

The structural outlook of the south African college councils: A comprehensive review in comparison with global college governance systems

 Bongani June Mwale^{1*}, Mfanelo Ntsobi², Maphefo Anno-Frempong³, Phakamile Twala⁴

^{1,2}Sci-Bono Discovery Centre Johannesburg, South Africa; mwalebj@icloud.com (B.J.M.).

³Transport Education and Training Authority Randburg, South Africa.

⁴Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature, Mbombela, South Africa.

Abstract: South African Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges are important institutions for equipping youth with new skills that will support the country's economic growth. College councils are responsible for providing strategic direction, formulating policies, and overseeing the colleges' programmes and activities. However, despite legal requirements, their effectiveness is limited due to governance issues such as restricted authority, poor administration, and lack of stakeholder participation. This study emphasizes the need for strategic reforms to unlock the full potential of TVET colleges as agents of socio-economic transformation in South Africa. Using a qualitative, ethnographic methodology, the research assesses the governance structure of TVET colleges within a multilevel governance framework, focusing on authority, implementation challenges, and accountability systems of college councils. Comparative analysis with global models from the UK, Germany, and Australia highlights best practices in stakeholder engagement, governance professionalization, and industry participation. The findings reveal that South African college councils often function as symbolic entities without real power, hindering accountability and strategic responsiveness. The TVET College's Governors' Council and industry collaborations are notable examples of governance bodies that promote ethical leadership and financial integrity. Recommendations include strengthening legislation to empower college councils, increasing industry involvement and transparency, and developing industry-specific codes of good governance. These measures aim to align TVET colleges with national skills priorities, improve educational outcomes, and support sustainable economic growth.

Keywords: College council, Global comparison, Institutional autonomy, Systems governance, TVET governance.

1. Introduction

The College Council is the most important governing body at a public TVET college in South Africa. The Continuing Education and Training Act (CET Act) No. 16 of 2006 established the College Council, which serves as a platform for various groups to collaborate in ensuring policy adherence, efficient resource utilization, and public participation. The mandate of TVET colleges in South Africa is situated within the broader context of national training and skills development. Neoliberal ideas suggest that training increases productivity and that skills improve employability. Besides training and skills development, TVET colleges are tasked with promoting self-employment and producing job seekers for the national labor market. Additionally, TVET colleges are expected to meet industry demands and societal needs. The strong focus on TVET education is based on the belief that it will help reduce the high youth unemployment rate in South Africa (Needham, 2019; Sebola, 2022).

TVET colleges are essential to South Africa's skills and economic development, as they are meant to produce skills for the transformation of the economy by bridging the skills gaps, in particular in the

artisanry and trade sectors. TVET colleges are designed to offer practical, occupation-oriented training that produces graduates who are almost ready for work. The NDP has adopted an approach to enhance economic diversification and industrialization and has identified TVET colleges as one of the critical players and central pillars for South Africa's post-school education and training system by producing a skilled workforce for the economy. The NDP has set a target of 30,000 qualified artisans per year by 2030, and to achieve this mammoth task, it is important that TVET undergo serious transformation, both from managerial and governance points of view (Kana & Letaba, 2024; Maluka & Mulaudzi, 2025; National Planning Commission, 2020).

South Africa acknowledges Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) for offering post-school vocational education to younger members of society. TVET colleges, formerly known as Technical Colleges, consist of 50 public institutions with numerous campuses across the country. These colleges are located within the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, and the Skills Development Branch (Kana & Letaba, 2024; Makola, Dube, & Tabane, 2023; M. Sithole, Wissink, & Chiwawa, 2022).

1.1. Problem Statement

The Continuing Education and Training (CET) Act affords college councils significant power, but the current operation of South African TVET schools indicates that there are difficulties with their setup that hinder growth, innovation, inclusivity, and student success. College councils are responsible for formulating policies, providing strategic leadership, and monitoring activities. However, in practice, they often function as cosmetic or symbolic bodies with limited authority or capacity to implement change. Existing challenges in the governance and management of TVET colleges reveal notable deficiencies in both management and governmental practices, despite the anticipated strategic impact and substantial governmental investment (LGSETA, 2024; Makola et al., 2023; Nkambule & Ngubane, 2023; M. Sithole et al., 2022).

1.2. Research Objectives

1. To critically evaluate the corporate governance architecture of TVET colleges in South Africa from a regulatory perspective.
2. To evaluate whether the current TVET institutional governance framework enables college councils to perform their fiduciary responsibilities without hindrance.
3. To explore the degree of accountability between college principals and college councils within the current governance structure.
4. To offer valuable insights and regulatory changes to the existing governance systems, enabling college councils to enhance the corporate governance of TVET colleges.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the legal and institutional powers and functions that the CET Act grants to College Councils?
2. To what extent are college councils able to perform their fiduciary, strategic, and oversight duties in practice?
3. Does the current reporting and accountability mechanism allow college councils and principals to positively drive institutional performance?
4. What policy insights and regulatory amendments should be designed to establish an enabling environment and improve corporate governance of TVET colleges?

