

*International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*  
 Vol. 22, No. 10, pp. 378-393, October 2023  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.22.10.21>  
 Received Aug 11, 2023; Revised Sep 18, 2023; Accepted Oct 19, 2023

## De/colonising Theoretical Literatures and the Educational Qualifications to Unpack the Grotesque Skills Gap in South Africa

**Christiana Kappo-Abidemi** 

(Human Resource Management) School of Development Studies  
 University of Mpumalanga, Mbombela, Mpumalanga  
 South Africa

**Christopher Babatunde Ogunyemi** 

(English) School of Social Sciences  
 University of Mpumalanga  
 Mbombela, Mpumalanga, South Africa

**Abstract:** The research uses decolonial theory to delineate the conceptualisation of the academic qualifications provided by South African tertiary institutions and their relevance to closing the national skills gap. Decolonising the South African educational system represents a progressive approach that is new to both students and educators. Both government and employers acknowledge a skills shortage in South Africa. However, the question of where the skills should be provided is unanswered. Graduates are expected to have specific skills before entering the labour market. The study uses desktop research that focuses on secondary data to explore the phenomenon. The research has two objectives: to present a decolonial explanation of the relationship between academic qualifications and national skills needs and to explore ways of integrating current academic qualifications offered by educational institutions in South Africa to address the national skills gap. The study explores how the content of the National Qualification Framework and its relevance in skills development can be decolonised. The study found that the existing educational qualification programmes in South African tertiary institutions are unable to address the skills gap effectively due to emerging needs highlighted in recent literature. To address this issue, there is a need to restructure academic qualifications to better align them with the country's skill shortages or explore alternative approaches to aligning knowledge and skills. The study recommends examining the national skills shortage beyond the higher education institutions' academic structure and looking at other factors, such as workplace discrimination in training and development. Collaboration between stakeholders, employers and tertiary education institutions should be

---

\*Corresponding author: *Christopher Babatunde Ogunyemi*; [christopher.ogunyemi@ump.ac.za](mailto:christopher.ogunyemi@ump.ac.za)

encouraged for curriculum development and alternative means of skills acquisition.

**Keywords:** decolonialization; educational qualifications; skills shortage; knowledge acquisition

## 1. Background of the Study

The South African labour market has always been perceived to lack critical skills for nation-building and economic development (Field, Musset & Alvarez-Galvan, 2014). Over the years, the nation has relied on European and other developed countries for expatriates to provide these skills. There is a general perception that South Africa's present skills development system has mostly failed to meet the country's skills requirements. In South Africa, there are concerns about the economy and its potential to produce inclusive growth that will significantly reduce unemployment and poverty. Access to education and skills is a critical facilitator of economic progress. Therefore, there is a need to provide a framework for the development of skills for highly competent individuals to occupy jobs that will be beneficial to all in a diversified and dynamic society such as South Africa (Reddy et al., 2016).

Consequently, skilled people could be able to go into business for themselves and create income-generating companies to support their families and grow to generate job possibilities. Furthermore, in a climate of fast economic structural change, persons with skills are more likely to be able to adapt to changing economic requirements and therefore remain employed. A lack of education and skills characterises the South African labour market and is reflected in several worldwide indexes (Mouton et al., 2013). Many people who drop out of school do so without receiving fundamental knowledge. Acceptable qualifications are needed by some employers before any recruitment is done, but vocational credentials at various National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels do not fully equip learners for the workplace. The low fundamental education basis in South Africa is influenced by a combination of factors, including inadequate funding, overcrowded classrooms, a lack of qualified teachers, outdated teaching methods, socioeconomic disparities, high dropout rates, limited access to technology, language barriers, insufficient parental involvement and cultural and societal factors (Maisari et al., 2019). In addition, the skills system is underperforming, often seen as failing to provide the necessary skills for both new entrants and existing employees (Human Resource Development Council (HRDC), 2013).

South Africa has 26 universities that graduate thousands of students with various degrees and qualifications yearly, yet the number of unemployed youths constantly increases. The Quarterly Report (Statistics South Africa, 2021) indicated a 34.9% unemployment rate in the first quarter of the year. The statistics show that 2.4% of the total unemployed people were graduates. However, in 2021, the Department of Water and Sanitation brought in 24 Cuban engineers to help with infrastructure challenges and exchange knowledge. Likewise, in the preceding year, about 200 doctors were brought from Cuban to South Africa to help fight the coronavirus (Business Tech, 2021: Jika, 2020). Why were South Africans not used when more than 50% of universities produce doctors and

engineers yearly? How do we justify the lack of critical skills South African graduate doctors and engineers need to tackle the country's economic needs with their academic knowledge?

The common practice amongst academic institutions is to develop an educational curriculum based on existing knowledge and practice. However, existing knowledge may be irrelevant in certain situations, especially in this generation, where learning and new challenges constantly evolve, and the workplace is expected to adapt. As much as there is always a demand for new skills in the workplace, the academic knowledge provided by educational institutions is also expected to be updated (Modiba, n.d.). In addition, academic institutions are expected to find common ground where knowledge can be transmitted to meet the demands of the workplace. The skills gap will continue to widen as long as knowledge is acquired in isolation. Likewise, unemployment will increase as much as academic knowledge fails to be converted into workplace-needed skills.

