



**RETHINKING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CAREER DECISION
MAKING: THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS AT A SELECTED SOUTH
AFRICAN TVET COLLEGE ON WHAT INFLUENCES THEIR CAREER
DECISIONS**

BY

LUCKY MALULEKE

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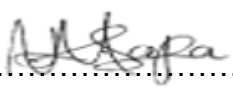
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**SUPERVISOR: DR LESLEY POWELL
CO-SUPERVISOR: PROF SHERVANI PILLAY**

DECLARATION

NAME: LUCKY MALULEKE
STUDENT NUMBER: 215357663
QUALIFICATION: PhD in Education
TITLE OF PROJECT: RETHINKING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF CAREER
DECISION MAKING: THE VIEWS OF STUDENTS AT
A SELECTED SOUTH AFRICAN TVET COLLEGE ON
WHAT INFLUENCES THEIR CAREER DECISIONS

In accordance with Rule G5.11.4, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned thesis is my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for assessment to another University or for another qualification.


.....
SIGNATURE

3 December 2021
.....
DATE

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation was born out of my interest to understand how young people think about careers and education, and training. There is no specific event that led me to want to pursue research on students' career decisions in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Since the year 2007, when I started studying at University, I have motivated young people from my village to pursue careers of their choice. Sometimes I would go to high schools to speak to Grade Twelve students. Sometimes I would be invited to speak, especially at school events and when matric results were released. For years, when I listened to myself and other people speak to high school learners, I noted with disappointment the bias towards university education. We tend to think of and speak about post-school education as synonymous with university education.

At University, I was introduced to TVET in 2009¹. I was also fortunate to get an internship to work in this area. I was further lucky to work as a lecturer, teaching in TVET. Over the years, through reading literature and personal conversations, I have realised that there is a tendency to think of TVET (and institutions that offer this kind of education and training) as low-status education. I then wanted to understand why, if this is true, we have more and more students going to these institutions. I have also come to note that some scholars and researchers challenge this deficit notion of TVET, one of whom is my supervisor, Dr Lesley Powell.

This dissertation was supervised by Dr Lesley Powell and Prof Shervani Pillay. They are both based at Nelson Mandela University. Lesley is the Research Chair: Youth Unemployment, Employability and Empowerment. I greatly admire the scholarly work that she has done, that she is continuing to do, and how this manifests in her supervision approach. I feel honoured to have been supervised by her. It is, therefore, not surprising that I have cited her published works recognisably, given her influence on me and the field (especially TVET and youth). Also, Lesley made it possible for me to attend one of the world's best conferences, the Journal of Vocational Education and Training (JVET) Conference (Journal of Vocational Education and Training). She

¹ In 2009, when I first learned about technical and vocational education, the colleges that offer this form of education and training were called 'further education and training colleges'. The module for which I registered was called 'Introduction to Education and Development'. This module contained a section on public further education and training, focusing on South Africa.

further made it possible for me to attend a students' conference for the first time in my life.

I am thankful to my second supervisor, Prof Shervani Pillay, my academic supervisor and senior in the Faculty of Education where I work and study. As a philosopher, Shervani has helped me learn to ask questions and go beyond knowing but to reach the level of knowing how to know. I am also grateful that Shervani agreed to be my supervisor although TVET is not her academic field. Her willingness to step into the field, to walk with me, and to bring her critical eye and ear to my learning was enormous.

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I wish to extend my gratitude to my family. My family is large, with many of us. Everyone in my family is equally valuable. My family shaped me, the way I think, and the way I see the world. I think it is at home where I could be me. Blood is thicker than water. The foundation of my life is my family. I am who I am because of my family. I

am very proud of our parents, Mdun'wazi John (father), Mthavini (first wife), and Tsakani (second wife and my mother) Maluleke. I am very proud of my sisters (Mamayila, Phephu, Tsakani, Tintswalo, and Nkhensani) and brothers (Daniel, Wilson, Thomas, Richard, Philemon, Simon, Michael, Eleck, and Miehleketo). I want to acknowledge my wife, Pretty Langutani Maluleke, for always being there for me. I spend most of my time with my wife, and it is growing together with her that encourages me, and which gives me a reason to live and want to do better. I can say that Langavi The Khaleesi and Lonene Rosita Elektra (swimomondhiya swa manana na tatana va swona), my two daughters, have the same effect on me. They are still young but seeing them grow makes me want to be a better person every day.

As I reach the tenth level of the national qualifications framework, I wish to give special thanks to my friend and brother, Thabo Mavundza, for his unmatched support. When I look back, I note with humility that had it not been for him, I would probably not have studied at university when I did. Even more, his support during my university years is also unmatched. On this note, I wish to pass my thanks to his family, especially his brother (Sinhle), Father (Philip), and mother (Emelinah), for making me feel and know that I have a place in their home.

Last, but not least, I extend my gratitude to the College where this study was conducted. I acknowledge the contribution of the College Principal, Deputy Principal, Campus Managers, and Heads of Departments. I must also acknowledge that without the students, this project would not have been possible. Unfortunately, I cannot list them for ethical reasons, but I am indebted to them.

ABSTRACT

In South Africa, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has been identified as a potential solution to the triple challenge of inequality, poverty and unemployment. The 2013 *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: Building on Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School Education* (DHET, 2013) identifies TVET colleges as an area of great expansion. Although such an expansion is important and necessary, it is unfortunate that in South Africa, research has paid little to no attention to what influences TVET college students' career decision making. Concerning this, the study reported in this dissertation aimed to investigate what influences the career decision making of TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, Eastern Cape, South Africa. This qualitative study, located within the subjectivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology, contributes to understanding what influences the career decision making of TVET college students in a developing context of South Africa. Drawing on qualitative (individual and group) interviews with students, it examined the career decisions of a small sample of students enrolled at one South African public TVET college in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. In so doing, the study brings four elements to the study of career decision making. Firstly, empirically, it brings a fresh and subjective perspective of what 'TVET' and 'career' means to TVET students. Secondly, it brings to the literature on TVET, an analysis of the Careership Theory that draws from the TVET college students' experiences. Thirdly, it brings to our understanding of career decision making, the role of structure and agency from a Bourdieusian² perspective. Fourthly, it transcends the heavily critiqued Bourdieusian model to encompass the notion of capacity to aspire, borrowed from Arjun Appadurai, to better explain the role of culture in social action.

Data were collected using individual and group interview methods, which were later transcribed and analysed thematically. The findings show that career decision making is dependent on the perceptions of the primary decision makers and other social agents that learners interacted with in the field. Career decision making is situated in the vast social inequalities and unequal power relations shaped by unequal access to

² The Careership Theory is informed by the Bourdieusian framework, developed by Pierre Bourdieu. In this study, I do not limit the theoretical analysis to the careership model as it was developed in the 1990s, but I dig deeper into the theory that informs the Careership Theory, that is, Bourdieu's social theory. I also acknowledge that Bourdieu's theory is outdated, and other scholars and researchers have contributed to its advancement over the years. As a result, I also include the theoretical perspective of Arjun Appadurai on the role of culture in aspiration and social action.

cultural, economic and social capital. However, as much as social structures influence career decision making, the role of agency must not be underestimated. The findings further reveal that career decisions are located in the objective and social structures, and these are influenced by capital (cultural, economic and social). Furthermore, career decisions are influenced by the capacity of the individuals to choose, to know what to choose, as well as structural enablers like finance. In short, the findings reveal that inequalities matter, for example, socio-economic and gender disparities.

Keywords: *TVET College; Students; Career Decision making; Nelson Mandela Bay Metro; Careership Theory; Navigational Capacity; Agency and Structure; Capital, Field and Habitus; Interpretivist; Qualitative*

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ACRONYMS

ASGISA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
FET	Further Education and Training
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GEAR	Growth, Employment, and Redistribution
GNVQ	General National Vocational Qualification
JIPSA	Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NC(V)	National Certificate Vocational
NDP	National Development Plan
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSDS	National Skills Development Strategy
PSET	Post-School Education and Training
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
YTC	Youth Training Credits

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCING THE INQUIRY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

In South Africa (as it is in many countries around the world), technical and vocational education and training (TVET) has been brought to the centre of addressing the triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment (DHET, 2013; Perry, 2009). To address these challenges, public TVET colleges have been cited as having an important role player. As a role player, TVET colleges were set to expand so that they can accommodate more youth and adults, including those not in employment, education or training (NEET) (DHET, 2013; Kraak, 2013). Indeed, there was an increase in headcount enrolments in the public TVET colleges until at least 2015 (Republic of South Africa, 2018). Ever since then though, statistics show that since 2016, public TVET colleges enrolments have been declining (Republic of South Africa, 2018, 2019b, 2020). Public TVET colleges offer a diverse range of programmes from which the students must choose. Unfortunately, in South Africa, there is limited research that addresses what influences the career decision making of TVET college students. Despite this neglect in academic research, making career decisions is a major concern for school leavers (Fatoki, 2014; Zakaria et al., 2017) and it is a challenging venture for most young people in many countries (Obwoye & Kibor, 2016).

All over the world, students face a dilemma of making career decisions because these decisions are influenced by numerous factors (Shumba & Naong, 2012). Making a career decision is often difficult because it has long-term effects on the life of the chooser (Ayodele, 2019; Mengistu, 2017). Career decisions and the social agents who make these decisions are important because these decisions influence the social and working lives of the decision makers (Fatoki, 2014; Mengistu, 2017; Shumba & Naong, 2012; Tabassum & Rahman, 2014). This is so because a career is not just a job, occupation or employment, but it includes a continuous accumulation of experience and knowledge, as well as progression (Ayodele, 2019). It is also perceived as a “sequence of interactions of individuals with society, education and organisations throughout their lifespan” (NQF/CAS, 2013, p. 9). The topic of ‘career decision making’ is of recurring interest within the higher education sector (Fatoki, 2014), but this is not the case in the public TVET college sector.

Despite the undeniable importance of career decision making, there is a dearth of research in this area within the public TVET colleges in South Africa. Notwithstanding the government's ambitions to make public TVET colleges a viable alternative to higher education institutions, little is known about why students enrol in these institutions (Powell & McGrath, 2019b). Using the public TVET college sector as the context, this study focuses on what influences the career decision making of students. An understanding of what influences the career decision making of students may help create a potential match between policy imperatives and perceptions, attitudes, and interests of students (Foster, 1965; Powell, 2014). Also, understanding the students is of equal importance, as career decision making cannot be separated from its makers. It has been argued that it is important to know how students think, to reduce the mismatch between the political ambitions of the government and the actual response of students (Powell, 2014).

There are various perspectives about students and what influences their career decision making. Some perspectives on the influence of career decision making point towards socioeconomic and sociocultural factors (Gallagher et al., 2015), employability (Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014), gender biases and preferences (Mtemeri, 2017). Other perspectives point to the family backgrounds of the students, as the family is the primary source of socialisation (Ayodele, 2019), and they provide social, cultural and economic capital (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Hart, 2019; McMillan, 2014). In addition to family background, in South Africa, the broader socio-historical and political issues like apartheid are said to continue to influence the lives and actions of students when they make educational choices (Albien & Naidoo, 2017). For example, family, community and racial background continue to influence educational opportunities, with some children attending well-resourced schools, and others attending poorly resourced schools (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014). The effects of educational inequalities are well articulated in the Bourdieusian literature (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014; Hart, 2019; Hodgkinson, 2009; Reay, 2004b), as well as in the recent literature linked to the notion of the capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004; Gale & Parker, 2015; Genicot & Ray, 2014; Maja, 2020).

Research has grown in the field of TVET in general, but there is a shortage of research that focuses on public TVET college students' career decision making, hence the need for such a study. It is important to conduct such a study within the public TVET college sector because all eyes have now shifted to public TVET colleges to produce the necessary skills to solve the triple challenge of inequality, poverty and unemployment (Vale, 2017). It is claimed that the role of public TVET colleges in South Africa is not merely economical, but it is also to redress the inequalities caused by apartheid by improving racial representation and creating equal opportunities for all (DHET, 2013; NPC, 2012). Furthermore, the public TVET colleges potentially serve as a viable alternative to university education, while also providing second-chance opportunities to those who have not completed matric³, and those who do not qualify to study at university (DHET, 2013; Vale, 2017).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Literature shows that career decision making is one of the most important steps that young people must take at some point in their lives (Booyens, 2012; Kaneez & Medha, 2018; Shumba & Naong, 2012). Unfortunately, in the South African literature, little is known about the students and why they enrol in public TVET colleges (Powell & McGrath, 2014a; Vale, 2016). Consequently, existing research has made vague statements regarding how students think about and understand the usefulness of TVET in their lives (Powell & McGrath, 2014b). This is problematic for the country because the government has placed its trust in the public TVET colleges to develop the skills necessary for economic development, as well as create opportunities for the masses, thereby redressing the inequalities of the past (DHET, 2013). Poor research output within the public TVET college context contributes to this problem.

Poor research output on TVET is not just a South African phenomenon but is an issue of concern in southern Africa and sub-Saharan Africa at large. In a book chapter titled *The multiple contexts of vocational education and training in southern Africa*, McGrath (2005) highlights that it is difficult to locate an internationally published journal article in this area in southern Africa. Regarding research on or with public TVET college

³ In South Africa, the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is the matriculation certificate, with Grade 12 serving as the matriculation grade. So, 'matric' is short for 'matriculation'. Generally, when we say 'matric', we usually refer to Grade 12.

students, one of the reasons for this poor knowledge about the students is the dominant research practice in the sector that ignores students' perceptions (Powell, 2014). About 15 years since McGrath's (2005) remark, Papier and McGrath analysed the research output in TVET, with a particular focus on doctoral and master's theses (Papier & McGrath, 2020). Of all the theses that they reviewed, they found that a focus on students is mainly absent, as more emphasis is on curriculum-related matters (Papier & McGrath, 2020). This analysis shows that although research has increased in the TVET sector, a focus on students remains a research priority to which academic attention must be paid.

The recent White Paper for Post-School Education and Training [hereafter referred to as the 'White Paper'] sought to increase enrolments in the public TVET colleges (DHET, 2013; NPC, 2012), although, since 2015, numbers have been capped due to financial constraints (Kahn, 2019). The post-school education and training statistical reports since 2016 show a decline in public TVET colleges enrolment figures (Republic of South Africa, 2018, 2019b, 2020). The 2016 report, which was released in 2018, shows that public TVET colleges' enrolments were on the increase between 2010 and 2015, moving from 358 393 to 737 880, respectively. In 2016, the report shows that the headcount enrolment went down to 705 397 students (Republic of South Africa, 2018). The 2017 report shows a further decline to 688 028 headcount enrolment (Republic of South Africa, 2019b). The 2018 report shows an even further decline to 657 133 headcount enrolment (Republic of South Africa, 2020).

Important to note in South Africa is the growing inequality gap (The World Bank, 2018). In this study, the inequalities in South Africa, linked to both apartheid and its continuing legacy, are theorised from a sociological perspective, namely through Careership Theory (Hodkinson, 2009) and the notion of capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004; Fataar, 2010). Drawing from the Careership Theory, which is linked to Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977), and building on Appadurai's critique (Appadurai, 2004), the purpose of this study is achieved.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

Considering the above, the purpose of this study was to explore the views of public TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro on what influences their career decisions. This study drew on a sociological approach to understand what

influences the career decision making of public TVET college students. It employed Careership Theory, developed in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s (Hodkinson et al., 1996). The Careership Theory is built on the concepts of 'capital, field and habitus', associated with Pierre Bourdieu, the French sociologist (Bourdieu, 1993a). Given the criticisms laid against the sociological approach, especially that it tends to be deterministic, Appadurai brought the notion of 'navigational capacity', thereby showing that social background inheritance must not only be looked at in historical terms but must also be looked at as future-oriented (Appadurai, 2004). To achieve the purpose of this study, I brought this notion of navigational capacity to Careership Theory to boost the explanatory power of the Careership Theory, which locates within Bourdieusian conceptual tools. In this way, this study helps us to rethink career decision making within the TVET college sector.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTION

This study was conducted in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, Eastern Cape Province, Republic of South Africa. The study's overarching question was: *What influences the career decisions of public TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro?* This main question, along with this study, is located within the sociology of education, thereby looking at what influences career decision making from a societal and structural perspective (Du Plessis et al., 2018). It considers that career decision making involves more than cognitive abilities, personalities and interests. The sub-questions below seek to advance this sociologically-informed inquiry.

1.5 SUB-QUESTIONS

The sociological theory of career decision making claims that students' career choices are informed by their worldview, which is itself influenced by the socialisation of social agents (Hodkinson, 2009). As they live and grow in society, young people derive meanings and understandings of concepts, including those of 'education', 'college', and 'career'. As they interact with other social agents, they learn what is considered good or bad, what is considered worthwhile or not, as well as what is better or worse than another. The career decisions that social agents make, for example, are also influenced by the meanings that are socially derived, as well as the value associated with such meanings. In light of this, the first sub-question was: *How do students understand the concepts of 'TVET' and 'career'?*

The Careership Theory further notes that career decisions are influenced by both internal (subjective) and external (objective) social structures. As much as career decisions are influenced by social agents' personalities, interests and various other psychological traits, the Careership Theory notes that these are neither natural nor neutral, but are socially derived, and are also influenced by external (objective) structures. In light of this, the second sub-question was: *What social structures influence the career decision making of TVET college students?* To avoid the extreme of structural determinism, the study also strongly considered that career decision makers are not mere victims of social structure, but they act with agency and intent as well, hence the last sub-question: *How do TVET College students' 'agentially' navigate these 'social' structures to pursue their careers?*

1.6 RESEARCH CONTEXT

This study was conducted in one of the two public TVET colleges in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa. Public TVET colleges are part of the post-school education and training, which comprises of several institutional types, such as public and private universities, private colleges, as well as community education and training colleges (Republic of South Africa, 2020). The public sector comprises 85 institutions, which are 26 higher education institutions, 50 TVET colleges, and 9 community education and training colleges. In 2019, there were 50 registered public TVET colleges operating on 264 campuses (Republic of South Africa, 2019a). The Eastern Cape Province has 8 registered public TVET colleges, two of which are in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. For ethical reasons, I use pseudonyms for these two colleges, namely Bay College and Metro College. Where I use figures, I do not specify which colleges such figures represent, to further hide the identity of the college where the study was conducted.

