in purposive sampling participants are nominated because of some individual differences. In this study, the researcher intentionally nominated a purposive sample of six students, encompassing three young men and three young women aged between 21 and 25 years. Among the six students in the purposive sample, the researcher confirmed that the other three must have prospered in the NVC level 2 examinations in 2015 and the other three must have

experienced failure to register for the NCV programme in 2016. The reason why the researcher interviewed students who had passed or failed to succeed was that the researcher intended to elicit participants' experiences of factors that promote or hinder participation and success in the TVET college education and training programmes.

### **1.6.3 Research Questions**

- What are students' experiences of participation and success in the context of one TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the factors, which facilitate or impede student participation and success in this TVET College?
- How do students navigate the contextual dynamics that affect participation and success?

## **1.7 Organisation of this Study**

Chapter two provided a critical analysis of the empirical studies within South Africa, in the Sub-Saharan Africa as well as international research on the challenges, which contributed to poor participation and success rates in higher education in general, and the TVET sector in particular. Chapter three provided a logical outline of the research methodology and design, which was employed in this research project, and the research instruments, sampling procedures, the research paradigm, which informed the research approach, as well as issues relating to data analysis, ethics and trustworthiness of the study. Chapter four presented, interpreted and analysed the data with a view to find answers to the research objectives and questions outlined in the introductory chapter of this study. Lastly, Chapter five concluded, summarised key research findings, provided an outline of recommendations as well as implications of the study for future research.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

The main thrust of this chapter was to provide a synopsis of the whole research project. Along this vein critical research concepts such as a breakdown of the rationale and significance, focus and purpose and background of study were provided to put the research study in perspective. A summary of related literature from South Africa as well as internationally was also outlined to contextualise the research topic within the boundaries of what other researchers have found out within South Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa as well as in

the diaspora. Lastly, the research design and methodology as well as the a breakdown of key research questions was also provided to ensure that the research focus and purpose is linked to what the researcher intends to unravel through the narratives of six students in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

## **CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The promulgation and implementation of the TVET curriculum by the South African government is a significant innovation in breaking the cycle of poverty in post-apartheid and democratic South Africa. The TVET curriculum focuses on two broad curriculum pathways: the National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) and the National Certificate Vocational (NCV). The aim and intention of the NCV curriculum include allowing learners to access and master abilities, awareness, standards and attitudes for all-time learning; to continue horizontal education and training; to access higher education; and to follow self-employment or employment opportunities (DHET, 2015). The NCV curriculum, which is the main focus of this study, is a student-centred approach to teaching and learning, and outcomes-based in nature was introduced in the Further Education and Training Colleges Act 98 Of 1998. Further, education and training, according to the Education White Paper 4 (1998) is all learning programmes that are registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) from levels 2 to 4 as determined by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act, 1995 (Act 95 of 1995) and corresponds to the present Grades 10 to 12 in the school system. The NCV programme is, therefore, offered at National Qualifications Frameworks (NQF) 2, 3 and 4. It provides Grade 9 learners a vocational alternative to an academic Grade 10-12 by offering industry-focused training (Garraway, Bronkhorst and Wickham, 2015).

The new NCV, curriculum was introduced to Colleges in 2007. This curriculum included both theoretical and practical aspects of learning. There was a significant change in the subject and assessment guidelines, and the concept of internal continuous assessment (ICASS) and integrated summative assessment (ISAT) was introduced in the curriculum (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013b). The new NCV curriculum was introduced in FET Colleges with a matrix of 11 programmes each comprising of 3 Fundamental subjects, 3 Vocational subjects and 1 Elective subject. The elective subject could be chosen from any field or programme thus providing for a wide range of variations available to students. From the onset of these changes, FET Colleges were expected to emulate the business world in the running of their colleges so as to be responsive to the needs of the business community and in the long run, be able to operate as fully autonomous

institutions (Akoojee, Gewer and McGrath, 2005; McGrath, Akoojee, Gewer, Mabizela, Mbele and Roberts, 2006; Akoojee, 2008; Towani, 2010).

The decision of the South African government to develop an education and training system that could provide a range of potential pathways that enable youth to make a smooth transition from mainstream schooling to the world of work is significant due to the lingering effects of the pre-1994 education system (Branson, et al. 2015). Although FET is a noble concept and should be applauded, the number of youth who have benefitted from this national education and training programme still remains very low given that the main thrust of the FET curriculum was to increase the number of youth who would participate in the economy through employment and entrepreneurship. Branson, Papier, Needham and Hofmeyr (2015), highlight the fact that the majority of South African youth do not register in post-school education, with only 8% of youth between the age of 18 and 24 attending university or college, with only 4% of these youth attending vocational colleges. Statistics South Africa (2013) reports that the percentage of 16 to 18 year olds out of the education and training system was at 14% in 2012 against a background of youth unemployment of 33%. Furthermore, statistics of individuals within the age group of 20 – 24 indicate that 16% remain in school, 21% in employment and 51% are not in employment, education or training (NEET).

This paints a very bleak future for the majority of youth in post-apartheid, democratic South Africa. Moreover, Education For All (2015), reports that only 4% of the 2012 intake of FET Colleges completed their qualifications in 2014. This implies that as long as the completion rates are low and the reputation of FET College qualifications remains poor, the choice by the South African youth for technical, vocational education and training will not be realised (The Presidency, 2014). In 2014, the DHET officially renamed Further Education and Training Colleges (FET) to Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) (Singh, 2015).

Ramphela (2008) highlights the point that a far-reaching renovation of a prejudiced, disorganized education system with rudiments of distinction in a sea of unevenness into a coordinated and consistently outstanding one has been a major challenge for post-apartheid South Africa. Wilson-Strydom (2015) also argues that the concerns about participation and success are vast, multifaceted, disputed and fundamental to meaningful change within the South African post-school education sector. However, Jones, Coetzee, Bailey and Wickham

(2008), argue that some individuals perform poorly due to their financial, academic, institutional, social and cultural circumstances. The Department of Education (2014) attuned the funding formula for the public higher education sector to include certification rates with a view to ensuring that success becomes a greater focus in post-school education and training. However, challenges relating to participation and success remain obstacles to an achievement-oriented tertiary education system in South Africa. It is, therefore, the intention of this chapter to make a critical analysis of factors that promote or impede participation and success in TVET Colleges, as well as evaluate the impact of academic, institutional, socio-economic and cultural factors on students' participation and success in the TVET Colleges. This chapter will provide an outline of legal frameworks, educational policies and empirical research that influence participation and success rates in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Additionally, this chapter presents a discussion of the theory and key concepts, which inform this study on widening participation and success in post-school education.

## **2.2 Widening Participation: The Legislative Framework**

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2012), educational transformation in terms of legislation and policy had a huge impact on TVET Colleges. Legislative and policy frameworks such as the Constitution of South Africa (1996), Further Education and Training Act No. 98 of 1998, Skills Development Act of 1998, White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, and National Student Financial Aid Scheme Policy had a titanic effect on determining the scale of participation and success among tertiary students in general and on TVET College students.

The Constitution of South Africa (1996) is explicit on issues regarding the provision of equitable opportunities for the citizens of the Republic. For instance, Section 29 states, "everyone has the right to basic education, including adult basic education". Furthermore, it emphasizes that the state should take reasonable measures to make opportunities for participation in basic and post-school education available and accessible. This implies that learners should have adequate infrastructure, teachers, and equipment and face no barriers in terms of access. The aim of Section 29 of the Constitution of South Africa are focused around the substantive attainment of sufficient learning to enable South African youth to participate as citizens, contribute to society and derive self-fulfilment, sufficient enough to enjoy one's dignity. The provisions of the Constitution of South Africa are in line with

international human rights legal statutes, which identify the right to education as an end in itself and a means to an end. Along this vein the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (2016) states that education should permit all persons to participate successfully in an unrestricted society, stimulate understanding, acceptance and companionship among all racial, ethnic and religious groups.

The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 places prominence on the importance of access to education and training in South Africa. The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 was designed by the South African government in the middle of high levels of unemployment, low levels of investment in the South African employment market, pronounced discrepancies in income sharing, disparity in opportunities and poverty because of the tyrannical apartheid policies (Skills Development Act 98 of 1998). This act aimed to address two main issues. Firstly, it focussed on the need to improve skills and increase productivity in order to compete successfully in the global economy, and the need to reverse apartheid imbalances and create a more inclusive and cohesive society. According to the Department of Labour (2009), the main aim of the Skills Development Act is to develop the skills of the South African workforce and improve the quality of life of workers and their prospects for work. Furthermore, it helps individuals acquire new skills and to use the workplace as an active learning environment in order to improve productivity within the workplace. Section 2(1)(e) of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998, intends to redress the unfair discrimination in training and development experienced by the majority of Black people during the apartheid era. Haasbroek (2014) states that the development of skills through training and development has always been the most powerful lever for improving both individual opportunity and institutional competitiveness.

According to Grawitzky (2007), the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 was introduced due to the realisation that the economy was being constrained by the shortage of a skilled workforce and the political imperative to redress the unfair discrimination in training and development in employment opportunities. Furthermore, there was a general decline of training being conducted by employers, while at the same time the country was facing rising levels of unemployment as the labour market lacked sufficiently qualified and trained human resources. The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 accentuated the need to transform skills development through investment, turning the workplace into a democratic site and improving the quality and relevance of education and learning in the workplace because employers are reluctant to hire unskilled persons.

Access to education is an issue that was accentuated in the majority of legal instruments in South Africa. Thus, Further Education and Training Colleges Act 16 of 2006 focuses on ensuring access to further education and training by persons who have been marginalised in the pre-1994 period in terms of gender, class, ability, sexual orientation and race. The aim of Further Education and Training Colleges Act of 16 of 2006 is threefold. Firstly, it aims to restructure and transform institutions to respond better to the human resources, economic and development needs of South Africa, including redressing past discrimination and ensure equal access to education and training. Secondly, it aims to promote strategic priorities determined by national policy objectives at all levels of governance and management within the further education and training sector. Thirdly, it also aims at fostering respect and encourages democracy and an institutional culture, which promotes fundamental human rights and creates an appropriate environment for teaching and learning. The above-mentioned issues are mainly in response to the oppressive apartheid system that trampled on human dignity of majority South Africans. According to Maimane (2016), the South African government has tried to create a socio-legal and policy environment that promotes equal access to education and training, however, the situation, especially for learners who come from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, remains dire. Statistics in South Africa indicates that youth unemployment remains unacceptably high, the percentage of youth who choose the TVET route is still very low and completion rates in TVET Colleges is also very low. The tragedy of the whole TVET system is that dropout rates are astronomically high, which paints a very bleak socio-cultural and economic scenario for the future of South African youth (Statistics South Africa, 2015).

Although many legal and policy instruments were put in place between 1998 and 2013, throughput rates in TVET Colleges remained very low and did not match the financial investment and the government's vision of a massive expansion of the TVET sector (Singh, 2015). This raises serious concerns with regard to the quality of teaching and learning, as the pressure was on TVET Colleges to provide post-school education and training to a large number of youth who had completed grade 12, youth who were unemployed and youth who wanted to articulate into higher education institutions such as universities (Mestry and Bosch, 2013; Singh, 2015). Therefore, there is a need for the government of South Africa, through the department of higher education and training, to put systems, processes, and structures in place. This will ensure that legal, regulatory and policy frameworks do not remain paper tigers but instruments of transforming policies into tangible results within the post-school

education and training establishment (Further Education and Training Act 16 of 2006). Thus, legal and policy provisions should be monitored with a comprehensive system of observation and evaluation in order for students in TVET Colleges participate successfully and add value to the South African economy.

Policy documents such as the National Certificate Vocational (NCV), the introduction of the College bursary scheme and the government priorities as outlined in the New Growth Path for job creation provided a clear mandate that the TVET College system should address the skills shortage in the country by providing high quality education and training to the youth in order to pave way for employability (Department of Economic Development, 2011b). The National Development Plan, the New Growth Path and the National Development Strategy placed more emphasis on job creation and the expansion of education and training to help reduce poverty and inequality in South Africa (Department of Economic Development, 2011b). Furthermore, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013c) developed a Public Further Education and Training College Attendance and Punctuality Policy to enforce high levels of attendance and punctuality in order to improve students' chances for success and to prepare them for the professional culture of the workplace (Singh, 2015).

### **2.3 White Paper for Post-School Education and Training**

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (WPPSET) can be described as a blueprint and roadmap for post-school education and training programmes in South Africa. This document comes against a historical background of unfair, inequitable, racial and sexist educational policies and practices, which were supported by legal statutes promulgated mainly during the tenure of the illegitimate and oppressive system of apartheid. With the birth of democracy in 1994, the new government set in motion policies and programmes to redress past injustices to accommodate the previously disadvantaged sections of the Republic. The new government prioritized the urgent provision of an educational and training environment, which was accommodative and accessible to all South Africans. The WPPSET focuses mainly on building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa.

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013), the WPPSET's main vision is to create a post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens and of employers in the public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives. To this end the White Paper for Post-School

Education and Training aims at building a single, coordinated post-school education and training system, expand access, improve quality and increase diversity of provision as well as building a stronger and more cooperative relationship between tertiary institutions and business organisations (DHET 2013).

The WPPSET aims to create a close relationship between education and work; however, social justice is imperative in order to provide equity for all individuals (DHET, 2013). Social justice is significant as South Africa aims to move away from a fragmented, unfair, inequitable, and racially divided system that privileged the minority racial group at the expense of the majority. Therefore, it makes sense to build a system based on non-racial, fair, just, equitable, and non-sexist principles. Although the government has tried to build a non-racial society based on principles of social justice, DHET (2013) observes that deep-seated inequalities are rooted in the country's past. Thus, the disparities of wealth, educational access and attainment, health status and access to opportunities are still largely based on race and gender. It is therefore not by accident that the remaining disparities of wealth, educational access and attainment, health status and access to opportunities are still largely based on race and gender. The accomplishment of greater social justice is closely related to equitable access by all sections of the population to quality education and training (DHET 2013). This means that there is need to expand access to PSET opportunities for the previously disadvantaged sections of the South African society, at the same time ensuring that the quality of the post-school system benefits young South Africans in terms of the development of skills, knowledge, and work-related experience.

#### **2.4 The TVET System in South Africa: Challenges, strengths and prospects**

The TVET system in South Africa was born out of the need to close the skills gap that currently exists in the South African labour market. Along this vein, the Centre for Researching Education and Labour (2016) posits that the large number of youth who are not in education, training or employment, together with the discourse of the critical skills shortage has provided the necessary impetus for TVET to become a significant driver of the overall response to the socio-economic development of South Africa. The 6<sup>th</sup> Summit of BRICS countries comprising of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa held in Fortaleza in Brazil in July 2014 affirmed the strategic importance of the role of education for sustainable development and inclusive economic growth, and pledged to strengthen education cooperation in which all the BRICS members unanimously agreed that TVET is the engine of

economic development and should be well-resourced if development should be realised (Centre for Researching Education and Labour, 2016). To this end, UNESCO (2015) emphasized that there is need to strengthen the links between business and TVET Colleges to facilitate workplace learning.

While the constructing of the TVET concept has been perceived with a lot of fanfare, zeal and optimism, like any other curriculum innovation, it has been met with many challenges. For example, years of neglect have left the TVET system considerably weak and for this reason, it has suffered inadequate throughput and certification rates (The Presidency, 2012). Poorly crafted curriculum outcomes, a lack of responsiveness to the needs of industry and a negative relationship between TVET Colleges and business are some of the challenges facing the post-school education and training system in South Africa (Lolwana, 2011). The lack of financial, material and infrastructural resources because of underfunding of colleges, together with the poorly trained teaching staff have led to challenges in the administration and management of TVET Colleges (Human Resources Development Council of South Africa, 2014). One of the major challenges facing TVET Colleges is the lack of parity of esteem between the TVET system and other post-school education and training institutions in South Africa including universities (DHET, 2013). Official reports from the government about TVET Colleges highlight a weak financial management system, poor governance and poor quality education offered to learners (DHET, 2012). Furthermore, TVET Colleges are indicted of a lack of coherence in the system, weak partnerships with the labour market actors and questionable curriculum quality in the programmes (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2014).

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2014), reports that enrolment in the public TVET Colleges system increased radically after 2010, with a particularly sharp increase between 2011 and 2012. While the public TVET system experienced a sharp increase in enrolments, increased student enrolment at the TVET Colleges has not been accompanied by a concomitant increase in human, material and infrastructural resources. For example, there was a student increase of 400 273 in 2011 which increased further to 657 695 in 2012, representing a 61% student increase and a mere 3% increase in the number of staff. However, the OECD (2014) report highlights this expansion of the TVET system as a positive development, given that a higher number of students were able to enrol into the TVET sector and benefit from the government's policy of widening access and participation in the post-school education and training in South Africa.

DHET (2012) argues that this increase in student numbers had a negative impact on the lecturer/student ratio, which rose from 1:25 in 2011 to 1:41 in 2012, a direct result of unrestricted access for mainly students pursuing white-collar programmes such as human resource management and office administration. This implies that the government should now focus on increasing financial, human, infrastructural and material resources in critical skills areas such as artisan training because it looks like there is an oversubscription on office-based TVET qualifications. The government's policy of education and training in TVET Colleges should, therefore, shift from training of white-collar graduates since the South African economy is in dire need of blue-collar professionals such as fitters, instrument technicians, welders, bricklayers, plumbers and boilermakers. The OECD (2014) report highlights the fact that involving the business sector in the process of curriculum design and development as well as maintaining a mutual relationship between business and the TVET Colleges is likely to create a symbiotic relationship where both the business sector and the TVET system will benefit from the liaison. This means any curriculum design and development in the blue-collar trades should involve industrial experts so that the curriculum will benefit both industry and the graduates from TVET Colleges.

## **2.5 Student-related factors which influence access and success in TVET Colleges**

According to Jones et al (2008), the ease with which students become integrated into the academic environment of the college may facilitate a process that will make it possible to succeed in their education and training programmes. Furthermore, Jones et al (2008) argues that a major factor in student dropout, cited by students of all races, is their poor academic and social preparation for post-school education and training.

### **2.5.1 The influence of socio-economic status on participation and success**

The holistic development of a student in a TVET College is dependent on a number of variables. One of the most influential factors that can make or break the student's ability to cope with the rigours of studying at a TVET College relates to the student's socio-economic background. Laosa (2015) defines socio-economic status as the student's family background including nutrition and health status, environment at home, income of parents, their educational experiences, and means of recreation in the family as well as place of residence. Hill, Castellino, Lansford, Nowlin, Dodge, Bates and Pettit (2014) suggest that the socio-economic status of parents not only influences children at home but also develops competition among the students belonging to persons of different social and economic

background. This view tallies with findings from Oni and Omoegun (2007) who concluded that a significant difference exists among the rate of deviant behaviour among students belonging to different socio-economic statuses.

Ali, Haider Munir, Khan and Ahmed (2013) are of the view that a student's educational success is dependent on the social status of the students in the society. This implies that since the majority of students attending the TVET College under study mainly come from disadvantaged social backgrounds, this can have a negative effect on their performance in academic activities. Machebe (2012) encapsulates the above views by concluding that the socio-economic status of parents influences the academic performance of students to a very large degree in educational institutions.

Blau and Duncan's (1967), cited in Liu and Xie, 2014 pioneering empirical work found a high correlation between academic attainment and the family's social standing and sociological scholars have set out to find out reasons for this association (Liu and Xie, 2014). The Wisconsin Model, developed by Sewell Archibald, and Portes (1969) cited in Sa, Forax and Rietveld (2016) elaborates and extends the basic Blau-Duncan model by incorporating social psychological factors, such as attitudes and aspirations, in explaining the association between family socio-economic background and academic achievement. The Wisconsin Model posits that family socio-economic background affects children's academic achievement by influencing their attitudes and behaviours (Liu and Xie, 2014). Sociological studies have found that socio-emotional attributes such as valuing hard work and having high aspirations are closely tied with children's success at college (Hsin & Xie, 2014); and that socio-psychological pathways are key in transmitting parental characteristics to students, particularly by effecting student's educational outcomes (Zeng & Xie, 2014).

### **2.5.2 How time management promotes participation and success**

The other student-related factor, which was found to promote or impede students' rate of participation and success, was time management (Jones et al, 2008). For example, in Jones et al (2008) many students reported that they quickly became aware of how poorly they were managing their time in the first semester of their first year, for example, not being able to prioritise their studies and not being able to keep up with the volume of work. Consequently, this prompted them to think differently about how to approach their work in the following semesters. These changes in approach included preparing for lectures, attending all classes, revising the lectures daily rather than "cramming" at the last minute, and generally putting

more effort into their studies (Jones et al 2008). A study by Nickerson and Kritsonis (2016) revealed that time management determines how students perform. These researchers found out that a student should be able to allocate time such activities as reading books, watching movies or participating in extra-curricular activities.

A study by Miqdadi, ALMomani, Mohamed and Elmousel (2014) found that the majority of the successful students study on a daily basis for one to two hours, which is as reasonable and good enough. Those students are able to manage their time well, and schedule their daily activities, giving their studies a portion of time each day. Another result was that successful students do not study for more than three hours a day. They do not spend a huge amount of time studying; however, they focus and plan before starting which makes them study for a shorter period. Also, the results show that most of the unsuccessful students study only before exams and that explains their low grades. They tend to delay their college duties. Eventually, they get shocked when they see that a huge amount needs to be studied, and unfortunately, they fail to do so (Miqdadi, ALMomani, Mohamed and Elmousel, 2014).

### **2.5.3 The relationship between the lecturer and the student**

A study by Gallagher (2013) found that positive lecturer-student relationships enable students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and provide scaffolding for important academic skills. Thus, a lack of positive lecturer-student relationship may create conditions, which do not promote the development of academic skills in students, which can also have a huge negative impact on academic achievement at post-school education and training level. Lecturers who support students in the learning environment can positively influence their academic outcomes, which is important for the long-term trajectory of college and eventually employment (Baker, Grant and Morlock, 2008; O’connor, Dearing, and Collins, 2011; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong and Essex, 2005).

Downey (2008) conducted a study synthesizing educational research on factors that affect academic success. The rationale for the study was to examine classroom practices that made a difference for all students, but in particular, for students at risk for academic failure. What was determined was that a lecturer’s personal interaction with his/her students made a significant difference. Ravitch (2010 p. 227) writes, “the goal of education is not to produce higher test scores, but to educate students to become responsible people with well-developed minds and good character”. Langer (1997) cited in Gablinske (2014) also comments that if the source of information is someone we respect, we are more likely to be influenced and

retain the information than if we view the source as untrustworthy. Thus, Cazden (2011) concludes that children's intellectual functioning, at college, as at home, is intimately related to the social relationships in which it becomes embedded.