Some people have had to devote quality time to obtain their university degrees simply because some jobs require them to do so. While past generations may have had only one job throughout their lives, it is now common practice to have multiple jobs and careers. With the development of the economy, the upcoming generations may expect to have a variety of positions and vocations throughout their professional life (Kumar,2020). There is an emphasis on balancing what is studied and what is required to do the job effectively. Most university graduates are underemployed due to the mismatch between academic qualifications and the workplace skills requirement. "Visible underemployment" refers to those forced to work fewer hours than they would want. These people are looking for or wish to work longer or full-time hours. Another description of underemployment is people doing work that requires a lower qualification than the one they have acquired (Greenwood, 1999; Mncayi & Dunga, 2016). The most disturbing aspect is that graduates are struggling to transform their academic qualifications into employable skills. Hence, the study explores the gaps between educational qualifications and the workplace needs of South Africa and global work demand and ways to close these gaps to improve the human capacity development of the nation for economic enrichment. The study will debate how the academic qualifications offered by South African universities and other higher academic institutions can be used to meet the demand for skills needed for economic growth and reduce unemployment among youths. The study will discuss different educational structures in South Africa and their relevance to the employability of citizens. Also, the South African national qualifications framework overseen by the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) will be compared to relevant similar bodies in developed countries.

Kappo-Abidemi and Ogujiuba (2021) reckon that the corporate social responsibility of higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in South Africa, should focus on the educational and skill development of historically disadvantaged individuals and on providing employment opportunities for graduates. The HRDC (2013) acknowledged that the present skills development system has mostly failed to meet South Africa's skills requirements. Likewise, various challenges within the education system inhibit it from functioning effectively to address the workplace knowledge, skills and capabilities of fresh

graduates of HEIs. HEIs in South Africa have focused on massifying education since the onset of democracy in 1994. However, as much as the HEIs should be accessible to all, quality cannot be compromised. Class sizes are overwhelmingly large in the current higher education system. Lecturers struggle to control the classes; meaningful, practically oriented engagement is almost impossible in an overpopulated classroom environment. Adetiba (2019) and Tanga and Maphosa (2018) acknowledged that contrary to expectations, some South African universities may not achieve the anticipated improvement of the social order because of the problematic implementation of policies addressing these educational scenarios.

The study aims to critically examine the content of the current academic qualifications offered in South Africa and their contributions to the national skills gap. The NQF overseen by SAQA will be used as a foundation for discussing the content of the academic qualifications offered in the country. Hence, the study has the following objectives:

- To reconstruct decoloniality and explain the relationship between academic qualifications and national skills needs.
- To explore various ways of integrating current academic qualifications offered by educational institutions in South Africa into the national skills gap.

## **2. Literature Review**

The decolonial theory is significant to the understanding of our study. The theory supports the contribution of new knowledge of indigenous systems and how the South African educational system could positively benefit from this phenomenon. According to Gyamera and Burke (2018), decolonial theory supports the acquisition of skills by challenging traditional western-centric knowledge systems and advocating for a more inclusive and diverse curriculum that incorporates indigenous and non-Western perspectives, thereby enabling learners to develop a broader and more culturally sensitive skillset. This approach encourages critical thinking, creativity, and a deeper understanding of global perspectives, ultimately enhancing individuals' capacity to navigate an increasingly interconnected and diverse world. These values are encapsulated in the Critical Cross-Field Outcomes (CCFO) of the NQF but are rarely integrated into actual learning content of HEIs. However, the overemphasis on tests and examinations to assess knowledge limits the acquisition of skills attributed to the knowledge (Faller et al., 2023). Kolb (2020) acknowledged that skills need to be related to future work-related endeavours.

The configuration of decoloniality is to 'delink' the Eurocentric perception of thoughts for indigenous concepts that are thought-provoking, independent and value-oriented. The need emerges to re-write the trajectory of oppression and colonialism that the subjugated suffered. As an academic discourse, though it is extremely difficult to emancipate people from traditional ways of thinking, decoloniality challenges the ongoing economic constraints caused by harmful past practices and strong Western influence .

According to Ogunyemi (2021), decoloniality is a systematic incorporation of thoughts that enhance liberation in the economic and the social-cultural context.

It is a conscious mind-set phenomenon that aims at eliminating the monopoly of knowledge and imperialism in the social systems. He further emphasises that decolonising knowledge is an academic and intellectual endeavour that promotes the use of Afrocentric perspectives to challenge Western dominance and oppression in education. This aligns with Spivak's idea, which emphasises the importance of rejecting the belief in white superiority to promote the dignity and success not only of black people worldwide but also the development of Africa as a continent.

Mignolo (2011), Vallego (2015) and Quijano (2007) unapologetically posit the notion that European epistemology has lent credence to the social and economic inequality of the oppressed in society. Though the origin of decolonial theory can be clearly traced to Latin America, it significantly reflects the cultural ethos of contemporary deprived societies. It also reflected the deprived societies of Africa and South-East Asia and other post-colonial settings in the world. Mignolo, Vallego and Quijano joined forces to deconstruct the western matrix of power, using the decolonial lens as a drastic shift from the subjugation of the weak to constructively create a new epistemology of liberation and awareness that should find its roots in educational life. This new approach is a configuration of originality underpinning the reconstruction of awareness and new knowledge which can revolutionise education in South Africa. African countries will obviously benefit from educational reconstruction that contributes to reflective observation and the enhancement of learning processes in educational development.