The emergence of the public TVET College system in South Africa is related to the development of the industrial economy before, during and after apartheid (Badroodien, 2004; Behr, 1988; Malherbe, 1977). Initially called Technical Colleges, these institutions were established during the industrialisation era to supply skilled labour to the industry. These colleges were accessible only to White males but were later opened to other racial groups as well (Badroodien, 2004). In 1981, the Manpower Training Act 56 of 1981 was passed which aimed at a more racially inclusive process

in technical education where people of all races were afforded artisanship opportunities (Republic of South Africa, 1981). Post-apartheid, Technical Colleges were transformed when the Further Education and Training (FET) Act 98 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998a) was enacted, in line with the Skills Development Act 98 of 1998 (Republic of South Africa, 1998b). Between 2001 and 2003, all Technical Colleges were declared FET Colleges. The 152 Technical Colleges of that time were then merged to create 50 mega FET Colleges with 264 campuses with their remit being to pursue efficiency and to improve access at intermediary skill levels.

The White Paper renamed FET colleges 'Technical and Vocational Education and Training' (TVET) colleges (DHET, 2013). The TVET colleges are currently the largest public provider of TVET in South Africa. The White Paper and other recent legislation such as the Human Resource Development (HRD) Strategic Plan (TVET Colleges Technical Task Team, 2014) and the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 (NPC, 2012) express a commitment to improving and increasing access and participation in the TVET sector. The NDP outlines that it is of great importance to increase and expand access to post-compulsory education even for those who perform poorly in school. The NDP, however, also notes that various parts of the PSET sector are underperforming, with TVET Colleges, particularly so as they exist as small and weak institutions (NPC, 2012). The White Paper for PSET highlights that the DHET's priority is to "strengthen and expand the public TVET Colleges so that they become institutions of choice for a significant proportion of school leavers" (DHET, 2013, p. 12). The ambition of the DHET to increase headcount enrolments in the TVET colleges to about 2.5 million by 2030 is faced with economic challenges that have led to declining enrolments (Kahn, 2019).

This study was conducted at Metro College, although Bay College could have been a good fit too. In 2016, these two colleges had total enrolments of 11 941 and 12 556, respectively (Republic of South Africa, 2018). In 2017, the enrolment figures were 11 793 and 10 814, respectively (Republic of South Africa, 2019b). In 2018, the enrolment figures dropped to 11 817 and 9 101, respectively (Republic of South Africa, 2020). The recorded statistics show that the Report 191 programme continues to attract more students. The NC(V) programme also attracts a reasonable number of students, whereas occupational programmes attract fewer students. Metro College

has a fair representation of the programmes offered within the public TVET college sector.



Figure 1.1: Map of Nelson Mandela Bay Metro

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metro is one of the economic powerhouses of the Eastern Cape Province as it possesses the harbour for exports and imports, as well as several multinational companies (Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council, 2017). **Figure 1.1** is a visual presentation of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality⁴. The two public TVET colleges offer predominantly similar programmes in line with national standards of programme

offers. These programmes are relevant to the economy of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. This relevance, or lack thereof, is of great interest to this study as it looks at what influences the career decisions of public TVET college students.

Concerning access, there is an increase of students from previously disadvantaged backgrounds as it pertains to race and gender. The 2016 statistical report shows that the total number of students in public TVET colleges in that year was 688 028, of whom 635 717 were of African descent, and 304 528 were male, while 400 869 were female (Republic of South Africa, 2018). The 2018 report shows that 603 112 were African students, of whom 278 526 were male and 378 607 were female (Republic of South Africa, 2020). The 2018 report further shows that more females enrolled for Office Administration, Electrical Infrastructure and Construction, Hospitality and Finance, Economics and Accounting programmes. When gender disparities are considered, females seem to prefer enrolling in Office Administration and males seem to prefer enrolling for Engineering and Related Design programmes (Republic of South Africa, 2020). Chapter 2 gives a detailed breakdown of these enrolments to paint the picture of career decision making at public TVET colleges.

⁴ The map of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropolitan Municipality was extracted from: <https://municipalities.co.za/map/1/nelson-mandela-bay-metropolitan-municipality>.

An analysis of public TVET college enrolment breakdown is also presented in a survey (tracer study) that shows that of the students who completed in 2013, 96.2 per cent were Black African (Papier et al., 2017). The survey further shows that the students who were admitted to the public TVET colleges had diverse prior (high school) qualifications. For example, 72.3 per cent held a matric pass, 24.2 per cent obtained a diploma status in matric, and 5.6 per cent obtained a bachelor's degree status in matric. While a browse of these statistics would suggest that public TVET colleges cater mainly for those with low high school results, this tracer study which surveyed students pointed to at least three reasons why they chose public TVET colleges, namely interest in a field of study, the possibility of getting a job, and availability of funding (Papier et al., 2017).

There is a wide distribution of students among the programmes offered in public TVET colleges. In 2018, 131 212 students enrolled on the NCV programme. Of these students, high concentration was in programmes such as Office Administration (27 695), Engineering and Related Design (16 720), Electrical Infrastructure and Construction (15 930), Civil Engineering and Building Construction (9 050), and Tourism (8 226). Low concentration was in programmes such as Process Instrumentation (with no students), Drawing Office Practice (225), Process Plant Operations (547), and Mechatronics (840) (Republic of South Africa, 2020). In the NATED programmes, the report shows that more males were registered for N1-N3 programmes compared to females. The N1-N3 programmes are engineering-related, thereby showing that more males registered for engineering studies at this level. The N4-N6 programmes, which were dominated by women in 2018, include both engineering and business studies (Republic of South Africa, 2020).

The TVET college was deemed suitable for this study for various reasons. One of the reasons is that TVET colleges are gaining popularity and more students are considering studying there. Hence, it is crucial to understand these students. A public TVET college was selected because it serves most of the poor and working-class students. Metro College is at the heart of the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, its campuses are spread across different parts of the municipality, and it is surrounded by multinational corporations. At the same time, it competes with the local University for students.

The Nelson Mandela Bay Metro has one public University. In the local University, there is one research centre that focuses on post-school education and training, with a strong bias towards adult and community education⁵. There is also a Research Chair, who focuses on youth, unemployment, employability and empowerment, with a special focus on TVET. The Faculty of Education in the local University is currently not doing any significant research work on TVET, except for a few students doing master and doctoral studies in this area. There is little research in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro that focuses on TVET, let alone research that focuses on students' career choices. This study is, therefore, well-positioned in fertile ground, less researched terrain. The interest in TVET in the local University is relatively new, and a lot still needs to be done, and this study is one of these early attempts.

1.7 WHY THIS STUDY MATTERS

This study matters because public TVET colleges, along with students and their career decision making, matter. Public TVET colleges matter because of their potential contribution to skills development and redress of inequality of access and opportunity, especially among previously disadvantaged groups. It is claimed that public TVET colleges make a huge contribution to the lives of students who study in them (Powell, 2014; Vale, 2017). These young people are inclusive of those from low socio-economic backgrounds, some of whom are characterised as NEET (Republic of South Africa, 2019a). The concept of 'NEET' has been widely used in policies, but it has negative connotations (Beck, 2013; Serracant, 2014). It focuses on the negative attributes of young people, thereby describing them as purposeless individuals who are associated with negative values (Serracant, 2014). Writing about students in one public TVET college in South Africa, Powell warned that we must avoid deficit perceptions about young people (Powell, 2014).

If South Africa is serious about public TVET colleges, the students, skills development, economic growth, education and training expansion and improvement, and alleviating poverty and employment, then it is equally important to investigate and understand what influences the career decisions of students. Drawing from the Ethiopian

⁵ In the years 2014 and 2015, I used to work for this research centre. Our focus was more on adult and community education. Also, there was no link with the Faculty of Education in terms of joint projects. Now that I work in the Faculty of Education, we continue to work in silos.

experience, Mengistu claims that it is important to achieve a match between the aspirations of students and policy conceptions (Mengistu, 2017). A similar view is shared by Powell concerning public TVET colleges in South Africa (Powell, 2014). Both Powell and Mengistu draw from the classical work of Foster, *The vocational school fallacy in development planning* (Foster, 1965). According to Foster, policies that seek to alleviate poverty and unemployment rarely succeed because they hardly match the aspirations, interests and attitudes of young people (Foster, 1965). In his other writings, Foster emphasised how in Ghana, young people would aspire to university education compared to vocational education (Foster, 1977). The sociological approach used in this study is also of significance.

1.8 SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO CAREER DECISION MAKING

This study is framed within sociological theorising of career decision making. Sociology emphasises the influence of cultural, economic and social environments on human action (Artess, 2014) and the patterns within group dynamics, for example, “social processes, conflicts, problems and interactions” (Ngcwangu, 2016, p. 109). In this respect, sociology is concerned about social structures and how social groups and individuals interact within these structures, as well as how unequal power relations play out. An example of this can be found in the organisation of education and training and occupations. Societies have developed mechanisms to select (through inclusion and exclusion) members to occupy different positions (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 2006), thereby distributing varying social statuses. An analysis of social structures makes it possible to unearth social inequalities in education, economy and society.

This study is framed within Careership Theory (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), which is a sociological theory that looks at the social, economic, cultural, political and other environmental factors that influence the lives and career choices that young people make (Hodkinson, 2009). According to the Careership Theory, students make career decisions concerning the fields they inhabit and the resources they possess, and these decisions are located in the habitus of the social actors (Lundahl et al., 2017). The Careership Theory claims that career decisions are pragmatically rational and are made within routines and turning points, and are also influenced by routines and turning points (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). It borrows heavily from Bourdieu’s theory of practice, especially the concepts of capital, field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1977).

The theory of practice sees a relationship between capital, field and habitus. Field refers to a social space in which social actors interact with others. Such a social field could be, for example, an educational field. The educational arena has rules, both written and unwritten, that social players must learn. The field represents the objective social structure, whereas habitus represents the subjective structure. Habitus refers to the embodiments of cultural capital, habits and skills the people accumulate throughout their lives. The dispositions of habitus are acquired through socialisation and social interactions. However, these dispositions are not deterministic, but do shape and guide human action. Dispositions of habitus also depend on the amount of capital that individuals have, for example cultural, economic and social (Bourdieu, 1986).

It is claimed that the purpose of a theory is not to explain everything on its own, but it needs to be extended (Ngcwangu, 2016). This is a reminder that theories are neither perfect nor complete, and they are contextually influenced, hence they need revision. For Careership Theory to gain explanatory power, its authors had to borrow from Bourdieu. The social theory of Bourdieu has been severely criticised for inherent determinism (Yang, 2014). Appadurai has criticised cultural theories, including that of Bourdieu, as focusing on historical aspects and failing to acknowledge that culture is also forward-looking (Appadurai, 2004). So, although the Careership Theory is used in this study to explain the career decisions of TVET college students, I borrow from other theorists to boost its explanatory power.

To explain the career decisions of TVET college students in South Africa requires an acknowledgement that various conceptual tools could be meaningfully brought together to aid the Careership Theory. In this regard, in addition to using the conceptual tools associated with Bourdieu's social theory, other concepts are brought into play. The first concept is 'capacity to aspire', associated with (Appadurai, 2004). This concept has been used by some South African writers to show that theorising culture should not just be about pastness, that is, mainly about how habits, tendencies and socialisation influence future actions of social agents (Fataar, 2010; Maja, 2020). To complement the notion of capacity to aspire, Ray added the idea of 'aspirational windows' (Genicot & Ray, 2014).

To bring together these conceptual tools is far from the notion of intellectual 'hairspray' (Reay, 2004b), but it is an acknowledgement that the Careership Theory and any other theory, needs extension because theory should not be seen in grand narrative terms where it explains everything by itself (Ngcwangu, 2016). Chapter 3 explores the Careership Theory and its related concepts and shows how this theory can benefit from borrowing from Appadurai's and Ray's conceptual tools, in addition to its allegiance to Bourdieu's conceptual tools. Combined, these theoretical positions give an insight into how aspirations are culturally influenced (Golding, 2013).

1.9 RESEARCH PARADIGM

It is argued that many studies on TVET colleges in South Africa deploy a quantitative design (Vale, 2016), thereby omitting the views of the students who study in these institutions. Quantitative designs are associated with positivist research, which has been criticised for its affinity for the "God's eye view, that guarantees absolute methodological certainty" (Denzin, 2001, p. 325). This study is framed within the interpretivist epistemology. The interpretivist epistemology stands in opposition to a positivist and an objectivist stance (Hiller, 2016). Interpretivist researchers acknowledge that methodological certainty is not possible because research reflects the perspective of the researcher (Denzin, 2001). This epistemology (way of knowing), involves the conception of who the social agent is (ontology) and where they come from (historically, contextually) (Denzin, 2001). Epistemology is concerned with justification, evidence, and reasons for believing that something is or ought to be true (Fumerton, 2006). It is concerned about how we come to know and how knowledge is produced (Hiller, 2016).

In the current study, the interview method was employed to solicit the social constructions formed through experiences of the world in which social agents live (Hiller, 2016). Qualitative interviews were necessary to inquire about the career decision making of TVET college students, based on their subjective experiences. Subjective perceptions are important because they are bound to the context in which human (social) action occurs. These subjective experiences are essential because social action is linked with values, which are formed locally. To understand the career decision making of TVET college students, I need to understand the meanings that the students derive from their experiences.

Purposive sampling was used (Babbie, 2005) to select participants for individual and groups interviews. The total number of participants was 33. These 33 students were located on three campuses, so they were divided into groups according to their campus. The study was conducted on three different campuses of the selected TVET college. A small number of students formed a focus group on each campus. The total number of those who participated in the focus group discussions was 33, of whom 15 were selected to participate in individual interviews. In chapter three, I show the participants' breakdown, including their campuses and areas of study.

The methodological approach, its related research designs, methods and techniques, are deemed suitable for this study for several reasons. The main reason is that it is ideal because the study seeks to solicit personal experiences relating to career decision making. It makes sense for this study because that which it investigates requires interpretation. Interpretation is important here because the study does not seek universal truth but the participants' truth, according to the meanings that they make of their experiences.

1.10 STRUCTURE OF DISSERTATION

This dissertation comprises nine chapters.

Chapter 1 is a brief introduction to the study. It outlines the rationale/motivation, background, purpose, research questions, setting, and a brief overview of literature and theory, as well as methodology and research design. This chapter also introduces the theoretical approach to this study, thereby introducing the sociological approach to career decision making. The theoretical approach is also highlighted in Chapter 2.

Chapter 2 is a critical literature review. This literature review focuses on what influences the career decisions of students. This study is interested in the career decisions of TVET college students. Since there is not enough local literature on this, the chapter covers literature beyond TVET colleges. This is because the focus is on career decisions, and wherever they are made, it is essential to consider. The chapter takes as its starting point that career decisions are made in the educational field that is itself unequal. Making a career decision is not merely based on interest and ability, but social factors influence these decisions as well. In an attempt with the sociological approach, the chapter relies mainly on sociological literature that is informed by

approaches such as Careership Theory. This theory is built on Bourdieu's concepts of capital, field and habitus – to be explained in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 focuses its attention on the Careership Theory. This theory is discussed in relation to Bourdieu's social theory. I consider in this chapter a conceptual expansion where I bring in Appadurai's notion of navigational capacity to Careership Theory. Appadurai's thesis is that cultural studies tend to focus on the cultural background of social agents as dictating their actions and choices. For Appadurai, this is a misinformed way of understanding culture. Thus, for Appadurai, aspiration is a cultural capacity, seeing culture as futuristic rather than backward. In this way, I transcend the idea of accumulation of capital (cultural, economic and social). The use of Appadurai's conceptual building blocks brings newness to the dated Careership Theory and the heavily critiqued determinism of the social theory of Bourdieu. It does this by bringing out the hidden notions of agency in the act of career decision making among students. In addition to this, Debraj Ray also brings the idea of aspiration window to complement Appadurai's theorising.

Chapter 4 focuses on the research design and methodology. This dissertation reports on the findings of a qualitative study located within an interpretivist paradigm. I used interviews (individual and focus group) to generate data. In this chapter, I also show how I executed an ethically acceptable study and the processes that I followed. This chapter is followed by three data presentation and analysis chapters, and one more chapter that seeks to consolidate the data and discussion chapters.

Chapter 5 is the first data presentation and analysis chapter. The findings presented in this chapter are linked to the first research sub-question, 'how do students understand the concepts of TVET and Career? The findings show that students have a sophisticated understanding of these concepts. In terms of TVET, the findings reveal the differences and similarities between formal definitions and informal definitions. Formal definitions are those of organisations like UNESCO, governments, and formal written bodies of work such as published journals, and the informal definitions are those of ordinary citizens such as the students. There is a gap between formal policies about TVET and how ordinary, non-specialist, laypeople understand TVET and its role in society. While this chapter shows data presentation and analysis, it is not

overloaded with literature to give more space to the views of the students/participants. Literature is cited where necessary.

Chapter 6 presents and analyses the findings relating to the second research sub-question, 'what are the social structures that influence TVET college students' career choices? The findings reveal that various social structures are at play. The role of social structures supports the sociological theories that emphasise the influence of social inequalities in society. The findings support the Careership Theory explanation of how career decisions are made. Moreover, the findings support the notion of navigational capacity concerning limited knowledge and resources among social groups.

