

Epistemic Injustice: Barrier to Articulation Management between Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

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Abstract

The call for free education and decolonization of higher education curricula in recent years by university students in South Africa has increased awareness of epistemological issues and the notion of epistemic justice in higher education. In national policies education is presented as a critical means for addressing inequality, poverty and unemployment and the need for integration of the various strands of the post-school education and training system is highlighted. Systemic articulation between institutions of learning and work is viewed as expanding access to education and training opportunities.

A national articulation baseline survey involving all public universities and technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges was undertaken in November 2016 in order to explore the existence and nature of articulation initiatives, and identify enablers and barriers to articulation between higher education institutions in South Africa. The report was completed in October 2017. This paper focuses on findings in the report related to articulation management between TVET colleges and universities. Although not explicitly stated, the findings revealed the prevalence of what we refer to as epistemic injustice, indicated by the extent to which individual and collective attitudes in academia perpetuate discrimination that impacts negatively on students' progression from one institution to another higher learning institution. The need for epistemic justice to be included in the articulation lexicon on a national level is highlighted. One of the recommendations made in the report is that the South African Qualifications Authority should raise the level of awareness of epistemic injustice at institutional and individual levels.

Keywords: epistemic injustice, articulation, individual and collective attitudes, discrimination, epistemic justice.

Introduction

National policies such as the White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education (1997) and the recently developed White Paper for Post School Education and Training (PSET) (2013) conceive of education as a critical means to addressing inequality, poverty and unemployment in the democratic context of South Africa. Centuries of oppressive and divisive colonial and apartheid history left South Africa with a legacy of discrimination in all its national systems, including higher education, at the time of transition to democracy in 1994.

Democratic South Africa inherited a racially segregated, unequal education and training system in which different types of learning did not enjoy parity of esteem and qualifications were not necessarily linked to learning pathways (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2017). In recent years, South African students' campaign for epistemological relevance at the higher education level has steadily increased. A consequence of students' call for free education and decolonization of higher education curricula is an increased awareness of epistemological issues and the notion of epistemic justice in higher education.

A mandate of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), established post 1994, is to oversee the implementation and further development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) which is the means chosen to integrate the education and training system and to enable lifelong learning (Republic of South Africa [RSA], 2008). The NQF is a comprehensive system developed for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications and part-qualifications. It comprises three co-ordinated qualifications sub-frameworks: General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education and Trades and Occupations, which have the objective of education and skills development (RSA, 2008). Each level of qualification or course of knowledge has to be allotted a certain number of credits at a certain specific level, for enabling these credits to be transferred across the system. The NQF levels serve as guidelines for curriculum development and indicate where curriculum is positioned in the NQF. Level descriptors can be used as a benchmark of higher education to understand curriculum levels of any course being offered at the different institutions of learning. This NQF framework has the potential to influence articulation collaboration and articulation of programmes in any field (RSA, 2008).

The whole framework of credits and qualifications is managed by SAQA which conducts research to support this work and expands its capacity through long-term research partnerships with public higher education institutions (HEIs). While much has been achieved regarding systemic redress, access, progression, quality and transparency in the context of the NQF, the major current focus, clearly expressed in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (PSET) is on articulation (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). This current focus culminated in the promulgation of the Articulation Policy of the Post School Education and Training System (DHET, 2017).

SAQA's current research project in partnership with the Durban University of Technology (DUT) which commenced in 2016, explores the enablers and barriers to systemic articulation. The study is entitled: *Developing an understanding of the enablers of student transitioning between Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)*. It also explores successful articulation models that address identified barriers. In this research partnership, articulation is understood as the enabling of mobility within and between the various learning programmes and institutions (including colleges, universities and workplaces) that comprise the post-school education and training system (SAQA-DUT Research Proposal, 2016:1). Articulation is intended to broaden access to higher education.

This research initiative necessitated a basic understanding of the prevailing issues related to articulation in the post school sector in South Africa. Consequently, a national articulation baseline survey (NABS) was undertaken in November 2016, prior to the commencement of the larger research project, involving all public higher education institutions (HEIs) and technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges. The baseline survey aimed to explore the existence and nature of articulation initiatives and identify enablers and barriers to articulation between higher education institutions in South Africa. The survey report was finalized in October, 2017.