1.4. Significance of the Study

The NDP has placed TVET colleges at the center and backbone of South Africa's skills revolution intentionally. The primary mandate of TVET colleges is to train skilled workers according to the demands of businesses by providing vocational, occupational, and skill-based education and training that

equips students with the competencies needed to contribute to economic growth and development. This cannot be achieved without sound corporate governance practices at TVET colleges to provide sound strategic direction, policy formation, and oversight designed to promote the national skills development agenda. The current corporate structure and regulatory framework impede college councils from executing effective accountability and oversight at TVET colleges due to constrained authority, limited powers, and functions. This study is essential to determine if the existing form permits college councils to offer strategic guidance and oversight of institutions (Education, 2022; Kana & Letaba, 2024; National Planning Commission, 2020).

2. Theoretical Framework

The study adopted the Multi-Level Governance (MLG) Framework to provide a critical analysis of the college governance and management structures, governance powers and functions, decision-making mechanisms, and oversight instruments of TVET college councils in South Africa. The MLG framework gives rise to shared responsibility and coordination of activities and functions across multiple levels: national, provincial, and regional. This framework further provides for the vertical and horizontal integration of governance and decision-making across the spheres of governance and authority.

The MLG framework further emphasizes that effective governance requires collaborative coordination of activities and functions across the tiers, including decision-making, while enhancing rigor in the management of delegation authority and careful coordination of powers and functions across the multi-layered system of governance. The study's capacity to critically evaluate and examine the institutional outlook of corporate governance was enhanced by this framework, particularly in light of the fact that the minister appears to be the executive authority, the college councils are the accounting authority, and the administration is the accounting officer (Allain-Dupré, 2020).

3. Literature Review

3.1. Governance in Post-School Education

Governance in higher education is the system that guides, monitors, and holds institutions accountable. Governance extends beyond mere administration; it encompasses strategic planning, financial oversight, compliance with regulations, and granting institutions greater autonomy. In the post-school education system (PSET), effective administration enables schools to adapt to social and economic needs while maintaining academic integrity. In the American context, the public governing board is often relatively small compared to private institutions, resulting in limited expertise for policy development and decision-making. As with all group interactions, the influence of an assertive individual is magnified in smaller groups, which can lead to leadership imbalances. It is common to find public governing boards overseeing several higher education institutions (HEIs). Often, they govern all public institutions or those of a particular type within a statewide system. Limited understanding and expertise among board members can also lead to blanket policies that are uniformly applied to all HEIs within the group (Adams, 2024; Maria & Matias, 2022).

Globally, ministries are more likely to invest significant influence and systematic control of HEI. The US's approach aims to shield HEIs from potential political interference. There are two governance models that effectively differentiate between continental Europe and the US: the state control model and the state supervising model. The former model reflects the European governance structure dominated by the authorities of the government bureaucracy and faculty guilds. The latter model more closely mirrors the US approach, exhibiting significantly less governmental influence and interference. For instance, in Portugal, Law 62/2007 of 10 September (RJIES) establishes the legal framework for the higher education system and its institutions. This law mandates that each public higher education institution (HEI) must have a general council consisting of 15 to 35 members, depending on the institution's size and complexity, with at least 30% of those members being external. The council elects

its president from the external members, and it also elects the rector/president of the university/polytechnic institute (Maria & Matias, 2022).

The trend in European higher education has been to establish a central governance body, such as a board or council, with representation from external stakeholders, while authority is reinforced at the central level and collegiality is diminished. The composition of the boards of European universities, when they exist, aims to balance representation from both internal and external stakeholders or at least involves consultation with the university during the minister's appointment of all members. Notably, in countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden, external stakeholders predominantly control the board; in Norway, internal stakeholders dominate; and in Austria exhibits an equilibrium situation. Additionally, European boards (except in the Netherlands) generally include some representation of internal stakeholders, such as academic and non-academic staff and students. Variations among boards are characterized by the presence of external members, representation of students and non-academic staff, and differences in board size. Empirical evidence indicates that external representation may enhance corporate influence and social embeddedness; this includes representation from the public and civic sectors, private sector companies, civic organization leaders, and distinguished professors, while political representation tends to be limited (Maria & Matias, 2022).