#### **2.5.4 The influence of geographic location on academic achievement**

According to the Rural Education Access Programme, (REAP) (2011) students growing up in a rural environment lacked exposure to written and spoken English, which affected their language competence at tertiary level. The report goes on to say that resources such as books, magazines and newspapers, that people in more urban settings may take for granted were generally inaccessible to the families of students who participated in the REAP (2011) study. Neither are there public libraries in rural areas, so students from disadvantaged backgrounds would not have had the opportunity to read for pleasure, to keep abreast of world events, or to develop their English language skills (REAP 2009).

Dickerson and McIntosh (2010), using data from the United Kingdom, concluded that the closeness to the nearest college does not affect the decision to participate in full-time post-school education and training. Distance matters for students whose grades were below average in the college system: as the distance to closest college providing academic education increases, they are less likely to participate in full-time post-school education in general and tend to switch to vocational education. In the United States of America, Gablinske (2014) found that low-income individuals are more likely to attend a good public college if there is one nearby. Frenette (2012), using Canadian data, found that creation of a vocational college in an area increases college participation of local youth, especially among students from lower-income families. The evidence from the Netherlands in Sa, Forax and Rietveld (2016) indicates that geographical proximity to professional colleges increases the probability for school leavers to continue education at the post-secondary level. Using detailed geographical data from Sweden, Kjellström and Regnér (2009) find that higher distance between area of residence and nearest college has a small but statistically significant negative effect on college enrolment.

#### **2.5.5 The role of motivation on participation and success**

A report by Bailey (2007) cited in Jones et al (2008) comments that student progress and success suggests that students' experience of academic and social integration impacts on their intentions and commitments to their chosen programmes and institutions, and this in turn has

an impact on whether they complete their courses successfully. This view is supported by Jones et al (2008), who affirm that students' intentions and commitments to their courses were found to be even more dependent on whether they had chosen the correct course of study in the first place. In a similar study in England, Mullins (2015) found out that the reward and punishment levelled at learners in the past would affect their motivation and attitude towards learning in the present. The expectations of others and the climate which surround learners will determine their readiness to learn, which will in turn result in learners performing poorly academically (Ibid). In the same vein a negative attitude towards learning could result in learners performing poorly preventing them from obtaining required results for university entrance (Mullin, 2015). Coetzee (2006) cited in Jones et al (2008) also highlights the fact that personal characteristics and attributes are nonetheless important mediating factors in overcoming obstacles in both academic performance; willpower, determination and self-motivation.

#### **2.5.6 The relationship between parental support and student success**

Although the majority of students in the TVET system in South Africa are above the age of eighteen the involvement of parents in their education and training programmes is of paramount importance. Parental support may include such activities as motivating their children to study diligently at the college, encouraging them to do their assignments on time, and providing coaching and mentoring services to help their children improve their learning in different subjects. Parental support is associated with children's higher achievements in language and mathematics, enrolment in programmes that are more challenging, greater academic persistence, better behaviour, social skills and adaption to college life, better attendance and lower drop-out rates (Henderson and Mapp, 2009).

The involvement of parents in the child's education has been lauded by a number of authorities, however, Taylor (2004) notes that understanding each community's unique barriers and resources is necessary for establishing and maintaining effective collaboration between families and education institutions. Olsen and Fuller (2008) suggest that the college must actively support parental involvement in tangible ways but firstly educators must mediate the barriers to home-college collaboration then take a proactive stance in helping families to become major participants in their children's education. It is, however, unfortunate that within the TVET sector parents play a peripheral role in the education and training needs of their children. The argument normally put forward by many stakeholders is

that TVET students are adults so they are able to make their own credible decisions. However, from my experience in the TVET system, a lack of parental involvement in the student-college education and training equation is a major problem facing South African TVET Colleges. Thus challenges such as communication, a lack of resources, beliefs, and values as factors that threaten the development and consolidation of positive parents-college relations (Decker et al 2007; Perry-Chisholm et al 2008).

### **2.5.7 Participation in non-academic activities and success**

Non-academic activities refer to other college activities that are offered together with the academic curriculum, particularly sports, music and art (Kariyana, Maphosa and Mapuranga (2012). Castelli, Hillman, Buck and Erwin (2007) non-academic activities are largely ignored in most educational institutions because the main focus of the college curricula and after-college programs is on academic achievement. However, Hoffman (2016) argues that participation in non-academic activities provides an important socialization experience for many youth. For example, participating in these activities has been linked to a greater college attachment and sense of belonging, better academic achievement, higher academic aspirations, and less risky behaviours such as alcohol and drug use, or dropping out of college (Darling, Caldwell and Smith, 2005). While a number of authorities have highlighted the merits of non-academic activities, other authorities (Eccles, Barber, Stone and Hunt, 2013) suggest that in terms of risk behaviours such as alcohol consumption, drug use, and substance abuse, both boys and girls can be negatively affected by participation in sports. Reason given for these outcomes vary and range from peer pressure in athletics subcultures to a propensity for risky behaviours (Hartman and Massoglia, 2007). Thus, the involvement of TVET College students in non-academic activities can never be ignored since the benefits far outweigh the demerits.

### **2.6 Non-academic factors that influence participation in the TVET sector**

Jones et al. (2008) demonstrates that students from low socio-economic backgrounds face financial challenges due to their geographical, social and economic circumstances. Callender (2011), who states that the most disadvantaged students, experience the greatest risks, hardship and financial resources, corroborates this. Funding students in developing countries like South African tertiary institutions, therefore, is important because even in developed countries like the United Kingdom, the overriding principle is that student financial support

should maximise opportunity for all to be able to access high quality lifelong learning (Hayton and Paczuska 2012).

Letseka and Maile (2008) suggest that another cause of students from low socio-economic backgrounds failing to access higher education is the relatively low levels of public funding for tertiary education, which translates into higher fees, effectively shutting out the poor and reducing the ability of tertiary institutions to contribute to social and economic development. These challenges affect students' participation in and continuation of their studies in terms of access and the application fees charged by post-school education institutions, which may act as a barrier to many students of low socio-economic backgrounds by excluding them from applying to more than one institution (Jones, et al. 2008). Thus, Maguire, Ball and Macrae (2009) indicate that middle class students with their increased social, economic and knowledge resources 'choice is presented as natural, orderly, clear-cut and almost beyond question, very unlike the chancy, uncertain process many working class students are caught up in' mainly because working class students lack the economic means to support their studies. However, Hayton and Paczuska (2012), argue that students from the British higher education system who come from low socio-economic backgrounds without a tradition of higher education encounter a range of risks and barriers not normally faced by their middle class counterparts. This indicates that financial challenges experienced by tertiary students in South Africa are not a local phenomenon.

Archer, Hutchings and Ross (2013) explain the existence of barriers among working class students as emanating from the fact that middle class and working class families have different access to various forms of cultural, social and economic capital and resources, which differentially frame the educational choices that different families will make. Thus, middle class parents can pass on cultural material advantages that privilege their children to succeed within the education system (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2013). On the contrary, working class families experience a greater amount of economic and physical constraints and lack of the same knowledge of the system and social networks that encourage the reproduction of privilege (Reay, Davies & Ball, 2011). However, Hayton and Paczuska (2012) argue that high-achieving, well-motivated post-secondary graduates in the British higher education system without responsibilities and strong family support but few economic resources may risk and go on to higher education, judging that they are likely to get a tertiary qualification, find a job and so repay tuition debts.

### **2.6.1 National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) Support in TVET Colleges**

NSFAS was established in 1999, by the enactment of National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act 56 of 1999 to promote an equitable access to post-school education and to students from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. Therefore, the national student financial aid is a critical contributor to the promotion of equity in access to technical, vocational, education and training in South Africa (DHET Research and Policy Report, 2016). The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is the single largest provider of financial aid to students in tertiary institutions in South Africa. Therefore, it is important in providing financial access to post-school education and training for large numbers of financially disadvantaged students who would otherwise not be able to afford to pay for their education (Jones et al, 2008). As an arm of the South African government responsible for funding students from disadvantaged backgrounds, NSFAS is premised on the principle of cost sharing which means students and/or their parents/guardians are liable for paying the remainder of the cost for further education and training (Sader & Gabela, 2017).

Thus far, NSFAS has funded 15 million students, including the 2015 academic year (DHET Research and Policy Report, 2016). The amount of funding allocated by the DHET and administered by NSFAS has grown from R22 million in 1991, when it was Tertiary Education Fund of South Africa (TELSA), to R6.6 billion in 2013 for the higher education sector (DHET, 2015). NSFAS plays a pivotal role in the TVET system as access to further education and training remains a challenge due to poverty and unemployment levels among the previously disadvantaged sections of South African communities (De Villiers, 2012). The establishment of NSFAS, as a vehicle for allocating funds to students from low socio-economic backgrounds has been a critical part of the government's success in achieving a higher participation rate among the country's poorer students (DHET, 2015). However, the major challenge NSFAS is facing includes administrative inefficiencies and a chronic underfunding of its operations (DHET Research and Policy Report, 2016). Despite this criticism, the drive towards increasing access to and participation in the TVET sector has resulted in much more diverse student populations and the emphasis on life-long learning has seen increasing numbers of mature students (De Villiers, 2012). DHET has been able to increase the number of African students participating in further education and training significantly from 4.4% in 2000 to 70.1% in 2013 (DHET, 2015). Furthermore, African students are the largest beneficiaries of NSFAS funding, with this group accounting for 87% of the students in 2013 followed by coloured students at 4.7% (DHET, 2015).

In spite of the growth of African students, the disparities in participation in further education and training among the different race groups shows that while the black population accounts for about 80% of the total South African student population, its post-school participation rate remains at 16.5%, compared to the white population group with a 54.7% participation rate with an overall population representation of 9% (DHET Research and Policy Report, 2016). These figures explain why the number of white students in TVET Colleges is very low, implying that the majority of white students enrol in universities soon after matriculating. According to the DHET Research and Policy Report (2016), factors such as the poor quality of education at primary and secondary level, and the pervasive impact of inadequate resources, will continue to impact the participation rate for African students, as much as the limited access to financial resources for further study. NSFAS has been weakened due to the increase in fees, which means that despite the increase in funding, the number of actual beneficiaries has not significantly expanded over the years since 2012 (DHET Research and Policy Report, 2016). For instance, during a 2011 review of NSFAS commissioned by the Higher Education branch of the Department of Education, the figures reveal that although the gap seemed to have shrunk, 25.2% of students who applied for NSFAS at the selected institutions profiled were still not funded (De Villiers, 2012).

Despite changes in the TVET sector between 1998 and 2013, a Report of Ministerial Committee on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (2009) reports that NSFAS has been plagued by underfunding, high drop-out, low graduation rates, lack of an effective allocation formula, an unjust means test, poor bursary administration, under-utilised funds, poor governance, poor loan recovery mechanisms and ineffective financial control. Thus, the issue of underfunding has a ripple effect on the entire financial aid system that culminates in students who qualify for financial aid dropping out of the tertiary education and training system leading to low graduation rates in higher education institutions in general and TVET colleges in particular. Unfortunately, this could result in little to no access to funding for qualifying students.

Although the administration of NSFAS has been plagued with a plethora of challenges, its footprint is not all doom and gloom. For example, the Department of Higher Education and Training (2013) reports that the main strength of NSFAS is that it provided student financial aid to 659 000 students, distributing more than R1,2 billion in student financial aid between 1999 and 2009. The main strength of NSFAS is that it provides student financial aid, which creates access to higher education for students who would otherwise not be able to attend

tertiary education. The Ministerial Committee on the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (2009) argue that there is a universal approval for the role NSFAS has played in broadening access and creating life-changing expectations to hundreds of thousands of South African students.

### **2.6.2 The Role of TVET Colleges in Facilitating Financial Aid**

TVET colleges play a very important role in providing financial support to students from low socio-economic backgrounds. This can be facilitated by assistance, which is offered through the Student Support Office (SSO) in each of the TVET colleges in South Africa. The main responsibility of the SSO is to assist students where they experience difficulties in accessing educational opportunities because of financial barriers. Students are able to apply for financial aid and find out about general bursaries available for college students through the SSO. The main function of the SSO is to manage and administer financial assistance for students from low socio-economic backgrounds, primarily NSFAS loans (Maimane, 2016). Since the difficulties experienced by disadvantaged students impact directly on their academic achievement, and thus affect their chances of obtaining continued financial aid, the relationship that SSO staff have with the rest of the TVET college system is pivotal for referring students to other support services such as counselling and academic support (Blom, 2016).

Furthermore, Jones et al (2008) reports that despite the sincere willingness of the SSO staff to assist disadvantaged students, the registration process for NSFAS students always present problems, especially if these students do not have extra funding from other financial sources. Moreover, students who registered prior to the approval of their NSFAS loan application found it difficult to pay their registration fees (Jones et al, 2008). However, in some cases arrangements were made for students to register while waiting for the confirmation of their loan application. In one post-school education and training institution, bureaucratic and complex application processes caused considerable stress, particularly for first-year students. This was exacerbated by their unfamiliarity with the language of the institution, making the process even more burdensome for students from low socio-economic backgrounds (Ibid).

According to Jones et al (2008), it is imperative for students to have access to educational funding as it ensures access to TVET Colleges. Furthermore, although the NSFAS loan goes a long way towards assisting students, there are still financial gaps that may be relatively small in the overall picture, but that can make a significant difference between students

completing their studies or dropping out. However, students experience high levels of financial stress, which can affect their academic achievement and lead to social alienation and polarisation (Maimane, 2016). Additionally, sufficient financial resources to enable students to live above mere survival mode, and fully engage both academically and in campus life, can thus be considered a vital ingredient for academic, social integration and ultimately student success (Jones et al, 2008). This implies that it is worthwhile to establish the extent of financial difficulties experienced by student populations with NSFAS loans, which are not receiving other bursary support to provide an institutional understanding and acknowledgement of how financial disadvantage plays out in a student's life. This is important because it will enable the development of holistic institutional solutions, such as external funding partnerships, rather than isolated responses to students' financial difficulties (Steyn, 2014). Jones et al (2008) highlights the fact that students failing to graduate out of the TVET system and NSFAS losing any possibility of recouping these loans are a waste of human, material and financial resources.

### **2.6.3 Management of National Student Financial Aid Scheme**

The management of NSFAS has been found to influence students' level participation and success in TVET Colleges (Blom, 2016). Students perform poorly because the institutions have failed to create an environment that is accommodative and conducive to their learning needs (Harb & El-Shaawari, 2006). For example, NSFAS caters for a large number of at-risk students, this contribution can never be enough to meet the full scope of the need, and the challenge becomes the responsibility of individual TVET Colleges to determine the size of the awards according to their student population profile (Jones et al, 2008). The problem of distributing financial resources in South African TVET Colleges is a challenge, which spans the boundaries of the African continent. According to Frimpong, Agyeman and Ofori (2016) underfunding is one of the challenges, which affect poly-technical colleges in Ghana. Underfunding of polytechnics in Ghana has limited their ability to effectively and efficiently perform their traditional duties of teaching and has affected the capacity to improve the state of their physical facilities, which are crucial to teaching and learning (Bamiro and Adedeji, 2010).

### **2.7 Academic factors which influence participation and success**

High failure rates in TVET Colleges result in unacceptable levels of attrition reduced graduate throughput and an increased cost of training a nation's labour force (Mlambo,

2011). This implies that high failure rates are costly to all stakeholders since the certification and graduation rates for the TVET Colleges are reduced. Some of the factors that have been attributed to poor academic performance by TVET students relate to a lack of pre-requisite subjects which facilitate articulation between the school and college, teaching methods practised in the college, the culture of the institution and class attendance (Mlambo, 2011).

### **2.7.1 Articulation between school, college and university**

Jones et al (2008) found out that students reported not being able to register for the programme of their choice because they had not taken the required subjects at Grade 12, while others had made uninformed and inappropriate programme choices. In many instances, students reported only having made a choice when they were waiting in the queue, basing their choice on what other registering students had selected because the name of the programme sounded interesting. Others chose programmes, which were popular among their friends at school because they thought that such programmes were lucrative (Ibid). Moreover, in order to follow their favoured field of study at a tertiary institution, they need to have the correct combination of subjects (Bailey and Phillips, 2015).

Lack of knowledge about subject combinations for particular programs can be a dead-end activity for many students especially in the TVET system because according to the Government Gazette (2016) currently there is a lack of definition and order in learner progression routes and articulation arrangements. While the majority of universities do not accept graduates of TVET Colleges, the Government Gazette (2016) states that education and training must be situated within the framework and value systems of lifelong learning, social justice and innovative participation in the economy. To this end, this articulation policy will facilitate movement of learners between and within the sub-frameworks of the National Qualifications Authority (NQF), and between institutions and within institutions in order to enable access, progression and social mobility. The current situation where students from TVET Colleges cannot articulate into higher education institutions is a huge disadvantage to TVET students because education and training in TVET Colleges is an end-in-itself rather a means to an end.

### **2.7.2 The influence of pedagogical practices on participation and success**

One criticism that has been levelled against the pedagogical practices in the TVET sector is that educators in the TVET system are ill prepared for the ambitions expressed in the

Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)'s White Paper on Post-School and Training (2013). Many of the ills besetting the sector are blamed on the weak initial preparation of TVET educators, particularly in respect of teaching expertise (Blom, 2016). Since TVET has been used by organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (2015) (UNESCO) and International Labour Organisation (2011) (ILO) to refer to education and training that prepares persons for gainful employment and is offered in the post-secondary community and/or technical colleges, or informally by means of on-the-job training where a junior employee is coached by a senior and experienced employee (McLean and Wilson, 2009). Due to the nature of the education and training practices within the TVET sector, there is a need to streamline pedagogical practices to meet the goals and objectives of the TVET training system.

Since the defining characteristic of TVET is the strong links with business which reflect the development of occupational identities through the socialisation of the individual into the culture of a particular occupation (McLean and Wilson, 2009), pedagogical practices should reflect a form of education and training with a close relationship with work, and the world of work, which is achieved by curricula that provides theoretical as well as occupational knowledge, through linkages with business and industry (Blom, 2016). According to Taylor (2011), TVET Colleges should successfully carry the burden of expectations in terms of the economic and social needs of the country, the recruitment of educators with right balance of both industry experience and pedagogical skills. Wyngaard and Kapp (2004) highlight the fact that a lot of vacancies in the TVET system were filled by new staff members who had technical qualifications but very little teaching experience, or educators from the schooling system who had pedagogical knowledge but no technical qualifications. Greenwood (2010) suggests that TVET College educators need a combination of technical qualifications, pedagogical knowledge and industry-related experience to provide quality teaching that will ensure success and create a vibrant and effective post-school education and training sector. A key characteristic of vocational pedagogy should include learning and teaching which focus on bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and work-based skills (UNESCO, 2014).

### **2.7.3 The importance of language on participation and success**

The problems in the South African education system have a long history such as the campaign by the African National Congress in 1954 when it challenged the Group Areas Act. The use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction was also a cause of disagreement between

the African learners and the then apartheid government. The 1976 Soweto uprising heralded the climax of the conflict between the African students and the apartheid government, and an end to the use of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in African schools. The current discourse in the South African education debates is that the mother tongue is the basis of all learning and learners should be taught in their indigenous languages because bilingualism cannot be set as the aim of teaching (Rammala, 2009). Nevertheless, the majority of TVET students struggle to communicate in English and that could be one of the factors that put them at a disadvantage, since that is the language used to respond to questions in the examination. A study conducted in India and South Africa (Sayed et al 2007) found that similar exclusionary experiences are being felt in both countries where language is used as a critical means of exclusion. In South Africa, exclusion is experienced in the almost blanket denial of access to mother tongue learning while in India children are forced to learn Hindi instead of their mother tongue (Rammala, 2009).

#### **2.7.4 Class attendance and academic performance**

Class attendance remains a source of conflict between students in the TVET College under study and the teaching staff. Students do not attend lectures as prescribed by the college rules and policies as a result their academic performance plummets especially in the final semester of each year when they write examinations set by the Department of Higher Education and Training. Although the Department of Education has developed a Public Further Education and Training College Attendance and Punctuality Policy to enforce high levels of attendance and punctuality to improve students' chances of success and prepare them for the professional culture of the workplace (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013c) attendance and punctuality remain the twin challenges which are likely to pose a concrete obstacle to the successful implementation of the TVET concept. Because there are no consequences for non-compliance to this policy since students come to class when they feel like although the policy clearly states that students must attend at least 80% of the whole learning programme (DHET, 2013c). The major reasons given by students for non-attendance include, but not limited to assessment pressures, poor delivery of lectures, timing of lectures, and work commitments (Newman-Ford, Lloyd and Thomas, 2009).

In recent times, students have found a need to seek employment while studying on a part-time basis due to financial constraints (Mlambo, 2011). The numbers of part-time and mature students has risen sharply (Ibid). The use of information technology also means that

information that used to be obtained from sitting through the lectures can be obtained at the click of a mouse (Mlambo, 2011). Indeed, web-based learning approaches have become a modern way of learning in this era of technologically based mode of learning. Given all these developments that either make it impossible for students to attend classes, the question that needs to be asked is whether absenteeism affects student's academic performance (Mlambo, 2011). Research on this subject seems to provide a consensus that students who miss classes perform poorly compared to those who attend classes (Devados and Foltz, 2006, Durden, and Ellis, 2005, Park and Kerr, 2009, Schmidt, 2013). Based on these findings a number of stakeholders have advocated for mandatory class attendance (Mlambo, 2011). The inability of these cross-sectional studies to isolate attendance from a myriad of confounding student characteristics, for example, levels of motivation, intelligence, prior learning and time management skills, is a major limiting factor to the utility of these findings (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2013).

Durden and Ellis (2005) carried out research on student differences in socio-economic background, ability, and motivation and reported a small positive relationship between attendance and academic achievement, that is, a few absences do not lead to poor grades but excessive absenteeism does. A study conducted by Ali, Jusoff, Mokhtar and Salamat (2009) also shows that attending lectures plays an important role in improving students' academic performance. They found that students who avail themselves in lecture theatres regularly obtained greater symbols in comparison to those who did not attend lectures (Ali et al, 2009). Consistent with these results, Moore (2006) found out that students who did not attend lectures were likely to answer questions incorrectly to concepts taught during their absence. With particular reference to these research results students in TVET Colleges should be encouraged to attend all lectures since attendance and punctuality have a positive relationship with academic success.

## **2.8 Institutional Interventions**

Thomas et al (2009) suggest that for any TVET student to benefit from tuition offered by the different tertiary institutions in South Africa there is need for TVET Colleges to support students across the life cycle, but prioritising the first year students and providing the necessary institutional support. The student lifecycle approach has the following main stages: pre-entry advice and guidance, admissions and induction, first semester, moving through the course and employment. This approach benefits students in that it offers them comprehensive

and consistent form of provision: The lifecycle approach enables institutions to develop their provision of support in line with individual student need, rather than institutional practice (Action on Access; 2012). To this end, Thomas et al (2009) provide the following overview of elements of academic practice considered effective in providing holistic student development, that is, practices, which focus on the students' psychological, physical, social, language and emotional needs.