This paper focuses on the findings in the survey report related to the management of articulation between TVET colleges and HEIs. The survey revealed the extent to which individual and collective attitudes in academia perpetuate discriminatory practices that impact negatively on students' progression from one institution to another institution of higher learning. As researchers involved in the baseline study, we view this discriminatory individual and collective or institutional attitude in articulation management as epistemic injustice.

This paper intends to create an awareness of the existence of epistemic injustice in articulation management in the PSET sector. In the first section of this paper we review literature on the concepts of articulation including the management of articulation and epistemic injustice. Next, we cover relevant aspects of the national articulation baseline survey, its findings and discussion based on the findings. In conclusion, we propose recommendations to address epistemic injustice in the management of articulation between TVET colleges and universities. We highlight the importance of relational agency theory as a guideline to building collaborative relationships between TVET colleges and universities in order to promote successful systemic articulation; and the role of SAQA as critical for the implementation and realisation of the suggested recommendations.

Literature Review: Key Concepts of Articulation and Epistemic Injustice

Articulation remains a challenge in the PSET system in South Africa. The focus on articulation is a relatively recent issue in the South African higher education agenda.

As a consequence, there is a scarcity of literature on articulation for the South African context. The key challenge for education access in South Africa is to design a flexible post school education and training system that enables people to find articulation pathways that meet their needs.

Accordingly, the PSET White Paper (2013: vii-viii) is seen “as a vision for an integrated system of post-school education and training, with all institutions playing their role as parts of a coherent but differentiated whole....The system envisaged must provide paths for articulation between various qualifications, and there should be no dead-ends for students; there should always be a way for someone to improve their qualifications without undue repetition”. The PSET system is understood as comprising all education and training provision for those who have completed school, those who did not complete their schooling, and those who never attended school. It consists of the following institutions, which fall under the purview of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET):

- 26 public universities
- 50 public TVET colleges
- Public adult learning centres (soon to be absorbed into the new community colleges)
- Private post school institutions
- Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the National Skills Fund (NSF)
- Regulatory bodies responsible for qualifications and quality assurance in the post school system, SAQA and the Quality Councils (PSET White Paper, 2013: xi).

The PSET White Paper further points out that in terms of management and articulation there are conflicting and uneven quality assurance mechanisms and articulation possibilities with the mix of qualifications in TVET colleges. They are complex to administer and difficult for learners and parents to understand and often poorly quality assured (PSET, 2013: 14). It is clear that successful articulation in an envisioned integrated system of post-school education and training can only take place by design and not default. Research on understanding articulation and issues related to enabling successful articulation is an important element of the design process.

Articulation is defined and understood in various ways. However, the common factor in most of the definitions is that articulation enables mobility within and between the various learning programmes and institutions (universities, colleges and workplaces) that comprise the post-school education and training system (Makhafola, 2005: 14; N'gethe et al.,2008: xvii; SAQA-DUT research proposal, 2016). Articulation may be engendered through credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). Credit accumulation and transfer means “an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace” (SAQA, 2013: 6). Recognition of prior learning refers to the principles

and processes by which prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification or further learning and development (SAQA, 2013:9).

Lotz-Sisitka (2015) presents a broader understanding of articulation whereby articulation is viewed as 'systemic articulation' or a 'joined up' system incorporating qualifications and various other elements aligned to and supportive of, learning pathways. Articulation could also be seen more specifically, in terms of the structuring of qualifications to allow progression, with or without intra-or inter-institutional agreements for credit accumulation and transfer. Articulation could also refer to the pathways followed by individuals as they progress, and are supported in their learning and work. Aspects such as the quality of qualifications and learning, and career development advice or initiatives are part of articulation. The concept of 'transitions' becomes important, when a learning pathway involves transitions from training to work, from work to training, from school or College to Higher Education (Lotz-Sisitka, 2015).

The recent national policy on articulation states that a well articulated system is one in which there are linkages between its different parts; there should be no silos, no dead ends (DHET, 2017). In support of students' progression, it highlights this critical point-if a student completes a course at one institution and has gained the relevant knowledge and skills at the necessary levels, this must be recognized by other institutions if the knowledge gained is sufficient to allow epistemological access to programme(s) that the student wants to enter. Learners must be supported in their individual learning and work pathways (DHET, 2017: 1).