Chapter 7 responds to the sub-question, 'how do TVET College students *'agentially'* navigate the social structures in pursuit of their careers?' This structure brings together several concepts to demonstrate that career decision making is complicated and can be explained in various ways. For example, the Careership Theory speaks of serendipity, turning points and horizon for action. Chance/serendipity happens when a person is at the right place at the right time, and this could be during a routine or turning point and may coincide with the horizon for action. Appadurai speaks of horizons of aspirations and the capacity to aspire. Brought together, these concepts help to explain, from a sociological perspective, what influences the career decisions of students.

Chapter 8 consolidates Chapters 5 to 7. Chapters 5 to 7 do not have a theoretical overload, just to allow the data to speak for itself. There is some theoretical analysis in these chapters but it is limited to necessity. Chapter 8 somewhat leads to the conclusion chapter.

Chapter 9 is the concluding chapter that seeks to summarise the study and its contribution to literature and theory. This chapter shows that the Careership Theory can be enhanced and made meaningful and relevant to a South African context. Despite this move, the chapter also highlights that it would be of interest to South Africans and Africans at large, to develop career decision making theories/models that are informed by local experience, language, culture, and various other circumstances.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews literature that discusses the influences that affect the career decision making of students. There is a wide body of literature on career decision making in South Africa and the world. This wide body of literature is informed by different theoretical perspectives (Brown & Lent, 2013), and each theory reflects its ontological understanding of the human and its philosophical perspective to interpret career behaviour (Stead & Watson, 2017). Thus, the choice that any reviewer of career theories must make is dependent on their ontological understanding of the human and on their philosophical orientation and paradigm. The dominant theories of career development, career decision, guidance and counselling are generally located within either the field of psychology (Albien & Naidoo, 2017; McMillan, 2014; Savickas, 2013; Watson, Creed, & Patton, 2003) and/or framed within the logic of economics and rational choice theories (Gabay-Egozi et al., 2010; Liu, 2019). There is also a growing body of literature supported by the sociological approach to educational decision making (Bydawell, 2015; Fataar, 2010; B. I. Maja, 2020; Zipin et al., 2015).

This chapter acknowledges the value of all theoretical perspectives, but it shows that the sociological approach has some explanatory benefits and advantages as well. The chapter covers a wide body of literature, including career decision making literature in higher education. The reason for this is that this study is influenced by Hodkinson's Careership Theory, which has not been used to explain the career decision making of TVET college students in South Africa. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the psychological, rational choice and sociological approaches to career decision making. It then proceeds to explore a wide body of literature on career decision making. While sociologically informed and influenced literature dominates the chapter, literature informed and influenced by other theoretical frames is also cited. Important to note in this chapter is that while there is a body of literature in South Africa that speaks to why students choose to enrol in public TVET colleges, it is important to be cautious and conscious of the paradigmatic approaches employed to explain these reasons. On this note, the chapter notes the work of Powell (Powell & McGrath, 2014b, 2014a), Sibiyá (Sibiyá & Nyembezi, 2018; Sibiyá et al., 2021), Matenda (Matenda, 2017), and

Groener (Groener & Andrews, 2019). The chapter starts with a brief overview of dominant theoretical approaches in career decision making research.

2.2 THEORETICAL APPROACHES: BRIEF OVERVIEW

Career decision making has been analysed through several lenses, including psychology and rational choice perspectives. The psychological approach to career decision making tends to take the individual actor as the main actor (Costa et al., 1984; Stead & Watson, 2017). This analytical approach is rooted in Western approaches that tend to focus on individualism. Concerning the individual, psychological approaches usually focus on the ability of the individual to make a choice, for example by focusing on self-efficacy (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 2001; Buthelezi, Alexander & Seabi, 2010) and individual interests (Ayodele, 2019; Sinclair, Nilsson & Cederskär, 2019). Another is the rational choice theory which focuses on the maximisation of utility and avoidance of pain. In education, the rational choice approach was formalised by Breen and Goldthorpe (1997) as an attempt to explain the educational choices of students and parents. At the centre of this theory is the premise that humans are guided by the desire to avoid pain and the drive to pursue pleasure, and that all social agents act with intent, and this intent is towards maximisation of utility (Bentham, 1823).

The sociological approach looks at how social action is constituted within social structures. It takes into consideration the importance of family and the surrounding environment in the career decision making of young people (Hodkinson, 1998b; Zipin et al., 2012). This chapter considers a broad spectrum of literature on career decision making but makes a point that the sociological approach has some explanatory advantage of how career decisions are made. It is guided by the literature drawn from Hodkinson's Careership Theory, which shows that career decision making is located in the habitus of the social actor, and these decisions are neither irrational nor totally rational; career decisions are influenced by capital (cultural, economic and social), as well as interactions in field; and that these career decisions embedded in the life histories of the social agents, happen within routines and turning points, and are also a result of chance events (serendipity) (Hodkinson, 2009).

This chapter also acknowledges the limitations of Careership Theory, along with its allegiance to Bourdieu's social theory in relation to its deterministic notions. To transcend this, the chapter extends Careership Theory with the notion of the capacity to aspire to explain how cultural inheritances can be seen as future-orientated, as opposed to pastness (Appadurai, 2004; Fataar, 2010; Maja, 2020) and aspirational windows (Genicot & Ray, 2014; Ray, 2006). Most importantly, the chapter shows that poor and working-class youth do not lack agency, but their adverse circumstances enforce agentic strategies (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). For example, when these young people are denied access to university, they do not sit around helplessly but seek alternative options such as public TVET colleges (Groener & Andrews, 2019). In what follows, I explore how career decisions are socially and culturally influenced. In what follows, the chapter offers a brief perspective of rational career decision making and then moves to show that there are other factors that contribute to such career decision making approaches.

2.2.1 RATIONAL CAREER DECISION MAKING

Rational choosing implies that social agents make calculations and are well-informed about the consequences of their actions. In Germany, for example, Becker and Hecken compared the choice to enrol in either higher education or vocational training (Becker & Hecken, 2009). Using the theory of subjectively expected utility developed by Hartmut Esser, and rational action theory developed by Breen and Goldthorpe⁶, the authors discovered that students are likely to choose to enrol in an institution with less investment risk and a high possibility of success (Becker & Hecken, 2009). The authors show that there is a difference between the choices of working-class and upper-class students. The upper social classes usually face low investment risk as they have the economic capital to invest in education, and they tend to exhibit high educational motivation. Whereas the upper social classes tend to focus on their potential success in higher education, the working-class tends to focus on the investment risk, whether they can afford to invest the little financial resources at their disposal or not. Hence, working-class students tend to follow a vocational route because it is affordable, and where they become apprentices, they get paid while

⁶ Richard Breen and John H Goldthorpe produced what would be called classical work, titled '*Explaining educational differentials: towards a formal rational action theory*'. This article, published in the *Rationality and Society* journal, used a mathematical approach (model), to explain the how resources and constraints affect educational choices.

undergoing training. Moreover, in the German dual system, the vocational track is usually shorter than the higher education track. Both working-class and upper-class students evaluate the possible risks and successes and make their decisions accordingly (Becker & Hecken, 2009).

The findings of Becker and Hecken (2009) are supported by the findings of Jæger in a comparable context of Denmark (Jæger, 2007). Jæger's (2007) study made comparisons between vocational education, upper secondary education, and no education. The choices that the students (participants) were likely to make are linked to high future income. As a result, the option of 'no education' was not preferred. The students would choose between vocational and upper secondary education, based on their evaluated risks and benefits. The author points out that rational action does not happen in a vacuum, but it is influenced by the environment in which social actors find themselves. For example, the beliefs about returns to education are rooted in family backgrounds and social interactions (Jæger, 2007). It is important to note that even when rationality is believed to be at play, the social and cultural environment also contributes to decision making.

The scenarios described above have some relevance to South Africa in that cost of education has an influence on career decision making or at least the institutions that students choose. In a South African public TVET college study that was part of her doctoral studies, Powell discovered that there was a student who was accepted to a university twice but her parents could not afford to pay university fees (Powell, 2014). This is not surprising in the South African context where poverty and inequality are widely acknowledged (Needham & Papier, 2011; NPC, 2012; The World Bank, 2018). In the following sections, the chapter explores the influence of the socio-cultural environment on career decision making.

2.2.2 SOCIO-CULTURAL CONTEXT AND CAREER DECISION MAKING

The sociological viewpoint has limitations associated with determinism, although this chapter shows that the sociological perspective is also progressive and transformative. An example of this determinism can be found in Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Willis, 1977). In this seminal work, Willis shows that the different occupations and positions that people occupy are neither

random nor accidental, but emanate from the socio-economic status of families. These ideas, drawn from a sample of students in the 1970s United Kingdom context, are also supported by relatively recent research findings in the same region (Gorard et al., 2006; Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008), as well as by South African research (McMillan, 2014). Willis claims that the behaviour of the students (for example the 'conformists'/'ear'oles' or the non-conformists/ 'boys') emanates from their socialisation (Willis, 1977). On the one hand, the parents of the conformist students are also conforming in their approach to life. They take the education of their children seriously. They have career plans for their children. On the other hand, the parents of the non-conformists have little to no regard for the educational futures of their children. These parents are themselves non-conformists, less educated, and have little to offer in terms of career planning (Willis, 1977).

This deterministic perspective is based on the idea that different social backgrounds breed different values. In a study conducted in the United Kingdom, Greenbank and Hepworth (2008) found that working-class people have different values from their middle-class peers. For example, in relation to career guidance, they found that youth from working-class backgrounds preferred informal information (*hot information*) to formal or professional information (*cold information*) regarding career guidance (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008). This perspective is similar to the notion of 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984) linked to *habitus*, which is based on the notion that social background breeds different views of the world. In relation to different values, Willis argues that the culture of young people leads them to different career paths, for example, the non-conformists tend to have a culture or lifestyle that leads to poor success in conventional education (Willis, 1977).

This perspective is also evident in the scholarly work of Hodkinson, linked to the Youth Training Credits in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s (Hodkinson et al., 1996). The vocational education students in Hodkinson's study rationally made career choices; for example, these choices were based on some knowledge of the occupation or advice from a trusted significant other (Hodkinson et al., 1996). These decisions were not necessarily technically rational but were pragmatically rational, that is, they were based on localised partial information. Also, they were pragmatically rational in the sense that they were informed by the context, family background, culture and

histories of the students making the career decisions (Hodkinson, 1995). In this way, these career decisions are said to be located within the habitus of the social actors. But to a greater extent, and mostly to do with this Bourdieusian approach, this work suggests the direct influence of inequality based on social class in career decision making.

The role of the family, in conjunction with its socio-economic status, is emphasised. Drawing from the findings of a study conducted in Greece, Moniarou-Papaconstantinou and Tsatsaroni (2012) show how cultural and social capital influence the career decisions of students. Both questionnaires (with 177 students) and semi-structured interviews (with 41 willing students) were deployed. Two and a half years later, the researchers continued with the study, thereby interviewing 15 of the students who were interviewed in the first stage of the research project. The authors write of the students concerning their cultural and social capitals. One of the students named Fedra, for example, is associated with low cultural and social capital. Her approach to career choice is defined in these terms, looking at how she initially did not see herself fitting in the higher education sector, hence her initial choice of vocational training. Her career decisions were influenced by her former teachers and her peers because her family of truck drivers could not help her with career decisions. Because her family was not rooted in education, they were not very helpful in career decision making. Although she ended up doing LIS, she had no confidence in herself because she thought of LIS as a difficult area of study (Moniarou-Papaconstantinou & Tsatsaroni, 2012).

Contrary to Fedra is Lina whose parents were school teachers and had an interest in her career future (Moniarou-Papaconstantinou & Tsatsaroni, 2012). Her parents, being well versed in education, took it upon themselves to look for programmes for their daughter. Although she wanted to become a psychologist, her parents influenced her to do LIS because they believed it was a good area of learning and career. This was a turning point for her because she had to adjust to a new learning area that she did not choose on her own. A month later, she started enjoying LIS, although she initially associated this field of study with a low status. The difference between Fedra and Lina is that they come from different family backgrounds. Fedra did not have parents who could help with making career decisions, whereas Lina had parents who

would not only help but also impose their subjectivity by making the choice for her. So, while cultural and social capital may be important, it is also important to consider that the career decisions of those with more of these capitals may be less informed by their own as parents may be more influential. Fedra represents a 'contingent' chooser, while Lina represents an 'embedded' or 'knowing' chooser (Moniarou-Papaconstantinou & Tsatsaroni, 2012).

Turning points and horizons for action can also be observed in the career journey of a participant in a Swedish study (Allin & Humberstone, 2006; Lundqvist, 2019). Although this and the previous examples do not relate to TVET, they are important in explaining cultural and social influences on career decisions. The research participant named Sally grew up in the countryside and it is claimed that she developed a masculine character in that environment. She grew up playing with her brothers and this made her grow physically strong, hence she later developed an interest in outdoor sports. The authors explain her career decision in terms of Hodkinson's notion of horizon for action and turning points. Due to her early life experiences with outdoor activities, outdoor sports was on her horizon for action. However, she also experienced some routine, turning points, habitus, serendipity and interaction with others in field. The authors show that,

In terms of her career decisions, the development of significance of other stakeholders in the field as well as the role of serendipity was also evident. That is, Sally's PE teacher encouraged her attendance at an outdoor centre, which confirmed her physical identity in the outdoor arena, and her attendance at an open day where she was introduced to outdoor education was organised by her school. Furthermore, Sally's entry to outdoor education rather than physical education training arose partly through a chance interaction with a woman already within the outdoor field (Allin & Humberstone, 2006, p. 143).

The authors explain Sally's career decision in relation to Hodkinson's notion of horizon for action, linked to two turning points, namely the end of primary schooling years and her training at the outdoor training centre. The above quotation shows how stakeholders such as her teacher and the woman who was already in the outdoor field contributed to her career decision. But Bourdieu's notion of habitus is also evident in her childhood identity that developed at home (Allin & Humberstone, 2006).

2.2.2.1 *Habitus Influence: South African Example*

A similar view is presented in South African literature by Galvaan (Galvaan, 2010; Galvaan, 2015; Galvaan, 2016; Ramugondo et al., 2015) who has written extensively from a sociological perspective. Galvaan uses the concept of habitus to explain how poor and working-class people, including women refugees, make occupational decisions. For Galvaan (2010; 2015), occupational choices are context-bound and located within the habitus of the agent. As she says it, 'it's the way it is'. Explicit in her approach is that context shapes the experiences of social agents, who, in turn, act in response to their situation (Ramugondo et al., 2015). Using the notion of habitus, Galvaan (2010; 2015) explored the occupational choices of marginalised students in a higher education institution in South Africa. The study generated one theme 'it's just like that', which, according to Galvaan (2015), illustrates practical consciousness, habitus and *doxa* as contributing factors to career decision making. Galvaan's study was located within a place called Lavender Hill in the Cape Flats in the Western Cape Province, where, according to her, there is considerable social inequality and injustice (Galvaan, 2010).

The findings of her study showed that the students made occupational choices in ways that fitted with the patterns in the community, which were generally influenced by external factors embodied by habitus, thereby contributing to the sustenance of occupational injustice (Galvaan, 2015). Galvaan's (2015) notion of the role of the surrounding environment in career decision making is also expressed by Alexander (2015) who studied career decision making in island communities in Orkney, Shetland. Alexander (2015) explained how island communities influence the way people think and how they culturally position themselves. Her study explored how the local labour market and the cultural context influence the way people make their career choices based on whether to stay or leave. Similar to Galvaan (2010), Alexander (2015) claims that the local environmental impacts on the cultural identities of islanders, and the dispositions of habitus play a significant role in how they make career choices. The opportunities in the two island communities (studied by Alexander) that she presents are limited by the labour market structure, thereby resulting in outward migrations (Alexander, 2015).

2.2.2.2 *Inequalities and Career Decision Making*

A study with three participants was conducted in Denmark to analyse how the habitus of people from different generations is formed, and how this changes for the next generation (Juul, 2008). The three participants were trained and worked as cabinet makers. The oldest participant named Kim grew up in a working-class household after the Second World War. At that time, it was less of a choice for poor and working-class youth to choose an apprenticeship. Juul states that,

His decision to go in for an apprenticeship was highly approved of by his father, and was at the same time in congruence with the expectations politicians and policy planners had for the young people of Kim's generation with a working-class background (Juul, 2008, pp. 711–712).

The author further shows that the other participants',

[D]ecision to attend the upper secondary school and to start at university is very much in accordance with what one would expect of someone of his family background (Juul, 2008, p. 713).

These two examples show how growing up in a particular family, at a particular historical period, and occupying a particular socio-economic status, can shape how an individual thinks and acts. In South Africa, as part of the NDP project, a scenario was created to paint the picture of the experiences of many young people (Kariem & Mbete, 2012). This scenario portrays a poor young girl from a rural village who attended a poorly resourced school, thereby standing little chance to excel. Consequently, she stood even little chance to pursue her studies further to secure employment in the labour market (Kariem & Mbete, 2012). How Thandi (the poor girl in the scenario) thinks about the future is not the same as someone whose career options are wider and less restricted. This can be explained in terms of the capacity to aspire (Maja, 2020). In his doctoral thesis, Maja shows that a working-class youth like Thandi (in the above scenario), does not have the same map to navigate through life as her middle and upper-class counterparts (Maja, 2020). While this is an acknowledgement of habitus and cultural capital as influencing factors of human action, I show later that even the most disadvantaged youth (social agents) do act with agency.