### **2.8.1 Student preparedness: Career Counselling**

One of the key factors in student success is correct programme selection and many students drop-out because the programme of study does not match their expectations (Jones et al 2008). According to Maimane (2016), a lack of informed career, planning and decision-making may result in wasted money, frustrations and hardship. Freeth and Ngidi (2006) are of the view that the challenge is that prospective students are coerced to make programme decisions when they may have very little information about the different careers associated with the programme which they are going to study at the post-school education and training institution. Through vocational guidance and counselling students need to know which occupations are best suited towards their interests, values and skills (Maimane, 2016). They may have an interest in a particular job, but they also have to know whether there is demand for the occupations and jobs, and how changes in the labour market will affect their chosen occupational field (Ibid). Mwamwenda (2014) is of the view that career guidance helps students to find out which courses will complement their choices and what the entrance requirements for these courses are. By implication, sound career guidance in TVET Colleges, as part of the curriculum, would go a long way towards addressing poor programme choice by students.

### **2.8.2 TVET student induction programme**

Induction programmes are important aspects of preparing students for higher education, especially as academic difficulties are reported to manifest predominantly in the first year when most exclusions and dropouts occur. Induction programmes can play a major role in helping students adjust to their new academic and socio-cultural environments, and consequently improve retention, throughput and success rates (Jones et al 2008). A study carried out by Freeth and Ngidi (2006) found out that many students interviewed reported that they had not attended induction sessions. Among the reasons why these students had not attended induction programmes were that they had not known about these sessions or because

they were in the process of sorting out practical issues such as registration, accommodation and application for financial aid. The study also goes on to say that students who had not attended induction programmes acknowledged that this had put them at a disadvantage. Overall, those students who had attended induction programmes confirmed these programmes had been useful. This implies that it is important for TVET colleges ensure that induction programmes for new students should be marketed in such a way that information about where, when and why these programmes is cascaded to the new students in such a way that each individual first year student is informed about this programme. This is important because this will assist the new students in acquiring information, which will help them to cope with the challenges of tertiary education.

According to Bailey (2007) cited in Jones et al (2008), induction programmes in a tertiary institution aims at facilitating both academic and social integration for new students. According to Jones et al (2008) most of the institutions in their study samples used induction programmes to introduce new students to the institutional support services, such as counselling, academic support services and student health services. At one tertiary institution in Jones et al (2008)'s sample, the local police was also invited to advice students on safe and unsafe social practices, which parts of town were unsafe as well as the damaging effects of a variety of narcotic drugs that were popularly available and what they looked like. Induction programmes, therefore, should be conducted in such a way that the institution provides an atmosphere, which will enable the student to adjust to the college academic and social life within the shortest time possible.

### **2.8.3 Academic support and development**

Academic integration of college students is an integral part of student retention strategy (Chandler and Potter, 2011; Purdie and Rosser, 2011; Tuchman and Kennedy, 2011, Talbert, 2012). Students' academic experiences and decisions are shaped by campus policies and practices (Tinto and Pusser, 2006). Muldoon (2009) suggests that developing learning communities is an effective way for integrating students academically. This strategy fosters student involvement through participation and interaction with peers (Braxton, Hirschy and Hartley (2008). Along the same vein Fullilove and Treisman (1990) cited in Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2011) found out that Chinese-Americans succeeded in mathematics at much higher rates than their Black peers because they studied in groups, which led to the

integration of those students' academic and social lives, more time spend studying and increased peer support.

Jones et al (2008) also found out that academic support strategies such as peer tutoring and peer mentoring and coaching are effective methods of integrating students academically as well as socially. However, Thomas et al (2012) noted that tutorials were varied from being formalised, compulsory, well-structured aspects of the academic programme to being voluntary and not being taken seriously by students. Where tutorials were add-ons, aimed at weaker students, they were sometimes perceived negatively, resulting in poor student attendance (Ibid). It is, therefore, important to create a tutorial support programme designed to foster success among students from all races through cultivation of communities of learning modelled after the Chinese-American peer group (Fullilove and Treisman (1990) cited in Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba 2011).

Chandler and Potter (2011) suggest that ongoing communication between the Student Support Office and lecturing staff encourages the tracking of students' success and identifies at-risk students that require targeted interventions. A targeted early academic alert process works as a tool for teaching staff to connect students to the campus support services (Chandler and Potter, 2011; Escobedo, 2007). Advice from the Student Support Office allows students to have regular, structured appointments throughout the semester and advising sessions are an opportunity to discuss the student's social involvement needs and ensure social interaction with peers (Braxton et al, 2004; Escobedo, 2007; Muldoon, 2009). Lecturing staff teaching at-risk students need to assist students to develop practices of understanding the task, setting goals, managing time, building confidence, taking responsibility, learning from lectures and preparing for examinations (Chandler and Potter, 2011; Tuckman and Kennedy, 20011). Academic support initiatives should be organised by senior management as a means of creating institutional commitment dedicated to providing academic, social and financial support (Schultheis, 2014).

#### **2.8.4 The influence of institutional culture on participation and success**

Schein (2014) notes that the culture of a group is characterised by a shared basic assumptions learnt by the group to solve internal and external challenges. Stolp and Smith (2010) define institutional culture as an embodiment of norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, symbols and myths understood in varying degrees by members of a school community.

The culture of an institution has been proved to influence academic performance in a variety of educational settings (Odongo, 2013). Organizational theorists have long reported that paying attention to culture is the most important action that a leader can perform (Macneil, Prater and Busch, 2009). Watson (2001) cited in Macneil, Prater and Busch (2009) warns that if the culture of the educational institution is not conducive to learning, student achievement can suffer. Resnick (2011) emphasises the point that school principals are responsible for establishing a pervasive culture of teaching and learning in their schools.

## **2.9 Theoretical Framework**

This study was conducted against Bourdieu (1977)'s theoretical framework of cultural capital. The aim of this section is to outline of the theory of cultural capital and its intersection with related concepts such as economic, social and symbolic capital, habitus and field. A critical discussion of these concepts will be presented in terms of their influence on students' academic participation and achievement in the TVET College under study. The main thrust of the theoretical framework is to establish the influence of cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital as well as habitus and field on the TVET college experiences of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in relation to their participation and success. I begin with Bourdieu's broader theoretical framework, including his notions of habitus and field and will discuss how this theory can be used to understand educational participation and success. I also present a critique of Bourdieu's (1973) concept of cultural capital and outline the merits and demerits of his theoretical framework.

### **2.9.1 Cultural, Economic, Social and Symbolic capital**

To explain educational outcomes Bourdieu (1973) specifies four generic types of capital: cultural capital, social capital, economic capital and symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1973) coined the term cultural capital to describe the different tastes and habits of specific social classes, demonstrating how those characteristics reinforce power relationships between those who possess desirable cultural attributes and the institutions that reinforce them (Bourdieu, 1973; 1977; 1983). Bourdieu (1973) defined cultural capital as instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed. This wealth appears to belong to the whole society, accessible to all based on individual ability and effort, but social origins determine its appropriation.

Bourdieu (1984) frames education as an arena of cultural conflict in which social inequalities are reproduced through the different forms of capital both within and outside the system. Cultural capital is, therefore, the possession and reproduction of cultural goods that is unique to specific social classes, which provides dispositions that are inherited from the family to the child (Bourdieu, 1983; 1973). Bourdieu (1973) views this as the way social class reproduces itself. Social class influences the family's tastes, which subsequently influences how families raise their children and how these children perform in education (Dumais, 2002). This cultural capital plays itself out in the classroom and gives students of middle and higher classes an advantage over their lower-class counterparts (Redford, 2007). When children go to school, this cultural capital learned at home helps the student to succeed in their academic programmes (Dumais, 2006). Another advantage which children of middle and higher socio-economic background have over their lower socio-economic status is that the teachers who also possess middle class cultural capital treat students differently according to the class they come from (Condrón, 2007; Carter, 2003). Much work done on cultural capital has emphasized the participation of high-class cultural activities such as museum attendance, going to art classes, reading and listening to classical music (Dimaggio and Mohr, 1985, Dumais, 2002; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004). While Bourdieu (1973) implied that these cultural values are passed on early in the child's life, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) found out that if learners participated in these cultural practices at the teenage stage of development, chances of performing better in academic work will be higher. However, Burke (2012) notes that although we have largely moved from a bottle-neck system to a mass post-school education system in many countries, those benefitting the most from policies aimed at expanded tertiary education are those with relative social, economic and cultural capital.

Bourdieu (1986) views economic capital as the foundation of all other forms of capital and treats all other types of capital as transformed, veiled forms of economic capital. Other forms of capital can be converted into economic capital, such as converting educational credentials into high paying professional position and economic capital can be used to other forms of capital, for example family income can be used to pay for school fees and tutoring services, leading to favourable educational outcomes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). According to Cheng (2012) family income captures only one aspect of how parental status influences educational performance.

Family, therefore, plays a crucial role in shaping the educational trajectories of children through the transmission of economic, social, symbolic and cultural resources (Cheng, 2012).

A substantive body of educational research in the developed world has tracked the impact of family income and wealth on educational outcomes of children. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally achieve better school outcomes than their less privileged counterparts (Blanden and Gregg, 2004). Studies conducted in the United States of America (USA) Canada and the United Kingdom (UK) have consistently and repeatedly showed that socio-economic factors have a persistent and substantial influence on school attainment and achievement (Acemoglu and Pischke, 2001; Ferguson et al 2007; Duncan and Murnane, 2011). For example, in the USA Acemoglu and Pischke (2001) found out that a 10% increase in family income is associated with a 1.4% increase in the probability of attending a four-year college qualification. Under the backdrop of widening income gap, a body of recently published research indicates a growing achievement gap as well as disparities in educational experiences between students from low socio-economic backgrounds and their more affluent peers in the USA (Phillips, 2011; Reardon, 2011).

Another form of capital which Bourdieu (1990) brings forward to analyse how the concept of capital determines educational attainment is symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1990) uses the term symbolic capital to denote the power of the dominant class to impose meanings through legitimation. Symbolic capital is a disguised form of power that demands recognition, deference and obedience with legitimacy (Swarz, 1997). It involves culturally valued attributes, such as educational credentials, that can be material but not recognised as such (McDonough and Nunez, 2004).

Differences in educational success can be attributed to different levels of existing social capital, which is produced in the networks and connections of families that the school serves (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). For example, social capital supports educational success in the form of appropriate school climate and the values that motivate students to achieve higher goals (Acar, 2011). The student's development is strongly shaped by social capital in the school, community and the family (Acar, 2011). Other authorities are of the view that social capital positively affects educational achievement and, consequently students' behaviour and development: it reduces drop-out rates and increases graduation rates (Israel, Beaulieu and Hartless, 2001) and college enrolment (Yan, 1999), as well as positively affecting achievements in tests (Sun, 1999).

### **2.9.2 Habitus and Field**

Despite a number of research papers in the past few years using Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of capital to explain educational inequalities, researchers have moved away from the less understood but critically important concept of habitus (Gaddis, 2013). Bourdieu (1977) explains the term habitus as the personal dispositions and attitudes, which students have towards schooling, which implies that a negative disposition towards school, ultimately affects educational achievement and attainment. Habitus has three pillars, which are a matrix of perceptions, appreciations and actions (Bourdieu, 1977). However, McClelland (1990) argues that habitus represents the past as well as the present and is shaped through cumulative effects of capital and a history of feedback on success or failure.

Bourdieu (1984) views habitus as a rigid concept while other scholars suggest that habitus can change based on an individual's ever-changing collections of interactions and experiences (Reay, 2004; Horvat and Davis, 2011). Gaddis (2013) suggests that if students have positive personal dispositions towards schoolwork; this can be an important mediator between cultural capital and academic outcomes. Although habitus plays an important mediating role in the relationship between cultural capital and academic outcomes, it has been woefully ignored in the literature (Gaddis, 2013). In spite of some evidence of the importance of habitus alongside cultural capital (Dumais, 2002), no research has provided follow-up investigation (Gaddis, 2013).

People maximize their positions by accumulating and using four types of capital and the value of capital is specific to the field within which individuals compete and manoeuvre (Bourdieu, 1984; 1990). Field is the term, which symbolises the struggle-within-a-struggle and competition within different social spheres (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It can be conceived as the structured spaces that are organised around specific types of capital or combinations of capital (Swarz, 1997). The dynamics of competitions in a given field result in social structures. These structures exert influence through shaping the disposition of the individual, while at the same time the structure can be shaped by individuals who have gained and accumulated a lot of capital (Cheng, 2012). In the education field, for instance, parents of different socio-economic backgrounds all struggle to do what they think is best for their children despite their differences in income, education levels, interpersonal networks and individual disposition (Phillips, 2011). These differences in specific types of capitals and

combinations of capitals results in different educational practices and strategies, which produce different educational outcomes (Reardon, 2011).

### **2.9.3 A critique of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital**

Despite the common consensus of treating culture, as a powerful force shaping the present educational trajectory, the theoretical usefulness inherent in Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital in empirical research has not been fully realized (Cheng, 2012). For example, past research using the concept of cultural capital in explaining different educational outcomes was mainly conducted in the first world and has yielded inconclusive results (Sullivan, 2007). According to Cheng (2012), one weakness with the theory of cultural capital is that Bourdieu himself has not offered a clear definition of the term cultural capital. Lamont and Lareau (1988) argue that the proliferation of definitions of the term cultural capital, and possibly the fruitfulness of the concept has created sheer confusion.

One of the common and grossly inadequate way of operationalizing cultural capital is to treat it as related to knowledge of high-class culture, such as fine art, classical music and literature (Cheng, 2012). Researchers taking this approach assume that possession of cultural capital serves as a signal of high social status that is implicitly rewarded in the educational system (Cheng, 2012). In this line of argument, variables such as one's familiarity with the middle and high class culture, including attitude, activities and information on art, music, literature and theatre as well as linguistic ability are often used as indicators of the amount of cultural capital the student possesses ( De Graaf et al., DiMaggio, 1982, Dumais, 2002; Sullivan, 2001). Another problem associated with equating cultural capital with high-class activities and consumption is that it creates the distinction between non-cognitive skills, habits, styles, cognitive skills, and grades, which does not fully capture the complexity of Bourdieu's original theorization (Lareau and Weininger, 2004). Both forms of competencies are interwoven in the habitus, are in part socially constructed, and therefore should not be treated separately (Bourdieu, 1986). However, Sullivan (2002) stresses that some authorities find Bourdieu's concept of habitus to be complex and ambiguous thus difficult to implement.

Interestingly, much of the research does not consider the concept of habitus in their analysis, making it difficult to see how Bourdieu's model functions (Dumais, 2002). Despite the broad acceptance of treating culture as a key element of social mobility in education, the theoretical potential inherent in Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital remains underdeveloped (Cheng, 2012). Along this vein, Bourdieu's own conceptual ambiguity and researchers' insufficient

consideration for both the context and content in applying the concept have hindered the advance in this line of inquiry (Phillips, 2011). In conclusion, it should be noted that empirical research has shown that it is rather difficult to clearly operationalize the concepts of habitus and field, which are important in understanding the relationship between cultural capital and educational achievement (Tzanakis, 2011). Lastly, critics of Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital reject it, as it is not supported by numerous studies, particularly quantitative research (Reardon, 2011).

## **2.10 Conclusion**

This chapter provided a critical analysis of factors, which promote or impede access, participation and success in post-school education. Student-related, academic, and institutional factors were found to influence students' participation and success in the TVET College under study. Prior research has revealed that students who come from low socio-economic backgrounds face more challenges in terms of access, participation and success. Furthermore, the students who do not have the cultural, economic and social capital to navigate the intricate demands of education and training activities in the TVET College also face challenges in attaining their technical, vocational educational and training programmes.

## **CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

For any research to accomplish what it intends to accomplish there is need for researchers to plan, design and implement research strategies which dovetail and interlock in such a way that the research questions are answered and research objectives achieved. This means that research success depends on blue-sky thinking, the thinking that involves creative, analytical and critical problem-solving approaches, which produce life-changing results in educational, vocational and training contexts. By implication, this implies that in this research the approach should be of a creative type, not informed by run of the mill methods, common methods, which produce common results and findings, which do not have any impact on educational change in technical, educational, vocational and training sectors. The process of planning, designing and carrying out research should therefore, enlarge, amplify and broaden the frontiers of knowledge so that solutions to current and future technical, vocational, educational and training challenges can be generated for the future TVET student populations. This chapter, therefore, focused on the choice of the research design and methodology in relation to the objectives of the research, research questions, the sample, paradigm, data generation methods, ethics and trustworthiness, applicable to the social geographies of participation and success in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

### **3.2 Qualitative Research Design**

The purpose of a research design is to specify a plan for generating research evidence that will be used to answer the research question (McMillan and Schumacher 2014). McMillan and Schumacher (2014) define qualitative research as an interpretive, critical, or naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to the research situation. The way in which people being studied understand and interpret their social reality is one of the central themes of qualitative research (Bryman, 2008). How researchers carry out research depends upon the nature of the social world and what can be known about it (ontology), the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology), the purpose(s) and goals of the research (axiology) and the characteristics of the research participants (Ritchie and Lewis, 2015).

The study adopted a qualitative research design because it allows the researcher to “generate meaning on how people make sense of their lives, experiences” (Atieno 2009 p. 14) and challenges they face in day-to-day interaction with their socio-cultural, educational, economic and physical environments. The choice of a qualitative research design in this study was appropriate as it enabled the researcher to focus on the meanings of key issues relating to access, participation and success in TVET Colleges. Qualitative research can facilitate the researcher to tackle sensitive issues, to appreciate the wider context of people’s experiences, and to make connections across different areas of the participant’s lives (Griffin, 2014). Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2013), also affirm that qualitative research is conducted in a natural setting and involves a process of building a complex and holistic picture of the phenomenon of interest. Atieno (2009) explains that a qualitative research design can be either critical or interpretive in nature because it captures the life experiences of participants and its goal is to understand the social or human problem from multiple perspectives. Greco, Baidissin and Nonino (2013) assert that qualitative approach to research is concerned with the researcher’s assessment of attitudes, opinions and behaviour. Thus in this research I was able to elicit data relating to students’ experiences of access, participation and success. Through the use of data generation techniques such as in-depth interviews, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of factors which influence participation and success rates among students of low socio-economic backgrounds in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

### **3.2.1 The Research Paradigm**

A paradigm, in simple terms, is a way of viewing the world (Hope, 2016). It refers to a set of philosophical assumptions that are shared by members of a research community (Humphrey, 2010, Chalmers, 1982 cited in Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). In essence, it is a way of representing a particular way of thinking that is shared by a community of scientists in solving problems in the field and it can be represented in terms of its ontological, epistemological and methodological concerns (Richards, 2003 cited in Asghar, 2013; Chalmers, 1982 cited in Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013). It includes a way of representing the commitments, beliefs, values, methods and outlooks shared across a discipline. These views may guide our thinking, our beliefs, and our assumptions about our society and ourselves, and how they frame how we view the world around us (Schwandt, 2001; Wagner, Garner and Kawulich, 2012; Bertram and Christensen, 2014).

In this study, a critical research paradigm was used. According to Wagner et al (2012), the critical paradigm adopts the stance that social reality is constantly changing, depending on the socio-political and cultural factors. Within the critical paradigm reality is viewed as multi-layered, that is, the surface reality which is visible and the deep structures that are unobservable (Humphrey, 2010, Wagner, et al, 2012). It is, therefore, important for researchers to use theoretical and historical information to unmask the deep structures of social reality, which are unobservable. Thus, in the context of participation and success rates in a TVET college it was important for the researcher to use a narrative inquiry approach in the form of interviews which would help to elicit information hidden in students' life and educational experiences. The use of interviews also gave the research process a dialogic thrust in line with the methods within the critical paradigm (Shah & Al-Bargi, 2013).

The critical paradigm is a force of liberation that engages an on-going conflict with the powers of oppression and seeks to bring about educational reform (Reeves and Hedberg, 2013). Critical researchers assume that social reality is historically constituted and that it is produced and reproduced by people (Myers, 2009). Although people can consciously act to change their social, educational, political and economic circumstances, critical researchers recognize that their ability to transform society is constrained by the structures of domination in the society (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2015). The aim of the critical paradigm is to openly critique the status quo, focus on the conflicts and constraints in the education system and bring about change that would eliminate the causes of alienation and domination (Reeves and Hedberg, 2013). The goal of critical paradigm is the social transformation to displace the existing structures of power and domination by opening opportunities for educational participation among persons previously excluded and dominated (Myers, 2009). The critical paradigm seeks to deconstruct discourse to reveal hidden structures of domination, particularly dichotomies of oppression, for example, the rich & poor, male & female, able-bodied & disabled and then reconstruct less exploitative educational, socio-economic and political arrangements (Boje, 2015).

The critical paradigm is also referred to as the transformative or emancipatory paradigm (Creswell, 2009). The term transformative or emancipatory paradigm denotes a family of research designs influenced by various schools of thought with a common theme of liberating and changing communities through group action (Mertens 2009). These schools of thought include, but are not limited to, Marxist, feminist, anti-racist, and disability rights scholars. At the heart of the knowledge interest of the critical paradigm is the aim to educate and empower

oppressed or disadvantaged groups (Humphrey, 2013). This corroborates the aim of this study, which was to unravel the lack of social, symbolic, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu, 1977) among lower class students, which translate into inequitable distribution of opportunities between middle class students and lower class students in order to enhance participation and success of lower class students in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The use of the critical paradigm enabled the researcher to go beyond identifying and describing the factors that are responsible for discrepancies in performance between lower class and middle class students and suggest interventions, which the TVET college can use to improve the participation and success of the disadvantaged group of students. Cohen, Manion & Marrison (2011) echo this aim of the critical paradigm when they point out that the aim of research within the critical paradigm is not just to describe or understand, but to change society to become more just.

### **3.2.2 The Narrative inquiry**

This study is a narrative investigation of the educational experiences of six students from low socio-economic backgrounds at a TVET college. According to Clandinin and Connolly (2006) narrative inquiry is an umbrella term that captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time, and takes account of the relationship between individual experience and cultural context. The theoretical underpinning of narrative inquiry is the belief that ‘telling a story about oneself involves telling a story about choice and action, which have integrally moral and ethical dimensions’ (Hunter, 2010). The process of telling the narrative is believed to have the potential to transform the participant’s experiences (Ibid). This form of research represents a change in focus from individual meanings to cultural narratives and their influence on people’s lives (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001). The aim of narrative inquiry is therefore not to find one generalizable truth but to ‘sing up many truths and/or narratives (Ibid). Ostovar-Namaghi, Nourouzi and Hosseini (2015) argue that people’s lives matter, but much research looks at outcomes and disregards the impact of experience itself. Narrative knowledge, therefore, is created and constructed through stories of lived experiences, and the meanings created from the narratives. Atkinson and Delamont (2016) highlight the importance of narratives as data generation methods by saying that there exists as social phenomenon, an array of spoken and written forms, which provide culturally appropriate ways in which personal experience is shared, knowledge is transmitted, memories are enacted and testimony is constructed. Pinnegar and Daynes (2016) suggest that the narrative can be both a method and the phenomenon of study. As a method, it begins with the experiences as

expressed in lived and told stories of individuals, and as a phenomenon, it means any incident deserving of inquiry and investigation, especially events that are particularly unusual or of distinctive importance (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2016). By implication, this infers that the narrative allowed researchers to understand the experiences of research participants from an intimate, personal and life-changing context.