The policy also highlights that education and training has to address personal, national socio-economic and community needs. By doing so, injustices such as poverty and unemployment can be addressed. It points out that in the current situation in the post-school education and training system, a number of articulation initiatives exist but more work is needed regarding articulation in order to build a truly integrated and articulated post-school system. Even though the NQF has enabling features to promote articulation, barriers to access, articulation and credit transfer still exist (DHET, 2017:1). The following issues are identified in the policy as barriers to articulation:

- a. Academic qualifications are considered more valuable and credible than comparable vocational or occupational qualifications;
- b. Some qualifications on the NQF are seen to be "dead end" in nature, and do not lead to further learning;
- c. There are general perceptions that the purpose and nature of technical and vocational education and training is to offer learning programmes which focus on a relatively narrow band of employment -related or job- specific skills and competencies, when in fact the qualifications /part -qualifications could have wider relevance;
- d. There has been inadequate building of coherence between the NQF sub -

frameworks;

e. There has been an absence of robust articulation arrangements or alignment work between the different programmes and institutional types; and

f. There is a general lack of institutional flexibility to support learners as they 'stop in and stop out' of their studies, where research has shown that this kind of 'staggered pathway' is the norm at all NQF levels (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2017:2).

While not stated explicitly-and this may be attributed to the concept of epistemic injustice being an unfamiliar concept in government lexicon- it is possible to discern hints of epistemic injustice in all of the issues mentioned above but specifically so in the first and third issues identified in the policy.

The management of articulation is an important factor in enabling successful articulation between and among institutions of learning, and between institutions of learning and the workplace. Van Der Waldt and Du Toit (1999) correctly point out that in a country such as South Africa where much needs to be done to reduce poverty, inequality and unemployment with limited resources, it is of cardinal importance for public institutions to manage existing resources more effectively to achieve greater need satisfaction. They add that the public expects the best possible management processes and services from public institutions.

Management may be formally defined as the process whereby human, financial, physical and information resources are employed in order to reach the goals of an organisation (Cronje et al., 2003:122). The four fundamental management tasks or functions are: planning, organising, leading, controlling and staffing (Cronje et al., 2003; Kerzner, 2013). Van Der Waldt and Du Toit (1999) refer to these functions as general or basic and claim that a distinction exists between general management and function-specific management. "Whereas function-specific management refers to aspects such as financial and personnel management, general management refers to the tasks that have to be performed at all management levels...and can best be defined by the types of functions that are undertaken" (Van Der Waldt and Du Toit, 1999: 12). We contend that the management of articulation includes both general management and function-specific management, given the challenges currently experienced in management is pervasive from the highest level of institutional management to the level of individual academics and administrative staff.

The larger SAQA-DUT study is based on the assumption that institutions of higher learning are open social systems and therefore systems theory and the systems approach to management are important for this investigation as it emphasises the interdependent interaction and relationship between parts and the whole (Van Der Waldt and Du Toit, 1999: 64). A system is described as a collection of parts which form some whole and the whole cannot be divided into independent parts; the effects of the behaviour of the parts on the whole depend on the behaviour of other parts (Cole, 2004: 74; Theron and Maphunye, 2005: 26). In the systems approach to management any person or a particular institution may be seen as a system and this

approach looks at the interconnections between the different parts of the institution to determine how well it is functioning. A systems theory perspective examines a broader picture, one that includes the environment within which the organisation exists and how changes in the environment affect the organisation. Therefore, a systems approach to the management of articulation highlights the interdependency of each system, that is, TVET Colleges and universities and individuals within these institutions. Successful management is essential to enable and contribute to the big picture of access to education and work for the majority in South Africa.

Epistemic Injustice

In the relationship between TVET colleges and universities on articulation and articulation management, we agree with Catala's (2015) description of epistemic injustice as injustices pertaining to the recognition and transmission of knowledge where a prior situation of social injustice exists, one of unequal power relations between different social groups, including inequalities in epistemic power. Those epistemic inequalities grant different levels of credibility and intelligibility to individuals based on their membership in different social groups, thereby creating epistemic injustice (Catala, 2015). The questioning of not only credibility but the value of qualifications from TVET colleges by some universities blatantly undermines the process of successful articulation. We believe that epistemic injustice presents a formidable barrier to articulation management that needs to be acknowledged as such and addressed from a number of perspectives.