Rational actors are not always precise about the outcomes of their choices, but they also broaden their options. A case in point is the choice of Religion Studies subject in the FET band in South African high schools (Chetty & Chetty, 2013). Religion Studies is often associated with Bible Studies, which is linked to the Christian faith. This subject, which was introduced in 2006, is relatively new, and it is not clear what career opportunities it holds for its choosers. Many students interviewed by Chetty and Chetty (2013) indicated that they chose this subject because they believed that it would lead them to open-ended careers, thereby giving them diverse opportunities. Also, the choice of this subject was linked to the likelihood of success, given that it is not a difficult subject. Students who viewed this subject as doable compared to other subjects were likely to choose it for this reason (Chetty & Chetty, 2013).

In South Africa, the rational choice theory has been used to explain why parents and children choose to move to urban schools, particularly suburban schools. Since the democratic dispensation, the country has experienced migration from rural and township schools to suburban schools. This migration is linked to the equity ideals of the new dispensation, where previously disadvantaged populations are now able to choose freely, thereby having the freedom to maximise their utility. According to Maile (2004), suburban schools give more opportunities to succeed so parents make choices that will help their children to learn to earn a living. Parents are rational actors in that they evaluate the benefits of sending their children to these former Model C schools against the cost of doing so. Even though parents tend to spend more money on these schools, they choose to invest in what they believe is a meaningful future for their children. Public schools in rural areas and townships in South Africa are generally cheaper, and/or free, but parents decide to invest their money in schools that charge fees (Maile, 2004).

2.2.2.3 *Agentic Moves Against and Within Structural Constraints*

Drawing from Hodkinson, this chapter acknowledges the relationship between structure and agency, thereby showing that career decision making requires “negotiations, alliances, struggle and conflict” (Hodkinson et al., 1996, p. 51). These negotiations, alliances, struggle and conflict, point to the nature of life that is neither static nor historically determined. Considering this, Hancock, claims that although individuals find themselves in situations due to their history, they are in a state of

transformation (Hancock, 2012). Concerning the five participants in his study, he claims that through new experiences, chances (serendipity), turning points and daily routines, the habitus and horizon for action also transform continuously. As the participants in his study changed jobs and areas of residence, they experienced different lives, and these contributed to the change in their habitus and their horizon for action, hence they chose to return to education (Hancock, 2012). The five men in Hancock's (2012) study did not simply succumb to their jobs because they felt destined but chose education to step out and up as they rediscovered themselves and what they can do.

The notion that Bourdieu's theoretical approach is deterministic emanates from its focus on inequalities based on class and family background, where the middle and upper classes seem to have the upper hand. Contrary to this perspective, Laughland-Booÿ et al. (2014) argue that young people from poor and working-class backgrounds tend to be more agentic than their middle/upper-class counterparts. The authors refer to the Australian higher education policies that emphasise that success is not about the socio-economic background, but it is about ability (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). In their research study, the authors found that youth from middle/upper-class families tend to be clear about their future career plans, whereas those from working-class backgrounds tend to have a plan and a backup plan.

According to the authors, youth from working-class backgrounds anticipate risk in terms of structural barriers, for example, failure to go to university due to low entry points or financial challenges. Consequently, these young people tend to have multiple plans so that should one plan fail, they consider the next option (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). The career decision making strategies described above resonate with the notion that a career decision is not a linear process where a decision is made at a young age and followed through but is affected by various factors. In their findings in the Youth Credits programme, Hodkinson et al. (1996) found that the young people whom they interviewed had various career dreams, but due to experiences such as poor academic performance, they had to make new choices. Making such compromises reflects agency in that when one option fails, the young people continue to move forward, thereby making new choices as they move along. According to the findings of an Australian study,

Many had already worked out alternative ways to achieve their study and career goals if they failed to achieve the requisite entry marks. They were also more likely to have considered various other individual or structural possibilities that may affect their choices, and to have thought about how they would achieve their goals if any obstacles presented themselves (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014, p. 9).

The above quotation stresses that working-class youth tend to have possible solutions to perceived obstacles because they find themselves in difficult positions that require agentic actions (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). Lack of social and material resources drives youth to acknowledge structural barriers and to act against such barriers. They realise that society requires individual effort, so they negotiate and engage with the structural boundaries that seem to hinder their progress. It is through the transformative power of their habitus that they confront disadvantage, look for alternatives, struggle for recognition, and venture into unfamiliar fields (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). Working-class youth may not be like 'fish in water' (Reay et al., 2009), but through agency, they can negotiate their way (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014).

Agency is considered important where structural constraints influence choices. A study conducted in Nepal shows that in Nepal, patriarchy and gender stereotypes are among the structures that influence career choices (Rai & Joshi, 2020). TVET, for example, is seen as education for men, thus women are discriminated against. The structures of patriarchy mean that women often settle for occupations or careers deemed appropriate for women. Despite these structural barriers, the three women who participated in this study set out to break these barriers. Because the three women were willing to go against the cultural expectations, they had to endure discrimination and stereotyping in TVET, but through their agency, they were motivated and committed to complete their TVET studies, including in engineering – a male-dominated field in their country (Rai & Joshi, 2020).

In South Africa, it is claimed that poor people are likely to face adversity; for example, a poor young black woman is likely to experience inferior schooling and marginalisation (Theron, 2016a). Although adversity is not desirable, agency flourishes in uncomfortable situations because that is where objective (constitutive structures) and subjective (social agent's habitus) tend to dislocate (Christodoulou & Spyridakis, 2016; Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). In Australia, the individualisation

discourse is often at odds with the lived realities of the poor and the working-class, and for them to move forward, they need new and innovative ways to deal with immediate circumstances. Contrary to the middle/upper-class youth, the working-class youth do not close off possible career options (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014).

It is privileged youth who tend not to challenge their habitus because their options usually work out. Privileged youth tend to follow social expectations consistently; for example choosing university education over other options (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). In so doing, they have an advantage of prior schooling that prepared them for university entry. But, for poor and working-class youth whose schooling gives little to no guarantee of such access, alternatives must be considered early in life. Therefore, privilege does not necessarily equate to agency or greater choice (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). This perspective contradicts the dominant view that youth from privileged backgrounds have more educational options than underprivileged youth (Reay & Lucey, 2003). However, it is very important to tread carefully here because privilege does offer a rich navigational map (Maja, 2020), but having a navigational map is not equivalent to having more agency.

Writing from a Sen-Bourdieu perspective, Hart (2019) shows that although social agents can have similar educational credentials, they are not destined for the same futures because their backgrounds continue to influence how they navigate through life. This idea is well supported in Bourdieusian literature where it is claimed that access to similar educational institutions does not necessarily close the gap between the rich and the poor (Colley & Hodkinson, 2001). Hart also reminds us that while we continue to debate issues around inequality in educational institutions, it is also important to note that there are millions of young people who do not have access to education (Hart, 2019). This argument is relevant to South Africa where millions of youth are not in education, employment or training (Kraak, 2013; Republic of South Africa, 2019a). Thus, talking about career decisions in TVET requires a consideration of the inequalities that shape access, experience and outcome in the education system of South Africa.

2.3 CHOOSING TVET: SOUTH AFRICAN EXPERIENCE

Post-school education and training in South Africa is broad, incorporating public TVET colleges, universities, universities of technology, community colleges, as well as private and non-governmental institutions (DHET, 2013). Theron, (2016b) and Stead and Watson (2017) argue that in South Africa, during the apartheid period, Black people were deprived of access to higher education in general and were denied access to certain occupations. Now, in their old age, parents and communities who never had access to the careers, they would have liked to, see the need to influence their children to take up these careers (Theron, 2016b). As a result, among Black people, there is a long-held perception that university education is better than a college education (Theron, 2016b). Many young Black people aim to 'make it in life', that is, securing high paying jobs in the labour market, and university education is seen as a potential 'bridge to riches'. This is a social expectation that has been created by adults who

[E]xplicitly and implicitly communicate upward mobility ideals and link these to academic education and white-collar careers. Via stories of resilience and the communication of admiration, they reinforce young people's enactment of their expectations (Theron, 2016b, p. 43).

In another article, Theron argues that academic or tertiary education is not the only means to secure economic inclusion (Theron, 2016a). She points to TVET as an alternative to higher education. The White Paper highlights that those who did not complete matric, as well as those who do not have enough points for university entry, can benefit from enrolling in public TVET colleges (DHET, 2013). Although this may be criticised as portraying public TVET colleges as rebound educational institutions, choosing these institutions can be seen as an agentic move (Groener & Andrews, 2019). Similar to the argument of Laughland-Booÿ et al. (2014) that working-class youth do not close off options, Groener and Andrews (2019) demonstrate that some of the South African youth who enrol in TVET colleges do so as a way of changing career direction. After they are denied access to university, they do not sit around and lament, but they set out to find an alternative, and also commit to successful completion (Groener & Andrews, 2019). The work of Groener and Andrews does not

necessarily draw from a Bourdieusian framework but it is useful within the South African TVET college sector to explain the actions of students.

The notion of agency signifies being actively involved in the activities or actions that shape an individual's life circumstances (Haffejee & Theron, 2019). Agency is not just about dreams and hopes, but it is about the capacity to take real action and to intervene in one's life circumstances (Groener & Andrews, 2019). These agentic moves are also reported by Powell and McGrath (2019) who demonstrate, based on a sample of public TVET college students in South Africa, that youth do not find it easy to enrol in post-school institutions. They move mountains before they enrol, and their paths are not necessarily straight, as some must work before they can manage to enrol. Some students struggled with transport to go to college daily. For example, Sinazo had to add an hour to her travel time, as well as added transport costs (Powell & McGrath, 2019b). For working-class youth to succeed requires them to transform their conditions by planning and being optimistic about the future (Groener & Andrews, 2019).

Agency is more visible when there are obstacles to overcome. Youth have hopes and dreams for the future, but there are also obstacles that stand in their way. The study of Groener and Andrews shows that TVET college students who experienced barriers could come up with different strategies to succeed, or could actively see other educational routes (Groener & Andrews, 2019). The obstacles that confront youth in their pursuit of education signify the effects of structure, and their reaction to these effects signifies agency. As they break the barriers, they transform the structural conditions that limit them; hence to understand agency, we must conceptualise it in relation to structure (Groener & Andrews, 2019).

For agency to thrive, it is also critical to have structural enablers in place. South Africa is trying to redress the remnants of apartheid on one hand, and the triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment, on the other hand (Perry, 2009). To ensure that all citizens benefit from the world-class education that the country is offering, access must also be expanded (Perry, 2009). Agency without existing educational opportunities would be very limited, if not non-existent, in relation to education. To meet the agentic moves of its citizens, the government of South Africa introduced the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to assist financially needy students

(Machingambi, 2011). Similarly, India tries to empower women and lowered caste citizens through various educational programmes (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020). The support through an international non-governmental organisation that ensures that girls complete primary and secondary schools has seen young women become empowered through education (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020).

When the horizons for action are enabled by structural enablers such as NSFAS in South Africa, youth can tolerate current hardships with the hope that these difficult circumstances shall pass (Theron, 2017). As they face hardships, they can envision the future, enabled through education. For young people who come from poor socio-economic backgrounds, with limited economic capital, education presents a promising future, hence agency is expressed in educational terms (Theron, 2017). These educational aspirations are linked to upward mobility so, it is not shocking that disadvantaged youth tend to associate investment in formal education with a long-term solution to their circumstances (Theron, 2017). For social agents to journey through the education system and life in general, they need the capacity to do so, for example through navigational capacity (Appadurai, 2004; Fataar, 2010; Maja, 2020).

Navigational capacity, or the capacity or the capability to aspire, requires some structural support as well. The example from India (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020) resonates with the South African parable of Thandi (Kariem & Mbetse, 2012). In the story of Thandi, it is shown that her situation is hopeless given the odds stacked against her. In the case of the Indian girls, it is argued that without financial support from the international non-governmental organisation, they would not have studied at all (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020). In both cases, the capacity or capability to aspire was limited by socio-economic position. This structural disadvantage is well articulated in sociological literature that focuses on structure versus agency (Frohlich & Potvin, 2010; Inghilleri, 2005; Reay, 2015). Through empowerment, agency and aspiration started to manifest in the lives of the girls in India, and they were able to dream better futures (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020). The following section looks at career decision making and the capacity to aspire.

2.4 CAPACITY TO ASPIRE AND CAREER DECISION MAKING

So far, this chapter has described career decision making as influenced by the relationship between structure and agency. In this section, I continue along this line but now add another perspective. The previous sections highlighted how life history can shape an individual's future life circumstances, as well as how an individual can exercise various forms of agency to transform their circumstances. Although the previous sections acknowledge the power of agency, the presentation of self, in relation to habitus and cultural capital, have been criticised as not future-looking (Appadurai, 2004). Also, the Careership Theory relied heavily on students' backgrounds to understand and explain why they chose certain career paths (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). To surpass this potentially deterministic perspective, I delved into some literature that is informed by the notion of capacity to aspire, to shed light on how culture can be seen as a navigational capacity (Appadurai, 2004).

Writing from a capabilities approach perspective, Powell shows how vocational education and training can enhance what she calls 'the capability to aspire' (Powell, 2012). The notion of capability to aspire emanates from the idea that humans need not only to be better producers but must also lead the lives they have reason to value and must have the freedom to do so. One of the values of Powell's work is to show us that students have reasons that are not captured in policies that promote vocational education and training, hence student voice is crucial. A different perspective to aspiration is offered by Appadurai (2004) who uses the concept of 'capacity to aspire', thereby calling us to look at culture as navigational capacity. While Powell (2014) sought to move beyond Sen and Nussbaum, and to bring the capabilities approach to vocational education and training theorising, Appadurai (2004) sought to transcend the deterministic cultural theories, including that of Bourdieu.

There is a relationship between the Capabilities approach and Bourdieu's sociology, and the appreciation of this relationship is important to understand educational choices. Hart developed a Sen-Bourdieu framework to explain how the different forms of capital can be used to explain how resources and commodities can be converted into capabilities (Hart, 2019). What is even more important to note here is why education matters to people, and how people can achieve the life that they have reason to value through education. This notion could be extended beyond why people

aspire, to consider how they can reach their aspirations through navigational capacity. Thus, the Sen-Bourdieu framework could also speak to Appadurai's notion of capacity to aspire (Appadurai, 2004).

The notion of navigational capacity is associated with Appadurai (2004) who studied how poor people (the slum dwellers) in India collectively fought for their rights and recognition. For Appadurai, the navigational capacity was linked to how these collective groups could map their futures, and take the necessary action to transform their unbearable circumstances for the better (Appadurai, 2004). The struggle of Indians in Appadurai's work can be likened to the struggle of Abahlali BaseMjondolo in the KwaZulu-Natal Province of South Africa, who have united to fight for recognition and improved treatment by the government (Motlatsi, 2020). While Appadurai's approach was collectivist, some South African scholars have used his conceptual framework to analyse and explain individual experiences (Fataar, 2010; Maja, 2020). In this section, I take the individual explanatory approach, referring to these South African experiences.

A study was conducted that focused on one young man who moved between rural and urban areas trying to improve his life circumstances (Fataar, 2010). This young man, whose pseudonym is Fuzile Ali, was born in a rural village and was not brought up by his parents. Fataar, using the notion of capacity to aspire, narrates the story of this young man, showing how he positioned himself to benefit from the opportunities that presented themselves to him (Fataar, 2010). When Fuzile Ali was withdrawn from school by his maternal grandfather, his paternal grandfather escaped with him to the city of Cape Town. Fuzile escaped from his maternal grandfather at night because he was promised that he would be able to go to school in the city. At the age of eight, his desire to study helped him to make an agentic move, although he was still too young to have a life plan worked out. His *planfulness* was evident when he was in high school back in his rural village.

After tasting city life, he could see more possibilities, and he made his way back. He asked his mother's sister to take him into her home (Fataar, 2010). She took him in, along with his sibling, although the shack in which they lived was overcrowded. After his mother relocated to Cape Town and acquired a house through a relief programme, he changed schools. In his old community, he used to attend a Christian church. When

he moved to the new community, he attended a Muslim school, and later converted to Islam. Being a Muslim brought new opportunities, for example, a new school, free education, a new home (staying with a middle-class Muslim family), and the capacity to aspire to a possible future (Fataar, 2010).

The capacity to aspire is either enabled or disabled by the opportunities and challenges that an individual faces, but some individuals are not easily discouraged. In the case of Fuzile, traditional tasks like herding cattle and sending them for dipping from time to time interfered with his schooling but did not distract him from studying. The poor conditions under which he lived in the city did not discourage him from studying. His desire to achieve a schooled career helped him to persevere, although his aspirational nodes and pathways were limited (Fataar, 2010). In his living environments, Fuzile was flexible and adaptable, so he did not feel trapped by place. Also, the fact that he was a top achiever at school fueled his hopes and aspirations for the future (Fataar, 2010).

The story of Fuzile Ali is in some ways similar to that of Lukas, who was interviewed by another researcher in a different context in South Africa (Bydawell, 2015). Lukas was born in a rural village in the Limpopo Province of South Africa. He was born into a big family. His father, like Fuzile's paternal grandfather, had multiple wives. Lukas, like Fuzile, grew up herding cattle, sending them for dipping once a week, and as a result, he would be late for school. The difference between the two is that Lukas never attended a school in the city, although his father was a migrant worker in Johannesburg. The similarity between the two is that they both enjoyed school because it helped them to escape the home environment. It gave them hope, and they aspired to a schooled career. Fataar explains that had Fuzile not returned to school after his maternal grandfather withdrew him, his aspirations would have been different, that is, his aspirations would have been unlikely to include a career that requires education (Fataar, 2010). The same is explained by Bydawell; that school progression was important in Lukas's life because he was able to dream about the future, which included him being educated (Bydawell, 2015).