An analysis of people's stories allows deeply hidden assumptions to surface (Ostovar-Namaghi, Nourouzi and Hosseini, 2015). Narrative inquiry, therefore, requires going beyond the use of narrative as a rhetorical structure that is, simply telling stories, to an analytical examination of the underlying insights and assumptions that the story illustrates (Bell, 2009). Narrative analysis treats stories as knowledge per se (Ostovar-Namaghi, Nourouzi and Hosseini, 2015) which constitutes the social reality of the narrator (Etherington, 2014) and conveys a sense of that person's experience in depth, richness and texture, by using spoken words (Ostovar-Namaghi, Nourouzi and Hosseini, 2015). Meaning making from narratives occurs throughout the research process rather than being a separate activity carried out after data generation (Gerhart, Taragona and Bava, 2007). The emphasis is on co-construction of meaning between the researcher and the participants (Ostovar-Namaghi, Nourouzi and Hosseini, 2015). In narrative research, a key theme has been the turn towards the relationship between the researcher and the researched in which both parties will learn and change in the encounter (Pinnegar and Daynes, 2016). In this process, the parties negotiate the meaning of the stories, adding a validation check to the analysis (Creswell and Miller, 2012).

Creswell (2011) views it as a mode of inquiry in qualitative research with a specific focus on the stories told by individuals. This implies that the very core of narratives in qualitative research is to generate data, which tells a story about the human condition. This could be by way of sharing knowledge, memories or providing testimonies that relate to people's life histories and conditions, which have enhanced or impeded people's life-chances in a competitive global economy. This study intended to elicit the narratives of students from low socio-economic backgrounds in relation to their participation and success in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. To elicit students' educational experiences in a TVET College the researcher constructed an interview schedule consisting of twenty-five questions focusing on issues pertaining to access, participation and success in the TVET College. The researcher was able to generate data, which could be used to answer the research questions as well as fill up the gaps, which exist in the education and training institution under study through the narratives of the six students.

Atkinson and Delamont (2016) view the use of narratives in qualitative research as a way of bringing together a holistic story, which has been broken like a ceramic pot, by cultural events, which disturbed the smooth flow of human socio-economic and educational activities. The best researchers could do was to use narratives as methods of bringing together those bits and pieces, from key individuals, who by telling their life stories, they actually helped to bring to light the disappearing and often, disappeared life styles of the group. Thus, story-telling and story-hearing offer a meeting ground for deepened connection, clearer understanding and mutual learning. The use of narratives in this study is important because according to Atkinson and Delamont (2016), narratives are pervasive in everyday life, and they are pervasive in contemporary educational practice. Because of the pervasiveness of narratives in social and educational spheres, narratives are among the key phenomena for social inquiry because they are highly conventional forms of social life (Atkinson and Delamont, 2016). This implies that the use of narrative inquiry in qualitative research is a natural way of generating data that has breadth and depth, because most of the responses from narrative inquiry relate directly to the socio-economic challenges, which narrators experience on a daily basis.

The researcher recorded narratives from six students with the intention of obtaining their experiences of participating in education and training programmes at a TVET college as well as factors, which led to them to succeed or withdraw from the college system. This is important because the narratives from students helped the researcher to have an understanding of students' experiences in the college system and also be able to draw from these experiences a sense of why some students participated successfully in the TVET college while, on the other hand, other students failed to make it through the college programmes. By generating data from the six students in the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, an appreciation of the importance of narratives was laid bare because according to Czrniawska (2012) the study of narratives is by no means confined to the narration itself but they are embedded in interactional and organizational contexts.

### **3.2.3 The Research Sample**

A sample is a group on which information is obtained (Fraenkel and Wallen 2008). Bertram and Christensen (2014) go a step further and define sampling as a process, which involves making decisions about people, settings, events or behaviours to include in a study. They are a number of sampling methods used in qualitative research, which include but not limited to

random sampling, purposive sampling, stratified sampling and convenience sampling (Creswell, 2009). For the purpose of this study, a purposive sampling method was used (Bertram and Christensen, 2014). Participants for the data collection phase were selected using purposive sampling for their potential to provide rich information on factors, which promote or impede participation and success in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

Patton (2009) comments that in purposive sampling subjects are selected because of some characteristics and McMillan and Schumacher (2014) concur by saying that purposive sampling is a process whereby the researcher selects particular elements from the population that will be representative of the research population. Based on the researcher's knowledge of the population, a judgement is made about which subjects should be selected to provide the best information to address the research questions as well as the research objectives. In this study, a purposive sample of six students was selected because it represented a group of students from a low socio-economic background and all the six students had experienced either success or failure during the course of their studies at the TVET College under study. Among the six students in the purposive sample, the researcher ensured that the other three must have succeeded in passing NVC level 2 examinations in 2015 and the other three must have experienced failure in one or more of the subjects which they engaged in during their NCV level 2 year. This was important because it would assist the researcher in identifying and analysing factors, which promoted or hindered students' participation and success in the TVET College under study.

### **3.3 Document Analysis**

One of the methods, which was used to determine the nature of the participants that would be included in the purposive sample, was document analysis. According to Cohen et al (2011), documents broadly include official documents, which provide direct evidence of decisions, which are directly or indirectly related to the purpose of a research inquiry. Bowen (2009) defines document analysis as, a form of qualitative research in which documents are interpreted by the researcher to give voice and meaning around an assessment topic. This suggests that document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing documents and it requires that documents be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2011). Bowen (2009) is of the view that documents refer to official facts, which are produced, shared and used in socially organised ways. According to Bowen (2009)

documents that may be used for systematic evaluation as part of a study may take the form of advertisements, agendas, attendance registers, minutes of meetings, manuals, books, brochures, diaries, journals, maps, charts, newspapers, press releases, and various public records.

In this study, the researcher used attendance registers, over and above the use of in-depth interviews as means of establishing the number of students who registered for the NCV level 2 in Financial Management in January 2015, NCV level 3 in January 2016 and NCV level 4 in 2017. Obtaining these numbers was important because it would give the researcher an understanding of the magnitude of participation rates between NCV levels two and four. The reason why the researcher carried out this analysis is because literature has shown that many college students drop-out of the system in the first year of their studies (Letseka and Maille, 2008; Scott, Yield and Hendry, 2007; Council of Higher Education, 2013; Murray, 2014). The researcher also examined attendance registers for the Information Technology cohort at NCV level 2 in January 2015, NCV level 3 in January 2016 as well as in January 2017. Lastly, the researcher also made an analysis of the Education and Development cohort at NCV level 2 in January 2015, NCV level 3 in January 2016 and NVC 4 in January 2017. An analysis of the difference between students who registered for NCV level 2 programmes in January 2015, NCV level 3 in January 2016 and those who registered for NCV 4 in January 2017 enabled the researcher to quantify participation and success rates in the TVET College. By using data from the attendance registers, the researcher was able to make an informed selection of six students, which would ultimately become the core of the research sample. Having designed and developed the in-depth interview as a data generation methods, the researcher went on to administer the in-depth interview schedule to a few students to identify any discrepancies, idiosyncrasies and ambiguities in the way the questions had been formulated. To this end, the researcher carried out a pilot study with three education and development students.

### **3.4 Data generation methods**

Data collection techniques were developed as part of a study's total research design in order to systematise the collection of data and to ensure that all respondents are asked the same questions in the same order (Saunders et al., 2003). For this study, the researcher used an in-depth interview schedule and document analysis as data generation techniques. The responses in the narrative reports were derived from questions in the in-depth interview questions and it

was important to include in-depth interviews in this study because they would assist the researcher to come up with students' narratives, which would speak directly to social geographies of participation and success in the TVET College.

### **3.4.1 In-depth interviews**

In-depth interviewing is a qualitative research technique that involves conducting intensive individual interviews with a small number of respondents to explore their perspectives on a particular idea, program, or situation (Boyce and Neale, 2006). Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012) comment that in-depth interviews are a two-way conversation and a purposive interaction in which the interviewer asks the participant (the interviewee) questions in order to collect data about the ideas, experiences, beliefs, views, opinions and behaviours of the participant. According to Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012) much of the data that is collected and used in qualitative research is generated through in-depth interviewing.

To obtain research data in-depth interviews of six students comprising two students in the Information Technology cohort, two students in the Financial Management cohort and lastly two students in the Education and Development cohort were carried out by the researcher.. The researcher went through all twenty-five questions with each of the six students. All the responses from the interview questions were transcribed, coded and developed into themes. The use of the in-depth interview schedule enabled the researcher to obtain useful information about participants' experiences of participation and success in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. According to Wagner, Kawulich and Garner (2012) the aim of in-depth interviews is to obtain rich descriptive data that will help the researcher to see the world through the eyes of the participant. Nieuwenhuis and Smit (2012) comment that if the person being interviewed thinks that the topic is important and if he/she trusts the researcher, he/she will provide the researcher with information, which the researcher will not be able to collect in any other way.

Creswell (2009) also comments that the use of in-depth interviews offers researchers a method for accessing stories to broaden understanding while honouring the authority that individuals have over their own life memories. The use of in depth interviews have their own challenges because according to Patton (2012) also notes that a major challenge to researching life-changing events is to investigate the experience without being intrusive and without negatively affecting participants who are already feeling victimised and misunderstood. The researcher was, therefore, supposed to have enough background

knowledge and empathy for the research topic to create the trust of the study participants, to build genuine rapport which require successful interviewing and to understand the ‘language’ of the experience in order to recognize the significance of what was being said by the narrators (Creswell, 2012). This means that the process of establishing rapport was very important in the interviews because successful interviewing required paying attention to participants’ point of view. Establishing the connection that makes possible requires ‘becoming informed about your setting’s social, economic and educational structure so that you can shape your conduct with sure-footedness that such knowledge helps you to fit in’ (Warner, Garner and Kawulich, 2012). Because of the importance of establishing trust, the researcher tried to connect with the narrators by being genuine, maintaining eye contact and using language that was familiar to the interviewees (McMillan and Schumacher 2014).

The other issue, which the researcher took into consideration, was to agree with the narrators about the contents of the transcripts. Creswell (2012) notes that it is important to ask the narrators not only to review the transcripts of the interviews but also to read and evaluate the interviewer’s interpretation of their individual narratives. This is important to clarify and confirm the record providing an opportunity for the participants to examine their own thinking and to recognize and reflect on their own life experiences. To this end, the researcher asked the respondents to read the transcribed data to make sure that what was contained in the transcripts tallied with what that respondents had said during the interviews

The use of in-depth interviews would, therefore, allow the researcher to obtain data that was in line with students’ perceptions of factors, which promote or impede participation and success in the TVET College under study. Tseng and Siedman (2007) observes that when people tell stories, they select details of their experiences from a stream of consciousness. It is this process of selecting constitutive details of experience, reflecting on them, giving order to them and thereby making sense of them that telling stories becomes a meaning-making experience. This view is supported by Macmillan and Schumacher (2014) who posits that narrators make choices about what to share with interviewers and these choices are connected to perceived significance, with details provided or omitted to support the telling of the memory. Thus, in-depth interviews offered access to that place where interpreted human experience and response intersected with an educational, social, cultural, spiritual or political dynamic, providing the means by which privately held contents of memory could be communicated to the listening researcher. This implies that the use of in-depth interviews in this qualitative research proved to be a method of obtaining students’ experiences in a

friendly and amicable way. The reason why the researcher decided to use in-depth interviews is that it allowed the researcher to pose some open-ended questions and the participants to express their opinions freely (Bell, 2009). One challenge with the use of in-depth interviews as data generation methods is that it is difficult to standardize the interview across different participants, since each interview is administered under different times and situations (Kinchlelow and McLaren, 2015). However, it is possible to generate rich data, information and ideas in such conversations because the level of questioning can be varied to suit the context and the interview can probe the interviewee more deeply on specific issues as they arise; but can be time-consuming and difficult to analyse data (Preece, Rogers and Sharp, 2005).

### **3.4.2 Data Analysis**

In narrative inquiry, data analysis is undertaken within the context of socio-geographical, educational, cultural and economic perspectives. They are deconstructed in order to reveal powerful discourses, pecking order, presumptions, deliberate oversights and polar inverses (Hunter, 2010). Narrative analyses are usually based on large units of texts or biographical stories (Rice and Ezzy 1999, cited in Hunter, 2010) and moral and transformational dimensions of storytelling are explored (Hunter, 2010). As a roadmap of analysing research data in this study, the researcher deconstructed the data collected and looked for themes and sub-themes (Hunters, 2010), in order to build up a coherent explanation of how students experience issues relating to participation and success in the TVET College.

After each interview, the researcher transcribed the findings and summarised each participant's narrative in his/her own words and pulled out one representative quote for each participant. The researcher went through the quotations several times and recorded his impressions of what was going on for the participant and between the participant and the researcher as the narrative unfolded. He recorded his insights about the data into a memo file attached to the participant's narrative file and coded these insights. He tried to conduct this process with humility, recognising that some voices are silenced and other voices and knowledge dominate the airwaves' (Byrne-Armstrong, 2001 p. 112). The writing process became intertwined with the analytic process (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander, 1997) as a method of discovery and analysis (Richardson, 1994). The researcher finally identified themes across all the stories analysed and described the narratives under three main

themes: student-related factors, academic factors and institutional factors affecting participation and success in the TVET College.

### **3.4.3 Pilot Study**

The pilot study was carried out to ensure that the interview schedule was designed and developed to answer the research questions as well as the research objectives in this study. The researcher carried out the pilot study with a group of three Education and Development students to take note of any problems relating to phrasing of interview questions, intelligibility, purposefulness and meaningfulness of the interview questions. Having gone through the interview questions, the researcher found that some questions required rephrasing because they were not intelligible to the respondents mainly because of the language barrier. The large majority of students in the college under study use IsiZulu as a mode of communication. For this reason the researcher believed that the students in the research sample might encounter language as a barrier given they are all English second language users. With the assistance and direction of the supervisor, the initial cluster of interview questions were reworked. Analysis of the data generated in the pilot study, also enabled the researcher to rephrase some of the questions so that students. The pilot study also helped the researcher to identify questions that had been omitted, redundant and irrelevant. Having piloted the interview questions, the researcher was able to come up with a new schedule of questions that was later administered in the in-depth interviews with six students.

### **3.5 Ethical Issues**

Ethics have something to do with being able to differentiate right from wrong. In simple, basic research principles, the common denominator of ethics is normative behaviour (David and Resnik, 2011), that is, behaviour that is acceptable. In this research, ethics, therefore, can be viewed as a method or procedure for deciding how to act and for analysing complex problems and research issues without infringing on the rights and privileges of participants. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) suggest that it is essential for researchers to take note of the following when carrying out qualitative research:

**Do no harm.** There should be a reasonable expectation by those participating in a research study that they will not be involved in any situation in which they will be harmed. This implies that the researcher guarded against situations, which would hurt the participants

emotionally, psychologically and physically, by keeping information gleaned from these students private and confidential.

**Privacy and anonymity.** In this study, pseudonyms were used for all participants to protect their identity and the researcher protected the identity of the college. The researcher ensured anonymity by not sharing responses obtained from participants with anyone except the research supervisor.

**Informed consent.** The researcher informed the participants of the nature of the study and that they could choose to participate or not. Informing participants of the nature of the research was important so that my participants would make an informed decision whether to participate in the study or not. They were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time during the research process.

### **3.6 Issues of Trustworthiness**

Trustworthiness is a concept used by Guba and Lincoln (2005) which comprises of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Trustworthiness is the corresponding term used in qualitative research as a measure of the quality of research. Trustworthiness in qualitative research is defined as the extent to which the data and data analysis are believable and trustworthy (Guba and Lincoln, 2005). Qualitative research is valid to the researcher and not necessarily to others due to the possibility of multiple realities (Creswell, 2009). It is upon the reader to judge the extent of its credibility based on his/her on understanding of the study. Most rationalists would propose that there is not a single reality to be discovered, but that each individual constructs a personal reality (Smith and Ragan, 2005).

Thus, from a critical perspective, understanding is co-created and there is no objective truth or reality to which the results of this study can be compared. Therefore, the inclusion of a participant checking into the findings, that is, gaining feedback on the data, interpretations and conclusions from the participants themselves, is one method of increasing credibility. Although it has its own disadvantages, Lincoln and Guba (2005) consider member checking into the findings as the most critical technique for establishing credibility.

Research findings are transferable or generalizable only if they fit into new contexts outside the actual study context (Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit, 2004). Transferability is analogous to external validity, that is, the extent to which findings can be generalized. Generalizability refers to the extent to which one can extend the account of a particular

situation or population to other persons, times or setting than those directly studied (Maxwell, 2013). Transferability is considered a major challenge in qualitative research due to the subjectivity of the researcher as the key instrument, and is a threat to valid inferences in its traditional thinking about research data (Seale, 2004). Seale (2004) advocates that transferability is achieved by providing a detailed, rich description of the settings studied to provide the reader with sufficient information to be able to judge the applicability of the findings to other settings that they know. However, this study cannot be generalized to wider technical, vocational, educational and training contexts because firstly, the size of the sample used in this research was very small and secondly, the study was carried out in one institution in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. It is anticipated that if results of similar future studies can be generalised, a much larger sample should be used and the study should be carried out in more than one institution.

Confirmability is the degree to which the research findings can be confirmed or corroborated by others. It is analogous to objectivity, that is, the extent to which a researcher is aware of or accounts for individual subjectivity or bias (Leedy and Ormrod, 2014). Auditing could also be used to establish confirmability in which the researcher makes the provision of a methodological self-critical account of how the research was done (Seale, 2004). In this study the researcher made auditing possible by other researchers, by archiving all collected data in a well-organised, retrievable form so that it can be made available to them if the findings are challenged (Merriam, 2009).

### **3.7 Conclusion**

This chapter made an outline of issues relating to the research design, methodology, research sample and paradigm. Data generation methods such as individual interviews and document analysis were outlined to give the reader a sense of how the research was carried out. As has been highlighted in the preceding sections, this study was carried out against the theoretical framework of cultural capital. It was important to use this theory because it provides a background of why there is differential academic performance between socio-economic classes. The study also used interviews as its design was of a qualitative nature. The research methodology, which was used in this study, was narrative inquiry because this method of generating data allows participants to outline their experiences in a friendly and amicable manner. The research paradigm selected for this study is the critical or emancipatory paradigm because the aim of this study was to transform, emancipate and free students who

are victims of injustice and insecurity within the context of access, participation and success. Lastly, an outline of ethical issues as well as issues relating to trustworthiness was also outlined so as to bring an awareness of the 'dos and don'ts' in this study, and the extent to which the findings of this study can be replicated in future researches.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presented the findings from data generated through interviews with six students at a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal and a discussion thereof. The key research questions, which guided this study, were as follows:

- What are students' experiences of participation and success in the context of one TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal?
- What are the factors, which facilitate or impede student participation and success in this TVET College?
- How do students navigate the contextual dynamics that affect participation and success?

With the key research questions as the lenses through which the process of data presentation and discussion it was envisioned that, this chapter would take cognisance of the following: student-related, academic and institutional factors, which promote or impede participation and success. It is the intention of this chapter to also present the findings from participants, discuss these findings in terms of how students in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal experience participation and success in the institution. The findings obtained from the participants were examined in the context of theories and empirical studies so that the study might provide areas of deviation and juxtaposition with previous studies.

To this end the chapter presented the key findings, discussed the findings within the context of empirical studies carried in the area of participation and success in South African TVET Colleges and the theory which informed the subtleties of participation and success in post-school education and training in South Africa. However, before delving into the nitty-gritties, the heart and soul of the nature of the findings it was pertinent that biographical information of the participants was provided so that the reader had some background knowledge of the critical issues affecting the participants with regards to their post-school education and training intentions, professional prospects, socio-cultural and economic circumstances. A presentation of participants' narratives was made so as to put the research topic and questions in perspective. Participants' narratives were also corroborated by the relevant literature as

well as Bourdieu's concepts of cultural, economic, social, symbolic capital as well as field and habitus.

## **4.2 Biographical information of participants**

The researcher chose six participants between the ages of twenty-one and twenty-five in the Financial Management, Information Technology and Education and Development cohorts of 2015. The participants were named Ian, Robert, Ngosazana, Zuzi, Dinesh and Prumel. For ethical reasons and to protect the actual identities of the participants, the researcher did not use the actual names of the six participants.

### **4.2.1 Ian**

Ian is a Black, male and twenty-one year old Education and Development student from a local township in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Ian said he was raised by his grandmother, who used her old-age pension and her small salary which she earned working as a domestic worker to buy food and clothes for four other members in the household. Among the four family members receiving financial support from Ian's grandmother, two are Ian's half-brothers, who are currently pursuing secondary education at a local secondary school and the other two are Ian's cousin-sisters, who are still in primary school. Ian highlights the fact that since her childhood days he experienced financial crisis because there was only one person working in his household so it was difficult to meet all the family needs.

Ian also said that when he finished his matric he decided to study Education and Development programme at a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, because he has always wanted to be a teacher. He said he chose this programme because he wanted to inspire other people; he saw the need to educate young people and most importantly because he has a deep love for the future of young children. Ian said that when he finishes his Education and Development programme he wants to work for his community and improve the life-chances of his family. Ian strongly believes that education is power. However, the fact that Ian is being looked after by a grandmother, who is a domestic worker and whose financial situation is grossly compromised implies that Ian lacks the required economic and cultural capital, which can enhance his participation and success in the TVET College. To overcome this lack of economic and cultural capital Ian said that he applied for the National Student's Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) and he hoped that he will be able to acquire financial aid until he completes his NCV level 4 qualification.

#### **4.2.2 Robert**

Robert is a Coloured, male and twenty-three years old Education and Development student in TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. He said he was raised by his single-mother who works in a local multinational supermarket as a salesperson. Although her mother works in local multinational supermarket as a salesperson, Robert said the money, which his mother earns, is barely enough to meet the needs of everyone in the household because they are other six siblings, who comprise four sisters and two brothers, in the family who require financial support.

Robert said that the reasons why he chose to pursue a programme in Education and Development are two-fold. Firstly, to assist his mother in raising his three younger siblings, who are still in primary school and secondly to end the myth that male teachers cannot teach children in early childhood settings. Robert said he loves the Education and Development programme because it will help him change the children's lives in the future.