Prior to 1994, the apartheid system had institutionalised racial segregation in all spheres, thereby creating one of the world's most unequal societies. A segregated educational system where inferior education was given to the majority to prepare them for an inferior place in society was one of the foundations on which white 'superiority' was built. Epistemic injustice is only beginning to feature in higher education discourse in South Africa due in part to higher education currently being challenged by students who are demanding relevance of knowledge and the 'decolonization and Africanization' of curricula.

Miranda Fricker's seminal work *'Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing'* (Fricker, 2007) focuses on two types of injustice, namely testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. In simple terms testimonial injustice describes situations where a speaker's words are perceived as less credible than they ought to be, due to prejudice held by the listener. The prejudice leads to the speaker being fully, or partially, excluded from participating in the production and transmission of knowledge. The speaker suffers a 'credibility deficit' and their words are perceived as less credible than they ought to be. It should be understood that attributing of a credibility deficit does not by itself constitute testimonial injustice. It is the attribution of the deficit together with a prejudice, held by the listener that categorises the injustice as testimonial. Testimonial injustice may often result in damaging consequences for articulation and also the limitation of career progression. Epistemic injustice may also be structural in nature, for example

members of certain groups may simply not be asked their opinions as they are regarded as invalid (Graham et al., 2017). Hermeneutical injustice describes the inability of individuals to effectively communicate their experiences or knowledge claims, due to a lacuna in the collective or societies' understanding of said experience or knowledge. The existence of this lacuna is due to the relative powerlessness of the social group, to which the individual belongs, and its inability to fully articulate its experience of being disadvantaged. This is a structural injustice in that the listener is not at fault for their inability to fully understand the speaker (Graham et al., 2017).

Fricker's work places emphasis on the individual's experience of epistemic injustice with the goal of identifying and eliminating some of the structural prejudices prevalent in our society. She advances the position that by recognising our own individual prejudices we may contribute to the amelioration of epistemic injustice by our now enlightened individual actions. Contrary to this, Anderson (2012), advocates that some epistemic injustices are best addressed at the societal, as opposed to the individual level, thereby implying the requirement for structural or policy change. This is not to say that structural changes should be implemented at the expense of efforts to promote individual value changes, but rather that the structural change should also motivate an individual response, for without individual support the structural changes will ultimately lack effectiveness (Graham et al., 2017).

We contend that epistemic injustice as revealed in the baseline study, has to be addressed at the individual, collective, institutional and structural levels as presented by both Fricker (2007) and Anderson (2012) respectively.

The Research Problem

Articulation (within and across) the institutional and qualification landscape is a national imperative that has featured regularly in Higher Education legislation. Although the goal of strengthening relationships between education and training institutions and between these institutions and workplaces is clearly laid out in the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (MHET, 2013), widespread implementation of legislative imperatives by institutions and workplaces is still needed.

In view of the problems related to students' access and mobility from one institution of learning to another and from institutions of learning to the workplace and vice versa, articulation has become an important investigative issue for SAQA. SAQA's Partnership Research has revealed and sought to address gaps in the understanding of articulation and learning pathways.

The main focus of the SAQA-DUT research partnership is on investigating relationships that enable articulation within and across Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges and Universities in general, and between TVET Colleges and Universities of Technology (UoTs) in particular. The main focus

of the research is to understand how to build collaborative/cooperative relationships between TVET Colleges and UoTs which will enable, enhance and promote successful articulation and integrated College-University learning pathways. The research attempts to answer the following broad question: *How can collaborative relationships between TVET Colleges and UoTs be developed, which will enable, enhance, and promote student transitioning between TVET Colleges and HEIs?*(SAQA-DUT Research Proposal, 2016)

The National Baseline Study

The national baseline survey is part of the larger SAQA-DUT partnership research project which extends from April 2016 to March 2020. The focus of this study is to determine the enablers and challenges to articulation between TVET colleges and universities and between these institutions and the workplace. The national baseline survey focused on the articulation relationship between all 26 public universities and all 50 TVET colleges, a total of 76 institutions. The 26 public universities include 9 Universities of Technology (UoTs). The rationale for the survey was to obtain 'a big picture' understanding of articulation and articulation issues in the post school education and training sector. The findings of the baseline survey are intended to supplement the SAQA-DUT partnership research project.