The career directions of both Fuzile and Lukas were not necessarily clear, although these interviewees knew that they wanted to be educated. In the case of Fuzile, he enrolled for a theology course after matric, but he said he hoped to do law at a

university later (Fataar, 2010). The last time Moya interviewed Lukas (three years after the initial interviews), he had completed a master's degree, and he was hoping to work as a university lecturer (Bydawell, 2015). The opportunities that presented themselves, for example, NSFAS (in the case of Lukas), and the move to a Muslim school (in the case of Fuzile), were important in cultivating a capacity to aspire toward some future. Also, these opportunities would not have come if the two individuals had not been in search of a better future; what Hodgkinson would call an initiated turning point (Hodgkinson, 2009).

The experiences of these two interviewees reveal the effect of class on the capacity to aspire. In his doctoral thesis, Maja focused on gender and class to delineate the experiences of urban high school students in South Africa in relation to their capacity to aspire (Maja, 2020). He interviewed both middle-class and working-class students to draw a comparison between the two groups. He discovered that both working-class and middle-class youth were hopeful about the future, but their hopefulness was not based on the same aspirations. For the working-class youth, their aspiration was to get out of their situations, whereas the middle-class youth hoped to maintain their status (Maja, 2020). Similar to the youth described by Laughland-Booÿ et al. (2014), the youth described by Maja (2020) saw the future differently, for example, middle-class youth saw possibilities while working-class youth saw both possibilities and obstacles.

The horizon of aspiration is influenced by social class. The youth described by Maja differed in their views of the future. The middle-class youth seemed to have a broader perspective of the careers into which they wanted to pursue, whereas the working-class youth had a narrow scope of possible career futures (Maja, 2020). These differences emanate from their family backgrounds. The middle-class youth would always refer to what their parents, other family members, and family friends would advise them, whereas working-class youth parents and family members did not have much to say about career paths. It becomes apparent that young people from different socio-economic backgrounds inherit different codes (Maja, 2020). This analysis has been made repeatedly within sociology (Atkins, 2008; Ball, 2003; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979; Kettley & Whitehead, 2012).

In a study involving South African high school learners, the authors discovered that dropping out of school serves as a biographical discontinuity, where future careers are cut short before they even begin. In cases where families live in poverty or where there are no parents, learners are likely to drop out of school. The self-efficacy of learners is negatively affected by negative life experiences. Moreover, the authors found that disadvantaged communities offer children limited educational opportunities, poor role modelling, and low parental involvement (Buthelezi et al., 2010). The argument of Buthelezi et al. (2010) is also supported by Theron's findings, which point to the necessity of good role models in disadvantaged communities (Theron, 2016).

The findings of Buthelezi et al. (2009) are supported by the findings of Dodge and Welderufael (2014), who investigated the factors that influence career choices of township high school learners in South Africa. Dodge and Welderufael (2014), concluded that children from disadvantaged communities tend to learn helplessness, and this learned helplessness affects the self-efficacy of the agents. As a result, those who learn to be helpless through experience and observation (through observing helpless adults) tend to develop a negative outlook towards career barriers. It was further discovered by the authors that poor communities tend to impart the poverty mentality on the upcoming generations because the adults do not serve as useful role models (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014). In Bourdieusian literature, this could be related to habitus, whereby young people tend to internalise the actions of the adults around them and tend to act in the same way (McMillan, 2014). According to the findings of Dodge and Welderufael (2014), it is important that young people receive support from their surrounding environment.

In addition to poor schooling, individual ability is an important factor in the career development of learners. The findings of Dodge and Welderufael (2014) further reveal that apart from poor schooling, individual academic ability is also an important factor that influences career choices. Some students struggle to read and write and fail in school. According to the authors, experiencing learning difficulties damages an individual's self-efficacy (Dodge & Welderufael, 2014). In the case of Fuzile (Fataar, 2010) and Lukas (Bydawell, 2015), it can be argued that their academic abilities encouraged them not to give up on education. Agency, therefore, is supported by ability. This psychological viewpoint is important to consider here because it helps to

clarify that inequalities also result from biological traits, although social factors matter more (Blackmore & Cooksey, 2017).

The difficulty that the sociological theories face is to move from historical factors as determining the future, to looking at how the past and the present serve as a lens through which social agents can aspire toward a possible future. While Bydowell, (2015) focused on Bourdieu's notion of habitus and its influence on choice, Fataar, (2010) and Maja (2020) focused on how the inherited codes can help individuals to look into the future and exercise agency to achieve their goals. Laughland-Booÿ et al. (2014) took this notion a step further, showing that adversity is a wake-up call for the poor and the marginalised. Adversity evokes agency to take concrete action to get out of uncomfortable and unpleasant life circumstances. As individuals navigate through life, their lives are not smooth (routine), but they come across hurdles (turning points) that influence their life directions, and sometimes chance (serendipity) events influence their actions. In these routines and turning points, social actors do not act alone, but influence and are influenced by other agents who can be regarded as significant others.

2.4.1 Social Interactions and Significant Others

Significant others play a crucial role in the career decision making of young people. Adults, as supposedly experienced members of society, must provide resources for young people and lessen the odds for young people to navigate through life with ease (Theron, 2016b). Lessening the odds does not always require parents to have financial resources of their own but can come in the form of helping young people to identify external funding opportunities (Shumba & Naong, 2012). Therefore, adults can purposefully alter the odds for the young people to face fewer challenges, especially concerning structural disadvantage, that is, systemic barriers that disadvantage people from achieving their goals (Theron, 2016b).

Students do not operate in a vacuum, but within different kinds of relationships; for example, family relationships and friendships. However, we cannot underestimate autonomy in human action, but we must understand that autonomy to act is influenced by what people know and the context in which action is constituted, what Bourdieu (1984) refers to as 'field' and 'habitus'. In this regard, Greenbank and Hepworth (2008)

argue that students operate in a web of sophisticated relationships, and it is these relationships that we need to understand if we seek to know how they make career choices. These relationships comprise of family members, friends, neighbours and other general community members, relatives, strangers and professionals that students encounter (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008).

Several studies have emphasised the role that significant others such as parents, siblings, friends, teachers, lecturers and career guidance counsellors play in the career decision making process of students (Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014; Ball et al., 1999; Maringe, 2006). Maringe (2006) argues that the role of teachers in the career decision making of students is greater than that of parents, an idea supported by Foskett and Hemsley-Brown (2001). Ayiah-Mensah et al. (2014) found that teachers play a role in this, but their role is not necessarily greater than that of parents. Both findings are valid if we consider that they are not based on the same environmental context and historical period. People from different parts of the world do not approach career choices in the same way. From the work of Ball et al. (1999), we can see that in communities where parents are literate, they are more likely to play an active role in shaping their children's career paths as compared to their illiterate counterparts.

Significant to note here is that the education system is not a level field and those with more resources (capital) tend to have better access to education (Gorard et al., 2006). As a result, poor and working-class parents are largely illiterate, and their contribution to their children's knowledge about careers and other related educational matters is limited (McMillan, 2014), even if they all have similar aspirations. Atkins (2019) argues that young people from poor backgrounds generally have the same aspirations but do not have the capital (cultural, economic and social) to pursue such ambitions. The author also shows that students come from different social, economic and cultural backgrounds. All these elements have an impact on how these social actors navigate through the education field. As much as young people may wish to achieve similar educational qualifications, they do not have similar navigational capacities or navigational maps to reach their career destinations (Gale & Parker, 2015).

Depending on one's socio-economic status, one is likely to grow up in, or be socialised into a certain culture. Willis argues that life is neither random nor accidental, but it follows a pattern (Willis, 1977). Different homes breed different children. The

differences displayed in schools predict the differences in future occupations (Willis, 1977). The same can be said about Bourdieu's notion of taste (Bourdieu, 1984). Social actors from different socio-economic backgrounds eat different food, listen to different music, have different hobbies, and have different basic needs. As a result, these social actors develop different habitus, thereby thinking and acting differently (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014). In terms of looking into the future, Maja (2020) points out that the inability to see a clear future affects working-class youth more than their middle-class counterparts. For example, some youth just want to get out of their situations, so they see getting a job as their end game, while others may seek to maintain their social status while also moving up the economic ladder. This could also be explained concerning cultural inheritance whereby some young people inherit a culture of confidence as their parents prepared them for the future (Hart, 2019). Those who face adversity may just want to be freed from their current circumstances so their maps may not be detailed.

2.4.2 Upward Mobility and Economic Inclusion

Some young people study simply to get jobs, while some have a longer commitment to studying further (Ball et al., 1999). This view is supported by Needham and Papier (2011) and Powell (2014) who argue that TVET college students in South Africa think way beyond jobs; they aspire to be more than just employees or workers. There is consensus in Ball et al. (1999), Needham and Papier (2011), and Powell (2014) that employment is not absent in the thinking of students about post-compulsory education and training. Such thinking is not only evident in students, but also the policies of education and training, for example, the White Paper (DHET, 2013). A study conducted in South Africa with TVET college students, reports that there is a noticeable number of students who enrol at TVET colleges with the impression that it is a quick way to get a job (Papier, 2009). Such students associate TVET colleges with the acquisition of skills that place them at an advantage in the labour market.

It is worth restating that although students do consider employment in their thinking about career choices, it is one amongst other aspects (Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014). Ayiah-Mensah et al. (2014) found that the career choices of students are complex and using employment as the main influence is too simplistic. In countries like Kenya though, where TVET is forcefully linked to market dynamics, a study by Obwoye and

Kibor (2016) found that job market dynamics play a big role in influencing the career choices of TVET college students. A similar finding was reported in Takoradi and Ho Polytechnics in Ghana (Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014). It is, however, not just about getting any job, but more about getting an 'ideal' job, that is, a job with high prestige or status in society, and a promise of upward mobility (Obwoye & Kibor, 2016).

The idea of an 'ideal job' is also evident in Ayiah-Mensah et al. (2014) where they consider the views of parents on certain occupations. The authors show that in Ghana, there is a perception that some trades and occupations are not noble or decent (for example plumbing, repairing watches or house painting). Consequently, parents do not want their children to pursue such trades and occupations (Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014). This is not only a Ghanaian phenomenon but is also true in the South African context. Baatjes et al. (2014) also allude to the stigma that is placed on vocational education in South Africa. The authors indicate that historically in South Africa, vocational education was perceived and treated as education and training for the poor and academically weak students. In *Education in South Africa: 1923-1975*, Malherbe (1977) discusses how White parents (who were mainly farmers) did not see any value for their children to take up an apprenticeship in watch stores in the early 1900s.

South Africa has the challenge of poverty alleviation, and it is believed that education is instrumental in this regard. The idea of escaping from poverty is well captured in *Post-school education: Broadening alternative pathways from school to work* (Branson et al., 2015). The authors argue that having a post-school qualification places a potential labour market entrant at an advantage. Based on the results of the 2011 national census, the authors show that a person with a college qualification stands a better chance to be employed compared to a matric certificate holder. The results further show that those with university qualifications have even more chances of being in employment and earning more. Most young people in South Africa do not, however, enrol in post-school education. Only 8% of youth aged 15 – 24 are in any type of post-school education (university or college) (Branson et al., 2015, p. 42). The NDP sees improved education as a key to employment and high earnings. For this to happen though, we need economic growth that will give way to the availability of employment opportunities in the labour market (NPC, 2012). As Akoojee(2016) argues, we cannot

just assume that more enrolments and qualifications will result in the availability of opportunities.

The capacity to make a career choice can either be enhanced or limited. Needham and Papier (2011) show us that students are not always clear about every choice they make or about everything they say about their future aspirations. For example, students talk about self-employment in vague terms (Needham & Papier, 2011). Having a business is appealing to many young people as it is thought to come with financial freedom. Unfortunately, many young people lack knowledge on how to create businesses because they grew up in families and communities that neither possess nor promote business values. This is well explained by Kiyosaki (2011) in his popular book *Rich Dad Poor Dad: What the Rich Teach Their Kids About Money – That the Poor and Middle Class Do Not*. In his book, Kiyosaki (2011) demonstrates that the social and cultural capital that rich parents bestow on their children grooms them to think in wealthy terms. On the contrary, poor and middle-class parents do not have such social and cultural capital to bestow on their children. As a result, children of rich parents are likely to venture into business with knowledge and confidence, as opposed to their poor and middle-class counterparts (Kiyosaki, 2011). So, when students say that they want to pursue business, but say this in vague terms as indicated by Needham and Papier (2011), it is because they do not have adequate navigational maps (Maja, 2020), although they have an aspiration to become businesspeople.

2.5 CONCLUSION

It is important to reiterate that the career decisions of students are rational, as acknowledged by various writers (Daoud & Puaca, 2011; White, 2007; Willis, 1977). According to Willis, the career decisions of students follow the social patterns of the schools (Willis, 1977). Since career decisions are neither irrational nor technically rational, they can be understood as being pragmatically rational (Ball et al., 2000). These decisions are conditioned by environmental factors and asymmetrical power relations, and the resources or capital that young people possess, as well as 'horizons for action' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In other words, young people make career decisions concerning the fields they inhabit (Lundahl et al., 2017).

These choices, made in relation to fields, are influenced by turning points, that is, the ups and downs of life. Turning points can be structural, self-initiated or forced by different situations. Within each turning point, career decisions are pragmatically rational (Ball et al., 2000) and embedded in the complex struggles and negotiation of the relevant field. To understand the career decisions of students, it can be argued that it is important to also look at their historical background. Hodkinson (2009) argues that career choices or decisions have the past, present and future. This means that they do not happen randomly, but past experiences, current circumstances and future aspirations and fears contribute to career decision making.

This chapter has shown that career decisions are sophisticated and do not follow a linear order. For example, Groener and Andrews (2019) have shown that the students who go to TVET colleges do try to go to other institutions, and when they fail to enter, they consider the alternatives. It has been argued that this is not necessarily an indication that they are losing hope, but it is an act of agency, where students create alternative plans for themselves (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). The choices that the students make are influenced by their capacity to navigate through structures and to do so, they require navigational maps. Unfortunately, students who come from poor and working-class backgrounds tend to carry maps with little or no navigational information, and that places them at a disadvantage (Fataar, 2010; Maja, 2020). Through their agentic moves, when one door closes, they look for another door, until they secure a place to study. Additionally, the chapter has shown that the poor and working-class tend to be more agentic because their conditions require them to do more, rather than simply conforming to social expectations (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014). In the next chapter, I discuss the theoretical frameworks and the underpinning concepts that have been used in the study in more detail.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed literature relevant to the study. It showed that career choices are not value-neutral but are shaped by the contextual circumstances of the choosers whilst simultaneously recognising that social actors, that is, anyone who takes part in conscious or deliberate action in relation to other members of society (Abercrombie et al., 1994), are not just victims of social structures. The current study focuses on what influences the career choices of TVET college students in one selected college in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. The theoretical framework applied is the Careership Theory, a sociological theory developed by Hodkinson in the United Kingdom in the early 1990s to expand understandings of career decision making (Hodkinson et al., 1996).

This chapter starts by giving an overview and scope of the use of the sociological approach in general, and that of the Careership Theory in particular. This overview shows that Careership Theory is not popular, although it has been used over at least three decades. The overview is followed by the historical background of the Careership Theory, showing its origins. The Careership Theory is built on Bourdieusian concepts of capital, field and habitus, so the historical background is followed by a brief discussion of these three concepts. The chapter shows that career decisions are influenced by capital (or the resources that individuals and families possess and to which they have access), the fields that social agents inhabit, as well as their subjective experiences and perceptions.

The chapter then proceeds to a discussion of the tenets of the Careership Theory. The basic proposition of this theory is that career decisions are complex, and they are neither irrational nor technically rational. Career decisions are pragmatically rational, that is, they are influenced by the context in which they are made. They are also influenced by the position of the career chooser in the field, as well as the resources that they possess. Moreover, career decisions are influenced by the interactions that career choosers experience. Most importantly, inequality plays a significant role in

terms of distribution of, and access to educational opportunities. This is well expressed in the South African education system, where social inequalities influence access to education and training institutions. This chapter points out that the Careership Theory, although developed in a foreign and distant land, does apply to South African issues.

The chapter concludes by showing that both the Careership and social theory of Bourdieu have shortfalls. The major shortfall lies in the outspoken deterministic elements, where social structure is perceived as more powerful than human agency, as well as focusing on the social, cultural and historical determinants of social action. To overcome this, this chapter borrows from Appadurai the notion of capacity to aspire, which defines aspiration as a cultural capacity (Appadurai, 2004). The capacity to aspire is also complemented by Ray's notion of aspirational windows (Mookherjee & Ray, 2003). It also shows that empowerment is important for aspiration to be realised (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020). The chapter then presents a potential model for this theory that moves beyond the original conception. The chapter ends with a summary of the concepts and conceptual framework that are used throughout the dissertation and against which the discussion of findings and their significance are positioned.

3.2 SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE: GENERAL OVERVIEW

This chapter has noted that sociologists are interested in understanding, among other things, the distribution of the members of the population within social and economic structures (Cicourel & Kitsuse, 2006). In this regard, sociologists have observed how different societies have developed strategies to select, exclude and include members within these structures. Furthermore, sociologists have observed how education has come to the centre of this unequal distribution of opportunities, privileges and statuses. This unequal distribution is also claimed to have its origins in the family where parents from different socio-economic backgrounds bestow on their children varying cultural, economic and social capital. Career decision making theories like the Careership Theory take this as their theoretical starting point.