Robert said that he stayed for two years after finishing his grade 12 and the thought of pursuing an Education and Development programme came within a blink of an eye. Pursuing an Education and Development programme at a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal made Robert realise that he had what it takes to become a Foundation Phase educator. Robert strongly believes that when he finishes his NCV level 4 qualification he will pursue a Diploma in Early Childhood Development because his NCV programme has taught him attributes such as learner support, teamwork and the importance of professional integrity in early childhood education. Robert also believes that success is not a one-man endeavour but a process, which is defined by how many people you take along your life-journey and make them realise their dreams.

Robert said that for him to realise his dream of becoming an Early Childhood Educator he needs to have exposure to the necessary economic capital, which will enable him to make his dream a reality. Robert indicated that he is solely dependent on NSFAS to acquire the required economic capital to enhance his chances of participation and success in the TVET College. He also hoped that his participation in the Education and Development would expose him to an educational environment where his lack of cultural capital will be taken care of.

### **4.2.3 Ngosazana**

Ngosazana is a Black African young woman, twenty-two years old and pursuing an Information Technology (IT) programme in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Ngosazana said that she was born on 4 October 1995 at Baragwaneth Hospital in Gauteng but spend most of her life in a rural geographical area in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Although Ngosazana is one of the few young South Africans who were born at the dawn of South Africa's democratic dispensation, she has nothing to celebrate since her life has been a life of tears, toil and trauma.

She also laments the fact that she never knew her father since her childhood because he abandoned the family a very long time ago. The sad part of Ngosazana's life-story is that she says she only came to know her father when he was in hospital, fighting for his life and unfortunately, he died before she could know him better. Ngosazana also said that she hails from a family of five members: her mother, two sisters and a brother who is disabled. According to Ngosazana all, the five family members are dependent on her mother's social grant, which is barely enough to cover all the financial and material needs of the family.

Ngosazana concludes her life-story by saying that she was raised in a small village with an old lifestyle, a community that still obeys the customs, traditions and cultures of the African way of life so religiously. She said that she decided to pursue an Information Technology programme to dismiss the myth and gender stereotype that IT is a profession mainly suitable for males. The other reason why she decided to pursue this programme is that she intends to participate in solving the shortage of IT professionals, which is currently obtaining in the South African labour market. She said that she wants to make her mother so proud of her and to make her mother realise that no matter what life has thrown upon her family, they will always rise again. Ngosazana's life-story is a story characterised by a lack of cultural, economic, social, and symbolic capital. Nevertheless, Ngosazana has made it her mission to work towards improving her cultural capital, which will have a positive effect on the other forms of capital, that is, economic, social, and symbolic capitals.

### **4.2.4 Dinesh**

Dinesh is an Indian, twenty-five year old, young man, pursuing an Information Technology programme in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. He said that he was born in a small town called Howick and he is the eldest of the three children. Dinesh came from

humble beginnings, well-respected parents and family. The cornerstones of Dinesh's family are respect, traditional values and education; which is the most important aspect of Dinesh's family life. However, soon after finishing his matric in 2009, his father died in car accident and this sad turn of events in his family forced him to look for work and help his mother to raise his other two siblings. He was employed as an insurance agent from 2009 to round about 2014, when he was retrenched due to the financial crisis which had hit most of the western world but whose shock waves were felt mainly in the developing world, including South Africa.

Dinesh says he decided to enrol for an IT programme because he has always been fascinated by the 'magic' of technology. Although the IT programme has proved to be a tall order, Dinesh says he is determined to pull through and realise his dream of becoming an IT professional. He also says he enrolled at a TVET College to regain his long-lost education and he looks forward to rectify the time lost since he finished his matric eight years ago.

Dinesh said that his past has motivated him to be where he is today. He strongly believes that everyone has a chance in life and it is never too late to make a change in one's life-chances. His advice to other young people who have gone through similar tragedies is that wherever they are, they must not give up on themselves. When they take care of themselves, they can take care of many others and when they inspire themselves, they can inspire the whole, wide world. Dinesh's life-story is also a narrative, which shows that resilience and determination are twin-strategies, which help other young people who have gone through tragedies, which threatened the very core of existence of vulnerable sections of our society. Dinesh's narrative indicates challenges, which are multi-pronged and range from a lack of economic capital to symbolic and cultural capital, which have the potential to make or break the life-chances of young people growing up in single-parent families.

#### **4.2.5 Zuzi**

The fifth participant by the name Zuzi is a Black African, twenty-two year old Financial Management student who was born in a small village in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Zuzi said that she grew up in a family of seven siblings comprising of four brothers and three sisters. Unlike other participants of African origin who grew up in single-parent families, Zuzi was fortunate enough to grow up with both the mother and the father. However, one challenge that Zuzi highlights in her narrative is that her father married a second wife, which made it very difficult for the whole family to enjoy the financial support of the father. The father

worked as a farm-worker and his wage was barely enough to support a family of seven children, let alone a second family with its different set of financial and material needs.

Zuzi said that she decided to enrol for a Financial Management NCV programme at a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal because she was very good with numbers. The other reason why she decided to pursue an FM programme is that there are more job opportunities in the financial sector and she said that most of the people who pursued this programme managed to secure very lucrative jobs in the private or the public sectors. Zuzi concluded by saying that she intends to pass her NCV level 4 qualification in Financial Management and proceed to enrol for National Diploma in Financial Management to increase her chances of employment in the competitive South African labour market. Although Zuzi's life-story is a life of vulnerability due to her family situation, she strongly believes that she will be able to overcome, firstly, a lack of cultural and economic capital, which was born out of her experiences growing up in a polygamous family.

#### **4.2.6 Prumel**

Prumel the last participant in this purposive sample is an Indian male, twenty-one years old pursuing a Financial Management programme at a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. Prumel said that he was born in a small town called Escourt located in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. He is the last born in a family of six siblings comprising of two girls and four boys. Prumel highlights the fact that education is highly valued in his family and his family would sometimes sacrifice their own financial comfort to make sure that all the children had a decent education. According to Prumel, his community is almost like family to him because he was taught most of the social, cultural, religious and traditional norms, which became part of his value system from the elderly members of his community.

Prumel said that he chose to pursue an NCV programme in Financial Management because he has always had an interest in financial intelligence. According to Prumel financial intelligence cut across all organisations including manufacturing, engineering, banking, insurance and government entities. Prumel strongly believes that pursuing an NCV programme in Financial Management will open a whole new world of work opportunities for him, thus he will be in a position to choose from a wide array of job opportunities. This is possible, because according to Prumel Financial Management is the oil that lubricates the business processes in both the public and the private sectors. Prumel's dream is to finish his NCV programme in Financial Management and proceed to pursue a Bachelor of Commerce

in Accounting, which will enable him to do his internship with celebrated accounting firms such as Ernst and Young. This route will definitely enable the young Prumel to realise his dream of becoming a fully-fledged Chartered Accountant. An analysis of Prumel's narrative indicates a family structure and community, which support the life-chances of young people through a socialisation system that is holistic, systematic and tailor-made to meet the individual needs of young people. Being a last born in the family, Prumel seems to have a rare advantage of an unfettered and unrestricted exposure to the much-needed cultural and economic capital, which are the twin-ingredients in enhancing participation and success in the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

### **4.3 KEY FINDINGS**

An analysis of the data generated through the interviews revealed student-related factors such as socio-economic factors, place of residence, motivation, choice of subjects, preparation for post-school education and attendance as some key themes. Academic factors identified include language of instruction, students' under-preparedness for the NCV curriculum, teaching methods used, assessment approaches, relations between students and lecturers, as well as institutional structures such as academic support programmes that influence students' participation and success. Institutional factors such as the registration process, non-academic activities in the institution and educational resources also featured prominently in the participants' responses in the interviews conducted during the data generation phase.

As explained previously (See Chapter 3), class registers were analysed to identify the success rate of students in the Financial Management, Education and Development and Information Technology cohorts in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 academic years. The rationale for including Financial Management and Information Technology students was premised on the understanding that these groups experienced the highest levels of attrition at NCV level 2. It was, therefore, for this reason that a study to find out the causes of this high level of attrition at NCV level 2. To this, end the study sort to establish the number of students who initially registered at NCV level 2 and compare this to the number of students from the same cohort who registered at NCV level 3 as well as NCV 4 in the subsequent years. This was important because the researcher wanted to establish whether student numbers had decreased or had remained the same from NCV level 2 to NCV level 3 and NCV level 4. The researcher established that the number of students who registered for NCV level 3 was always much lower than the number of students who registered for NCV level 2. For example, in 2015 a

total of 51 students, comprising of 25 males and 26 females enrolled for the Financial Management (FM), National Vocational Certificate (NCV) programme at level 2.

However, in 2016, the number of students dropped to 12 FM students, comprising of 4 males and 8 females at NCV level 3. The same scenario replicated itself in the Education and Development (E & D) level 2 and 3 cohorts of 2015 and 2016 respectively. The E & D cohort of 2015 level 2 comprised of 95 students, with 27 of these students being male and the remaining 68 being female. A numerical analysis of the same group of students at NCV level 3 showed that only 50 students enrolled for E & D in 2016 for the level 3 academic year. The same pattern reproduced itself again in the Information Technology (IT) cohort of 2015 and 2016 at levels 2 and 3 respectively.

**Table 1: NCV Level 2 enrolment in 2015**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>E &amp; D</b>	<b>FM</b>
Males	48	27	25
Females	26	68	26
Total	74	95	51

For example, 74 students registered for IT in 2015 at NCV level 2, comprising of 48 males and 26 females, but the same group dropped to 29, comprising of 18 males and 11 females, when they moved to NCV level 3 in 2016.

**Table 2: NCV Level 3 Enrolment 2016**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>E &amp; D</b>	<b>FM</b>
Males	18	3	4
Females	11	47	8
Total	29	50	12

Data obtained by the researcher in three faculties, that is, Education and Development, Information Technology and Financial Management revealed that the number of students who register at NCV level 2 is much higher than the number, which continued with their studies at NCV level 3 and level 4.

**Table 3: NCV level 4 Enrolment 2017**

Programme	IT	E & D	FM
Females	6	20	3
Males	9	2	2
Total	15	22	5

Data collected from attendance registers showed that issue of student numbers in the Financial Management, Education and Development and Information Technology cohorts in the 2015, 2016 and 2017 academic years fluctuated drastically due to a multiplicity of challenges students faced during their studies. For example, in 2015 51 students enrolled for the Financial Management (FM), National Vocational Certificate (NCV) programme at level 2. However, in 2016, the number of students dropped to 12 FM students at NCV level 3. This represented a whopping 76% drop in student numbers in the department of Financial Management, meaning that only 24% of the students who registered for Financial Management at NCV level 2 in 2015 managed to register for the same program at NCV level 3 in 2016.

The same scenario replicated itself in the Education and Development (E & D) level 2 and 3 cohorts of 2015 and 2016 respectively. The E & D cohort of 2015 level 2 comprised of 95 students. A numerical analysis of the same group of students at NCV level 3 showed that only 50 students enrolled for E & D in 2016 for the level 3 academic year. A comparative analysis of drop-out rate between the departments of Financial Management and Education & Development shows that the latter fared very well because according to the figures obtained by the process of document analysis show that 53% of Education and Development registered at NCV level 3 in 2016 compared to only 23% of the Financial Management students who registered at NCV level 3 in 2016. This huge discrepancy can be explained as emanating from a lack of prerequisite subject knowledge for their chosen programmes. Financial

Management students reported facing challenges in some sections of the FM curriculum because one of participants who took part in the interviews indicated that,

*The minimum requirements for admission into the Financial management programme is a grade 9 school report but a student with a grade 9 will have a problem with Financial Management at NCV level 2 because grade 9 students do basic financial accounting principles and NCV level 2 is equivalent to grade 10, and grade 10 learners do financial management concepts at a much deeper level (Zuzi).*

The same pattern reproduced itself again in the Information Technology (IT) cohort of 2015 and 2016 at levels 2 and 3 respectively. For example, 74 students registered for IT in 2015 at NCV level 2 but the same group dropped to 29 when they moved to NCV level 3 in 2016. This implies that 39% of the students in the IT cohort managed to register at NCV level 3 in 2016 and 61% of the students who had registered failed to qualify or just decided to pull out of the education and training system at the TVET College under study. Such huge percentages of students who pull out of the education and training system can be explained as emanating from a lack of preparation of post-school education students face during their studies. For example, one of the IT student intimated that,

*The minimum requirements for admission in an IT programme is grade a grade 10 report, but it is quite shocking because IT requires a lot of thinking. It would be better if the minimum entry requirement for IT was a matric certificate with passes in Pure Maths and Physical Science (Ngosazana).*

A follow-up by the researcher on the 2017 cohort, a group that started its education and training programmes in 2015 showed that among the IT cohort the group had dropped from 74 students in 2015 to 8 students in 2017, representing a dropout rate of 91%. An E & D comparison of the 2015 enrolment also showed a similar pattern, with the 2017 group dropping from 94 students in 2015 to 22 students in 2017, representing a 77% dropout rate. With the FM cohort of 2017, only 5 students registered for the NCV level 4 programme out of 51 students who registered for the same programme in 2015, representing a dropout rate of 90%.

The pattern which prevailed in all three cohorts, that is NCV level 2 to level 4 in IT, E & D and FM prompted the researcher to find out why the number of students plummeted. One of the interview questions, which guided the researcher to find answers to this pattern, was; what are the reasons why students at NCV level 2 succeed in their education and training programmes? A response, which summarised why students at NCV level 2 succeed in their studies, was provided by an Education and Development student, who said,

*Students in the NCV level 2 year succeed because they enrol for programmes, which fit within the framework of the subjects, which they passed at matric level. For example, students who study for NCV programme in Education and Development are required to have passed English First Additional Language (EFAL) and most of those who enrol for Education and Development without EFAL have slimmer chances of passing the NCV, E & D programme (Ian).*

**Table 4: Percentage Difference between 2015 to 2017 enrolments**

<b>Programme</b>	<b>IT</b>	<b>E &amp; D</b>	<b>FM</b>
2015	74	95	51
2016	29	50	12
2017	8	22	5
Percentage enrolment rate (2015-2016)	39.%	53%	24%
Percentage Drop-out rate (2015-2016)	61%	47%	76%
Percentage enrolment rate (2015-2017)	11%	23%	10%
Percentage drop-out rate (2015-2017)	89%	77%	90%

An analysis of IT students in this study at both NCV level 2 and 3 shows that there is a higher number of male students who enrolled in 2015 than in 2016 and 2017 at the TVET College under study. Be that as it may, Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2011) note that it is important for future analyses and synthesis of empirical research to consider the unique experiences of women of colour because they have distinct experiences and face challenges resulting from a confluence of their racial backgrounds and gender, especially considering that women are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields (Hanson, 2004; National Science Board, 2002).

Despite the main thrust and focus of DHET, being to promote access, participation and success of students within students from low socio-economic sector there is a very low graduation rates among black South African students. Letseka and Maile (2008) note that South Africa' graduation rate of 15% is one of the lowest in the world. This is of particular concern given the shifts that have taken place in employment distribution and the critical shortage of high-level skills in the labour market (National Plan for Higher Education 2001). This implies that these factors are likely to act as major impediments to achieving the government's economic development goals (Letseka and Maile 2008).

#### **4.4 The influence of Student-related factors participation and success**

Having gone through academic and institutional factors, which influenced participation and success, the following section, is going to make an analysis of student-related factors, which influence successful participation of students in their academic programmes at a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The following student-related factors are going to be examined: the influence of socio-economic status on choice of institution, the role of NSFAS on facilitating participation and success, challenges associated with application for financial aid and suggested solutions for easing challenges associated with NSFAS application. Socio-cultural factor such as the proximity of the student's social environment to the TVET College was analysed because this factor proved to be a determining factor on the student's decision to study in a particular college. Due to financial challenges, many students would choose to pursue an inferior programme because pursuing a programme of choice without the necessary financial support would create more problems than solutions to the student. Other student-related factors that emerged during the data generation process are choice of subjects, career guidance, motivation, college attendance and preparation for post-school education.

#### 4.4.1 Choice of Institution

Socio-economic status of the majority of students proved to be a hindrance to students' participation and success in the TVET College under study. Most of the students who participated in this study indicated that their social and economic backgrounds had a huge negative impact on their choice of institutions to which to register. For example, many of the students said that they decided to register at the TVET College under study because it was nearer their homes. Although some of the TVET Colleges, far from their homes had education and training programmes which these students wanted to pursue, socio-economic factors such as unemployment and poverty in the family hindered these students from pursuing programmes of their choice. For instance, on the question, which required students to outline factors, which influence their decisions to study at the college a participant in the study, said,

*The main reason I chose this TVET College is that it is closer to my home. It saved me money for such things as accommodation, transport and food as I lived near the college (Ian).*

The other participant corroborated the above view by saying,

*I applied to other colleges but due to financial constraints, I ended up enrolling at this college because everything is subsidised. All you need to do is to attend lectures, do your assignments, and write your tests and examinations (Prumel).*

Another participant in the research indicated that she applied to a number of public and private colleges in KwaZulu-Natal but due to financial challenges, she ended up choosing the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal because of financial reasons. She said,

*The TVET College under study was my third choice. My first choice was one of the public colleges in Northern KwaZulu-Natal and another private college. I also dropped the private college because it requires cash up-front and it has no provision for bursaries (Ngosazana).*

From the responses obtained from respondents, it was apparent that socio-economic factors, such as the students' geographical location, had a huge role in determining students' decision to pursue their studies at the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. This is confirmed

by Bourdieu's (1977) concept of cultural capital cited in Dumais (2006) which accentuates that when students go to college, the cultural capital learned in the home environment helps the student to make institutional choices which will make it possible for students to participate successfully in their academic and vocational programmes. Letseka and Maile (2008) found that students consider more carefully economic factors in times of distress and financial difficulty that include job opportunities to supplement their incomes, transport, food and accommodation costs as well as family home proximity. This is corroborated by Callender (2000) who is of the opinion that institutional characteristics such as cost, size, distance, the quality of programs, and availability of financial aid cost commonly associated with a comprehensive college choice and student background characteristics are primary determinants of students' decisions to choose certain colleges to participate successfully in their college programmes. From the preceding theory and empirical studies it can be deduced that the decisions by students to choose the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal were dependent on students' proximity to the institution and availability of financial aid. Nearness to the institution of learning implied that the students would not incur extra costs in terms of transport, food and accommodation. The availability of student financial aid was also an enormous pull-factor for participants because it acted as a cushion for those students who were coming from low socio-economic backgrounds and who suffered from a lack of economic capital.

#### **4.4.2 The role of NSFAS on facilitating participation and success**

The other theme, which came up, was the role of the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) on students' participation and success rates in the TVET College. From the responses generated from the participants, it was apparent that NSFAS bursaries play a significant role in facilitating students' participation and success in tertiary institutions. For example, one of the participants in the research sample acknowledged that,

*The college gets sponsorship from NSFAS so students who cannot afford to pay their fees can apply for a bursary from NSFAS and be able to study without putting a strain on their family resources (Ian).*

One of the participants in the research sample indicated that because of economic challenges in his family, he could not apply in any tertiary institution, but the availability of NSFAS bursaries lessened the financial burden on his parents and he was able to apply for an

Information Technology qualification at the TVET College under study. He appreciated the role of NSFAS by saying,

*I finished my matric in 2012 but due to financial challenges in my family, I was not able to apply to any institution of higher learning although I had good matric passes. I was later advised by a neighbour to apply at this college because I would be able to access the NSFAS bursary, which will cover tuition, transport and accommodation costs (Prumel).*

Another participant showed that students sometimes apply at colleges that are convenient to their circumstances, especially family conditions that include social and economic situations highlighted the importance of NSFAS bursaries. When asked whether he applied to any of the colleges in KwaZulu-Natal province, he had this to say,

*No, I did not apply to any other college, this college was my first choice because it is near my home and it is easier to register than other colleges. In other colleges, you need to pay money for registration. In this college, we are provided with bursaries from NSFAS (Robert).*

The responses from participants revealed that NSFAS played a very important role in cushioning disadvantaged students from the vicissitudes and idiosyncrasies of a lack of economic capital. Bourdieu (1986) views economic capital as the foundation of all other forms of capital and treats all other types of capital as transformed, veiled forms of economic capital. Other forms of capital can be converted into economic capital, such as converting educational credentials into high paying professional position and economic capital can be used to other forms of capital, for example family income can be used to pay for school fees and tutoring services, leading to favourable educational outcomes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). In this study a lack of economic capital posed a greatest challenge to students who came from low socio-economic backgrounds because this lack of financial resources acted as a barrier for these students to access post-school education and training programmes of their choice. In the same vein, the primary data collected and analysed by Jones et al (2008) demonstrates that students from low socio-economic backgrounds face financial challenges due to their geographic, social and economic circumstances. Letseka and Maile (2008) suggest that another cause of students from low socio-economic backgrounds failing to access tertiary education is the relatively low levels of public funding for tertiary education, which translates into higher fees, effectively shutting out the poor and reducing the ability of

tertiary institutions to contribute to social and economic development. These challenges affect students' access to and continuation of their studies in terms of access and the application fees charged by higher education institutions, which may act as a barrier to many students of low socio-economic backgrounds by excluding them from applying to more than one institution. However, provision of funding to disadvantaged students may not be a panacea to the educational challenges confronting students from low socio-economic backgrounds because according to Wilson-Strydom (2015) where tertiary institutions increase access without improving chances of success may create new forms of injustice, while seeking to overcome old forms. Nevertheless, the decision by the democratic government of South Africa to provide loans through NSFAS was one of the excellent educational, economic and financial philosophy, which helped to open doors to previously vulnerable and disadvantaged students in the post-1994 political dispensation.

#### **4.4.3 Place of residence**

A crosscutting theme, which emerged during the data-generation process, was the interrelatedness of proximity to a tertiary institution, students' participation and success rates. Primary data collected during this study showed that there is a very strong positive relationship between students' place of residence and their participation and success rates. This implies that when the college is delimitating its catchment area for prospective students, distance should be factored in to avoid recruiting and registering students from far-flung areas as such decisions will have negative effects in students' successful participation in college programmes. When participants were asked about how they chose the college they applied to, the majority of them indicated that nearness of the college to their place of residence was an important consideration.