Objectives of Baseline Study

The objectives of the baseline study were to:

- i) Understand how articulation is conceptualised in the institution;
- ii) Obtain descriptions of existing articulation arrangements associated with the institution;
- iii) Obtain descriptions of the management of these articulation arrangements, and challenges;
- iv) Capture the extent and nature of the successes and enablers of articulation experienced

This paper focuses on the third objective, specifically in relation to challenges experienced by the institutions regarding the management of articulation.

Design and Methodology

The design of the baseline survey was exploratory in nature. This is the first time that a national baseline survey was conducted in South Africa to obtain an overall understanding of the enablers and barriers to articulation within the post school education and training sector. Specifically, this is the first survey to explore the management of articulation between TVET colleges and universities. In order to achieve the objectives of the baseline study, the questions were open ended and required descriptive responses. Therefore, the survey methodology was qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is concerned with exploring a phenomenon from the 'interior' and it takes the perspective and accounts of the research participants as starting points. In general, qualitative research is concerned with exploring and answering the 'what', 'why' and 'how' questions (Ritchie et al., 2013:3).

Participants

An open ended questionnaire based on achieving the above objectives was jointly constructed by SAQA-DUT research team. The survey was conducted between August and December 2016. Given the time frame available, it was decided to focus on public entities only: all 50 public TVET Colleges and all 26 public HEIs (which included 9 UoTs) were included in the survey. In total the sample consisted of 76 institutions.

Procedure

For the HEIs, the survey instrument was emailed together with a formal invitation to participate, from SAQA's Chief Executive Officer, to the relevant Deputy Vice Chancellors or Registrars. For the TVET Colleges, the survey questionnaires and invitation letters were emailed to the College Principals. It was necessary to ensure that the highest academic office at each institution dealt with the survey, or delegated it to an appropriate person, recognised to be responsible for articulation arrangements at the respective institutions, in order to obtain the detailed information needed. Up to five follow-ups were made in each instance to enable the researchers to obtain the levels of clarity and detail needed. Forty-nine (98%) of the Colleges and twenty-five (98%) of the HEIs completed the surveys.

Data Analysis

The results of the survey were analysed using a variety of coherent mechanisms which comprised thematic analysis and the analysis of key words following a grounded theory approach. Braun and Clarke (2006:76) define thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data. Given that Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006; De Vos, 2002) is developed and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis, the Grounded Theory approach is useful for aligning theory in the South African context, regarding articulation, lifelong learning and integrated learning pathways, based on data from the proposed study.

Findings

Articulation Management Challenges

Responses to the main challenges experienced in the management of articulation are categorised as: student support and student issues; work placements; resources; curriculum issues between Colleges and HEIs; institutional systems and structures; and the relationships between Colleges and HEIs. Table 1 shows the reported incidence of these categories of challenges.

Table 1: Articulation management challenges as reported by TVET Colleges and HEIs

Challenges	Number of institutions reporting this challenge
Student support and student issues	6 Colleges, 2 HEIs
Work placement issues	8 Colleges, 1 HEI
Resources	4 Colleges (No HEIs)
Curriculum issues between Colleges and HEIs	8 Colleges, 2 HEIs
Institutional systems and structures	7 Colleges, 1 HEI
TVET College relationships with HEIs; HEIs lack of understanding/ attitudes towards Colleges: 'epistemic (knowledge-related) injustices'	10 Colleges, 2 HEIs

It should be noted that the 'Articulation management challenges' is biased in terms of the College voice; the voices of the universities are relatively silent on the matter. This finding is not surprising given the limited overall articulation approach on the part of the universities: the sense on the part of the universities of what the challenges are would be commensurately limited. From our analysis of the findings on management challenges, we perceive what is considered to be epistemic injustice to be located in the following challenges: curriculum issues between Colleges and HEIs; institutional systems and structures, and the relationships between Colleges and HEIs.

Curriculum-related challenges

Eight TVET Colleges and two HEIs mentioned curriculum-related issues as being challenging. Firstly, universities accreditation requirements may dictate that exemptions be granted for courses only if there is significant overlap in the content of the course being exempted and the course already passed. The response to these requirements is an examination of the content of the two courses to determine the extent of overlap.