3.2. Emergence of TVET Colleges in South Africa

Historically, South Africa had four types of public institutions offering public education to students for post-matric opportunities. These included public universities, Technikons (now called Universities of Technology), Colleges of Education, as well as Technical Colleges (which have now changed from Further Education and Training colleges to Technical Colleges for Vocational Education and Training). The mandates of universities, Technikons, and Colleges of Education were clear as institutions providing higher education knowledge and training to South Africans. The first clarity of higher education band institutions lies in the fact that, despite their acknowledged different levels of standards clarified through minimum qualifications for recruitment of academics and admission requirements of students into the programmes, they clearly showed that they offered post-metric qualifications to students in preparation for the work environment (Sebola, 2022).

The origins of the TVET colleges in South Africa date back to the apartheid era, when they were known as technical colleges. First, between 1994 and 2002, the TVET colleges in South Africa were formally known as technical colleges until the merging and restructuring processes that resulted in the landscape of the FET colleges. Second, in May 2003, the then Ministry of Education officially announced the launch of FET colleges to address the effects of the apartheid legacy. Thus, the goal was to combine the 152 small and weak technical colleges with the 50 strong FET colleges, which would address the imbalances of the apartheid legacy. Third, the DHET introduced the term TVET into the South African educational system in 2012. The shift from FET to TVET colleges was announced in 2014 by the Ministry of DHET at the launch of the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. The instruction directed the transition of all public FET colleges to change their name to TVET, and since 2014, the colleges have been recognized as TVET colleges (M. Sithole et al., 2022; Terblanche & Bitzer, 2025).

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET) have historically been controversial regarding their identity as institutions required to offer post-metric qualifications and the articulation of such qualifications to other qualifications offered in higher education systems. While they are widely recognized for providing technically skilled, targeted programmes aimed at addressing socio-economic problems in a country, this function is also seen as a mandate of Universities of Technology and other universities, which offer such programmes with higher quality and a competitive advantage over TVET colleges, at different levels of standard (Sebola, 2022). The earliest forms of TVET in South Africa were linked to mission schools. The 1922 Apprenticeship Act paved the way for the emergence of technical colleges, which aimed to provide theoretical training for apprentices attached to workplaces. Although the colonial and apartheid

systems' TVETs were originally intended for the training of a skilled white working class, changes to the South African economy resulted in colleges, over time, also being opened to African, Indian, and coloured South Africans, albeit not as apprentices (Njengele, Engel-Hills, & Winberg, 2024).

The term TVET was introduced in South Africa in 2012 through a process underpinned by the Further Education and Training Colleges Amendment Bill (B24-2012). The transition from FET to TVET was intended to be part of a broader strategy to improve the South African Post-School Educational System, ensuring that TVET colleges align with international trends and standards. As part of this transition, the government believes that TVET colleges are ready to be granted full autonomy, and the well-performing colleges should have discretion in managing their own affairs (Kana & Letaba, 2024). The shift from FET to TVET colleges was an easy task in South Africa because FET colleges were already focused on skills development and vocational training, which TVET is meant to promote. The transition was part of a broader strategy by the DHET to implement new efforts to improve the status of the colleges and transform them into efficiently functioning institutions. The process was expected to increase efficiencies, responsiveness, and equity across the country. The 50 registered and accredited public TVET colleges in South Africa operate on approximately 364 campuses spread across rural and urban areas of the country (Gomba & Malale, 2025).

3.3. Transition from FET to TVET

The 1998 FET Act scripted the first step towards decentralised governance. The Act fundamentally altered how South African vocational education and training was regulated and overseen. Until then, the National Department of Education had direct control over the colleges, as the governance structures were centralised. The FET Act of 1998 established governance structures at the TVET institutional level with the power to draft strategic plans and mission statements, develop policies, and hire staff. They were also expected to receive substantial input from numerous stakeholders. Incorporating the Student Representatives Council (SRC) in the college council was a key indicator of exemplary governance practice in TVET colleges. The SRC helps to promote a better relationship between students and the management of the college (Njengele et al., 2024).

The change from FET to TVET is a signal for the importance of integrating formal education with practical training and aligning the combined product to occupational requirements. TVET seems to embody a fundamental institutional enigma despite multiple changes intended to improve the quality and efficiency of the colleges. TVET is still not viewed as an institution of choice, as it is associated with poor management, underperformance, and poor educational outcomes because of weak management structures (Sebola, 2022). In 2013, nine FET colleges were under administration. The Finance and Fiscal Commission observed that “the sector is facing governance and management problems” concerning financial management, human resources, student support, and accountable administration. Financial accountability in the sector needs serious attention to ensure that any additional funding to the sector is used effectively and efficiently. TVET colleges continue to experience management and governance challenges that contribute to the instability of the colleges (Nzimande, 2017; M. D. Sithole, 2019).