The sociological approach takes into consideration the social structure, that is, how social agents in social fields position themselves in relation to others, and how mutual expectations are developed and lived up to (Musgrave, 2017). It is also observed in sociology how children are born in different socio-economic backgrounds, in which

case they do not choose. Also, people do not choose their skin colour or sex at birth. These non-chosen traits are important because there are meanings constructed against them. For example, being born in a poor family means that a child is likely to experience poverty from a young age. It is important to be careful not to claim that a person born into poverty cannot transform their circumstances. Despite the possibility to transform one's circumstances, it is important to note that by the age of school completion, young people have already learned in part how the occupational structure works.

It is acknowledged in sociology that biological factors are important for social positioning, but social factors are deemed stronger and more influential (Blackmore & Cooksey, 2017). It is mostly social factors that influence, for example, who attends what type of school, and who occupies what position. Considering this, sociologists can speak of social class and inequalities, as well as social status associated with these inequalities. Educational qualifications, symbolic as they may be, are used to sort people into different positions. Wealthy parents are mostly in a good position to invest in their children's education, thereby giving them an advantage in society. This is one way how class inequalities produce and reproduce themselves (Blackmore & Cooksey, 2017).

Class is dominantly understood in economic terms but Bourdieu sought to move past this economic analysis (Morrison, 2010). Bourdieu adopted a culturalist class analysis where he sought to shed some light on how it is produced and reproduced through cultural processes. Bourdieu's analysis can be meaningfully linked to Appadurai's (2004) notion of capacity to aspire, which is complemented by Ray's (2006) idea of aspirational windows. Appadurai claims that people's actions and choices can be explained through their capacity to aspire. Within this capacity to aspire, it is noted that aspirations derive from cultural norms and practices. To enact their aspirations, social agents need access to capital, namely cultural, economic and social (Golding, 2013). These aspirations must be viewed beyond individual preferences because they are formed as a result of an individual's interaction with others in social fields. The following section briefly looks at the overview of the Careership Theory.

3.3 CAREERSHIP THEORY: BRIEF OVERVIEW

Careership Theory is not a dominant theory in either TVET or career studies (Powell & McGrath, 2019b). This is in part because sociological approaches to career decision making are rare (Lovšin, 2014) and that Careership Theory is not a ready guide for career guidance and counselling. It is not popular in South Africa, although it has recently been cited in some local doctoral studies (Mtemeri, 2017; Smith, 2015). In his doctoral thesis, Mtemeri (2017) acknowledges various theories, including Careership Theory, although he did not apply it in the analysis of the findings. In another doctoral thesis, Smith (2015) employed various theories, including Careership Theory, to understand what youth in South Africa think about a career in the military. Smith (2015) discussed the Careership Theory in greater depth than Mtemeri (2017), who cited it in passing.

Some authors have offered constructive criticism of the Careership Theory, thereby contributing to its advancement (Maguire, 2005; White, 2007). Although Hodkinson (2009) offered a revamped version of the Careership Theory, it is maintained that its original authors have done very little to advance the theory (Barham, 2013), or to test it on larger samples (White, 2007). As a consequence, it has not grown to be one of the dominant and popular career decision making theories in the world, such as Albert Bandura's self-efficacy theory (Bandura et al., 2001), Donald Super's vocational development theory (Super, 1972) and John Holland's vocational typology theory (Brown & Lent, 2013; Watson, 2013).

The Careership Theory associated with Hodkinson developed from a case study on a British youth education and training scheme (Hodkinson et al., 1996). After research that was led by the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), it was concluded that employability could be promoted if individuals could be empowered to make the right career choices (McBride, 1990). This research brought forth what was known as the Youth Training Credits (YTC) programme, whose first phase was rolled out in 1991, and followed by further pilot studies in 1993 (Croxford et al., 1996). By 1995, the credit scheme was a nationwide programme (Lourie, 1996). In the YTC pilot programme, young people were furnished with financial credit to be used to pay for training

(Croxford et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1995; Lourie, 1996). The underpinning assumption of the YTC was that young people would make technically rational career decisions, that is, they would rationally choose education and training programmes that would lead them to employment, or that would yield greater utilities for their lives (Croxford et al., 1996; Lourie, 1996; Wikeley, 1990). According to McBride (1990), the Youth Training Programme was meant to give the power of career decision making to the youth. It is this pilot programme that Hodkinson and colleagues investigated and explained their findings through a new theoretical model that they developed.

Early in the implementation of the YTC pilot programme, the Economic and Social Research Council commissioned an evaluation study for which Phil Hodkinson, Andrew Sparkes and Heather Hodkinson were the researchers. Although career choosing was central to policy formulation (Davey, 2009), the research pointed out that during that period in the United Kingdom, attention was rarely paid to how the 'clients' (students) made career decisions (Hodkinson et al., 1996). The authors then developed the Careership Theory to focus on how clients made career decisions in real life. They argued that policies assumed that the clients would make rational technical career choices without accounting for the process that takes place when making career choices (Hodkinson et al., 1996).

3.4 BUILDING BLOCKS: CAPITAL, FIELD AND HABITUS

The study of the YTC drew on concepts associated with Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1984, 1993a; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) to develop a unique sociological theory about how career decisions are made in practice (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This model, which the authors called 'careership' theory, enabled them to examine broader sociological questions of choice, structure and agency. The authors explained that for a meaningful analysis, they landed on Bourdieu's door (Hodkinson et al., 1996). Given the limited scope of theorising, and the dominance of the folk theories in career development studies (Hodkinson, 2009), the authors found some uniqueness in Bourdieu's theory of practice (Jenkins, 2002).

Bourdieu developed what he called the 'theory of practice' as an attempt to explain social dynamics, power relations, and how social structures of society not only shape human conditions and actions but also reproduce social inequalities (Bourdieu, 1977).

The central thesis of the theory of practice is that social inequalities continue because of reproduction that emanates from differing and unequal capitals that different families endow their children with (Riley, 2017). In the following sub-section, I present the three concepts from Bourdieu (namely capital, field and habitus), in a linear fashion, although they are intertwined in practice.

3.4.1 Capital

The concept of 'capital' covers 'cultural', 'economic', and 'social' resources (Bourdieu, 1986). Capital, according to Riley (2017), refers to the resources available to a social agent. Cultural capital presents itself in the form of credentials and cultural objects (Riley, 2017). Cultural capital is also evident in socialisation that gives knowledge of society to the social agent (person). Economic capital, as the name suggests, comes in the form of material resources that can be quantified in monetary terms or related value, for example, as income and ownership (Hart, 2019; Riley, 2017). "Economic capital may be generated through inherited wealth, family income or engagement in the economy for financial return" (Hart, 2019, p. 585). Social capital presents itself in the form of social networks and obligations and relationships that are beneficial to social agents (Bourdieu, 1986). "Social capital is accrued through social networks, the family and wider community interactions" (Hart, 2019, p. 585). These concepts were not coined by Bourdieu, but came from elsewhere, for example, cultural capital is associated with Karl Marx (Desan, 2013), and social capital is associated with James Coleman (Coleman, 1990; Rogošić & Baranović, 2016).

These three kinds of capitals have different meanings in different social spaces, and they present their holders with advantages and disadvantages and different social standings. For Bourdieu mainly, it is different capitals that reproduce inequalities in society, including in education. Bourdieu's analysis of society was based on the French culture of his time, which Gripsrud et al. (2011) describe as outdated. Most of Bourdieu's writings indicate that the culture of the French dominant class was the culture to which to aspire, thereby observing differences between the cultural lives of working and middle-class families and children (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979).

The use of cultural capital as an explanatory concept has been criticised as suggestive of 'pastness', thereby assuming that a cultural actor is one from the past (Appadurai, 2004). This perception has been emphasised by various contributors to the book *Culture and Public Action* (Rao & Walton, 2004). It has also been taken forward by various scholars (Gale & Parker, 2015; Sellar & Gale, 2011; Zipin et al., 2015). Appadurai advocates that the use of culture must consider the sophisticated nature of how aspiration is constituted (Appadurai, 2004). The central thesis of this critique is that using culture to explain social action portrays social action as a reflection of one's history or background, and not how one acts according to the present circumstances and future aspirations. Also, access to educational opportunities is not automatic but depends on the capital that the social agents possess (Grenfell, 2019; Lidström et al., 2014; Pitman, 2015; Reay et al., 2009). It is sufficient to point out that at the centre of Bourdieu's theorising is the notion of inequality and the conflict of interests between the dominant and the dominated classes. This theoretical approach has seen some light across the world, in school (Reay & Lucey, 2000), college education (Atkins, 2010), and higher education (Galvaan, 2015; Zipin et al., 2015). Capital is a currency that social agents deploy in what Bourdieu refers to as 'social fields'.

3.4.2 Field

Field is one of the concepts in Bourdieu's trilogy of 'capital', 'field' and 'habitus'. In its simplest form, 'field' refers to a social space (Thomson, 2008). It derives from the French word 'le champ', which means 'an area of land, a battlefield, or a field of knowledge' (Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu identified different kinds of fields, for example, the 'field of literary production', the 'field of economic production' and the 'juridical field' (Bourdieu, 1983, 1987, 1993b). The *field* is likened to a game governed by certain rules, where players come to play the game with different resources (for example economic, cultural and social), power and privileges (Hodkinson, 1998b), thereby employing different strategies (Lamaison & Bourdieu, 1986). Within social fields, we can see the exchangeability of dispositions of habitus (Jenkins, 2002; Thomson, 2008). Bourdieu's theory of practice seeks to stand between structure and agency, and it sees the *field* as the objective element of the social system (Bourdieu, 1977).

The field or the social space where social agents perform social actions is a specialised sphere where social actors exist concerning one another (Singh, 2019).

Just like in a game, social actors in a field occupy different positions, which influence their actions differently (Thomson, 2008). The field is a space of unequal power relations that emerge from different statuses, perpetuated by different levels of capitals, as well as background, influenced by the habitus. The differing capitals and habitus portray the field as an arena of competition, competing to dominate, to succeed, to accumulate capitals, and to maximise positions. In this way, social actors gravitate towards fields that best match their dispositions (Maton, 2008).

One of the distinctive features of the field is that it is autonomous, that is, it is independent of social actors (Hilgers & Mangez, 2015). In *Sociology in Question*, Bourdieu (1993a) contends that the properties of fields can be analysed independently of the actors in them. Bourdieu further states that in these autonomous fields, there is a struggle; there is a fight and antagonism. This antagonism exists between the newcomers and the gatekeepers who fight for dominance (Bourdieu, 1993a). This antagonism exists because the gatekeepers, the inheritors (the dominant groups) and the newcomers (the dominated groups) believe that the game is worth playing, and this comes without saying (Naidoo, 2004). For example, both the newcomers and the gatekeepers invest in education because they believe in the intrinsic value of education, although these groups conflict with one another.

In the South African context, this struggle or conflict is evident in the post-school education sector where access is limited, and where there is a constant struggle to gain access to it. South Africa is a divided nation, characterised by rural, semi-rural, peri-urban, informal settlements, townships, and suburbs. The schools found in these places range from 'under-the-tree classrooms', 'mud schools', 'poorly-resourced schools', to 'former Model C schools' and 'affluent schools' (Equal Education, 2018). There is one field— education – but the resources that actors possess influence their position in the field. Although the South Africa Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996) and the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996, 1996) state that there must be no discrimination in schools or educational institutions in general, without money, some learners are left to attend the worst schools in the country. Access to education continues to be shaped by one's social position, and this is manifest in post-school education as well.

Despite the antagonisms and revolutions within different fields, Bourdieu (1993a) contends that social actors, whether dominant or dominated, do not strive to remove the entire field. Rather, they strive to occupy positions within these social fields. While Naidoo (2004) focused on the historical period of the field of higher education in South Africa, a recent example of the field of education as a battlefield for recognition, for position-taking, is evident in what is popularly known as the *#FeesMustFall* movement (Allais, 2017b; Visser, 2017). In other writings, field has been shown to exert influence on human agency, on social action (Reay & Ball, 1997). This theorisation of field also forms a major part of the Careership Theory (Hodkinson, 2009). While the field represents the objective element of the social environment, habitus represents the subjective part.

3.4.3 Habitus

Habitus is one of Bourdieu's most cited and hotly debated concepts, but also the least understood (Maton, 2008; Reay, 2004b). This concept has become one of the most used concepts in various fields, although it has also been misused and misunderstood (Maton, 2008). Reay (2004b) asserts that many users apply this concept like hair spray, without doing any meaningful theoretical work. Habitus is defined by Bourdieu (1984) as a cultural environment that tends to be internalised in the form of dispositions to act, think, feel and perceive. Habitus represents the subjective (internal) structure of the social actor, while capital and field represent the objective (external) social structure. For Bourdieu, the concept of *habitus* accounts for the agency-structure dichotomy or dualism, thereby showing that social action is a result of both internal and external factors combined and intertwined. The actions of a social agent are not only either internally or externally influenced, but result from both factors. As much as the body (social agent) lives in the social world, the social world also lives in the body and is inscribed in the body – embodiment. With the application of the concept of *habitus*, Bourdieu attempted to gain access to internalised perceptions, behaviours and beliefs of different social groups (Maton, 2008).

In education, habitus has been used to explain phenomena such as educational inequalities, both in terms of opportunity, access and outcome. In their book *The inheritors: French students and their relation to culture*, Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) describe how class differences manifest in the education system. They explain how

children from different class backgrounds achieve differently in school; how some are likely to gain access to higher education at the expense of others; as well as how they choose different programmes of study. As shown in Chapter 2, such inequalities are well described in the seminal writing of Willis (1977), *Learning to Labour: How Working-Class Kids Get Working-Class Jobs*. In recent years, habitus has been extensively used to further explain these differences and inequalities in educational opportunities and attainment internationally and in South Africa. Educational inequalities are categorized by Hart in terms of access to education, experiences in education, and educational outcomes (Hart, 2019).

The Careership Theory scholars used habitus as one of the pillars of their theory to explain how young people in the YTC pilot programme made their career choices (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). At the centre of their approach was the idea that inequality leads to different choices and destinies among young people. A similar approach was taken by Ball and colleagues in their analysis of inequalities in the educational markets (Ball, 2003; Ball & Vincent, 1998; Reay, 2004a). A similar approach and focus are also evident in some South African studies (Galvaan, 2015; McMillan, 2014). Therefore, Careership Theory brings to the fore the issue of inequality in education (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). It is this inequality that is evident in South African education and training that much of the literature is attempting to grapple with (Baatjes, 2018; Bydowell, 2015; Soudien et al., 2015).

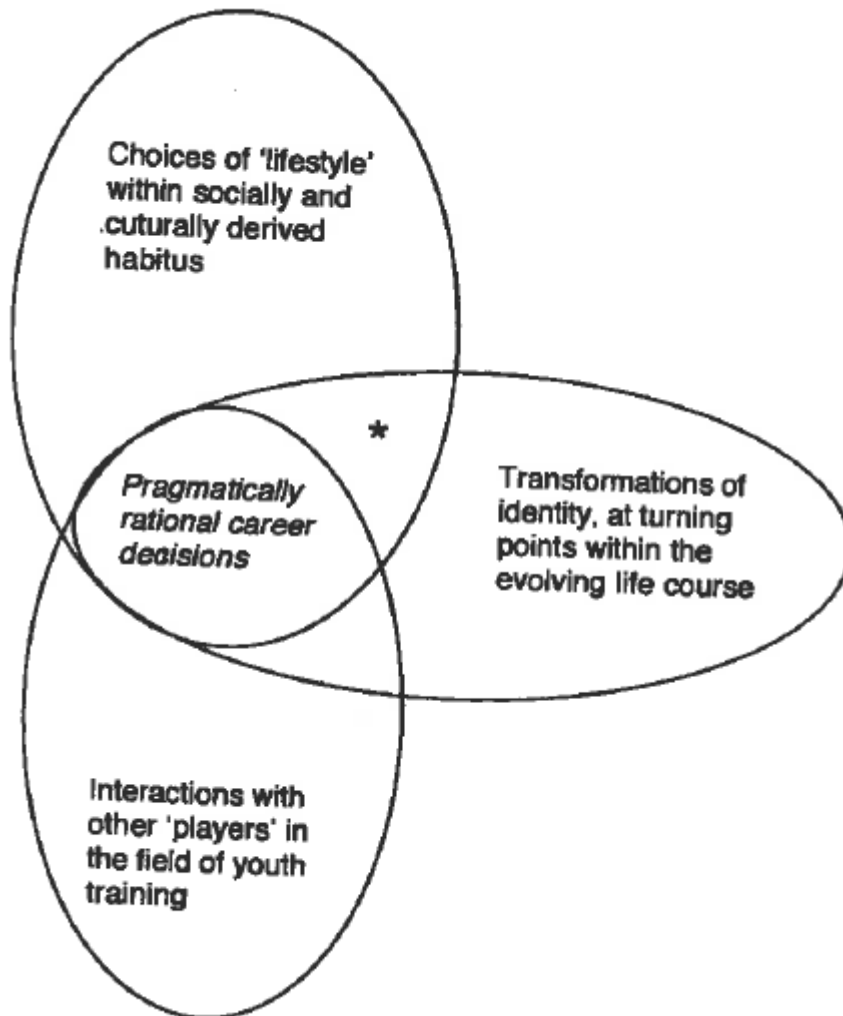
3.5 CAREERSHIP: BASIC TENETS

At inception, the *Careership Theory* had three basic tenets or dimensions (Hodkinson et al., 1996), which are outlined below:

- i. Decision making is located in the habitus of the social actor making the decision, and the decisions made are pragmatically rational, that is, they are neither irrational nor totally rational;
- ii. Career decisions are not the sole act of the choosers (the students) but result from interactions in the field (such as the post-compulsory schooling sector), and these interactions are shaped and influenced by the resources that actors possess (economic, social and cultural capital); and

- iii. Career decisions are embedded in the life histories of the social agents, within the routines and turning points which make and are made by and dependent on previous routines and turning points.