Reflective observation is a skill or method of learning that calls for reflection or observation on recently experienced events understood through tangible experience. The action allows the learner to reflect on the learning experiences that have taken place. The learner expresses their opinion about the learning by asking questions and discussing the experience with others. Bouw et al. (2021) posit that reflective observation happens through integrative learning because aspects of school and work must be purposefully blended within the learning environment. A curriculum that focuses on vocational education affects learning environment design. At the intersection between school and work, intentionally created learning environments or systems include coaching by professionals from occupational practice on genuine goal-directed work activities and the provision of physical spaces where students can apply their academic knowledge in developing their skills.

Furthermore, observational learning is the process of learning by observing the actions and results of others under specific conditions. In contrast to imitation, observational learning entails more than copying what others do. When stakes are high, students need to be able to follow, evaluate and learn from observed behaviours and consequences (Kang, Hernandez & Mei, 2021). Dean (2019) explains that observational learning can be achieved through Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) across all disciplines, qualifications and academic institutions. The workplace or community is a place for WIL, where learners can observe and participate in transferring theoretical knowledge into actual practice. Ma et al. (2020) maintains that observational learning develops the understanding of a

learner. Reflective observation is closely related to situational learning, which acknowledges that learning occurs best when it takes place in the context in which it is applied (Egbert & Sanden, 2019). Socio-cultural contexts need to be considered in applying knowledge in situated environments (Cheng et al., 2019). In South Africa, learners' work can be reflected in their active life experiences to integrate them into the new knowledge that is required to address the diverse needs of the economic environment.

Another factor to note is 'abstract conceptualisation', which is the notion of developing abstract concepts that can be generalised and applied to various situations. The conceptualisation of knowledge is a learning and teaching method that processes knowledge through a systematic thinking process. The learners' or facilitators' ability to apply the abstract concepts in practice and understand what it means to work in an actual situation will enhance the knowledge of the learner (McMullan & Cahoon, 1979).

### 3. Active Experimentation

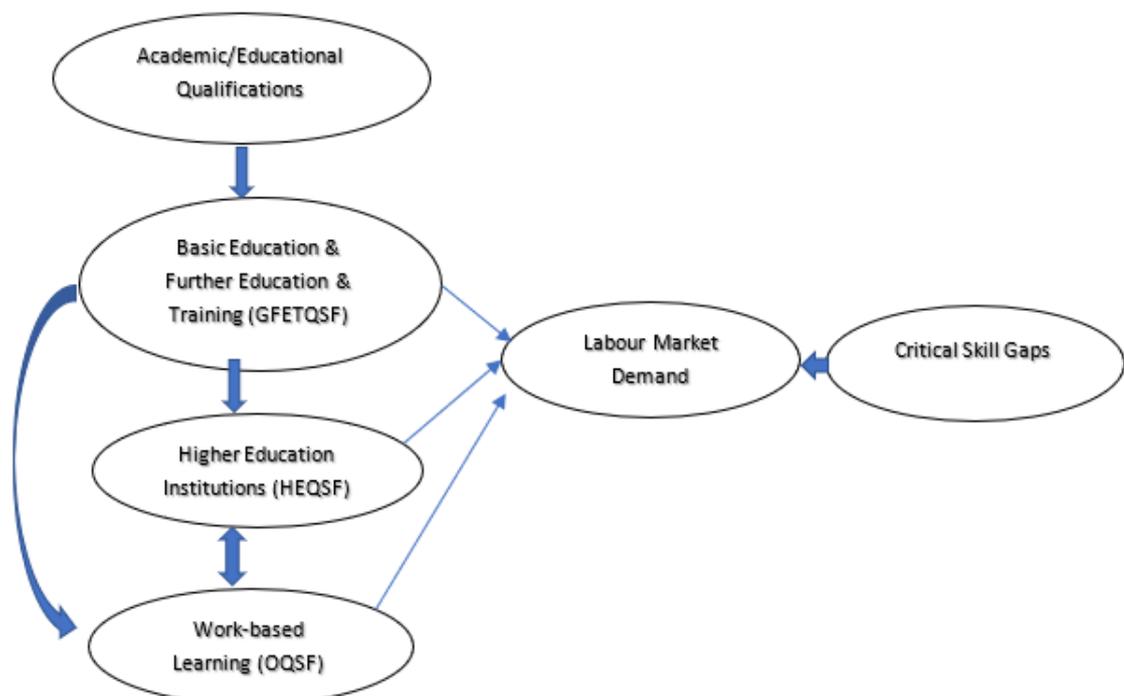


Figure 1: A conceptual framework for the study

The national focus and concerns over the years have been the issue of skills gap and skills development. Employers have constantly been raising issues about the lack of skills in different sectors, but hardly anyone can define where the skills should be acquired. Higher educational institutions' qualifications have always been the focus of skills acquisition. Even the recently released critical skills list by the Immigration Act (Department of Home Affairs, 2022) quantified the identified skills in terms of the NQF levels provided by the SAQA Act 1995. The NQF allocates different levels, namely NQF Level 1 to NQF Level 10 to qualifications to structure the basic requirements for progression at each level. NQF Level 1

means that the student has completed Grade 9 (i.e. the compulsory level of schooling) and is in a position to advance to further education and training either at a school to obtain the Graade 12 certificate or through a Technical & Vocational Education & Training (TVET) college, both of which will take them to NQF Level 4. NQF Level 10 is the highest NQF Level where students obtain their doctorate degree. The conceptual framework in Figure 1 shows that educational qualifications needed by the labour market can be achieved at any level of education. Likewise, the skill gaps can be bridged at all stages of learning, provided the skills are integrated into the theoretical knowledge.