3.4. The Role of Governing Bodies in TVET Institutions

Public TVET colleges in South Africa are part of a national education and training system and operate within a nationally determined policy and legislative framework. The Continuing Education and Training (CET) Act defines the roles and autonomy of college councils. Each college is accountable to a governing body responsible for strategy and monitoring areas, including implementation performance, regulatory compliance, and academic quality assurance. In TVET institutions worldwide, governing bodies have two primary functions: to oversee and to provide strategic direction (Matodzi, Research, Sutcliffe, Bannister, & Za, 2021). They ensure that colleges are aligned with national plans for developing skills while also collaborating with local businesses and communities. This strategy promotes flexibility, quick response, and stakeholder validity. In places like the UK and Canada, college

boards include members from industry, education, and civil society. Such an arrangement makes governance more transparent and inclusive (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024).

The King Report IV on Corporate Governance, published by the Institute of Directors in Southern Africa (IODSA), is the latest code on corporate governance and came into effect on 1 April 2017. It describes corporate governance as exercising the governing body's ethical and effective leadership to achieve the governance outcomes of ethical culture, good performance, effective control, and legitimacy (Institute of Directors in South Africa (IoDSA), 2016). Governance of the TVET colleges consists of three key structures: (i) college councils with the power to approve the college's mission, plans, and budgets; (ii) academic boards responsible for instructional programmes and internal quality assurance; and (iii) Student Representative Councils (SRC). In this report, the focus is on the first structure – the college council (M. Sithole et al., 2022).

The TVET colleges in South Africa have undergone years of change, and despite multiple attempts, they have also faced challenges in TVET management over the years, despite numerous efforts to improve the quality and efficiency of the colleges. For some time now, most TVET colleges in South Africa have experienced setbacks in relationships due to a lack of leadership, poor management, and inadequate financial resources to fund their operations. The merging of technical colleges into FET colleges led to changes in roles and management, which created issues for the management structure of the colleges. The TVET colleges require an effective management structure to be able to adapt to change and deliver on expectations (Che Selane & Odeku, 2024).

3.5. Corporate Governance in TVET Colleges

Corporate governance is regarded as a mechanism within the administrative reform process. Corporate governance can be defined as the framework that oversees and regulates organizations. In institutions like TVET colleges, corporate governance refers to the structure designed to facilitate the establishment of a new system and to guarantee its alignment with the educational and training requirements of the nation. Corporate governance fundamentally promotes effective governance in entities like TVET colleges. It promotes the implementation of effective environmental strategies that enable institutions to optimize resource utilization (Mwale, Mange, & Mango, 2021).

Effective governance ensures that institutions address the interests and concerns of all stakeholders, including students, professors, staff, alumni, and the wider community. Effective governance guarantees that institutions uphold rigorous academic standards and deliver a superior education to their students. Additionally, it ensures the efficient distribution of resources to support research, instruction, and student services. Consequently, it is essential for contemporary institutions to possess governing boards that operate effectively, professionally, and with the requisite knowledge to ensure the success and sustainability of the institutions. Governing bodies can play a crucial function (Maria & Matias, 2022).

4. Methodology

The research paradigm adopted by the study is the qualitative method, which uses an interpretivist lens to gain deeper insight and understanding of individual views and experiences, an assessment of organizational reforms, and contextual issues influencing corporate governance in the TVET setting. A qualitative approach allowed the study to assess the council's functionality better than the quantitative approach would have, since the study data collection method utilized a purposeful technique, gathering data through semi-structured interviews (Nickerson, 2024; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022).

Data was collected from 30 respondents utilizing a semi-structured format and a non-probability sampling method. The participants were intentionally categorized based on their roles and responsibilities within the TVET college to capture a diverse range of perspectives from various stakeholders, including fifteen (15) external college council members from different institutions, five (5) college principals, five (5) regular staff members, and five (5) student council representatives. The intentional data collection method enabled the study to obtain a holistic perspective that includes the insights of both external and internal stakeholders, as well as other key participants essential to the

existence and operation of college councils, such as the academic board, representatives from administrative sectors, and student representative councils. The data was triangulated and analysed thematically, ensuring that the themes corresponded with the established conceptual framework (Reed et al., 2021).

The study employed an ethnographic research approach to examine the lived experiences, power dynamics, and social ramifications related to the activities of college councils among participants in South African TVET. Ethnography entails the examination of group interactions, behaviors, and perceptions via immersion or prolonged engagement. For this research, the investigator assumed the position of a participant-observer in various college councils to examine both formal and informal power structures. This method allowed for the analysis of both explicit and implicit cultural influences that affect government operations (Olasehinde, Sarah, & Teslim, 2025).