Secondly, it remains a challenge to articulate into Higher Education based on the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) qualifications of TVET Colleges. This may be because of the unfamiliarity of the HEI practitioner with the content of the courses offered at the Colleges, or simply a manifestation of the lack of parity of esteem between the two, where a mismatch is assumed merely because the course is offered elsewhere. Responses that reflects HEIs lack of familiarity with TVET Colleges programmes are as follows: *"HEIs not understanding TVET colleges subjects offering and qualifications"*; *"the non-understanding of what the programme is about and why it's implemented at a TVET College"* and *"there are still instances in which the qualifications from TVET Colleges are not recognised by Institutions of Higher Learning"*. There are cases where mismatch of curriculum content occurs, but this is ordinarily established by first examining the content.

Some Colleges maintained that the universities are not aware of the rules, regarding the articulation of the NCV into Higher Education. One College response highlights this lack of knowledge by HEI personnel: *“Our NCV students are made aware of the Level 4 articulation gazette at induction- unfortunately qualifying students still experience problems at some HE institutions when they try to register. The registration personnel on the ground at HE institutions don’t appear to be aware of the gazette and the Level 4 NCV students who meet the requirements of the gazette must be considered for registration”*. A College noted that the same HEI would use different approaches for College students with similar NCV results. Another College claimed that an HEI resisted the admission of students with NCV Level 4 and other TVET qualifications-*“HEIs resist and close their doors to consider NCV level 4 and N6 students”* and *“there was also an impression that the criteria was more strict for College students compared to their Matric counterparts though some of college students already had Matric”*.

This College suggested that the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) should develop guidelines for the recognition of TVET qualifications for entry into HEIs.

Institutional systems and structure-related challenges

Institutional systems and structures were identified as challenges by seven TVET Colleges and one HEI. These challenges related to a lack of guiding policies and procedures; management information systems (MIS); administration systems; access or placement tests and recognition of prior learning (RPL) procedures within faculties in HEIs. The considerable physical distances between institutions were also seen as being challenging for articulation management.

It was reported that good working relationships between Colleges and HEIs were often dependent on specific individuals in the institutions involved, and that these relationships became a challenge when these ‘champions’ left the institutions. The following TVET response indicate the lack of institutional systems and structure as a challenge: *“not all HEI have developed documentation that assists the articulation process”*.

TVET College - HEI relationship-related challenges

The challenge of TVET-HEI relationships for the management of articulation was mentioned by ten TVET Colleges and two HEIs. Colleges identified the autonomy of HEIs as they had the power to change entrance requirements. In addition, the correct departments and contact personnel in HEIs were not necessarily easy to identify. Colleges experienced difficulty in arranging appointments with the Deans in HEIs-*“Setting up appointments with HEI, getting an appointment with relevant Deans takes a very long time”*. The HEIs were reported as generally not regarding the TVET Colleges as being equal partners in the PSET system, and the role-players in partnerships often had different agendas-*“We find it extremely difficult to engage universities to collaborate with us as we are not regarded as an equal partner”* and *“there is discrimination in that universities as they take students without practical experience over those that come from a TVET college with practical experience and exposure to the workplace”* were responses indicative of prejudicial treatment by HEIs towards TVET Colleges.

There was generally poor understanding of 'articulation', and a fear of commitment by both TVET Colleges and HEIs to the processes involved. The Gazetted agreements appeared to allow for easy articulation but the HEIs ultimately have a say in admission. Common understanding was lacking regarding implementing the policies for access to qualifications offered by HEIs.

The Colleges struggled to get recognition by HEIs. Front desk officials in most HEIs are not knowledgeable about the qualifications offered at TVET Colleges. The Colleges refer to Government Gazette rules and SAQA 'bands' in order to articulate the TVET offerings correctly, especially for students from NCV programmes wanting to continue their studies at universities, but the NCV qualifications are not well known or acknowledged by the universities. In addition, the quality of NCV Level 4 passes was deemed to be not good enough for universities.

Discussion

Unhealthy relationships, specifically those that are discriminatory in nature could result in what we refer to as 'epistemic injustice'. The injustices are in relation to the lack of recognition and respect for different kinds of knowledge, especially when it involves the HEIs' lack of understanding of, or indifference to, TVET College qualifications and standards.