The following diagram depicts the original *careership* model at its inception and conceptualization.



Source: (This figure is taken from Hodkinson et al. (1996, p. 140). The shape has been altered to fit in this page.

Figure 3.1: The Dimensions of Career Decision Making

Figure 3.1 above is the model that was designed by the original authors (Hodkinson et al., 1996) of the Careership Theory to explain the sophisticated nature of career decision making.

The model shows that young choosers (social actors) are not the only players in the training field. Other stakeholders influence these choices, both directly and indirectly, a point also raised by Hatcher (1998). The model further shows that throughout one's life, there is a transformation of identity. Routines and turning points shape the identity of the social actor, which further shapes the choices they make. Career decision making is part and parcel of the development of the social actors' *habitus* and therefore, making a career decision must be understood as both socially and culturally embedded. Career decision making is not a linear activity and can be either short-term or long-term, or a response to serendipitous opportunities (Hodkinson et al., 1996). However, in everyday life, the overlap between lifestyles and the life course is holistic. They are separated here for analytical clarity.

3.5.1 Pragmatically Rational Decisions within the Habitus

The British education system that Hodkinson and colleagues were writing about and against was built on the notion of the labour market, which valued rationality, particularly technical or instrumental rationality (Hodkinson & Hodkinson, 1995; Hatcher, 1998; Colley & Hodkinson, 2001; Davey, 2009). In their early writings, the authors emphasised their opposition to the notion of technical rationality in educational choices (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Contrary to educational policies that favoured technical or instrumental rationality, the authors of careership argued that the youth or students that they interviewed made career choices that were neither technically rational nor irrational, but were pragmatically rational (Hodkinson et al., 1996). In their book *Triumphs and Tears: Young People, Markets and the Transition from School to Work*, Hodkinson et al. (1996) claim that they coined the term 'pragmatically rational', which suggests that decisions are not solely based on evaluation of costs and benefits, and they are also neither totally rational nor irrational. However, the concept of 'pragmatic rationality' was well in use before that, for example in *Pragmatic Rationality in Education* (Haynes, 1975).

The term 'pragmatically rational' was introduced in Chapter 2 exists as a combination of two concepts, namely 'pragmatic' and 'rational'. 'Rationality' is a broad concept that has been applied in different fields, for example in Psychology (Evans, 2014; Tetlock & Mellers, 2002), in Medicine (Djulfbegovic & Elqayam, 2017), and Economics (Becker, 1976; Elster, 2016). Historically, it is associated with names such as, among others, Immanuel Kant in his famous book *Critique of Judgment* (Kant, 1790), David Gauthier in his classical book *Morals by Agreement* (Gauthier, 1986), as well as Kahneman and Tversky in their article *Judgement under uncertainty: heuristics and biases* (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974), and John Elster in *Sour Grapes: Studies in the subversion of rationality* (Elster, 2016). The word 'pragmatic' on the other hand, is linked to the theory of 'pragmatism', which is generally associated with William James in his book *Pragmatism* (James, 1907), and John Dewey in *How we think* (Dewey, 1910). Taken together, there is an extensive body of literature on 'pragmatic rationality' (Daoud & Puaca, 2011; Finkelstein, 2013; Foskett & Hemsley-Brown, 1999; Haynes, 1975; Healey, 2009; Hodgkinson & Sparkes, 1997; White, 2007).

The value of the 'rationality debate', that is, whether students are rational or not, or whether they are technically or pragmatically rational, is questioned by White (2007). Firstly, there is an endless list of different types of rationality, what Djulfbegovic and Elqayam (2017) call the 'many faces of rationality'. Secondly, there is no agreement on what the word 'rationality' means (White, 2007). There is no consensus on the meaning of the word,

And the debate on human rationality is a high-stakes controversy that mixes primordial political and psychological prejudices in combustible combinations (Tetlock & Mellers, 2002, p. 97).

This quotation shows us that this is an ongoing debate, where nobody has the last word, and therefore, as White (2007) argues, there is no need to keep on debating whether humans are rational or not, or to even try to measure their rationality or irrationality. However, despite such criticism, the concept of 'pragmatic rationality' is continuously found relevant and used in research on educational choices (Lindblad & Lundahl, 2020; Lundahl et al., 2017).

The central idea is that social agents act with some level of rationality, although this rationality is not technical. Bourdieu, for example, strongly rejected notions of technical rationality, especially the presentation of rationality proposed by Jon Elster (Jenkins, 2002). Following Bourdieu, (Hodkinson et al., 1996) similarly applied the concept of rationality, demonstrating that career choices are context-dependent. The same approach is found in the work of Diane Reay, where she constantly demonstrates that the choices of children and parents are based on some rational calculation, but this rationality is bound to a context (Reay, 2018; Reay et al., 2009; Reay & Lucey, 2000). Even in the analysis of career choices in outdoor sports (Allin & Humberstone, 2006; Humberstone, 2004) and soccer (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019), analysis shows that career choices are made with some level of rationality, but this rationality cannot be divorced from the context in which the choices are made.

Although the authors of the Careership Theory acknowledge that students are rational, they hold a strong view that this rationality is not instrumental, but pragmatic, as career decision making is located in the habitus of the choosers (Hodkinson, 2009; Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The opposite of this pragmatic rationality is presented in the classical work of Jeremy Bentham, where he divides action into two parts: avoidance of punishment or pain and increment of benefits or pleasure (Bentham, 1823). Economists such as Gary Becker have employed this rational approach in their analysis of human action (Becker, 1976). Careership Theory sympathises with the idea of instrumental rationality but argues strongly that it does not present real choices. Rather, social agents act and choose concerning where they are, what they know, and what they possess – the horizon for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Writing from the English perspective, Diane Reay brings in the idea of ‘reflexivity’, combined with habitus, to account for this pragmatic rationality (Reay, 2018). ‘Reflexivity’ features in Bourdieu’s writings about social action (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992).

3.5.2 Life Histories, Routines and Turning Points

The Careership Theory seeks to explain an uneven range of routine experiences combined with turning points in an individuals' life (Hodkinson, 2009). Turning points

refer to times when an individual's life goes through transition or change (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). In their words, Hodkinson and Sparkes claim that,

At a turning-point a person goes through a significant transformation of identity. *Careership* can be seen as an uneven pattern of routine experience interspersed with such turning points. Within each turning-point, career decisions are pragmatically rational and embedded in the complex struggles and negotiations of the relevant field (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 39)

During the early conceptualisation of the Careership Theory, Hodkinson & Sparkes (1997) identified at least three types of turning points, namely *self-initiated*, *structural*, and *forced*. These turning points are intertwined with periods of routine. A *self-initiated* turning point refers to a change or transformation in one's life where the individual concerned is proactive in the instigation of a new life course. *Structural* turning-points are different from *self-initiated* turning-points in that events are determined by external structures. We also have *forced* turning-points, where life-changing phenomena are imposed on individuals. Changes that occur in people's lives are part of life routines, and routines and turning-points are not separable from one another. During the initial stages of careership, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) identified at least five types of routines, namely *confirmatory*, *contradictory*, *socialising*, *dislocating*, and *evolutionary*.

These five types of routines describe different experiences with choices that have been made (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). *Confirmatory* routines resemble experience that reinforces a career decision that has already been made. *Contradictory* routines describe an experience that undermines or contradicts the original decision made, leading to dissatisfaction with the original decision. *Socialising* routines describe the experience of confirming career identity that was not there before. *Dislocating* routines describe living with unwanted career choices or identity, especially when the social agent is not in a position to make changes to their original decision. *Evolutionary* routines explain experience where a person gradually outgrows their original career identity without any pain or contradiction (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

The notion of routines and turning-points has been found wanting (Allin & Humberstone, 2006; Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019; Barham, 2013; Hodkinson et al., 2006; Lundahl et al., 2017) and has been subjected to some revision. It is difficult

to identify a turning point within a routine and to determine the duration of a routine (Barham, 2013). Andersson & Barker-Ruchti (2019) added another turning point to the original and revised list, namely 'initiating turning point'. Hodkinson (2009) suggested that the notion of 'turning points' be shifted to 'learning', that is, learning throughout life as one constructs one's career. Nonetheless, Barham (2013) remains confident that the notion of turning points has something valuable to offer in our understanding of career decision making.

For the current study, I do not take the explanatory power of routines and turning points at face value. In line with (Hodkinson, 2009), I acknowledge that life is not packaged in routines and turning points, but I concede that these concepts are useful for identifying, discerning and explaining the complicated nature of changes in one's life (Hodkinson, 2009). In the current study, therefore, I use the idea of turning points and routines to account for shifting perspectives, social spaces and horizons for action (Lundqvist, 2019), without falling into the trap of 'pastness to dominate' (Zipin, 2009). This point is further discussed in the section where I bring in the notion of 'navigational capacity'.

The fundamental idea in the Careership Theory is that young people make career decisions with the resources they possess or have access to and the *fields* that they inhabit (Lundahl et al., 2017). These resources, fields and habitus allow for horizons for action to either expand or shrink (Lundqvist, 2019). A horizon is associated with vision or the extent to which a person can 'see' (Hodkinson et al., 1996) or 'aspire' (Zipin et al., 2015). In the Careership Theory, the horizon is related to human knowledge, perception and the ability to act. The career choices that young people make are influenced by what they know, and their actions are influenced by their position, as well as their embodied dispositions. Thus, Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) argue that career guidance that focuses on choices that are outside the students' horizons for action is rarely successful. This is because people look at the possibility of success before they make choices, and they are more likely to choose what they see as a possibility, based on the knowledge and resources they possess. Although rationality is part of this process, the analysis here must not be associated with rational choice theories because the rationality explained here is not pure rationality, but pragmatic rationality (Haynes, 1975)

3.6 CAREERSHIP: SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

The Careership Theory has been used in a TVET context abroad (Hodkinson et al., 1996). In South Africa, it has been cited in at least three doctoral theses, two refer to it in passing (Mtemeri, 2017; Powell, 2014), and one with reasonable consideration and explication (Smith, 2015). No literature in TVET in South Africa focuses intently on the Careership Theory to explain why students or apprentices have chosen a vocational or technical programme at a college or elsewhere. Nonetheless, this does not imply that careership cannot be meaningfully imported and employed in a TVET context in South Africa in the twenty-first century. As Ngcwangu (2016) warned, we must always acknowledge where the theories that we use emerged and developed.

Part of the Careership Theory's usefulness in the context of South Africa lies in the approach of the theory, for example, a focus on inequality in education. South African history reveals the formalisation of inequality and inferiority through educational and labour market exclusion. These inequalities of the past seem to continue in the new democratic society (NPC, 2012), even though racial discrimination is no longer the leading factor, but one among many. Despite the changes since 1994, what remains clear in South Africa is that social structures "play a central role in setting up individual choices about educational training, credentialing, and employment prospects" (Babson, 2014, p. 157).

To say that social structures influence our destiny is not equivalent to saying that we do not act with agency. Such misunderstanding may come as a result of mistaking agency for 'freedom to choose'. In his popular book *I write what I like*, Biko (2004) describes how the lives of Black people were deeply conditioned by the political structures of apartheid. Although Black people were oppressed to the core, they showed resilience and a fighting spirit against the political structures. In the case of India, Appadurai (2004) asserts that even in the most oppressive circumstances, poor people maintain some level of dignity. Concerning aspiration, Appadurai contends that,

I am not saying that poor people cannot wish, want, need, plan, or aspire. But part of poverty is a diminishing of the circumstances in which these practices occur. If the map of aspirations (continuing the navigational metaphor) is seen to consist of a dense

combination of nodes and pathways, relative poverty means a smaller number of aspirational nodes and a thinner, weaker sense of the pathways from concrete wants to intermediate contexts to general norms and back again (Appadurai, 2004, p. 69).

To shed some light on the above quotation, Ray (2006) argues that poverty smothers dreams as well as the process of attaining them. Poor people have aspirations and wishes, but these are socially determined and are not equally distributed (Appadurai, 2004). Also, as much as poor people may have aspirations, developing strategies to achieve them is a challenge. It is a challenge in poor communities because there is not enough observed experience of success, hence the dreams and aspirations of poor people sometimes diminish in front of their eyes. These diminishing circumstances are also articulated by Bourdieu concerning higher education selection in France, arguing that,

The chances of higher education can be seen as the product of a selection process which, throughout the school system, is applied with very unequal severity, depending on the student's social origin. In fact, for the most disadvantaged classes, it is purely and simply a matter of elimination (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979, p. 2).

The Careership Theory recognises structure (for example, educational structures, processes and practices) and the relationship between social institutions (micro and macro). In acknowledging structure, the Careership Theory brings sociological concerns to the question of career decision making, particularly alertness to inequality (Hodkinson et al., 1996). In the case of South Africa, therefore, the Careership Theory can be useful in dealing with issues of inequality, unemployment, and poverty. Such inequality and poverty are evident in Aslam Fataar's work concerning children in the Western Cape who travel far away from their homes to seek better education because there are no good schools in the local places of residence (Fataar, 2007).

In some cases, because of their differing circumstances, children achieve differently. For example, orphaned children are more likely not to complete school, although some are more resilient than others (Operario et al., 2008; L. Theron et al., 2011). This reveals that any analysis within the sociology of education cannot escape the continuous and never-ending relationship between micro and macro structures. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the current study is located within the inequalities in South Africa that present different social agents with different life experiences. These

inequalities have been well captured in various policy documents, such as the NDP (NPC, 2012) and the White Paper (DHET, 2013). In these documents, the government of South Africa acknowledges that the war against inequality, poverty and unemployment is far from over. Education and training are proposed as possible solutions to these triple challenges.

It is also important to point out that literature in TVET in South Africa acknowledges the effects of structure on social agents (Groener & Andrews, 2019). The most common approach to TVET literature is the focus on structural disadvantage, thereby targeting youth and unemployed persons from disadvantaged backgrounds. Some of these disadvantages are evident in concepts such as 'youth at risk' (Papier et al., 2018), the 'social time bomb' (Cloete, 2009), those 'not in employment, education or training' (Cloete & Butler-Adam, 2012), and the 'marginalised groups' (Baatjes, 2018). This literature reveals that young people do not have equal capacities to navigate through the structure to reach their dreams. Most importantly, the focus of the South African government on uplifting the disadvantaged youth speaks volumes about the obvious effects of structure on human progress, development and agency.

The problem within the dominant literature in career development and career choices is that it has neglected structure and sees career decision making as an instrumental process dependent on information and commitment (Hodkinson, 2009). It has been shown in several studies that structure plays a central role in career decision making (Atkins, 2017; Galvaan, 2015; Rosvall et al., 2020). For example, the effects of structure are evident in the male respondents in Hancock (2012). Even more strongly, the effects of structure are presented in Atkins (2019). The central idea in these writings is that those who occupy a lower position in social structures are likely to occupy certain (generally lower) positions in the economy.

Structure matters in South Africa because of growing inequalities, including educational inequalities, which undermine, limit and suppress human agency. This can be best expressed by the story of Thandi (Kariem & Mbetse, 2012). As part of the National Development Project, a scenario was created to paint a picture of the experiences of many young people in South Africa. This scenario portrays a poor young girl from a rural village. She attended a poorly resourced school, thereby standing little chance to excel. Consequently, she stood even less chance to pursue

her studies further to secure employment in the labour market. The scenario ends by demonstrating that the possible time she is likely to break away from poverty is when she reaches the age of 60 and starts to receive the government social grant (Kariem & Mbete, 2012). Still, the social grant money is too little for her to call herself 'not poor'. This possibility is also presented by a South African study that shows that a young person from a poor family and community is more likely to experience hardship and unfortunate events like crime and violence (Haffejee & Theron, 2019)

At the heart of the Careership Theory are the pervasive social inequalities (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993), a feature that makes this theory more relevant to a study of TVET within the South African context, a country characterised as the most unequal in the world (The World Bank, 2018, 2019). The Careership Theory authors landed at Bourdieu's door because his analytical concepts could, at that time, unapologetically confront the nature of inequality in the educational markets in the United Kingdom. These inequalities, created by social structures, limit human agency to navigate through social structures (Atkins, 2008; Atkins & Flint, 2015). Within these social inequalities, the theory seeks to tackle the structure-agency dilemma, a central feature in Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977). Bourdieu sought to understand how social structure and individual agency are reconciled, that is, how the social world and inner self shape each other (Grenfell & James, 2004).

For Bourdieu, social agents act within existing social structures, which are already structured (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). By their existence, these structured structures structure human action and practices. Thus, Bourdieu argues that one's habitus shapes one's current and future practices, as well as aspirations and perceptions (Grenfell, 2008). For Bourdieu, structure and agency lie in the objectivity-and-subjectivity dichotomy, with capital and field representing the objective reality, and habitus representing subjective reality. The central point in the theory of practice is that structure is relational; that is, it is the relationship between individuals, institutions and other social entities – how these relate, for example, how power relations play out, based on how society is organised (Singh, 2019).

3.6.1 Bourdieusian Perspective: Brief Criticism

Sociological theories have been largely criticised for failing to escape the problem of determinism (Artess, 2015). Bourdieu's theory of practice has also fallen for this line of criticism (Christodoulou & Spyridakis, 2016; Jenkins, 2002; King, 2000; Riley, 2017; Sullivan, 2002; Van de Werfhorst, 2010; Yang, 2014). The theory of practice has mostly been criticised for presenting social life as predetermined. Yang (2014) argues that it is not possible to anticipate change within Bourdieu's theory. For Jenkins (2002), Bourdieu presents a model that shows social agents as passive actors. According to Jenkins (2002), instead of clarifying this, Bourdieu uses *habitus* to account for his claims, but *habitus* creates other theoretical problems (King, 2000). Riley (2017) argues that Bourdieu's theory of practice is tautological and weak. While the theory of practice attempts to resolve the objectivity-subjectivity dichotomy, *habitus*, according to King (2000), throws us back to subjectivism. The concept of cultural capital is also another contested terrain.