5. Discussion

5.1. Powers of TVET College Councils

College councils are the highest decision-making entities within the college setup in South Africa, and the Continuing Education (2022) (as amended), grants them fiduciary powers and functions. Councils are accountable for the provision of strategic direction, policymaking, budget and financial supervision, audit, and performance management, as outlined in the Act. This responsibility encompasses the establishment of the vision, mission, goals, and institutional values, as well as the approval of the strategic plan and annual performance plan to ensure that they are consistent with national priorities such as the National Development Plan 2030 and other related international development priorities as set forth by recognized organizations such as the UN, OECD, and others. Councils are accountable for budget approval, financial management oversight, asset protection, and the establishment and maintenance of internal controls and risk management.

In South Africa, college councils are accountable for the improvement of stakeholder management and integration, the promotion of industry participation, and the engagement of the public sector in accordance with intergovernmental relations instruments. College councils are also accountable for the management and terms of service of college council-appointed employees, provided that they adhere to the empowering labour laws. Despite the fact that college councils are not authorized to appoint principals and deputy principals, they do participate in the recruitment of college principals and deputy principals upon invitation. This is despite the fact that college principals are appointed by the minister and technically report to the director-general of the Department of Higher Education and Training. The participants of the study identified this as a significant lacuna. A more centralized role was strongly recommended by the participants in order to clarify the reporting and accounting lines, powers, and privileges.

Councils are tasked with enhancing student inclusion and stakeholder engagement by ensuring that all programs are equitable and facilitating avenues for students to express their concerns. College councils are responsible for creating and maintaining a constructive relationship with organized labour, community stakeholders, the student representative council, and both public and private sector enterprises. Primarily, college councils are tasked with upholding internal and financial control mechanisms to safeguard public funds, conducting audits, and managing risk to enhance accountability, transparency, regulatory compliance, integrity, and sustainability.

5.2. Governance Challenges in South African TVET Colleges

South Africa's governance system for TVET colleges is characterized by a tension between autonomy and state control (Akoojee & McGrath, 2008). While the CET Act provides for inclusive council structures, actual implementation is uneven, with challenges including poor attendance, limited capacity, weak accountability systems, and insufficient industry participation (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2019).

Good governance in the TVET sector has not been easy to achieve. There have been problems of poor financial oversight, lack of strategic and academic leadership, crises caused by poor human resource management, and, in some cases, actual fraud. Since the decision to transfer public TVET colleges to DHET in 2009, a few colleges have had their college councils disbanded, and an administrator was appointed to address problems and re-establish sound governance.

5.3. Pandemic of Corruption

The ability of governments to effectively provide public goods, support an environment that can generate jobs and growth, address market failures, and engage citizens in the process is more important than ever. Countries with strong institutions are more resilient, better able to facilitate private sector growth, reduce poverty, deliver valuable services, address climate change, earn the confidence of citizens, and avoid conflict and fragility (World Bank, 2018, 2020).

Public sector governance and anticorruption continue to rank high among the most important development priorities. In this context, governments need to do more with less to meet increasing demands from citizens while removing obstacles for private sector development. To effectively address climate change and pandemic risks, there is a need for a stronger, more flexible, and more responsive civil service that can incorporate risk management and has access to contingencies in an emergency. The lessons from the COVID-19 response point to the need to adapt models of government operations, service delivery, and interactions with citizens, which include GovTech options for modernization of services to citizens and businesses (World Bank, 2018, 2020).

Building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions that deliver citizen-centric services, facilitate private-sector growth, and build trust in government is paramount for promoting shared prosperity on a livable planet. The world needs sound institutions and stable and responsive governance systems that can navigate and address the complex current challenges (World Bank, 2020). By ensuring fair and transparent practices, inclusive policies, and citizen-focused services, governments can foster economic growth that benefits all segments of society. Moreover, accountable and transparent governance promotes responsible resource management that invests in and contributes to the creation of a sustainable and livable planet for current and future generations.

5.4. Good Governance and Institutional Performance

The correlation between effective corporate governance and institutional performance in TVET colleges is evident. The leadership capacity of TVET colleges in South Africa appears to be further constrained by inadequate physical and human resources. In response, several effective governance approaches are being implemented to manage these colleges and maintain competitiveness. Implementing corporate governance mitigates numerous issues encountered by organizations, including trust in accounting information. Effective corporate governance has led to an expanded perspective on achieving effective outcomes. Management is responsible for formulating and executing corporate strategy, as well as managing the institution's operations under the board's supervision, with the aim of generating sustainable long-term value (Mwale et al., 2021; Yulianti, Maryam, Hamdiah, Mahdi, & Khairuna, 2024).

The correlation between effective corporate governance and institutional success in TVET institutions is evidenced by the council's consultation with student representative councils to establish an appropriate framework for advising on policies related to student support services within the public college. This act implements effective corporate governance, fostering positive and sustainable performance in vocational institutions. Students at all public colleges must adhere to a code of conduct, as well as disciplinary actions and procedures established by the council in accordance with national policy. The quality of instruction and learning is evidenced by high pass rates, establishing the college as a centre of excellence. Formal relationships allow institutions to guarantee curriculum relevance and lecturer expertise and to offer placement opportunities that improve students' prospects for securing formal employment (Luke Atugeba & Acquah-Sam, 2024; Mwale et al., 2021).