In the comparative study of twelve African countries, including South Africa, on differentiation and articulation conducted by N'gethe et al., (2008), the findings reveal that the problem of articulation is a regional one. They point out that:

articulation in Africa seems to be in its infancy and write that " the mobility of staff and students between university and non-university tertiary institutions suffers from a lack of cooperation and absence of dialogue between the two institutional groups. In fact, an unhealthy rivalry often characterises their relationship....graduates seeking 'academic progression' into the university system often encounter a void in which there are no clearly defined articulation pathways to follow, the level to which they are admitted being dependent on the course they wish to pursue and the regulations of the particular university to which they are applying (N'gethe et al., 2008:xviii).

The report stated that the internal structures of institutions tended to inhibit articulation amongst and between institutional types. Consequently, they tend to view articulation-even amongst themselves-as a managerial nuisance that is best avoided (N'gethe et al., 2008: xviii).

The epistemic injustice described in this survey is primarily testimonial in nature. For students to readily obtain epistemological access to programmes as indicated in the recently developed articulation policy, specifically from TVET colleges to universities requires the removal of epistemic injustice. Epistemic justice is a set of principles and practices that collectively constitute the amelioration of recognized

epistemic injustices. This may be at the individual or structural level. Epistemic justice also includes the process of identifying epistemic injustice and determining the basis upon which to engender epistemic justice (Maistry and Lortan, 2017).

Relationship-building within and between the TVET Colleges, HEIs and workplaces, requires deliberate effort. Edwards' (2010) concept of 'relational agency' is useful for understanding and strengthening relationships. According to Edwards' relational agency theory, the underlying foundation for different systems to work together well are best described in the nature of their interaction and relationship with each other. Relationship building is therefore one of the core elements which is vital for different systems to progress and function effectively (Edwards, 2010:1).

Four ideas are central to relational agency. The first idea is that relational expertise involves additional knowledge and skills over and above specialised core expertise. Second, relational expertise involves understanding and engaging with the motives of others. It allows the expertise offered by others to be surfaced and used. Third, relational expertise is useful vertically (in authority hierarchies), but it is also relevant for horizontal collaboration across practices at similar levels in authority hierarchies. Lastly, relational expertise respects history, but is focussed on the common knowledge created through shared understanding of the different motives of those collaborating, and going forward together (Edwards, 2010). The theory of relational agency can serve as a critical framework that guides the development of constructive, cooperative relationships between the institutions to seek solutions to epistemic injustice as a barrier to successful articulation between the institutions.

Recommendations

As a first step towards addressing the issue of epistemic injustice, we propose that epistemic justice be included in the articulation lexicon and discourse at a national level. We view the role of SAQA to be significant to this proposal and accordingly recommend that the South African Qualifications Authority not only raise the level of awareness of epistemic injustice at both institutional and individual levels but also seeks appropriate solutions to this barrier.

As a starting point, we suggest the organization of participatory workshops between academia from universities and TVET colleges to address the issue of epistemic injustice at the individual and institutional levels. In addition, publications by SAQA on epistemic injustice as a barrier to systemic articulation management could serve the purpose of raising awareness on the national level.

Conclusion

This study reveals that epistemic injustice in both testimonial and hermeneutical forms present itself in the articulation pathways between TVET Colleges and HEIs in South Africa. The notion of justice is inextricably intertwined with ameliorating injustices. If epistemic justice is to be understood as a deliberate response to recognised epistemic injustice with the purpose of ameliorating said injustices, then

a critical component of epistemic justice is the recognition of said epistemic injustice (Maistry and Lortan, 2017).

Therefore, it becomes necessary for TVET Colleges and HEIs to be consciously and jointly aware that epistemic injustice is a critical barrier to effective articulation between TVET Colleges and HEIs. If epistemic injustice is not addressed between the different levels of higher education, then very little progress will be made towards addressing issues of inequality, poverty and unemployment and the legacies of apartheid of inferior and superior knowledge in South Africa.

Epistemic justice directs HEIs to rethink fundamental questions about knowledge: of what should be known; for what purpose; how to know it and what should be the criteria to legitimize knowledge (Restrepo 2014). Epistemic justice demands a shift in attitude by academia in HEIs and to acknowledge and value the knowledge of TVET College students transitioning to HEIs. SAQA has a critical role in creating an awareness of epistemic injustice within the post school sector and making recommendations to the national government on how issues of epistemic injustice could be addressed.

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