According to Hernandez-March et al. (2009), higher education policies are increasingly included on government agendas at both the national and supranational levels. Higher education is critical for a country's social well-being and economic prosperity. A country's ability to compete in today's knowledge-based global economy depends on a stable supply of highly qualified workers, a sustainable system of research and development, and an efficient mechanism for transferring knowledge from universities and public research organisations to the business network. This shows that HEIs are more focused on knowledge-based education than skills acquisition. However, there is a need to find common ground between theoretical knowledge offered by academic institutions and practical knowledge required by the economy to bridge the skills gap.

The theoretical framework adopted for the paper encourages a practical adaptation of theoretical knowledge, whereby the HEIs provide an avenue for knowledge to be practised. The conceptual reality is that academic institutions and qualifications in South Africa are structured for various purposes from which they are not allowed to deviate. However, the skills gaps could be addressed using multiple means rather than focusing on baseline academic qualifications provided by tertiary institutions. Mkhonza and Letsoalo (2017) maintain that there are two ways for organisations to fill their skill gaps, either by upskilling or hiring. Upskilling requires training the existing workforce in the necessary skills while hiring means appointing a new person from outside the organisation that possesses the needed skills. The important point is that the skills have to somehow be acquired from some source.

### **3.1 Academic Qualifications in South Africa**

Employers in South Africa and around the world want graduates who are ready to work. The ongoing debates about graduates from higher education institutions lacking skills and knowledge have increased employers' scepticism about graduates' ability to perform effectively in the workplace once hired.

It is expected by various stakeholders that educational institutions like schools, colleges and HEIs should prepare individuals for life via skills development. At the most basic level, such development, which includes teaching reading and numeracy skills, aids in creating work prospects. The human capital paradigm states that, contrary to popular belief, the number of years spent in education improves one's capacity to find work. However, it is argued that skilled worker unemployment is complex and linked to factors such as educational quality, lack of experience, discrimination and inflexibility (Mobarak, 2019). This view confirms that unemployment is a socio-economic issue that is detrimental to

economic welfare and output and diminishes human capital (Mpendule & Mang'unyi, 2018). There are prominent players in the area who are impacted and influenced by the qualification system. Schools, universities, companies and learning centres are examples of providers. Employers fund a significant portion of adolescent and adult work-related training and education, and as gatekeepers, they may encourage, facilitate or prevent access to learning.

A qualifications framework is a tool for developing and categorising qualifications based on learning levels' criteria. This collection of standards might be hidden inside the qualifications descriptors or made apparent through a set of level descriptors. The scope of frameworks may be broad, encompassing all learning outcomes and routes, or narrowed to a specific sector, such as early childhood education, adult education and training or a specific vocational field. Some frameworks have more design features and a more rigid structure than others; some have a legal foundation, while others represent a consensus of social partners' viewpoints (OECD, 2002). Similarly, Behringer and Coles (2003) describe a qualification as a unit of recognised learning outcomes such as certificates, diplomas, degrees and licences. Academic qualifications that will enhance skills development and bridge the skills gap cannot be achieved without mentioning lifelong learning relevant to organisational needs and individual development. Lifelong learning is a personal activity. One of the factors explored by this paper is how the qualification system influences people's motivation, inclination and ability to pursue more education. Lifelong learning is essential for adults, but it also applies to school children, students and working and non-working individuals. Even the most developed nations have begun a quest to continually grow the educational system and improve the quality of education since education has attained a level that cannot be restricted to specific periods in the human lifespan (Solmaz, 2017).

The South African academic qualifications are described in terms of the NQF levels provided by SAQA, which could be achieved through different means. The employers assume that the required knowledge and skills for the nation and businesses should be gained from HEIs. The ten levels of National Qualifications Framework focus on scope of knowledge, knowledge literacy, method and procedure, problem-solving, ethics and professional practice, assessing, processing and managing information, producing and communicating of information, context and systems, managing of learning and accountability in order to align competence in both intellectual and academic skills of knowledge to analyse, synthesis and evaluate information (SAQA, 2012; van Huyssteen, 2002). Hence, the NQF makes provision for alignment of knowledge to skills in principle but the process is not clear in practice. However, the universities are structured differently for various purposes. Universities of Technology are more aligned with workplace skills acquisitions. At the same time, traditional universities are more knowledge-oriented, and comprehensive universities offer programmes that could be either knowledge-based or skills-based. However, Reddy et al. (2016) opined that basic education also plays a critical role in the labour market's education and training since most of the South African workforce does not have tertiary education.

For this reason, discussing the difference between knowledge and skills is essential. According to Boulet (2015) and Conway (2022), knowledge is information gained through sensory input, such as reading, watching, listening or touching. Knowledge is defined as familiarity with information and theoretical concepts. Knowledge can be transferred from one person to another or gained through observation and study. Likewise, skills refer to the practical application of knowledge in a specific situation through sensory input and output and are developed through practice. Social skills, for example, are developed by engaging with people through observation, listening and speaking. Continuous practice and engagement is probably the best way to master new skills. Alternatively, work-related skills can be acquired through workplace training and development programmes (Andriotis, 2017).