A significant association exists between effective corporate governance and institutional success in TVET colleges in South Africa. TVET centres are facing increasing pressure to demonstrate accountability in operations that influence student enrollment, educational outcomes, and the cost of education. Leaders at these institutions must possess the capability to discern emerging educational trends and to steer the institution accordingly. This will facilitate the attainment of a vision grounded in collective values and the formulation and execution of successful curriculum modification methods. TVET colleges in South Africa must rigorously implement sound corporate governance standards, as outlined by the King codes, to achieve positive and sustained institutional performance in service delivery and ethical conduct (Badenhorst & Radile, 2018; Mwale et al., 2021).

A critical study investigating the correlation between corporate governance and firm performance demonstrates the influence of corporate governance on firm performance. An inverse link exists between corporate governance and firm performance (Azegele, Okeyo, & Nyambergera, 2021). Although existing literature supports this, research also indicates that adherence to national governance and institutional frameworks influences the relationship between corporate governance and performance (Vo & Nguyen, 2014). The findings suggest that enhancements in governmental efficiency can elevate corporate governance procedures, thereby improving business performance (Luke Atugeba & Acquah-Sam, 2024). The urgency of the national government regarding the institutional framework of TVET governance in South Africa has reached an unprecedented level. This could be achieved either by expediting the amendment process of the CET Act or by implementing instructional notes through regulatory issuance.

5.5. Governance Bodies in the TVET Landscape

The governance ecosystem in South African TVET colleges includes three other influential primary entities that significantly impact its function: the TVET Colleges Governors' Council (TVETCGC), the South African College Principals Organisation (SACPO), and the South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training Students Association (SATVETSA). These three institutions represent the college councils, college principals, and student representative councils, respectively. The TVETCGC, among others, is responsible for building college councils' capacity, ensuring checks and balances exist in TVET governance, and empowering their member colleges with critical updates and industry linkages. SACPO, designed as the platform for college principals' convergence point to share experiences and best practices, symbolizes institutional leadership to drive the technical and administrative policy discourse, operational governance, and institutional performance. SATVETSA should ensure student participation in decision-making and provide them with a platform to contribute to the programmes and activities of TVET colleges to advance the ultimate objectives of access, success, and equality.

Comparative frameworks around the world demonstrate the importance of representative organizations in ensuring that education systems are accountable and legitimate. The Association of Colleges (AoC) in the UK has developed a Code of Good Governance that is widely adopted. This code assists councils with aspects such as ethical leadership, transparency, and student inclusion. An additional example is Germany's dual vocational education and training (VET) model, where the state, businesses, and chambers of commerce participate in governance. The Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) oversees research and regulation. In Australia, TAFE Directors Australia (TDA) serves as the primary authority for public providers, collaborating closely with state authorities to maintain consistent governance through council handbooks and established frameworks. These examples illustrate that representative groups play a crucial role in promoting good governance across vocational education systems.

The roles of TVETCGC, SACPO, and SATVETSA in South Africa might be strengthened by implementing a cohesive Code of Good Governance for TVET Colleges, based on the AoC model but customised for the South African environment. This kind of code would set the minimum requirements for council members, administrators, and student leaders in areas including financial responsibility, risk

management, stakeholder involvement, and ethical behaviour. In addition, systematic training and ongoing professional development for governors and principals, provided through collaborations like the TVETCGC–National School of Government partnership, would guarantee that governance participants possess the essential skills to manage intricate institutions. Equally crucial is the establishment of tripartite governance forums at the national and regional levels, where the three entities may work together to discuss performance indicators, student success metrics, compliance reports, and risk assessments. This method would be similar to Germany's shared stewardship model, which would help find a balance between accountability and collaboration. To strengthen student government, there should be official mechanisms for students to be represented on councils and channels for students to report problems and provide feedback that ensure their voices are heard in decisions about how the school is run. Finally, independent governance evaluations, which are currently widespread in the UK and Australia, should be used to assess how well TVET governance structures work. This will help create a culture of transparency, responsiveness, and continuous development.

5.6. TVETCGC Strategic Impact

The TVET Colleges Governors' Council (TVETCGC) is the group that represents all 50 TVET college councils in South Africa. It has a significant impact on how the sector is governed. Its role extends beyond advocacy; it also coordinates efforts to enhance governance professionalism across the educational system. The TVETCGC ensures that principles of accountability, ethical stewardship, and strategic oversight are integrated into the operations of colleges and universities by bringing together college councils and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), standardizing council duties, and promoting these principles as fundamental to institutional functioning.