For example, one of the participants research sample said,

*It was difficult for me to apply to any of the colleges in KwaZulu-Natal because of the issue of distance. I depend on my grandmother's pension, which means it would be very difficult for me to study too far from home, so I had to choose this college because it is closer to my home. It saved me money for such needs as accommodation, transport and food as I lived near the college (Ngosazana).*

The issue of distance also surfaced from another participant who said,

*I applied to other colleges but due to transport costs, I ended up enrolling at this college, because I do not need to pay a lot of money for transport and besides, everything is subsidised. The other reason why I chose this college is that the college is so close to my home that I can even walk when I do not have money for transport (Zuzi).*

Another participant in this research also highlighted the advantage of studying at a college near one's home as follows,

*I chose this college because it is close to my home. This is an advantage to me because, as a single mother, I have to stay closer to my baby and she gets sick I will be able to give her the care she needs. If I had chosen a college, which is far from my home, I will also have problems in getting accommodation because I do not have any relatives staying in neighbouring towns (Zuzi).*

The data gleaned from the interviews showed that those students who reside near the college find it easy to participate successfully in their education and training programmes because they do not incur costs such as travelling, food and accommodation. Thus students' place of residence have an academic and social impact students' success because according to Rogosic and Baranovic (2016) differences in educational success can be attributed to different levels of existing social capital, which is produced in the networks and geographic location of students (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). For example, social capital supports educational success in the form of appropriate college climate and the values that motivate students to achieve higher goals (Acar, 2011). The student's development is strongly shaped by socio-geographical capital in the college, community and the family (Acar, 2011). According to Blom (2016), individuals living close to TVET Colleges arguably have lower commuting, relocation, or psychological costs. This relationship has motivated several authors to use college proximity as instruments for educational attainment. For example, Dickerson and McIntosh (2010) emphasise that although detailed travel time information and educational data is available, isolating the impact of geographical constraints is challenging because possible unobservable variables might affect both student performance and location of families and colleges. This means that students' place of residence can make or break the students' chances of participation and success in the TVET College under study. Students

who reside too far away from the college might suffer from travelling fatigue, which will lower their psychological and intellectual state of mind, a situation that will militate against their successful participation in educational and vocational programmes.

#### **4.4.4 Choice of career**

On the question, which required the participants to indicate whether the college under study was their first choice one of the students who participated in this study, said,

*No, my first choice was to study for a degree in Medicine at Nelson Mandela Medical School. I could not be accepted for this programme because I did not have Maths and Science subjects, a basic requirement for a degree in Medicine (Zuzi).*

One of the participants in this study highlighted the influence of choice of subjects on students' performance in their education and training programmes. He said,

*Most of the students have a background in Maths Literacy and when they choose to do IT, they are thrown into Pure Maths. That could be the reason why they fail NCV level 2 especially in IT. Besides, Pure Maths subjects such as Computer Programming and Systems Analysis are also very challenging (Robert).*

On the question, which required the participants to indicate whether the college under study was their first choice, a participant in this research had this to say,

*I tried to do my Financial Management programme in a TVET college in New Castle the problem was that FM curriculum in that TVET college had Pure Maths as a core subject instead of Maths Literacy, so I could not do Pure Maths since I had no background knowledge in the subject (Ngosazana).*

A synoptic analysis of prerequisite subjects for careers revealed that some of the students ended up pursuing career paths, which they did not want. Due to a lack of the cultural capital in terms of the prerequisite subjects, the students had no choice but to undertake careers which they had no intention of pursuing. Bourdieu (1984) frames such a situation as an arena of cultural conflict in which social inequalities are reproduced through the lack of different forms of capital both within and without the system. Bourdieu (1973) views this as the way

social class reproduces itself because the students' home environment did not provide opportunities for the cultivation requisite cultural capital, which helped students to pursue career paths of their choice. When students go to college, the availability cultural capital learned at home helps the students to succeed in their academic programmes (Dumais, 2006) because family, plays a crucial role in shaping the educational trajectories of students through the transmission of economic, social, symbolic and cultural resources (Cheng, 2012). Olsen and Fuller (2008) suggest that the college must actively support parental involvement in tangible ways but firstly educators must mediate the barriers to home-college collaboration then take a proactive stance in helping families to become major participants in their children's education. The core reason why the majority of the participants emphasised the problem of Pure Maths is that they lack encouragement from parents from an early age. Parental involvement may include such activities as motivating their children to study hard at the college, encouraging them to do their assignments on time, and providing coaching and mentoring services to help their children improve their learning in different subjects. Parental involvement is associated with children's higher achievements in language, mathematics, and enrolment in more challenging programmes (Henderson and Mapp, 2009). Thus, parents can play a gigantic mediating, mentoring and coaching role in terms of advising their children on which career paths to pursue and recommending a set of prerequisite subjects, which will allow their children to pursue careers of their dreams.

#### **4.4.5 The influence of motivation on participation and success**

The issue of self-motivation also surfaced during the data generation process. Most of the participants strongly believed that a sense of the will to succeed could serve as an inspiration to study hard. For example, one participant said,

*Students pass because of open-mindedness. They know what they want in life, they fight even when their personal circumstances are bad. The other thing is because of the background of the students, they are motivated by role models in their neighbourhood to work hard and succeed in life (Dinesh).*

Another participant corroborated the above view as stated below,

*Some students come from poor backgrounds and they know what they want in life. By studying hard, they are able to escape from the hardships, which*

*they experienced as they were growing up. Some are inspired by their parents who provide a home environment that is equipped with reading materials (Ngosazana).*

Another participant was also of the view that external motivation on the part of the students could be the reason why students do well in their education and training programmes. He said,

*Some friends who studied at this TVET College informed me that if I study for an NCV qualification, I will be at the same time upgrade my Matric results and I will be able to apply to study at university (Ian).*

The prevalence or a lack of motivational situations in the technical, vocational, educational and training milieu can be explained by using Bourdieu's (1977) concept of habitus. Bourdieu (1977) explains the term habitus as the personal dispositions and attitudes, which students have towards schooling, which implies that a negative disposition towards school, ultimately affects educational achievement and attainment. Bourdieu (1984) views habitus as a rigid concept, however, other scholars suggest that habitus can change based on an individual's ever-changing collections of interactions and experiences (Reay, 2004; Horvat and Davis, 2011). Gaddis (2013) suggests that if students have positive personal dispositions towards college work; this can be an important mediator between cultural capital and academic outcomes. In a similar study in England, Mullins (2005) found that the reward and punishment levelled at learners in the past would affect their motivation and attitude towards learning in the present. The expectations of others and the climate which surround learners will determine their readiness to learn, which will in turn result in learners performing successfully academically (Ibid). In the same vein a negative attitude towards learning could result in learners performing poorly preventing them from obtaining required results for university entrance (Mullin, 2005). This means that the issue of motivation should be viewed with a different set of lenses, lenses, which interrogate the role of holistic models of inspiration, and motivation, which involves both the home environment as well as the college setting. In this vein the home and the TVET College under study should design, develop, implement and evaluate synergistic models of motivation which provide the impetus and energy in TVET College students so that there is a minimum lack of self-drive on the part of the enrolled students.

#### **4.4.6 The correlation of college attendance and academic achievement**

Another issue, which came up during the interviews, was the relationship of college attendance and academic achievement. The participants who were interviewed strongly believed that college attendance plays a significant role in ensuring that students do well in their studies. When asked why students at NCV level 2 performed badly in their studies was of the view that,

*Students are not serious, they take level 2 to be easy and then they do not attend lectures, and they do not study, when they are given an opportunity to attend during weekends and June holidays they do not even come. However, students who study hard, attend classes always do well in their examinations (Prumel).*

The above view was also supported by another participant, Robert, who was of the opinion that NCV level 2 students do not perform well in their studies specifically because of attendance and generally because of other issues which include a lack of self-discipline. He said,

*Some students do not adjust and adapt to college academic life. They think that they are still in high school where they are spoon-fed by their teachers. They do not know that at college no one tells you to come to class, as a result they only come to class when they feel like, which cause them to fail at the end of the year (Robert).*

The above views were also accentuated by another participant in the study who was of the view that,

*Students fail because they do not attend classes. When they came to the college, they knew what they wanted to study but when they met friends, they were influenced not to study and attend classes. As a result, they failed or dropped out of the college. (Zuzi).*

Consistent levels of attendance in the TVET College under study is of paramount importance because most of the work done on cultural capital emphasized the participation of high-class cultural activities such as museum attendance, going to art classes, reading and listening to classical music (Dimaggio and Mohr, 1985, Dumais, 2002; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004).

While Bourdieu (1973) implied that these cultural values are passed on early in the child's life, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) found that if learners participated in these cultural practices at the teenage stage of development, chances of performing better in academic work will be higher. Research on the subject of class attendance seems to provide a consensus that students who participate in high-class cultural activities are unlikely to miss class (Devados and Foltz, 2006, Durden, and Ellis, 2005, Park and Kerr, 2009, Schmidt, 2013). Based on these findings a number of stakeholders have advocated for mandatory class attendance (Mlambo, 2011). The inability of these cross-sectional studies to isolate attendance from a myriad of confounding student characteristics, for example, levels of motivation, intelligence, prior learning and time management skills, is a major limiting factor to the utility of these findings (Rodgers and Rodgers, 2013). A study conducted by Ali, Jusoff, Mokhtar and Salamat (2009) also shows that attending lectures plays an important role in improving students' academic performance. They found that students who avail themselves in lecture theatres regularly obtained greater symbols in comparison to those who did not attend lectures (Ali et al, 2009). Consistent with these results, Moore (2006) found out that students who did not attend lectures were likely to answer questions incorrectly to concepts taught during their absence. With particular reference to these research results students in TVET Colleges should be encouraged to attend all lectures since attendance and punctuality have a positive relationship with academic success.

#### **4.5 Academic factors influencing participation and success in the TVET College**

An analysis of academic factors which influenced academic performance of especially NCV level 2 students at the TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal were found to include language of instruction, the pedagogical approaches the relationship between the student and the lecturer, under-preparedness of students for the NCV curriculum, assessment approaches and academic support programmes. The above academic factors were found to have a significant influence on TVET students' participation and success rates in the various academic, technical, training and education programmes in the public college under study.

##### **4.5.1 The under-preparedness of students for the NCV curriculum**

The poor academic performance by NCV level 2 students was interpreted as emanating from students' under-preparedness for the NCV curriculum. For example, one respondent was of the view that many students are under-prepared for the Information Technology curriculum. He had this to say,

*Most of the students have a background in Mathematics Literacy and when they enrol for an Information Technology (IT) programme, they are thrown into Pure Mathematics. That could be the reason why they fail NCV level 2, especially in IT. Besides, IT subjects such as Computer Programming and Systems Analysis are also challenging. (Ngosazana)*

The above sentiments were also echoed by another IT student who said,

*Maths is quite heavy and it drags me down. It is better if the IT curriculum focuses on computer subjects. I always ask myself why we should concentrate on Pure Maths when it does not contribute to the development of computer knowledge (Prumel).*

Another female IT student concurred with the above view. She had this to say,

*Information Technology students who have a good background in Pure Mathematics in high school and who also have access to computers at the college and at home have greater chances of doing well in their studies (Zuzi).*

The findings with special reference to the level of preparedness of students to the NCV curriculum indicated that there was a lack of synergy between what students intended study at the TVET College and the required subjects at high school level. This can be interpreted because of students' lack of the relevant capital in terms cultural, economic, social and symbolic capital. This absence of these forms of capital could be the reason behind the students failing to cope with the NCV curriculum. This is in line with Bourdieu (1986) who accentuates that disadvantaged students are less successful, not because they were of inferior intelligence, but because the curriculum was biased in favour of those things with, which middle-class students were already familiar. Thomas et al (2012) also argue that the under-preparedness of first year students in TVET colleges should not be viewed as simply a deficit that students bring into the lecture rooms; TVET colleges are equally unprepared for the demands of their diversified student populations. It is, therefore, important for the TVET college leadership and management to come up with a cocktail of approaches that will mitigate the negative effects of students' under-preparedness for the TVET curriculum. One way of addressing these issues is to have bridging courses in fundamental subjects such as Mathematics, Mathematics Literacy and English First Additional Language.

#### 4.5.2 The language of instruction and academic outcomes

The issue of language has been widely viewed by respondents who participated in this research as one of the most limiting factor in enhancing student participation and success. The participants conceded that language could be a barrier to learning if a student has poor reading and writing skills in the subject of tuition. For example, one of the participants in this research attributed her poor performance in other subjects of the curriculum as emanating from her poor reading and writing skills in English. She said,

*I had a big challenge in Psychology of Education and English. English was a big challenge because it is not my mother language. I also had problems in understanding Psychology of Education concepts, theories and principles because of my poor English language skills. I could have done better in Psychology of Education if I understood English very well (Ian).*

Another participant, who indicated during the interview that he uses Afrikaans, English and IsiZulu at home emphasised that his reading and writing skills in English are not very good although he is fully conversant in Afrikaans, English and IsiZulu. He had this to say,

*The barriers I experienced are in terms of understanding some concepts that are mainly explained in English. To overcome this barrier I asked my other classmates to explain some of the concepts in IsiZulu. Although I speak Afrikaans, English and IsiZulu, my English in the classroom has some gaps, which I need to work on (Robert).*

The other student who participated in this study also strongly believed that the English language could limit how students can understand, especially, if the student is a second-language speaker of English. She said,

*The barriers I experienced are in terms of understanding some of the concepts which are mainly explained in English, maybe, because I speak English as a second language. To overcome this barrier I asked my friends to explain the concepts in IsiZulu so that I would have a better understanding of the ideas of the topic (Ngosazana).*

In research, language as a form of cultural capital, which should be cultivated in the home environment, proved to be a barrier to the students' successful participation in technical,

vocational, educational and training programmes in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu\_Natal. Wright (2015) argues that it should be recognised that deep rural speakers in particular do not always want their languages modernised or interfered with: these languages carry traditions, values and sonorities of significant cultural importance, so that many rural speakers would prefer them to be respected and preserved just as they are. This is emphasised by Lareau and Weininger (2003) who note that the theory of cultural capital has enabled researchers to view language as a resource, that is, one that provides access to scarce resources, is subject to monopolisation, and under certain conditions, may be transmitted from one generation to the next. Jones et al (2008) also highlight the importance of English as a language of instruction by asserting that disadvantaged students who struggle to express themselves in English find it more difficult to be assertive, such as in the face of institutional bureaucracy around registration or programme selection. Language competence not only makes it easier for students to understand abstract concepts, but also increases a student's confidence to engage in more complex conceptual theorising (Wickham 1999 cited in Jones et al 2008). This implies that a substantial number of students may be under-achieving because they are struggling with language issues. A female academic development staff member who participated in the Jones et al (2008) report noted that English is not a first language for most students and so they are "automatically disadvantaged because their first language is not recognised in the classroom interaction, so it is not being used as a resource in classroom discussion or group activities". The academic development staff member also observed, "different languages can be used as strengths". She concluded by saying, "That is one example of how students are disadvantaged, not only because of what they are perceived not to have, but what they do have is not seen as valued". Thomas et al (2012) have consistently argued that this sort of institutional hegemony should be addressed by adapting post-school education and training curricula to meet the emerging needs of new kind of students. This means that a starting point would be to align the post-school education and training curricula with the students' needs, review successful foundation programmes, and incorporate the key elements into the mainstream curricula. Thus in this study students who possessed a competitive level of language proficiency may have found it easier to make sense of what was learnt in the technical education and training system, whereas those with poor linguistic competencies may have struggled to adapt to the rigors of academic and technical gymnastics. The emerging crosscutting theme from participants seems to suggest that the issue of English as a language of instruction poses the greatest challenge to students who speak it as a second language. It is pertinent that the department of higher education and

training promulgate policy frameworks, which take cognisance of students' socio-economic background, and their inability to grasp concepts elaborated in the English Language. This is important because the majority of students in TVET Colleges hail from vulnerable linguistic, economic and social backgrounds, therefore, it stands to reason that the language of instruction is factored into the curriculum implementation strategy of the TVET College.

#### **4.5.3 Academic support programmes in the TVET College**

The other theme, which emerged during the interview sessions, is that of academic support. The majority of students acknowledged the existence of academic support programmes in the college. These are tutorial programmes, which are facilitated by fellow students to ameliorate barriers experienced by students during conventional face-to-face instruction by lecturers. In the TVET College under study, the institution has set up extra-classes in Maths, Maths Literacy and English after realising that students struggle with these fundamental subjects. The purpose for including these extra-classes was to iron out any learning difficulties experienced by NCV students in Maths, Maths Literacy and English. For example, one of the participants in this research explained,

*We have Saturday and winter classes, which help us to achieve success because we are taught by Peer Tutors who in some cases explain concepts in the mother tongue. This helps us to understand concepts better than when lecturers use English, a language which most of us are unfamiliar with (Ian).*

This view was corroborated by another participant who said,

*Yes, the college provides weekend classes and these are good because you are taught by other students, so you are free to ask questions, however not many students attend these weekend classes (Robert).*

One of the participants in this research also weighed in and said,

*We have Saturday classes where we attend for at least two hours and they are quite helpful because we are teaching each other as students. The lecturer will be acting as a facilitator and most of the teaching will be done by students who are referred to as Peer Tutors (Ngosazana).*

Another participant had an almost similar view but differed in that he bemoaned the absence of academic support in other areas of the curriculum. He had this to say,

*Yes, the college provides Peer Tutors to help students who face challenges in English, IT, Accounting, Maths and maths Literacy. It would be better if this support is given in all subjects, because I have a problem with understanding Education and Development topics such as The Hormonal System, The Nervous System and Special Needs Education. It would be better if we are given extra-academic support in these areas (Ian).*

Academic support programmes in the TVET College has been viewed as an important component of the education and training in the college. The absence of this academic support programme could be the reason why a sizable section of the students at NCV level 2 is performing below average. This lack of academic support may be a source of continuous process of the reproduction of educational inequalities in the TVET College because according to Bourdieu (1984) education plays an important role in aiding the reproduction of social inequality and social exclusion. Tzanakis (2011) who assumes that a central importance in the process of social reproduction is because inequalities in cultural capital reflect inequalities in social class corroborate this. Maimane (2016) has consistently highlighted the view that academic support and development should be provided by tertiary institutions to address issues around student retention, progression and success. Thomas et al (2012) recommend that institutional outreach systems should be put in place to develop students' academic skills and promote institutional engagement and that diagnostic approaches based on tracking and monitoring data to inform the provision of learning support be adopted to cater for the disadvantaged student. Thomas et al (2012) emphasise the importance of personal tutors, who take on a structured and pro-active role in supporting students academically. In the Maimane (2016)'s study various forms of academic support were associated with peers or mentors at the institutions and students who were able to make use of such assistance reported being able to cope better. Peer support was found to be effective as students could relate to them more easily. This implies that any academic support programme in the TVET College should carefully unpack issues, which negatively influence the disadvantaged sections of the student population and set in motion processes, which will mitigate the negative impact of participation and success in the TVET College.

#### **4.5.4 The influence of educational resources on participation and success**

On the question, which required participants to outline the nature of resources provided by the college, the majority of the responses were in the affirmative, that is, participants were happy with the level of support they received from the college leadership and management.

One of the participants in this study was of the opinion that,

*We are provided with textbooks, calculators, dictionaries and computers. Access to the internet should be improved since at the moment we do not have full access to the internet to do research in subjects such as Economics, New Venture Creation and Financial Management (Ian).*

Another participant, Robert, also corroborated the above observations by saying,

*In Accounting and Financial Management, lecturers were given Overhead Projectors (OHPs) so that it will be easy for them to explain accounting principles clearly to students. The students can see all the calculations projected on the board and we can also ask questions where we do not understand. Computers for Life Orientation help us to access the internet and calculators are useful for Accounting, Maths and Maths literacy. Textbooks and dictionaries are useful in all subjects including English First Additional Language (EFAL) (Robert).*

A participant in the research sample for this study also weighed in by saying,

*The resources provided by the college are calculators, computers and books. Of late, the college also free WI-FI, which helps us to access information from the internet without buying data bundles. These resources are important because most of us come from poor families so we do not have the financial resources to buy the resources (Ngosazana).*

The provision of the necessary and sufficient resources by the leadership and management of the TVET College under study showed a commitment to ensuring that college programmes are not stalled because of a lack of resources. While the provision of learning materials such as books, and ancillary tools such as calculators, computers and dictionaries was satisfactory some of the students decried a dire under-provision of internet facilities in the college. It can be argued that the non-provision of internet facilities can have ripple effects on students'

participant and success in their training and education programmes. The fact that the college leadership is providing students with the necessary resources is quite an encouraging scenario, which has the potential to increase levels of participation and success in the college.

Resources such as books, calculators, computers and dictionaries are very important in ensuring that technical vocational education and training programmes in the college are accomplished. However, my experience as an educator in the TVET has shown that the provision of resources in the college is inadequate because sometimes some students spend the whole academic year without textbooks, which compromise the quality of learning in their academic programmes. Access to the internet is one other aspect of resource allocation, which is a challenge to the majority of the students. Although the college has installed WIFI around the college, access to the internet remains one of the greatest challenges in the college under study because students need to download information from a computer and print it out. However, when they access information from their cell phones it is very difficult to print the information from their cell phones because these cell phones are not connected to printers. One of the resources that has been highlighted by participants in this research is the provision of a library. The absence of a library creates a situation where students find it extremely difficult to research their assignments and ISAT projects, and this scenario leads to students performing poorly in their technical, vocational, education and training programmes. The only library that students in the TVET college can use is one that is provided by the municipality; however, the reading materials in this municipality library are not tailor-made to meet the academic needs of students pursuing their studies in the TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

On the question, which expected participants to outline how they used these resources the majority of the participants, expressed satisfaction on how these resources helped them to do their work without facing challenges, which would militate against successful completion of assessment tasks. One of the participants said,

*Yes, we have used the resources available in the college but I think the college should provide us with Ipads so that we are able to practice some of the work we are given during lectures, for example, Pastel Accounting (Prumel).*

The other participant also expressed satisfaction in the resources offered by the college but decried the quality and quantity of information in textbooks as well as from the internet. She said,

*Yes, I have used textbooks and computers to do research for my assignments, calculators for solving Maths problems. But sometimes the information in the textbooks is not enough. You find that you are doing an assignment but the information in the textbook does not help you at all. With the internet from the computers sometimes the information is too much and confusing (Zuzi).*

The other participant answered the above question in more or less the same fashion but this participant was not happy about the absence of a library in the college. He had this to say,

*Yes, I have used the textbooks and computers to research on my assignments and ISAT, dictionaries to find meanings of new words, especially in English improvement, but there need for the college to build a library to help us do extra research because sometimes the information in the textbooks is not enough (Dinesh).*

The above responses from the participants confirm that they are issues which the college leadership and management is doing very well especially in terms of providing the necessary resources, but they are also areas where the leadership should evaluate with a view to establish the importance of such areas so that issues of student participation and success are enhanced effectively. In this vein, the college leadership should put in place processes and structures, which help students to make sense of the huge volumes of information from the internet. Encouraging lecturers to help students to summarise such huge volumes of information can do this. On the issue of sufficient information in textbooks, the leadership of the college should encourage lecturers to use a variety of textbooks because from the researcher's experience at the college, most of the lecturers use just one prescribed textbook per subject. This does not bode well in situations where students are required to go through assessments, which cater for different levels of Bloom's Taxonomy (1953), that is, from the knowledge, level, through to comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis to evaluation.