Racial and institutional divisions and disparities have marked South Africa's higher education system. Van Huyssteen (2002) acknowledges that the universities of technology, formerly technikons, were historically planned to award various career-focused qualifications focusing on implementing existing knowledge, skills and procedures such as National Certificates and National Diplomas. Before 1994, South Africa's technikons concentrated on educating skilled employees at the pre-professional level, primarily engineering practitioners and technicians in various sectors, such as biotechnology, health sciences, nature conservation, auditing, design, film and video. The distinction between technikons and universities is that, traditionally, technikons have a strong vocational focus, including their closeness and interaction with workplaces, and the lower entry requirements for most technikon programmes, resulting in a more inclusive student body than that of more elite universities. Technikons' industry ties were maintained through a structured and assessed system of workplace learning in most diplomas and a regular system of industrial advisory bodies attached to each programme (Department of Education, 2004; Garraway & Winberg, 2019; Mentz et al., 2008). Universities of technology seems to be better equipped to award skills-based qualifications.

The comprehensive universities, in contrast, were designed to confer degrees at the Bachelor (3 years), Honours Bachelor (Bachelor + 1 year), Master's and doctoral levels. For both types of institutions, the Standard 10 (Grade 12) certificate level, which is based on externally assessed and moderated tests on a national basis, is the entry point into undergraduate qualifications. The standard qualification for leaving school in South Africa is Grade 12 (sometimes called "Matric"). Universities of technology (technikons) accepted a Grade 12 pass, but universities demanded a "Full Matriculation Exemption certificate" requiring particular course combinations and a higher minimum pass mark. Since the early 1990s, technikons have been permitted to provide degrees (BTech, MTech, DTech). The ranges of qualifications supplied by the two types of institutions have remained unique despite these developments, and there has been difficulty articulating between the two systems (Garraway & Winberg, 2019; Mentz et al., 2008).

According to the Department of Education (2004), changes in academic disciplines and knowledge fields typically influence university programmes from within. It is generally a professional curriculum that emphasises the profession and the

body or council regulating it. Many other university programmes will probably lack the external contacts necessary to launch and run technikon-type programmes successfully. In these situations, institutions must simultaneously work on developing programmes and a network of partnerships with outside organisations representing business, industry and the community in order to inform curriculum development, create opportunities for cooperative and in-service learning, and keep up with the evolving skill needs of the labour market.

The traditional universities are purely academic and offer Bachelor's degree programmes only for at least three years. The admission criteria for a traditional university degree programme are slightly higher than that of a National Diploma and National Certificate, and the focus is on acquiring workplace knowledge. The focus of traditional universities is on general formative education with a theoretical orientation (Department of Education, 2004).

### **3.2 Legal Framework for Academic Qualifications in South Africa**

The National Qualification Act of 2008 by SAQA established the framework, while the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 governs the national skill requirements. The ten NQF levels are sub-divided into GFETQSF (Level 1-4) and HEQSF (Level 5-10). The GFETQSF comprises the General Certificate at level 1, a Grade 9 qualification, an Occupational Certificate at level 1, Elementary Certificate at level 2, a Grade 10 qualification and an Occupational Certificate at level 2 while the Intermediate certificate is at level 3, a grade 11 qualification and National Certificate at level 4, a Grade 12 qualification and the Occupational Certificate at level 4.

The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Frameworks (HEQSF) and General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Frameworks (GFETQSF) are the two sub-frameworks that make up South Africa's ten (10) NQF levels for academic qualifications. The Occupational Qualification Sub-Framework (OQSF), which is comprised of eight (8) levels, is the third NQF Sub-Framework (Durham, 2021). Each framework represents the lowest rank to the highest rank of qualifications. The qualification levels in South Africa are governed by legislation that applies to academic and occupational certifications. According to van Huyssteen (2002), the creation and implementation of these frameworks reflect an audacious and daring undertaking to unite all learning under a single framework of standards and certificates based on outcomes, with built-in quality assurance procedures.

NQF levels give prospective employees information about education and skills. They make it easier to select the job applicant who is most qualified and fit for an open position. As a result, NQF certifications also assist students in making the right decision regarding their future careers. The NQF describes the abilities needed for a particular employment field and how to acquire those skills (Durham, 2021). Reddy et al. (2016) indicated that 11.75 million persons in the South African labour force have less than a Grade 12 certificate out of 15 million employed people in South Africa, showing that more than 70% of the South African workforce were employed at NQF level 1-3 which might be an inhibition to career progression and skills development in the workplace.

The HEQSF includes a Higher Certificate at level 5 and an Occupational Certificate at level 5, a Diploma and Advance Certificate at level 6 and an Occupational Certificate at level 6, a Bachelor's Degree and an Advance Diploma at level 7, an Occupational Certificate at level 8, a Bachelors Honours Degree, Postgraduate Degree, and a Bachelor Degree at level 9, and a Doctorate Degree. Nevertheless, access to schools, universities and TVET programmes has improved recently. However, quality is still difficult to come by, which leads to poor academic advancement across all educational courses and low completion rates at academic institutions, TVET colleges, and universities (Reddy et al., 2016). Consequently, because of the attrition rate, the accessibility to HEIs does not always translate to the necessary national competencies. Achievement in the school subjects of Languages, Mathematics, and Science provides the basis for participation and achievement in technical themes in post-secondary education and training institutions and work. Rahmat et al. (2012) identified four generic abilities that graduates must possess in order to succeed in the workplace: academic, connectedness, personal management and exploration.