TVETCGC ought to work with professional organisations like the Institute of Directors of South Africa (IoDSA) and the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) to design sector-focused practices for TVETs. IoDSA is an authority and thought leader in corporate governance and has global experience with directorship, governance frameworks, and board evaluation, which are useful in TVET. Incorporating IoDSA's King Code and principles of effective governance into college council operations will assist TVET councils in aligning with national corporate governance requirements and make a strategic difference. In the same way, SAICA may help the TVETCGC improve financial control, the efficacy of the audit committee, and integrated reporting standards at all the institutions. Since financial management and liquidity are still significant risks for TVET schools, working with SAICA would help them keep their finances in order.

These relationships make the TVETCGC the guardian of ethical governance in the TVET sector. Its job is not just to represent but to change things: to make college councils more professional, make governance in line with national and international best practices, and protect the integrity of South Africa's vocational education system. The TVETCGC can ensure that TVET governance is as effective as corporate and higher education governance by working with groups like the NSG, IoDSA, and SAICA. Such collaboration would boost public trust and the effectiveness of institutions. Participants and responders emphatically asserted that the role of the TVETCGC should be redefined and enhanced with greater significance and assistance from the Minister and DHET to aid in establishing the corporate governance framework of TVET colleges. All participating respondents assert that the TVETCGC is one of the most undervalued corporate governance entities in South Africa and express a desire for the government to enhance its capabilities through financial grants and further technical assistance.

5.7. Appointment of Principals of TVET Colleges

The Minister is responsible for approving the appointment of the principals of TVET colleges in South Africa. This technically means that the DG is responsible, through appropriate structures, for overseeing the recruitment process and therefore recommends to the Minister a suitable candidate that

would emerge from that process. Nationally, information about vacancies is posted, allowing interested individuals to apply. Therefore, candidates are shortlisted in a process managed by the national office, although college councils are invited to participate in the shortlisting and interviews. However, DHET, through the Minister, makes the final decision on the appointment. This method could help ensure that the process is consistent and in line with recruitment policy, but it is sometimes condemned for being bureaucratic and limiting the participation of candidates outside the college environment. Although deputies and senior managers at colleges may apply, there is limited opportunity for organized recruiting from external industry leaders, which diminishes the direct integration of entrepreneurial or private-sector knowledge into college leadership.

The governing board is responsible for hiring principals or chief executives at Further Education (FE) colleges in the UK. Usually, hiring is open and competitive, and boards may look for applicants with either excellent educational backgrounds or established leadership in the business sector. This flexibility allows FE institutions to hire leaders who can ensure that the courses they offer meet the demands of employers, especially in fields where there is a high need for skilled workers. In the United States, boards of trustees select presidents for community and technical colleges through competitive processes. Search committees often consider both internal candidates (such as vice presidents or provosts) and external candidates from business, government, or community development backgrounds. They focus on the candidates' ability to raise funds, form strategic relationships, and impact the local economy.

The German model is different because it includes input from industry in governance instead of hiring leaders from outside the company. The public education authorities have power to choose and appoint education administrators, like the principals of vocational schools. But their leadership is very much tied to the dual system, which means they need to work closely with chambers of commerce and employer groups. This makes sure that even if most principals come from the education field, their decisions are still in line with what the industry needs. In South Africa, industry involvement in leadership is low. In Germany, on the other hand, employers are part of the governance structure, which makes up for the lack of external industry recruiting in main appointments.

5.8. Systems-Wide Oversight

The overarching system-wide oversight mechanism is essential for the accurate and precise implementation of TVET administration, governance, and oversight. This approach recognizes the important roles that industry, civil society, and parliament must play in improving TVET governance. Industry needs to ensure that TVET colleges follow the rules set by the industry. At the same time, civil society needs to become more involved with these schools to ensure that TVET programs meet national and international needs and that TVET colleges are open, honest, and accountable. Industry stakeholders, including district municipalities, SETAs, and QCTOs, should support TVET institutions in aligning their program offerings with the district's development model, economic strategy, and educational sector objectives. This argument enhances the MLG framework to foster collective accountability and coordination of operations and functions across several multi-layered levels, including national, provincial, and regional tiers.