To explain educational outcomes Bourdieu (1973) specifies four generic types of capital: cultural capital, social capital, economic capital and symbolic capital. Bourdieu (1973) coined

the term cultural capital to describe the different tastes and habits of specific social classes, demonstrating how those characteristics reinforce power relationships between those who possess desirable cultural attributes and the institutions that reinforce them (Bourdieu, 1973; 1977; 1983). Bourdieu (1973) defined cultural capital as instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed. This wealth appears to belong to the whole society, accessible to all based on individual ability and effort, but social origins determine its appropriation. Thus, in this study participants who took part in this research might find it very challenging to access the different forms of capital due their socio-cultural and economic circumstances. Jones et al (2008) has consistently argued that viewing disadvantaged students as being under-prepared for tertiary education in certain respects is elitist and unhelpful, and that preparedness for tertiary education institutions should be considered. A study by Freeth and Ngidi (2006) found that although the institution had certain mechanisms and programmes in place to assist disadvantaged students, the more fundamental institutional transformation was necessary in order to meet the needs of these students. This implies that the college should transform itself, move away from a traditional way of doing things and move towards a model that help students to learn as well as developing critical thinking in students. The probable reason why students complain that textbooks do not sufficient information could be that these students have not been equipped with critical thinking skills and problem solving approaches which are capable of going beyond the textbook knowledge. The college leadership should wake up to this reality, if graduates from the TVET college system can contribute meaningfully to the socio-economic development of South Africa. The college leadership can also transform the way curriculum is implemented in the TVET College by providing library services because currently there is no functioning library in the college under study. Library services are important because they help students to study independently, and therefore, develop critical and problem-solving skills, which are essential to operate in a competitive global economy.

#### **4.5.5 The interaction between assessment approaches and academic achievement**

On the question, which required students to identify the different assessment methods which college used to evaluate the students' work the majority agreed that the college uses class tests, assignments, examinations, practical projects such as Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks. (ISAT). Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks are student-centred research projects where students are required to carry out research with the guidance of the lecturer. While the lecturer plays a facilitating role, most of the work, including the process and the product of

the ISAT project is entirely responsibility of the students. One the participants in this project was of the perception that,

*Most of the assessments in my subjects are through written tests, assignments, examinations, ISAT as well as oral presentations (Robert).*

Another participant commented of the assessment methods as follows:

*We are assessed on a term-by-term basis through tests, and assignments, and over and above that, we have a summative assessment in the form of a research project called an ISAT, which tests on what we know and apply what we have learnt in a research-based project (Dinesh).*

Another participant responded in more or less the same way as the above participants. The only slight difference is that she added work-place experience as part of assessment. She said,

*We are assessed in through tests, assignments, examinations and volunteer programmes. (Zuzi).*

One issue, which is of great concern to academic staff at the TVET College under study, is that the majority of students struggle to secure openings to practice the skills due to a lack of social capital (Burke, 2012). Burke (2012) also notes that although we have largely moved from a bottleneck system to a mass post-school education system in many countries, those benefitting the most from policies aimed at expanded tertiary education are those with relative social, economic and cultural capital. One component of the assessment regime highlighted in the three responses above is the volunteer programme, which is commonly referred to as in-service training. In-service training is an important component of all the assessment methods outlined because it enables students to bring to the fore common ground between theory learnt in the classroom and the practical application of the theoretical knowledge and principles learnt during face-to-face classroom interaction with the educator and other students. Blom (2016) emphasise the fact that many qualifications require students to complete a period of in-service training before they can graduate. This in-service or industrial attachment was found to be most successful when the programme was structured, where there were formal institutional structures to assist students find suitable placement and where there were clear agreements between the institution, the organisation hosting the student and the student (Blom, 2016). The researcher is of the opinion that the leadership and management of the TVET College should market its programmes to private and public

organisations in KwaZulu-Natal province with a view to develop win-win relationships with business organisations which will assist the students in securing the much-needed work experience.

#### **4.5.6 Students' perception of assessment approaches used in the TVET College**

Having gone through participants' responses regarding the different assessment approaches used in the TVET College under study, the researcher tried to glean through responses that indicated the impact of these approaches on students' academic achievement. The responses showed that, overall participants were happy in the way they were assessed. For example, one of the participants was of the view that,

*I felt happy in the way I was assessed because projects gave me a sense of the workplace, experience of what the workplace is like. Tests and assignments helped me to see where I was lacking as a student. The ISAT helped me because it gave me an opportunity to interview a bank official at a local bank. The interview included things like how to make a credit card. I was also shown how to upload names of clients on a database. As a financial management student, I benefitted a lot (Robert).*

The other participant also expressed satisfaction on the way students at the TVET college are assessed. To show her gratification on the assessment methods used at the college she said,

*I am happy in the way they our lecturers have been testing us. We are tested on a continuous basis through practical and theoretical assignments. This helps us to be able to see the relationship between theoretical knowledge and practical skills that are important in our curriculum. Continuous assessment also helped me to prepare for our year-end examinations (Ngosazana).*

However, the other participants were sceptical in the way they were assessed because according to one of the participants his main problem was,

*The ISAT because I did not do it well. It is a self-activity, which requires individual effort and creativity. The other challenge with ISAT was that as a student I needed more time not only to research about my college but other organisations too (Dinesh).*

The other participant, also weighed in and said,

*Some question papers are difficult to understand which made me battle to answer the questions on my own. Some question papers come with mistakes and it is difficult to get the correct answer when the question itself is not correctly written. On ISAT we are required to go to companies to get information but it is difficult to get this information because companies say some information is private and confidential, and therefore, not for public consumption (Ian).*

Assessment is one pinnacle of education and training in any post-school establishment, however, Bourdieu (1977) suggests that the education system should do away with giving explicitly to everyone what it implicitly demands of everyone alike. This consists of academic, linguistic and cultural competence and that relationship with culture that can only be produced by family upbringing when it transmits the dominant culture. Tinto (2008) is also of the view that students need to have a clear idea of what is expected of them academically, especially in terms of being able to understand examination questions and how to answer them as well as understanding the requirements of assignments. As reported by Mlambo (2011) students themselves frequently raised the issue of struggling to understand examination questions and of obtaining poor marks as a result. This point also speaks to the necessity for lecturers to provide adequate explanations and guidelines by simplifying the subject matter and cushion students from intellectual violence, which is a common phenomenon in the contemporary teaching and learning situation.

#### **4.5.7 The nexus between ISAT and academic achievement**

The issue of Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks (ISAT) featured in most of the responses elicited from participants who took part in the semi-structured interviews. While ISAT is an integral part of students' assessment at all TVET Colleges in South Africa, the researcher observed that ISATs pose the greatest challenge to students, as illustrated by the following highlights from participants. On the question that required participants to identify any barriers to learning which they experienced, one of the participants had this to say,

*Yes, especially during ISAT, we are required to go to banks and most of the time the bank officials are busy and not in a position to help us. Sometimes we are supposed to interview bank officials but we fail to do so, so we end*

*up creating answers on our own, this leads us to get low marks for ISAT projects (Zuzi).*

On the question that required participants to outline how they dealt with the issue of the ISAT another participant said,

*I ended up going to small shops just to get a stamp, proof that I had done my ISAT in a business organisation (Prumel).*

When asked about how he felt about the way he was assessed, one of the participants in the research sample had this to say,

*I am not comfortable with ISAT because it involves a lot of research that requires the use of the internet, the college WI-FI is not working properly so we will be forced to use our own data bundles (Dinesh).*

Participants have viewed ISAT as an area of academic conflict between students and lecturers because students feel that lecturers do not provide the guidance at the required depth, breadth and intensity. Bourdieu (1984) opines that education is an arena of cultural conflict in which social inequalities are reproduced through the different forms of capital both within and outside the system. This is a mammoth task for TVET students who lack the social capital, which according to Bourdieu (1987) is the aggregate of possible resources that are interconnected with ownership of a long-lasting system of more or less established interactions of reciprocal colleagues and acknowledgements. A study by Freeth and Ngidi (2006) found out that although the institution had certain mechanisms and programmes in place to assist disadvantaged students, the more fundamental institutional transformation was necessary in order to genuinely meet the needs of these students. This suggests that a lack of social capital among the TVET students who are predominantly lower class can be a major cause of having to struggle to find officials in business who can assist them with their ISAT projects. This denotes that institutions should transform and assist students with their ISATs by networking with different organisations, marketing the different programmes the institution offers and creating positive relationships with private and public organisations that will enhance students' chances of being accommodated by these organisations when they are undertaking their ISAT projects.

#### 4.5.8 The influence of pedagogical approaches on academic achievement

One other outstanding theme, which came out very prominently, was the issue of pedagogical approaches used by educators during face-to-face learning situations. The responses elicited by the researcher showed that those lecturers who used teaching methods which were student-centred enhanced learning and consequently students did very well, but those who did not explain concepts well had a negative effect on the students, which resulted in students performing poorly in some of the subjects. For example, one of the participants in this research project said,

*I achieved success in six subjects and failed one subject. I think I failed the one subject because the lecturer does not explain concepts well. In fact, I don't understand the lecturer at all (Prumel).*

The other participant in this study also expressed the importance of constant engagement with his studies, classmates and the lecturers as the methods, which enhanced success in his studies. He said,

*I practice a lot and I experienced a lot of a change in the way I perform in Pure Maths. I make it a point to practise every day so as to improve my marks. I also participate in-group activities with classmates so that I can learn from my colleagues. I have also found out that consulting my lecturer where I do not understand helps in a very big way (Ian).*

One of the participants in this research study came up with a response, which is related to the above participants. He had this to say,

*Yes, I passed because I always put more effort in my studies and I am always keen to be the best. I participate in-group activities and this has helped me to achieve success. I have my personal study timetable, which I use even when I am at home (Dinesh).*

The reproduction of inequalities is facilitated in colleges where lecturers' pedagogic actions promote cultural capital of the dominant class by rewarding students who possess such capital and penalising others who do not. Thus, the college becomes a central agent of social exclusion and reproduction of educational inequalities. Differences in educational success can also be attributed to different levels of existing social capital, which is produced in the

networks and connections of families that the college serves (Rogosic and Baranovic, 2016). For example, social capital supports educational success in the form of appropriate college climate and the values that motivate students to achieve higher goals (Acar, 2011). The student's development is strongly shaped by social capital in the college, community and the family (Acar, 2011). Other authorities are of the view that social capital positively affects educational achievement and, consequently students' behaviour and development: it reduces drop-out rates and increases graduation rates (Israel, Beaulieu and Hartless, 2001) and college enrolment (Yan, 1999), as well as positively affecting achievements in tests (Sun, 1999). Empirical studies by Steyn (2014) indicate that tutorial support is the most obvious form of additional support for students who may be struggling to keep up because students learn most of the subject disciplines in smaller groups. Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba (2011) observed that Chinese Americans succeeded in mathematics at much higher rates than their Black peers did because they studied in groups, which led to the integration of those students' academic and social lives, more time spend studying and increased peer support. It is, therefore, important to create a tutorial support programme designed to foster success among students from all races through cultivation of communities of learning modelled after the Chinese American peer group (Fullilove and Treisman 1990) cited in Museus, Palmer, Davis and Maramba 2011). It is, therefore, important for the college leadership to ensure that lecturers are provided with coaching and mentoring packages so that they reinvigorate their teaching methods, a process that will have a positive impact in all education and training programmes in the college.

#### **4.5.9 The influence of lecturer-student relationship on academic achievement**

Responses obtained from participants showed that the issue of lecturer-student relationship could have negative or positive influences on students' academic achievement. Some of the responses from participants indicated that their relationships with their lecturers were sound, warm and very harmonious while on the other hand other participants showed that their relationships with their lecturers were very unfriendly. For example, one of the participants, had this to say,

*I describe my relationship with my some of my lecturers as unhealthy. I am of the opinion that lecturers should be more accepting, for example, if I cannot submit an assignment on the due date, accept it on the next day. The other problem I face with most of my lecturers is that of communication.*

*They teach in a language I do not understand, for example, I only speak English and Afrikaans but in the classroom, I am taught in IsiZulu, a language I do not understand (Ian).*

However, the other participant had a positive view of his relationship with his lecturers. He said,

*I have a very good relationship with my lecturers and this relationship has helped me to feel free to ask questions when I encounter learning problems. If I perform badly in a particular subject the lecturer usually asks me what the problem is and also provide me with tips on how to do better in the subject (Prumel).*

The other participant had both a negative and positive view of her relationship with her lecturers. She expressed both negative and positive emotions by saying,

*I feel comfortable with some lecturers and uncomfortable with others. We are almost like friends with some lecturers. When I don't understand something, my lecturers explain it in a friendly way and I feel that my lecturers are like family to me. However, with other lecturers I feel unwanted because when they hate you they will show you that they don't like you at all and these types of lecturers have self-pride so much that I don't feel free to ask questions (Zuzi).*

Despite a number of research papers in the past few year using Bourdieu's (1977, 1984) concept of capital to explain educational inequalities, researchers have moved away from the less understood but critically important concept of field (Gaddis, 2013). Students maximize their positions by accumulating and using four types of capital and the value of capital is specific to the field within which individuals compete and manoeuvre (Bourdieu, 1984; 1990). Field is the term, which symbolises the struggle-within-a-struggle and competition within different social spheres (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It can be conceived as the structured spaces that are organised around specific types of capital or combinations of capital (Swarz, 1997). Therefore, the concept of field is important in understanding student academic outcomes in the TVET College under study because according to Gallagher (2013) positive lecturer-student relationships enable students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and provide scaffolding for important academic skills. Thus, a lack of positive

lecturer-student field may create conditions, which do not promote the development of academic skills in students, which can also have a huge negative impact on academic achievements at high school as well as tertiary level. Teachers who support students in the learning environment can positively affect their academic outcomes, which is important for the long-term trajectory of school and eventually employment (Baker, Grant and Morlock, 2008; O’connor, Dearing, and Collins, 2011; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong and Essex (2005). This means that lecturers should made aware of their actions on students’ ability to grasp concepts, make the most out their interaction with students. This interaction is important because it enables students to take advantage of those little incidents of contact to grasp, make sense of what they learn and learn from the best. Thus, lecturers should develop, design and provide a teaching environment, which will facilitate participation and success in the technical, vocational, education and training context.

#### **4.6 Institutional factors, which influence academic success in the TVET College**

An analysis of the semi-structured interviews responses showed that institutional factors such as the administration of the registration process, NSFAS application, management of extra-curricular activities and strategies for dealing with student protests all have a bearing on the chances of students participating successfully in their academic programmes in the college.

##### **4.6.1 The relationship between the registration process and student participation**

The majority of participants who took part in the research expressed dissatisfaction in the way the registration process is conducted at the college. The participants decried the way queues are managed as well as the level unprofessionalism by some members of staff. One the participants, Dinesh summarised the registration process as follows,

*Getting into the college was difficult because there were so many requirements and there was no one to help me. There were also forms to be filled and no one to show me how to fill those forms. There should be a group of lecturers responsible for helping new students to fill application forms (Dinesh).*

Another participant, Prumel also expressed the same sentiments, although he was most dissatisfied with the process of applying for NSFAS. He had this to say,

*Gaining access into the college was very difficult since there was a lot of paperwork that accompanied my application for admission into the college. For example, application for tuition, transport and accommodation required a lot of supporting documentation to prove that my parents were not in a position to fund my studies from their pockets (Prumel).*

The other participant on this very same theme was of the opinion that being admitted into the college but the process of registration and application for financial aid posed the greatest challenge. He said,

*Getting the place to study was very easy but getting a bursary was difficult. For example, when you are filling in the bursary forms nobody tells you how it should be filled but when you make a mistake, they correct that particular mistake, and instruct you to re-join the queue. If you make a second mistake, they correct that mistake and you are again make to join the line. The process can take as long as two weeks to complete and it's frustrating (Robert).*

Another in the research participant was not happy about the process of registration, and she expressed her dissatisfaction almost in the same fashion as the above participant. She said,

*It was not easy to register for this programme in this college. It took like three weeks to complete the whole registration process. The application forms were completed and we were not assisted in filling in the forms (Ngosazana).*

Another participant, Zuzi, explained the frustrations she experienced more succinctly by saying,

*Everything sailed smoothly but problems started when I got to the desk where I was supposed to apply for a bursary. The bursary application form was long and I was made to make corrections over and over again. They corrected one mistake at a time and each time I would be instructed to join the queue. The college needs to be more lenient especially on the filling of the bursary form. It's better to tell us what needs to be done before we make a lot of mistakes (Zuzi).*

One of the challenges, which students encounter during the registration process, is the absence of understanding of how registration forms should be filled. This challenge emanates mainly from a lack of language skills to interpret the vocabulary needed during the registration process. Sullivan (2001) has consistently argued for unpacking cultural capital into a language skill-enhancing component and a participation in formal culture component. According to Maimane (2016), bureaucratic and complex application processes caused considerable stress, particularly for first-year students. This was exacerbated by their unfamiliarity with the language of the institution, making the process even more cumbersome for students from low socio-economic backgrounds. One student in Maimane (2016) reported that,

*Even the simplest thing as the registration for financial aid, the filling of the forms....their forms are so complicated. No one sits with you and explains. You go back with the forms and tell you; 'no this is wrong', they are going to reschedule the date. Sometimes they even kick people out because they keep rescheduling them and by the time they come back, they are closing off registration date. And once they are closed they are closed, whether they rescheduled you or not.*

Almost all the effect of cultural capital on grades was due to the enhancement of students' reading skills and cultural knowledge. Evidence from participants who took part in this research and from literature seems to suggest that the registration process in the TVET College under study as well as other post-school education and training institutions is a challenge for most of the first year students because of a lack of the required language capital and cultural practices of the college. There is, therefore, an urgent need for the TVET College under study to simplify the registration process to minimise levels of stress among prospective students. This is important because a smooth-sailing registration process will encourage a good pool of students to gain access, successfully participate in education and training programmes and contribute to the economic development of South Africa.

#### **4.6.2 Participation in non-academic activities**

The issue of non-academic activities also surfaced during the data generation process. Some participants were satisfied with the non-academic activities in the college while others expressed dissatisfaction with the range of non-academic activities in the college. One of the participants in this study had this to say,

*Yes, the college has provided students with many different programmes such as sports, HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns on campus, reading and music competitions. The problem with reading, music and sporting clubs are only active when we have competitions. I suggest that we have reading, music and sporting clubs throughout the year (Ian).*

Another participant, weighed in and said,

*They are reading and music clubs, as well as sporting activities, which are run maybe once or twice a year. Some students are very much interested in sports but since they are done only once a year, such students will end up leaving the college because sporting activities such soccer, and netball and volleyball are not played regularly (Ngosazana).*

Another participant, in the research expressed dissatisfaction in the way extra-curricular activities are managed in the college. He said,

*The college should organise groups of lecturers who co-ordinate sporting, reading and music clubs throughout the year. I am very much interested in participating in reading competitions, but the problem is that reading for the purpose of entering competitions is done only around July when it's time for the competitions. It would be better if these reading activities are done from January because it's not easy to read a whole novel and understand its contents within a few days (Dinesh).*

These findings from participants indicate a situation where non-academic activities have to be managed from a serious angle, a perspective that invites an active participation and involvement of the student body. This is important because most of the work which was done on cultural capital emphasized the participation of high-class cultural activities such as museum attendance, going to art classes, reading and listening to classical literature and music (Dimaggio and Mohr, 1985, Dumais, 2002; Kaufman and Gabler, 2004). While Bourdieu (1973) implied that these cultural values are passed on early in the child's life, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) found out that if learners participated in these cultural practices at the teenage stage of development, chances of performing better in academic work will be higher. Eccles (2003) suggested that participation in voluntary, college-based, non-academic activities increase college participation and achievement. This happens because it

facilitates the acquisition of interpersonal skills and positive social norms, membership in pro-social peer groups and stronger emotional and social connections to one's college (Eccles 2003). Smith (2008) also believes that participation in sports may also provide students with unique development opportunities that positively affect the student's self-concept. This may lead to a higher academic expectations and therefore better academic outcomes for student athletes (Smith 2008). According to Reeves (2008), students who took part in three or four non-academic activities during the academic year had dramatically better grades than those who did not. Darling, Caldwell and Smith (2005) suggested that participation in non-academic activities is related to higher grade point average, fewer disciplinary problems, lower absentee rates, decrease in dropouts, stronger commitment to the college work, more likely to attend university and graduate, taking more demanding coursework. A study by Olson (2008), participation in college music programme lessened students' feelings of alienation, promoted individual mental growth and provided a common bond between the home and the college. It, therefore, makes sense that participation in non-academic activities may contribute to an increase of wellness in psychological health, improved students' involvement in academic activities within the college, strengthen students' long-term educational endeavours and a decrease in behaviour problems. The TVET College leadership and management should therefore plan, design, develop and implement college-based programmes which raise the motivational intensities, inspirations and energy levels of students because students' participation and involvement in non-academic academic undertakings have significant impacts on students' academic outcomes.

#### **4.6.3 The effects of student protests on participation and success**

The other theme, which came up very prominently, was the issue of student protests, with their attendant negative effects on students' participation and successful completion of their training and education programmes. Student protests have become a perennial phenomenon, not only in the TVET College under study, but it has spread like veld-fire in most of South African tertiary institutions under the banner of #feesmustfall. An analysis of the nature and complexion of student protests reveal an uncaring attitude within the leadership and management of South African tertiary institutions in general and the TVET College under study in particular. While the leadership of tertiary institutions, including the TVET College under study assume that student protests are a result of the so-called 'third force' and consequently something which the leadership of colleges should not take seriously, it should be noted that the impact of student protests has far-reaching repercussions on the academic

and social life of disadvantaged students. Along this line of argument, one of the participants in this study commented that,

*The only challenge is when students strike. Due to strikes, our tests are run maybe daily which puts a strain on our preparation for the tests. Sometimes assignment due dates are changed because of strikes and we are required to submit more than two assignments on a single day (Ngosazana).*

Another participant indicated that he experienced learning challenges due to the disturbing and disruptive nature of student protests. He said,

*I have experienced barriers in some of the subjects I do at the college. For example, sometimes we have strikes at the college so we missed classes and as a result, I performed badly in subjects such as Accounting, Financial Management and Maths Literacy (Ian).*

While the above participants highlighted the negative effects of student protests, the other two observed that it would be prudent for the TVET College leadership to be pro-active and avoid taking action when students embark on strike action. For example, one of the participants in this study had this to say,

*The college should work together with students, in other words, college leadership should talk to students, and listen to students' concerns so as to create a cooperative relationship. There should be a constant communication between the college leadership and the students so as to be able to solve problems and avoid strikes and confrontations (Dinesh).*

Another participant also corroborated the above view and said,

*The college management must have meetings with students on a regular basis, especially on how to handle students' problems. The college management can do this by holding assemblies with students on a weekly basis so that students are updated on important issues, which concern the college (Zuzi).*

Student protests in South African TVET Colleges in general and the TVET College under study in particular are symptoms of much deeper problems within the department of higher education and training. One of the problems, which is revealed during situations of

antagonism and polarisation between college leadership and the student body, is the absence of a respect for the development of a social capital on the part of the college leadership. Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources, which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (Bourdieu, 1977) which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectively owned capital (Ibid). They may also be socially instituted and guaranteed by the application of a common name and by a whole set of instituting acts designed simultaneously to form and inform those who undergo them; in this case, they are more or less really enacted and so maintained and reinforced, in exchanges (Sullivan, 2001). Vasquez (2008) emphasize the view that if high expectations are communicated to students through different types of cues, verbal and non-verbal, the students' academic performance can be influenced positively. This means that student protests, which the college has been facing, could be avoided if the college leadership of the college under study had communicated with students on a regular basis. Berg and Theron (2013) argue that communication is one of the basics of all leadership behaviours, with verbal communication probably the most important.