For holistic employees, discipline-specific talents should supplement these abilities. According to Griesel and Parker (2009), the four main, interconnected factors that affect employability are effective practices (communication, time management, self-management, problem-solving, and lifelong learning); profound understandings rooted in a disciplinary base (specialised expertise in a field of knowledge); practical beliefs about one's own identity and self-worth; and metacognition (self-awareness and the capacity to reflect on, in and for action). However, as indicated above, Reddy et al. (2016) assert that more than 70% of the country's present workforce has less than a Grade 12 education, which demonstrates that the majority of South Africans in employment left school before even acquiring the information and skills needed for the workplace. Durham (2021) claims that the NQF system's framework gives options and support to those without official qualifications who want to change occupations, upskill themselves or those who dropped out of school before acquiring their Grade 12 certificate.

The Skills Development Act provides an administrative framework for creating and putting into effect national workplace and sector programmes to advance and improve the skills of the South African workforce, in addition to the NQF Act . The Skills Development Act 97 of 1998 was passed to correct a historical injustice in which some groups of people were excluded from educational opportunities. This Act made it possible to continue pursuing education and advancing one's abilities while working (Aigbavboa et al. 2016). The Act encourages employers to provide an environment at the workplace where people may actively learn new things and develop their knowledge. Additionally, companies were mandated to contribute to the annual skills development plan for their workers under the Skills Development Levies Act 1999, which is how the learning is funded. The Employment Tax Incentive Act 26 of 2013 was also introduced to address the unemployment problems among young people who were excluded from economic activity due to potential employers' regularly voiced reluctance to recruit young job searchers, mainly because young job applicants lack the necessary education, credentials and experience. A well-crafted incentive is

required, and a sizeable financial commitment is needed to provide the essential expertise and experience (Smale, 2012).

### 3.3 National Qualification Frameworks

An NQF is generally developed as part of a country's development initiatives, showing broad consensus regarding the form that qualifications should take and the desired outcomes of the initiative (Tuck, 2007; Young, 2005). Tuck (2007) explained that, historically, countries such as Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were the first countries to introduce national qualification frameworks between 1980 and 1990, while Ireland, Malaysia, Namibia and a few other countries followed suit as the second generation between the late 1990s and early 2000s. Countries such as Albania, Botswana, Angola, Lesotho and many others are still considering whether to have national qualification frameworks. In addition to NQFs, regions such as European Union, Pacific Islands and the Southern African Development Community are considering having a regional qualification framework (RFQs).

It is frequently asserted that NQFs will help certain countries, regions and the global economy achieve their objectives. From a broad policy perspective, NQFs and international frameworks provide obvious benefits for related reasons. Employers and admissions administrators or registration officers will have a legally recognised framework to compare various qualifications if an NQF is available. A European Qualifications Framework will assist regional organisations like the EU remove obstacles to unrestricted labour movement among member states. For students, an NQF will recognise credentials on a wider scale; for example, informal learning should theoretically also be eligible for accreditation by means of a recognition of prior learning policy (Young, 2007).

Young (2007) notes further important distinctions that need to be considered when analysing the possible drivers of the increasing interest in NQFs. The first is the difference between often irrational expectations of what an NQF's implementation will achieve and NQFs as a practical response to real political, economic and educational concerns like changes in labour markets and the growth and diversification of post-compulsory education. The second distinction is between the general idea of an agreed-upon set of qualities shared by a nation or group of nations and the widely varying ways the concept of a framework has been embraced in other nations. Beyond these distinctions, the NQF was created to recognise management qualifications and informal and non-formal learning (Behringer, 2003).

As indicated earlier, a major global trend in modernising national education and training systems since the late 1990s has been the creation of NQFs. The International Labour Organisation's Recommendation No. 195 on human resources development: education, training and lifelong learning, which was adopted in June 2004 (Tuck, 2007; Young, 2005), recommended the adoption of an NQF as a means of promoting the development, implementation and financing of a transparent mechanism for the assessment, certification and recognition of skills. Typically, a diagrammatical picture of the South African NQF is used to display and discuss it. It shows the structure from the highest qualification (a doctorate) to the General Certificate.

#### **4. Research Methodology**

The study used a methodical literature review that was carefully planned and carried out. The skills gap in South Africa has been the subject of research that looked at elements impacting the theoretical literatures of decolonising and educational degrees. Only articles that were released during the 10 years before the current study were deemed to cover current trends and to be pertinent. Additionally, studies that looked at outside influences on the creation of academic curricula were also examined in publications.