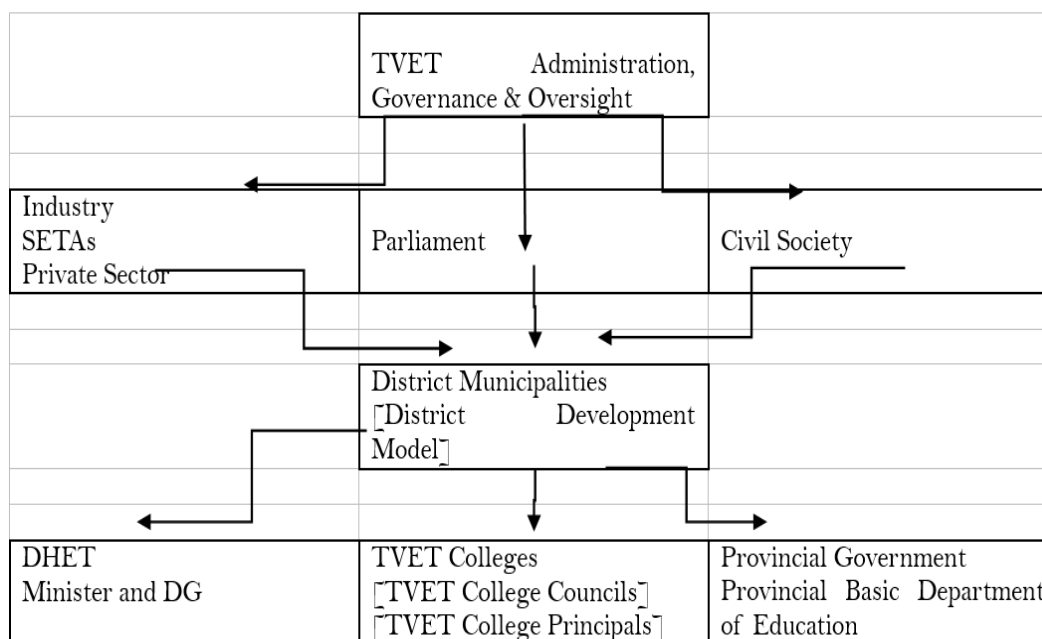


Figure 1.
System-Wide Oversight Mechanism.

The proposed System-Wide Oversight Mechanism for TVET Governance identifies industry, civil society, and parliament as critical partners to enhance the TVET oversight processes. The District Development Model (DDM) is a critical central planning tool that coordinates all sector partners with the aim of improving service delivery and socio-economic development by fostering coordinated planning and action across national, provincial, and local government spheres. TVET colleges would have to interact with the DDM when developing their strategic, operational, and sectoral plans and adopting their program mix. This will ensure that the colleges' processes align with the medium- and long-term plans adopted by the DDM, which aim to improve cooperation and coordination among all spheres of government as well as intergovernmental and cross-sector collaboration. (Mamokhere & Kgobe, 2023; United Nations, 2023). Although TVET colleges and the PSET system are nationally recognized competencies, this mechanism further enhances the participation of provincial governments and departments of education in supporting TVET colleges. It aims to strengthen their program offerings by providing various forms of support to ensure that these colleges contribute to the province's socio-economic prosperity.

6. Conclusion

The CET Act (2006) Sections 10 and 11 confer on college councils the power to operate public colleges, approve budgets, establish committees, and ensure adherence to rules and policies. However, these councils often struggle to accomplish their tasks because the framework is difficult to navigate. Firstly, councils cannot effectively fulfill their fiduciary duties because they lack the authority to recruit, control, and take corrective actions over members of the college executive who are critical in driving the implementation of college programmes. There are insufficient mechanisms to hold the administration accountable, as principals report directly to the DHET instead of the councils. This situation creates ambiguity regarding authority: whether the councils, the DG, or the Minister is in charge. Sometimes, councils are merely symbolic and lack real authority over certain decisions, reducing their effectiveness. The significance of councils is primarily influenced by the willingness of college principals to comply with council directives, which often results in friction and disruptions in college operations due to

struggles for authority and function. Prior to the conclusion of administration terms, college councils often fail to fully realize their objectives. Additionally, the composition of college councils in South Africa does not actively include industry representatives, which should be central to aligning TVET college curricula and programmes with industry trends, projections, and goals.

7. Recommendations

TVET colleges should be organized to encourage cooperation and democratic decision-making, involving a wide range of stakeholders and decision-makers, in particular industry. The minister must implement a rigorous criterion for public members aspiring to serve on the college council, necessitating certification from either the Institute of Directors South Africa (IoDSA) or the National School of Governance (SNG) in corporate governance, with a specific focus on the comprehension of PSET governance statutes. It is important that the government establish a certain level of assurance that it has adequately qualified individuals, in terms of skills, attributes, and education, at the helm of TVET college governance, especially if the government were to confer a certain degree of institutional autonomy. International case studies demonstrate that the systems of governance in South Africa may require modification to standardize and integrate the participation of industry to ensure that programmes offered by colleges align with industry occupational requirements. The process of appointing college principals should encourage the participation of industry partners or candidates that are outside the TVET space but have an in-depth understanding, knowledge, and skills to contribute to the TVET transformative agenda. The current system does not attract the best candidates that the industry and market can provide.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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