The views expressed by the above participants indicate including lack of social capital in the TVET College under study. An analysis of the goings-on the college under study shows that the college leadership has become a connoisseur in adopting and implementing “fire-fighting” strategies, that is, it only acts when the situation has deteriorated to unacceptable levels. There is therefore, need to come up with communication strategies, which ensure that students are kept informed. This is important because lack of formal channels of communication force students to rely on informal channels which are often misleading and full of concocted information, half-truths and information which is meant to raise emotional temperatures of students. Since the researcher joined the college in 2011, the college leadership, educators and students have experienced conflicts, which manifested themselves in form of strikes, by educators and students because of a lack of communication. Many of these strikes could have been avoided if the college leadership had initiated communication mechanisms whose objectives were to address lecturers' and students' concerns. While student protests have been perceived in negative terms, a critical analysis of this phenomenon in TVET colleges can be interpreted as the light that opens the eyes of the leadership of the TVET College under study. Without student protests the leadership of the TVET, college would not realise the magnitude of the problems being faced by students from low socio-

economic backgrounds pursuing studies so that they can improve their opportunities in a fast-changing South African labour market.

#### **4.6.4 Towards positive educational outcomes in the TVET College**

Having analysed, discussed and interpreted experiences of six students in a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal, this section intends to highlight how the college can create favourable conditions, which enhance successful participation of students in education and training programmes in the institution. From the data collected from the participants there seem to be a general consensus among research participants that the college leadership and management should focus on non-academic activities, information technology, resource allocation, and also pay particular attention to the enhancement of the college's academic activities.

When the participants were asked to suggest how the college should support students who experience barriers to learning, one of the participants had this to say,

*The college should provide students with accommodation within a walking distance from the college. The processing of bursaries should be done monthly so that students have money for food, transport and toiletries especially for girls. Last, but not least, lecturers should not be too strict in terms of language. They should allow students to use their mother tongue in articulating academic issues (Ian).*

Another participant suggested that,

*The college should create an application process to help students to submit assignments on-line and also get updates on their academic activities of the college. For example, other colleges and most universities use drop-box, an application which assists students to submit assignments and also continuous communication with students. Some universities in South Africa have a student portal which allows students to submit assignments without having to go to the university campus. Our college should also do the same (Prumel).*

While the above participant emphasised the need for the effective use of technology to enhance the accomplishment of the college's academic programmes a participant in this study reported that,

*The college should provide students with transport money on a monthly basis because many students dropout because of lack of money. The college leadership provide residences for students and also provide them with food, for example, breakfast, lunch and supper. We need a library where we can study do research on our assignments and projects. At the moment there is no library at the college. We can also have extra computers in the library, which we can use to download information when researching assignments and ISAT (Robert).*

Another recommendation, which came up during the data collection process, focused on the effective use of modes of communication to reduce incidents of conflict between the college leadership and the student body. A participant in this study suggested that,

*The college should work together with students, in other words, the college management should talk to the students, listen to students' concerns so as to create a cooperative relationship. There should be constant communication between the college and the students so as to be able to solve problems and avoid strikes and confrontations (Ngosazana).*

The need for communication, extra-curricular activities and library provision became common theme because another participant put her recommendations in point form as follows:

- *The college management should have meetings with students on a regular basis, especially on how to handle students' problems.*
- *The college should have a library because there is no library and students use the municipality library, which is ill equipped.*
- *The college management should hold assemblies with students on a weekly basis so that students are updated on important issues, which concern learning and teaching in the college (Zuzi).*

Another participant was more concerned about the issue of language of instruction in the college. Although he speaks English as a first language at home, he had this to say,

*The college management should provide interpreters because some of our colleagues do not understand English very well. This will help them understand what the lecturer would have explained because the interpreter will also explain the same concepts in their home language. We also need Ipads and/or tablets to download information needed in assignments and ISAT projects because many of the students do not have access to the internet, and the college also does not have a functioning library. The college should facilitate the processing of our NSFAS bursaries so that we will be able to have money for transport, food and accommodation (Ian).*

The above findings are supported by Bourdieu (1986) who views economic capital as the foundation of all other forms of capital and treats all other types of capital as transformed, veiled forms of economic capital. Other forms of capital can be converted into economic capital, such as converting educational credentials into high paying professional position and economic capital can be used to other forms of capital, for example family income can be used to pay for school fees and tutoring services, leading to favourable educational outcomes (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). According to Cheng (2012) family income captures only one aspect of how parental status influences school performance. Studies, carried out, emphasise that the uppermost reason for students' failure to participate and succeed in tertiary education programmes are a lack of economic capital (Sullivan, 2012). Thomas (2012) also notes that the key ways in which financial pressures impact on poor students in the United Kingdom are absolute lack of money, debt, and fear of debt, comparative lack of money in relation to previous income levels, in relation to peers and part-time work which interferes with time and energy for studies. While financial challenges may cut across all socio-economic levels, Jones et al (2008) note that students from low socio-economic levels are mostly affected. Students from low socio-economic level are affected, firstly in terms of access, that is, the application fees charged by tertiary institutions are a barrier to many disadvantaged students, which may exclude them from vocational education or preclude them from applying to more than one institution. Secondly, registration and tuition fees are an even greater financial barrier (Krause, Vick and Boon 2009). Within the South African context Maimane (2016) notes that the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) loan may cover registration and tuition fees but if students apply late they may be unable to access

financial aid for the first semester. Inability to pay these costs at the end of the first year results in students being excluded from registering. The other barrier which Blom (2016) highlights is the fact that since these students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they do not have access to information about institutional processes regarding registration and application for financial aid, so very often first year students apply late. A research by Mlambo (2011) found out that the majority of students from rural areas do not have family or friends near the tertiary institution with whom they could stay or offer them any financial support. These students, therefore, may come from the security of a small community, arrive in an unfamiliar urban environment, often having to find and finance their own accommodation, meals and transport, and to some extent, textbooks and equipment, with very limited resources or knowledge of how to manage their finances. It is, therefore, important for the college leadership under study to make the provision of food, accommodation and transport a primary priority if participation and success among disadvantaged students can be realised in the short to medium term.

#### **4.7 Summary of findings**

The data presented and analysed in this chapter showed that students are more worried about factors that promote or impede their successful participation in education and training activities in the TVET College under study. Firstly, student-related factors such as choice of subjects at matric, the student's socio-economic status, the accessibility of NSFAS, place of residence, preparation of post-school education, motivation and college attendance may impede or promote the students' participation and success in the TVET College. Secondly, academic challenges such as the under-preparedness of students for the NCV curriculum, language of instruction, pedagogical approaches, student-teacher relations, assessment approaches and academic support programmes all can make or break the TVET student's chances of participating successfully in the TVET education and training programmes. Thirdly, institutional barriers associated with the registration process, non-academic activities, provision of material and financial resources, and student protests have a bearing on whether students will do well in their studies. The next chapter will provide a synopsis of major highlights in this study, focusing more on the research findings. To this end the chapter that follows will provide a summary of the findings, conclusions and recommendations based on the findings, suggestions on future research and limitations of the present study.



## **Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This was a qualitative study, located in the transformative paradigm, which aimed at analysing students' social geographies of access, participation and success in a technical, vocational, education and training institution in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The study was undertaken through the development and understanding of the experiences of six students in a TVET college in KwaZulu-Natal province. Research data was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews, which were transcribed, coded and finally categorised into themes, which the researcher used during the process of data analysis. Document analysis was also used to find out students' participation and success rates in the TVET College. To establish students' level of participation and success in the TVET College, the researcher used attendance registers to find out the number of students who enrolled for Information Technology cohort, Education and Development cohort and Financial Management cohort in NCV level 2 and 3 respectively. An analysis of the number of students who enrolled for NCV level 2 and 3 revealed that there was a marked difference between the number of students who registered for training and education programmes at NCV level 2 and 3. In short, the number of students who registered for NCV level 2 programmes was higher than the number of returning students at NCV level 3.

The first chapter outlined the research problem, with the main emphasis on unpacking factors, which impeded or facilitated students' participation and success in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The second chapter reviewed the related literature, in terms of factors, which facilitate access, participation and success in higher education in general, and the TVET College under study in particular. The third chapter highlighted the broad aims of the study, the research design and methodology and the theoretical framework, which informed the rationale of the study. In the fourth chapter, data was presented and analysed using transcripts generated during semi-structured interviews with six students in TVET College under study as well as factors and figures generated through the process of document analysis. The fifth chapter provides highlights of the main research findings, recommendations that the college under study can implement in the medium to long term so as to ameliorate experiences of students at a TVET College in Northern KwaZulu-Natal.

## 5.2 Summary of main findings

In this study, factors, which impede or facilitate students' social geographies of participation and success, emerged in four broad areas of analysis. These are academic, financial, socio-cultural and institutional. Data elicited from the six students showed that the four factors identified in the preceding sentences affected most of the students in the TVET College.

A comparative analysis of the reasons why students experience inferior and superior academic performance at NCV level 2 revealed that the nature of the curriculum, attitudes of students towards their studies, poor attendance by both students and lecturers, lack of motivation in the majority of students who register for NCV level 2, cordial relationships between the students and lecturers, a good academic background in the relevant curriculum subjects, self-motivation on the part of the student all contributed to either inferior or superior academic performance by students in the TVET college under study. Stephen (2003) argues that the majority of students who enrol into tertiary institutions are ill prepared to undertake the rigours of academic gymnastics associated with studying at an institution of higher learning. This is supported by Bourdieu cited in Thomas et al (2002) who is of the opinion that disadvantaged students are less successful, not because they were of inferior intelligence, but because the curriculum was 'biased in favour of those things with which middle-class students were already familiar'. Jones et al (2008) suggest that for disadvantaged students to succeed in higher education they should have key academic competencies, which are vitally important for success in higher education such as being able to think and work independently, time management, appropriate study skills and proficiency in the language of tuition.

Academic support structures also emerged as a very vital factor, which can make or break the student's chances of participating successfully in the academic programmes of the TVET College. Data obtained from the six students who participated in the in-depth, semi-structured interviews revealed that academic support programmes could address students' retention, progression, and success. Over and above this benefit academic support programmes also have the potential to enhance academic skills, promote institutional engagement, provide learning support which is tailor-made to meet the needs of individual learners, take advantage of the importance and contributions of the coaching and mentoring roles of peer tutors. Thomas et al (2002) emphasise the importance of personal tutors, who take on a structured and pro-active role in supporting students academically. In Jones et al (2008)'s study various forms of academic support were associated with peers or mentors at the institutions and

students who were able to make use of such assistance reported being able to cope better. The involvement of personal tutors in the academic programmes at a TVET college under study was a sound innovation because according while Bourdieu (1973) implied that these cultural values are passed on early in the child's life, Aschaffenburg and Maas (1997) found out that if learners participated in middle class cultural practices such as attending extra academic development programmes chances of performing better in academic work will be higher. Jones et al (2008) emphasise that academic support and development provided by higher education institutions should address issues around student retention, progression and success, thus the involvement of peer tutors, as an academic support strategy should be managed effectively and efficiently to ensure the accomplishment of education and training programmes in the TVET sector.

Another crosscutting theme, which proved to be a thorn in the academic dexterity of TVET students, is the issue of language. Students who were interviewed highlighted the fact that language is one of the limiting factor in enhancing students' participation and success. They also indicated that learning could be very difficult if students have poor reading and writing skills in the subject of tuition. A female academic development staff member who participated in the Jones et al (2008) report noted that English is not a first language for most students and so they are "automatically disadvantaged because their first language is not recognised in the classroom interaction, so it is not being used as a resource in classroom discussion or group activities". Thomas et al (2002) recommends that institutional outreach systems should be put in place to develop students' language skills and to promote institutional engagement in this regard; and that diagnostic approach, based on tracking and monitoring data to inform the provision of linguistic support. Thus, people maximize their positions by accumulating and using four types of capital and the value of capital is specific to the field within which individuals compete and manoeuvre (Bourdieu, 1984; 1990). Field is the term, which symbolises the struggle-within-a-struggle and competition within different social spheres (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). It can be conceived as the structured spaces that are organised around specific types of capital or combinations of capital (Swarz, 1997). In the education field, for instance, parents of different socio-economic backgrounds all struggle to do what they think is best for their children despite their differences in income, education levels, interpersonal networks and individual disposition (Phillips, 2011). These differences in specific types of capitals and combinations of capitals results in different

educational practices and strategies, which produce different educational outcomes (Reardon, 2011).

One of the themes, which emerged from the six students' narratives, was the influence of assessment approaches on academic achievement. All the six students who participated in the study concurred that the assessment methods such as tests, assignments, ISATs and examinations play a pivotal role in enhancing students' participation and success in the TVET College. However, the majority of the participants felt that examination papers and ISAT projects pose a great deal of challenges for students. A frequent complaint from REAP (2007) report related to the difficulties students experienced in understanding test and examination questions, which resulted in them performing badly. This difficulty was even expressed by final year students in the REAP (2007) sample, which raises questions about academic literacy support in higher education. Jones et al (2008) conclude by saying that language competence not only makes it easier for students to understand abstract concepts, but also increases a student's confidence to engage in more complex conceptual theorising.

The in-depth semi-structured interviews also revealed that integrated summative assessment tasks (ISATs) impede students' chances of accomplishing their education and training goals. Some of the participants suggested that the college leadership and management should develop a symbiotic relationship with business organisations because ISAT projects involve students going into corporate organisations in search of information relevant to their areas of research. If there is no bilateral relationship between the college and the business organisation, students may find it very difficult to access information relevant to their areas of research from the business organisations. Jones et al (2008) emphasise the fact that many qualifications require students to complete a research project before they can graduate. This research project was found to be most successful when the research programme was structured; where there were, formal, institutional structures to assist students find suitable organisations to carry out their projects. Arguments put forward by Jones et al (2008) are that the management of ISAT projects may be fragmented, uncoordinated and unevenly implemented across departments and may lack the necessary support and expertise needed for ensuring the quality of curriculum development and teaching practice. Thus, for the ISAT projects to be successful there is need for TVET colleges to develop a co-operative relationship with business organisations so that students will be given the assistance they require during their integrated summative assessment tasks.

Another research finding which came out very prominently from the interviews with six students from the TVET College under study was the influence of the relationship between lecturers and students. Students felt that sound, harmonious, and warm relationships between lecturers and students enhanced superior academic performance whereas unfriendly, strained and belligerent relationships between lecturers and students promoted inferior academic performance among students. In a related study by Gallagher (2013), positive lecturer-student relationships enable students to feel safe and secure in their learning environments and provide scaffolding for important academic skills. Thus, a lack of positive lecturer-student relationship may create conditions, which do not promote the development of academic skills in students, which can also have a huge negative impact academic achievement at high school as well as tertiary level. Lecturers who support students in the learning environment can positively affect their academic outcomes, which is important for the long-term trajectory of tertiary and eventually employment (Baker, Grant and Morlock, 2008; O’connor, Dearing, and Collins, 2011; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong and Essex (2005). Thus, Bourdieu (1984) frames education as an arena of cultural conflict in which social inequalities are reproduced through the different forms of capital both within and outside the system. Cultural capital is, therefore, the possession and reproduction of cultural goods that is unique to specific social classes, which provides dispositions that are inherited from the family to the child (Bourdieu, 1983; 1973).

Institutional factors such as the administration of the registration process, the handling of NSFAS applications as well as the management of extra-curricular activities also featured prominently in the responses by six students who narrated their experiences of participation and success in the TVET College. All the six students felt that the administration of the registration process and the handling of the NSFAS applications are frustrating and time-consuming. On the issue of extra-curricular activities, the general sentiment was that the college should have such activities throughout the year instead of having these activities on an ad hoc basis, that is, when there is extra-curricular competitions such as HIV/AIDS and health-related programmes, reading, sports and music competitions. It is, therefore important for the TVET college to put in place mechanisms and structures which facilitate a student-friendly registration and bursary application process because according to Letseka and Maile (2008) a major cause of students from low socio-economic backgrounds failing to access higher education is the relatively low levels of public funding for tertiary education which translates into higher fees, effectively shutting out the poor and reducing the ability of tertiary

institutions to contribute to social and economic development. However, Wilson-Strydom (2015) recommends that colleges should embrace a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of access and participation: this understanding ought to infuse the ways in which TVET Colleges work at all levels, that is, administratively, academically and outside of the formal curriculum.

The other factor, which emerged during the data collection process, revealed that educational resources such as textbooks, calculators, dictionaries and computers have a major influence on academic achievement. The majority of the participants were of the opinion that access to these resources including internet should be supplemented by the installation of an effective WIFI service. The provision of technological innovations such as iPads and tablets should be made available to students to promote participation and success. It is important for the college to provide resources which enhance disadvantaged students' access, participation and success because according to Jones et al (2008) these students may have come from the security of a small village, arrive in an unfamiliar city environment, often having to find and finance their own accommodation, meals and transport, and to some extent, textbooks and equipment, with very limited financial resources. Bourdieu (1973) views this as the way social class reproduces itself. Social class influences the family's tastes, which subsequently influences how families raise their children and how these children perform in education (Dumais, 2002). This cultural capital plays itself out in the classroom and gives students of middle and higher classes an advantage over their lower-class counterparts (Redford, 2007).

### **5.3 Significance of the study**

This research explored six students' experiences of access, participation in a TVET college in Northern KwaZulu-Natal. The aim of the study was to find out factors, which impede or facilitate access, participation and success among NCV level 2 students. To achieve this goal, the researcher carried out a comparative analysis of students who enrolled for NCV level 2, which is considered first year cohort in the TVET system, and NCV level 3, which is regarded as the second year. This comparison revealed that there was a noticeable decline in the number of students who registered for the second year cohort, which is NCV level 3. These results were important in that they attempted to shed light to the underlying factors, which contributed to this trend in the number of students who initially registered for NCV level 2 and the decline in the number of returning students in the NCV level 3 cohort. An analysis of data obtained through semi-structured interviews of six TVET students revealed

that academic, financial, institutional and socio-cultural factors had a very huge influence on access, participation and success in the TVET College.

#### **5.4 Limitations of the study**

One key limitation of this narrative inquiry was the smaller number of participants in the study. Only six students participated in the research and the results from such a small number of participants cannot be generalised in all TVET colleges because the socio-economic conditions of students attending other TVET colleges may be the same and dynamics very dissimilar. For example, students in the TVET College under study may be disadvantaged as much as other students in other TVET colleges, but the fact that students from other TVET colleges are provided with accommodation and food closer to the college cushioned these students from the vagaries and vicissitudes of college academic life. However, the long and short of it all, was that to oversimplify from this small-scale study would be untenable and also could not be generalized to all TVET colleges in KwaZulu-Natal province and South Africa in general.

#### **5.5 Recommendations**

Based on the findings it is important for the college leadership and management to unpack and try to construct solutions, which speak directly to the challenges highlighted in this research. The college leadership and management should, therefore, design policies, which seek to address challenges, which students face in terms of their academic adventures. Along this vein, the leadership of the college should revisit the issue of language of instruction, the curriculum, teaching methods, the relationship between educators and students, assessments approaches with a special attention to the Integrated Summative Assessment Tasks (ISAT) and academic support programmes. There is also need for the leadership of the college to examine the impact of institutional factors such as the registration process, the provision of extra-curricular activities such as music, sports, reading competitions, poetry and drama. Other institutional variables to take note of are provision of human, material and financial resources as well as a proactive approach in managing student politics and activism. It is also crucial to analyse student-related factors such as socio-economic background of students, place of residence, choice of subjects, preparation for post-school education, motivation and college attendance. To this end, it is recommended that the college leadership take note of the following:

- The college should provide students with accommodation within walking distance from the college since most of the students who attend at the college are from low socio-economic backgrounds.
- There should be constant communication between NSFAS office and the college to ensure that students are provided with the much-needed financial resources for food, transport and accommodation.
- The college should create an online communication system, which can make it possible for students to get updates on their academic activities.
- The college management should have regular meetings with students to find ways of dealing with student protests and/or also as way of motivating students to take their studies seriously.
- The college leadership should provide students with a library to enhance their research skills. Currently, there is no library and students are using a municipality library, which is ill equipped.
- The management should hold assemblies with students on a weekly or fortnightly basis so that students are appraised on important issues which concern learning and teaching in the college.

### **5.6 Suggestions for further research**

In the light of the research findings obtained in this study, it is suggested that there is a need to carry out further empirical research on a comparative perspective, that is, research that provides a bilateral analysis and evaluation of factors, which influence participation and success in two social settings. This is important because the results of such a study will provide readers with data that demonstrate the influence of social geographies on the level of participation and success in two different TVET colleges and find out if similar factors emerge in such comparative studies.

Another area of research, maybe at doctoral level, could be an analysis of the influence of social capital on academic outcomes of under-privileged sections of our society, for example, learners suffering from autistic conditions. This is important because Bourdieu and other researchers have demonstrated that social capital can make or break the chances of learners performing successfully in academic programmes, especially bearing in mind that social relations are no longer human per se but it also includes the influence of social media, which has become so pervasive in our contemporary lives. It is, therefore, important to carry out a study that tries to provide an intersection between social capital and academic outcomes in a TVET or university setting, however, specifically targeting under-privileged learners.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

The introduction of the technical, vocational, education and training curriculum innovation in South Africa has opened doors to previously disadvantaged students in the post-apartheid and democratic dispensation. However, the lack of a connection between policy formulation and policy implementation remains a hindrance to successful student participation in TVET programmes. The results from this study indicate that the college management team should pay particular attention to student-related, academic and institutional factors, which promote or impede participation in the college under study. Indicators such as a decline in the number of students who register for academic programmes at NCV level 3 and 4 are a symptom of much deeper problems in the college under study. It is, therefore incumbent upon the college management team to construct and implement college-based policies, which work to promote access, participation and success, because without a proactive approach, the TVET College will struggle to produce students who will actively participate in the South African economy through employment and entrepreneurship. It is important for the College Management Team to design and implement communication media directed at first year students because according to Lau (2003) first year students are overwhelmed with transition from high school to college life and they might become overly stressed by the dramatic changes even before they finish their first year of college. Finally yet importantly, the college leadership and management should develop and implement an integrated approach in the allocation of human, material and financial resources.

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# APPENDIX A

Informed consent form to gatekeepers

# APPENDIX B

Informed consent letter to participants

# APPENDIX C

In-depth Interview questions

# APPENDIX D

Ethical clearance letter from UKZN