##### **4.1 Research design and scientific literature search**

In order to seek, classify, plan and critically assess the literature in order to develop themes, a hermeneutic outline was used (Boell & Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014). The journal articles were located using a variety of electronic bibliographic databases, databases from various disciplines and websites. Academic publications, Google Scholar, company blogs, company websites, Emerald Insight and AOSIS are all included in this database. In a search engine, the terms “decolonisation, educational requirements, skill shortage, and knowledge acquisition” were entered. With the use of these keywords, the study was able to locate themes and gain a deeper understanding of the internal and external elements affecting employee performance. To be further vetted, all the structures were recorded in an MS Excel spreadsheet. The spreadsheet was examined more closely in order to categorise relevant prior research that is consistent with the goals of the current study. To ensure that only papers that could contribute to the achievement of the goals of this study were examined, the pertinent articles were carefully and purposefully chosen. In this essay, internal and external factors impacting employee performance served as the unit of analysis. 95 percent of the articles that were chosen were released during the last five years. Because of this, the review was best based on current empirical studies that concentrated on the variables driving the skills gap in South Africa.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The research conceptualises the teleology of decolonisation in the description of South African educational qualifications. In an attempt to unpack the dire skills’ shortages in South Africa, the paper demonstrates various educational qualifications and the inadequacies in meeting the skills demand of the economy. The history of education in South Africa has developed from the colonial dispensation to the current system of educational qualifications in South Africa. The article suggests how decolonising knowledge could add a new dimension to the body politic of learners when new configurations are added that would make room for employable skills within the socio-economic space of South Africa. Using the decolonial lens, the research showcases how indigenous knowledge could be incorporated into the educational domain which would invariably develop the South African educational system and make it relevant in the African cosmology.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Dr. Christiana Kappo-Abidemi is thankful to the National Research Foundation (NRF), South Africa for a Thuthuka Grant (TTK210412593900) towards this

research work. The University of Mpumalanga Research Office is gratefully acknowledged for support.

## 6. References

- Adetiba, T. C. (2019, October). Massification of higher education in South Africa, the good, the bad and the ugly. In *Proceedings of International Academic Conferences* (No. 9410873). International Institute of Social and Economic Sciences.
- Aigbavboa, C. Oke, A. & Mokasha, M (2016). Implementation of Skills Development Act in the South African construction industry. *The Scientific Journal for Theory and Practice of Socio-Economic Development* 5(9): 53-64
- Andriotis, N. (2017). How to identify and address skill gaps at work. *EFront Learning*. <https://www.efrontlearning.com/blog/2017/10/identify-skill-gaps-workplace.html>
- Behringer, F & Coles, M. (2003). The role of national qualifications systems in promoting lifelong learning. *OECD Education Working Papers, No.3*, OECD Publishing doi: 10.178/224841854572
- Boell, S. K., & Cecez-Kecmanovic, D. (2014). A hermeneutic approach for conducting literature reviews and literature searches. *Communications of the Association for Information Systems, 34*(1), 12.
- Boulet, G. (2015). Identifying the difference between knowledge and skills. *ELearning Industry*. <https://elearningindustry.com/difference-between-knowledge-and-skills-knowing-not-make-skilled>
- Bouw, E., Zitler, I., & Bruijn, E. (2021). Designable elements of Integrative Learning environments at the boundary of school and work. A multiple case study. *Learning Environment Research, 24*, 487-517.
- Business Tech. (2021). *South Africa to bring in 24 Cuban engineers to help with infracture issues*. <https://businesstech.co.za/news/business/484165/south-africa-to-bring-in-24-cuban-engineers-to-help-with-infracture-issues/>
- Cheng, S. C., Hwang, G. J., & Chen, C. H. (2019). From reflective observation to active learning: A mobile experiential learning approach for environmental science education. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 50*(5), 2251-2270.
- Conway, B. (2022, February 14). The difference between knowledge, skills and abilities. *Employee Connect*. <https://www.employeeconnect.com/blog/difference-between-knowledge-skills-abilities-resume/>
- Dean, B. (2019). Observational research in work-integrated learning. *International Journal of Work-Integrated Learning*. Special Issue 20(4): 375-387
- Department of Education (2004). *Creating comprehensive universities in South Africa: Concept Document*. <http://education.gov.za>
- Durham, S. (2021, July 1). What are the South African NQF levels? SACAP. <https://www.sacap.edu.za/blog/applied-psychology/nqf-levels/>
- Faller, F., Burton, S., Kaniki, A., Leitch, A., & Ntshoe, I. (2023). Achieving doctorateness: is South African higher education succeeding with graduate attributes? *South African Journal of Higher Education, 37*(2), 93-108.
- Field, S., Musset, P & Alvarez-Galvan, J. (2014). A skills beyond school review of South Africa. *OECD Reviews of Vocational Education and Training*. OECD Publishing.
- Egbert, J., & Sanden, S. (2019). *Foundations of education research: Understanding theoretical components* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Garraway, J. & Winberg, C. (2019). Reimagining futures of universities of technology. *Critical Studies in Teaching & Learning, 7*, Special Issue.

- Greenwood, A. (1999). International definitions and prospects of underemployment statistics. *International Labour Organization*.  
[https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/stat/documents/publication/wcms\\_091440.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/stat/documents/publication/wcms_091440.pdf)
- Griesel, H. & Parker, B (2009). *Graduate attributes. A baseline study on south african graduates from the perspectives of employers*. Higher Education South Africa & the South African Qualifications Authority.
- Gyamera, G. O., & Burke, P. J. (2018). Neoliberalism and curriculum in higher education: A post-colonial analyses. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 23(4), 450-467.
- Hernandez-March, J. Martin del Peso, M. & Leguey, S. (2009). Graduates skills and higher education: The employer perspective: *Tertiary Education and Management* 15(1): 1-16
- Human Resource Development Council. (2013). *Review of the current skills development system and recommendations towards the best model for delivering skills in the country*.  
<http://hrdcsa.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/2.-Annex-1-Skills-System-Review-Report-5-Dec-2013.pdf>
- Kang, W., Pineda Hernández, S., & Mei, J. (2021). Neural mechanisms of observational learning: a neural working model. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 14, 609312.  
<https://doi.org/10.3389/Fnhum.2020.609312>.
- Department of Home Affairs. *Immigration Act, 2022. Critical skills list*. Government Printers.
- Jika, T. (2020). 200 Cuban medics to help SA fight Covid-19. *Mail & Guardian*.  
<https://mg.co.za/article/2020-04-25-200-cuban-medics-to-help-sa-fight-covid-19/>
- Kappo-Abidemi, C., & Ogujiuba, K. (2020). Higher education institutions and corporate social responsibility: Triple bottom-line as conceptual framework for community development. *Entrepreneurship and Sustainability*, 8(2), 1103-1119.
- Kurts, S., (2020). Kolb's experiential learning theory & learning styles. *Educational Technology*. <https://educationaltechnology.net/kolbs-experiential-learning-theory-learning-styles/>
- Ma, Q., Chan, A. H., & Teh, P. L. (2020). Bridging the digital divide for older adults via observational training: Effects of model identity from a generational perspective. *Sustainability*, 12(11), 4555.
- Maisiri, W., Darwish, H., & Van Dyk, L. (2019). An investigation of industry 4.0 skills requirements. *South African Journal of Industrial Engineering*, 30(3), 90-105.
- McMullan, W., & Cahoon, A (1979). Integrating abstract conceptualizing with experiential learning. *The Academy of Management Review*, 4(3), 453-458.
- Mentz, J. & Kotze, P. & Van der Merwe, A. (2008). Searching for the technology in universities of technology. *SACJ*, 42, 29-37
- Mignolo, W. (2011). *The darker side of western modernity: Global future, decolonial options*. Duke University Press.
- Mkhonza, L. & Letsoalo, A. (2017). Understanding the skills gaps in the public service sector. Research conducted by the Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority. PSETA. <https://pseta.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Understanding-the-Skills-Gaps-in-the-Public-Service-Sector.pdf>
- Mncayi, P., & Dunga, S. (2016). Career choice and unemployment length: A case of graduates from a South African university. *Industry and Higher Education*, 30(6), 413-423.

- Mobarak, K. (2019). Reflections of employed graduates on the suitability of their skills and knowledge for workplace-readiness. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 33(4), 186-202.
- Mouton, N. Louw, G & Strydom, G (2013). Critical Challenges of the South African School System. *International Business & Economics Research Journal* 12(1): 31-44
- Mpendulo, G. & Mang'unyi, E. (2018). Exploring Relationships between Education level and Unemployment. *Journal of Social Sciences (COES & J-JSS)*, 7(2): 2305-9494
- Ogunyemi, C. B. (2021). Fela Kuti's Black consciousness: African cosmology and the re-configuration of Blackness in 'colonial mentality'. *African Identities*, 19(4), 487-501.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2002). Rethinking human capital. In *Education policy analysis*. Paris: OECD.
- Smale, N. K. (2012). *An analysis of the use of tax incentives to motivate job creation* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Pretoria).  
<https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/26426/dissertation.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- Quijano, A. (2007). Coloniality and modernity/rationality. *Cultural Studies*, 21(2-3), 168
- Reddy, V., Bhorat, H., Powell, M., Visser, M., & Arends, A. (2016). *Skills supply and demand in South Africa*. Human Sciences Research Council.
- Rahmat, M., Ahmad, K., Idris, S., & Zainal, F. (2012). Relationship between employability and graduate skill. *Social and Behavioural Sciences*, 59: 591-597.
- South African Qualifications Authority. (2012). The South African Qualifications Authority level descriptors for the South African national qualifications framework. SAQA. <https://www.sqa.org.za/level-descriptors-for-the-south-african-national-qualifications-framework/>
- Solmaz, D. Y. (2017). Relationship between Lifelong Learning Levels and Information Literacy Skills in Teacher Candidates. *Universal journal of educational research*, 5(6), 939-946.
- Statistics South Africa. (2021). Quarterly labour force survey. *Stats SA*.  
<https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/P02111stQuarter2021.pdf>.
- Tanga, M., & Maphosa, C. (2018). Academic hurdles facing undergraduate students at one South African University. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, 35, 1-15.
- Tuck, R (2007). *An introductory guide to national qualifications framework: Conceptual and practical issues for policy makers*. Skills and Employability Department. International Labour Office.
- Vallego, A. A. (2015). *Latin-American philosophy: From identity to racial exteriority*. Indiana University Press.
- Van Huyssteen, R. (2002). The introduction of the South African National Qualifications Framework: A brief overview, with reference to higher education. *IERF*.  
<https://www.ierf.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/IERFSouthAfrica2002.pdf>.
- Young, M. (2005). *National qualifications frameworks: Their feasibility for effective implementation in developing countries*. International Labour Office- Geneva
- Young, M. (2007). Qualifications frameworks: Some conceptual issues. *European Journal of Education*, 42(4), 445-457