Going back to the notion that Bourdieu's theory claims that past inequalities breed current inequalities, which inevitably breed future inequalities, is criticised at different levels. At one level, it is criticised by Ferrare and Apple (2015) for presenting culture as something that is either lacking or missing in the poor and working-class children. Therefore, cultural capital is seen as something that the poor and working-class must acquire or accumulate, a point also emphasised in other writings (Bunda et al., 2012; Zipin, 2009; Zipin et al., 2012). At another level, though considered Bourdieu's signature concept, cultural capital, according to Goldthorpe (2007), could be meaningfully replaced by concepts such as 'cultural values' or 'cultural resources'. Though seen as beyond conceptual preference, the concept of cultural capital has a connotation that the dominant class always wins (Goldthorpe, 2007).

A critique is also offered from a critical realist perspective (Archer, 2010). Central to Archer's criticism is the assertion that socialisation, which is explained by Bourdieu through the use of the concept of *habitus*, cannot be constant from childhood to adulthood. With the changing of times and social practices, Bourdieu's theory must be taken to be relevant to the time and place it sought to explain, and it has to be acknowledged that the young people of the new millennium are different from those that Bourdieu observed (Archer, 2010). Although suggestions have been made to

bring reflexivity and habitus together, Archer contends that it is not clear if Bourdieu himself would accept this theoretical position as he continuously and constantly insisted that social actions are socialised and always influenced by the invisible hand of habitus (Archer, 2010).

For Wacquant (2014a), it is the poor understanding of Bourdieu that leads to too much and misguided criticism, coming from people who use theory as 'hairspray' (James, 2015). Wacquant argues that Bourdieu's theory is not necessarily deterministic, but shows the fluidity of life, and the difficulty to move between structure and agency. Dispositions are held inside but manifest on the outside as well. They shape how social agents think, but do not necessarily always determine their actions. So, although a person can walk according to their habitus, it is not guaranteed that the same habitus can be used in a risky situation, where a spontaneous reaction may be necessary (Wacquant, 2014). In *Pascalian meditations* Bourdieu (2000) himself argued that at some point he did not feel like responding to some of the criticism of his theory because it came from people who with a poor understanding of his theorising.

The problem that Reay (2010) identifies with habitus is that of 'conscious' and 'unconscious' actions, arguing that Bourdieu flips from an extreme of rationalist interpretation to an anti-rationalist interpretation. However, Reay (2010) emphasises that Bourdieu is indeed mistaken for a structural, social and material determinist because, in his theorising, Bourdieu uses the word transformation more often, especially about education. One of the points raised by Reay (2010) is that those who have a feel for the game, those who feel at home in social fields, are not always conscious about their actions, for example, higher education choice.

Another criticism of habitus is that it is confusing, hard to define and apply. Wacquant (2014a) notes that one of the criticisms of habitus is that it is seen as a 'black box' that confuses analysis, erases history and perpetuates the idea of replication of social structures. In response to this, Wacquant (2014a) warns that Bourdieu introduced habitus to explain cultural disjuncture and social transformation as opposed to social reproduction. Also, those who tend to critique habitus as a black box see it as acting alone. Habitus never acts alone but acts with capital and field. In a sense, habitus is always changing and it is changeable (Wacquant, 2014). To drive the argument closer to home, Wacquant (2014a) warns that habitus must be understood in its primary and

secondary form. The primary habitus is linked to the early socialisation of the child, whereas the secondary habitus comes at a later stage.

3.6.2 Careership Theory: Brief Criticism

As much as Hodkinson's Careership Theory draws heavily from Bourdieu's theory of practice, it is dangerous to assume that the criticism against the theory of practice can be applied against Careership Theory as well. The criticisms of the Careership Theory are more positive than negative, more of positive suggestions, thereby presenting it as a potential theory to explain the career choices of students. The main and obvious shortfall of Careership Theory is that it looks at career decision making from a historical (or retrospective) perspective, thereby presenting social action as a destination of some kind, for example, its emphasis that young women choose careers or occupations in line with their gender (Hodkinson et al., 1996).

Some scholars have suggested some improvements to the theory (Barham, 2013; Hancock, 2012; Hodkinson, 2008; Hodkinson et al., 2006; Maguire, 2005). For example, Hancock (2012) notes that there has been a shift from routines and turning points to the notion of learning, although Barham (2013) argues that the notion of routines and turning points remains relevant to the theory. The idea of learning is well documented (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 1997, 2000b; Hodkinson et al., 2007). While learning is a broad concept, the point that I take from Hodkinson (2008), Hancock (2012), and Barham (2013) is that rather than focusing on routines and turning points alone, it is better to look at people as social actors who learn throughout their lives. Going back to Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997), young people must be understood as upcoming, and in so doing come to learn about themselves as well as about careers, and their career choices change over time.

As students engage in formal learning, they are not passive, but make sense of the world through construction and reconstruction, thereby engaging in the process of becoming (Hodkinson et al., 2007). Nonetheless, through learning and becoming new people, the people are not necessarily entirely new, but they transform and feel different from the previous experience of self. In this way, from who they were, and what they are, students continue to learn who they want to become through anticipation of a different future (Hodkinson et al., 2007). This learning is not always

positive but may lead to students changing their career directions. However, learning cannot replace routines and turning points, as these happen simultaneously and are intertwined (Barham, 2013).

Apart from learning, there are other suggestions made to Careership Theory. Some additions to the Careership Theory come in the form of different conceptual uses, for example, the use of the concepts of 'spatial horizons' and 'socio-spaces' (Maguire, 2005), which are also widely used in Ball et al. (2000). These spatial horizons and socio-spaces enable and disable horizons for action, a notion captured by the concept of 'field' and 'horizon for action', which has already been introduced in this chapter. These concepts are used to account for different choices, showing that some young people's horizons are narrow, while others are wide. These concepts are useful to analyse a local environment and how it affects social action. For example, some of the students interviewed by Ball et al. (2000) selected work opportunities that were simply within their reach, that is, within their horizons for action.

Further refinements to the Careership Theory relate to 'position'; position in social structures, position in social fields, as well as generational position (Hodkinson, 2009). The position is internal and subjective, but also external and objective. This relates to the concept of habitus that seeks to explain that as much as social agents are positioned in social fields (objective social structures), they also hold perceptions about reality (subjective social structures). Also, a generational position is an idea that reality changes over time and career choices follow suit.

Another new area of exploration within careership is the idea of decision making styles, for example opportunistic, strategic, aspirational and evaluative (Hodkinson, 2009). For this, the concept used is serendipitous, meaning that career choices are not always predictable. This point has been emphasised throughout the life of Careership Theory, that sometimes a career choice is a reaction to an opportunity. Sometimes it is both aspirational and strategic in that it is carefully planned over some time. Planning does not always mean that it will happen as desired, and this is where routines and turning points, as well as career learning, come in to explain some of the changes that happen to plans and strategies and aspirations.

Based on the adaptation of the *Careership Theory* to a different cohort of students, Hodkinson et al. (2006) present the refined model as:

- i. career decisions are pragmatically rational;
- ii. these pragmatically rational decisions are influenced, enabled and constrained by horizons for action;
- iii. dispositions, horizons for action, as well as actions, are rooted in class, gender and ethnic identities;
- iv. resources (economic, cultural and social) are unevenly distributed but remain important to students' advancement; and
- v. significant others influence the career decisions of students.

3.7 CAREERSHIP AND CAPACITY TO ASPIRE

Social inequality does influence career choices (Zipin et al., 2012). Hatcher (1998) argues that inequalities breed different perceptions, what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'taste', and it is the evaluation of these perceptions (or 'tastes') that gives rise to different educational choices. A study conducted in India shows how the caste categorization of the population undermines the development of some groups while preserving the status of some groups (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020). Social class is reproduced in such settings as a result of internalised inequality that shapes how individuals perceive the world and how to act to transform their circumstances. To account for this, I turn to the concept of 'navigational capacity' (Appadurai, 2004), as expounded in educational studies (Fataar, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015; Maja, 2020; Sellar & Gale, 2011).

Careership Theory aids in understanding and unpacking how roles, status and rewards are organised, and how education plays a role in this social arrangement. It acknowledges that all people have aspirations, but these aspirations are influenced by the horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The horizons for action are explained differently by different writers; for example, some define them as socio-spaces (Ball et al., 2000). What sits at the centre of these horizons for action is the ability to see, the ability to act on what one sees or knows, the capacity to make a choice. The capitals (cultural, economic and social) play a role in influencing these horizons for action. This capacity to navigate through structures is referred to as

navigational capacity in *The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition* (Appadurai, 2004).

The concept of navigational capacity has been widely used in studies that focus on aspirations, especially educational aspirations (Bunda et al., 2012; Chee, 2018; Galliot, 2015; Zipin et al., 2015). This navigational capacity is also understood as a cultural capacity (Chee, 2018), although it is seen as more forward-looking compared to the concept of cultural capital (Appadurai, 2004). It is also explained as a map, similar to what tourists would use during a tour. Presenting navigational capacity as a map, navigating through the structure, for example, the education system, some young people know their way around, while others do not know their way around. This idea is well presented in the literature that looks at how young people from different social classes and backgrounds make their career choices (Ball & Vincent, 1998; Galvaan, 2015; McMillan, 2014; Reay & Ball, 1997).

From a Bourdieusian perspective, those who come from low social class backgrounds possess low capital, be it economic, social or cultural, and thereby make choices that are influenced by their lowly social positions, and vice versa (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Although Appadurai (2004) and his followers (Chee, 2018; Galliot, 2015; Zipin, 2009) consider Bourdieu's 'capitals' to be more historical, backwards-looking, or representing pastness, they acknowledge that social background plays a role in developing the navigational capacity of a social agent. Indeed, the concept of navigational capacity brings a new perspective to looking at social action.

Bourdieu's theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977) has been a target of criticism, unlike Hodkinson's *Careership Theory* (Hodkinson, 1998b) which has attracted less criticism so far. This, however, does not mean that *Careership Theory* would not benefit from some conceptual injection, given that its conceptual tools are linked to both the time and space of its origin and development. While no literature links *Careership Theory* with Appadurai's navigational capacity or horizons of aspiration, there is a clear link between the concepts of horizons for action and horizons of aspiration. Also, the usage of 'capitals' (cultural, economic and social) in *Careership Theory* relates to the usage in Appadurai, although Appadurai seeks to futurize the conceptual usage. Therefore, without causing any damage to the original conception of *Careership Theory*, the

concept of navigational capacity can be incorporated to give a futuristic outlook to the horizons for action. Therefore, a possible position of the Careership Theory would be:

- i. Career decision making is in the subjective social structure (*habitus*) of the social actor, in interaction with the objective social structures (*capital* and *field*)
- ii. Career decisions are influenced, shaped, limited and constrained by the social actor's ability to navigate social structures (navigational capacity) and amount of resilience, but also shaped by inequality
- iii. Career decisions are formed within the local contexts or communities (there is no individual without society) – collective aspirations and collective habitus

At the heart of the current study is the quest to understand how students not only navigate external or objective structures but how they navigate their (own) subjectivities as well. Explaining how students navigate social structures presents Careership Theory with the challenge of falling into the trap of social and cultural determinism, a shortfall that has been noted in Bourdieu's theory of practice on which Careership Theory borrows its conceptual tools. As discussed earlier, the deterministic nature of the theory of practice is widely acknowledged by both critics and supporters of Bourdieu. To answer the question 'how do students navigate social structures?', I refer to the concept of 'navigational capacity', which suggests the cultural notions of 'habits', 'norms', 'values' and 'beliefs' as explanations for human action and choice. Navigational capacity explains how social agents are at ease or not in social fields (Appadurai, 2004). For example, some students are familiar with college offerings due to their socialisation, while others need assistance.

3.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter is informed by Chapter 2, in which it was highlighted that career decision making is not just a technical and neutral act. Learners all over the world do not have equal access to educational opportunities, so when we talk about career choices, we must be mindful of the inequalities. Paul Willis has shown that the school itself breeds differences and inequalities, or at least reveals them. He argues that it is the culture of learners that shapes their futures (Willis, 1977). A similar line of argument is presented by Bourdieu, where he shows that for some poor students, access to higher education is so difficult that he likened it to exclusion (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979).

Inequality means that the playing field is not equal; some players have more playing resources or tools than others, and some players have more power than others.

The chapter, however, shows that emphasising the notion of inequality may be a helpful starting point, but this must not downplay the agency of the students in directing their lives and making choices. The chapter warns against the perception that social agents are mere victims of social structures that weigh down on them. However, the chapter does not present an unrealistically hopeful situation, where the world is presented from a motivational speaker perspective, where everything is possible. The chapter notes with caution that a social agent knows what they know as a result of where they were born, the places they have travelled, the books they read, the television channels they watch, where they attend school, as well as the people with whom they interact.

The main contribution of this chapter is that it brings the careership perspective to South African literature. Also, it shifts from the original conception of this theory and incorporates concepts that help it to move forward. The notion of navigational capacity, that I have added, helps us to look at cultural analysis differently. If we look at culture as a capacity to aspire, then we would start to think of culture as a booster, rather than a stumbling block. This perspective, from Appadurai, helps us to look at, for example, socialisation, not as a determining factor of the future, but as a source of thoughts, aspiration, and a map. This map is not generic, but it is unique for every social agent. Some maps are rich with information and guidelines, whereas others are poor in this regard.

This chapter has outlined the concepts and theoretical/conceptual framework that are used in the dissertation. The chapter discussed the basic tenets of Careership Theory, which are: pragmatically rational decision making located in the habitus; career decisions result from interactions in the field, and are influenced by cultural, economic and social capital; and career decisions are made in routines and turning points and embedded in life histories of social agents. While Appadurai warned against the use of capital and life histories to define aspirations, this study acknowledges that life histories are useful, though it is important to move beyond the determinism that comes with such approaches. The concepts of capital, field and habitus, which inform most

of this study, have been defined in the chapter. Important to consider is the interaction of these to inform and influence social action.

Bourdieu uses the concept of habitus and other concepts to provide a sociological tool for analysing how the social world functions (Maton, 2008). Habitus reminds us that although humans feel like free social agents, human action is governed by certain regularities and cultural practices. These unwritten rules of the game (social world) are not necessarily totally deterministic, although powerful. Some people can deviate from these rules of the game and thereby move from their disadvantaged and disadvantaging positions to advantaged and advantaging positions. Some people can see opportunities available to them and take them to change their life circumstances. Nonetheless, what is important to note is that social players come from unequal backgrounds, and social structures contribute to the reproduction and widening of social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990; Grenfell, 2008).

These ideas are accepted by Appadurai, although he brought a different perspective, thereby arguing that the notions of habitus and cultural capital can lead to the view of social agents as historically informed. Appadurai brought the notion of capacity to aspire to help us look at a social agent as someone who is future looking. This idea is also acknowledged by Ray, who brought forth the notion of aspiration windows. Bringing all these together, the analysis in this dissertation seeks to move way past Willis, Hodkinson and Bourdieu, by focusing on history, present, but most importantly, the future. This study acknowledges the power of accumulated capitals but shows that these do not cast-in-tone the future of social agents. While Bourdieu speaks back to Appadurai, ideas brought forward by Maja, Fataar and Ray, speak louder, showing that agency flourishes in difficult circumstances, though social agents are neither totally free nor completely bound.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the Careership Theory, which informs and is informed by the paradigm to be discussed in this chapter. The Careership Theory is aligned with the subjective ontology and interpretive epistemology, and essentially, the entire paradigm that guides enquiry in this study. This chapter follows the logic that the paradigm consists of five parts that form the whole, namely ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods, and sources. The ontological position in this study is subjectivism, where reality is understood to be based on social actors' experiences and perceptions. Accordingly, this study is guided by the interpretive epistemology that seeks to solicit the meanings that social actors make of their worlds regarding career decision making. Although the interpretive epistemology does not dictate a qualitative methodology, in this study, I chose the qualitative approach because of its flexibility and ability to honour the views of the participants. This qualitative methodology was supported by interviewing methods, where students were interviewed individually and in groups. The sources of data were students at one selected TVET college in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. In this chapter, therefore, I explain how I ethically conducted interviews with the students, and how I gained access to the TVET college. I further explain the decisions about methodology and methods, and how these were used to generate and analyse data in a trustworthy manner. I start this section with a brief discussion of the research paradigm.

4.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study is shaped or influenced by my perspective as a research student (or researcher). This worldview is called the 'research paradigm'. The research paradigm consists of ontology, epistemology, methodology, methods and sources (Scotland, 2012). Different writers define the word 'paradigm' differently (Thanh et al., 2015). For some, it is a structured set of assumptions about reality, knowledge of reality, and the ways to know about reality. For others, it is a worldview within which enquiry takes place (Wijesinghe, 2011). Guba and Lincoln (1994) define it as basic belief systems, which are based on ontological, epistemological, and methodological postulations. For

these authors, a paradigm “[...] represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the “world”, the individual’s place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts [...]” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 107). In this manner, research paradigms define the scope of enquiry by defining what falls within or outside the bounds of genuine enquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

In everyday life, a paradigm could also be likened to a map. In *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, Covey (1989) describes a paradigm as a map that is used to understand reality. Botshabelo Maja uses the notion of a map (borrowed from Appadurai's (2004) idea of navigational capacity) to explain how youth act according to the knowledge they possess (Maja, 2020). This map (or paradigm), according to Maja (2020) and others who lean on Appadurai for cultural theorising (Gale & Parker, 2015), is culturally derived. It comes as part of the socialisation process from a young age; for example, middle-class families prepare their children for adult life in certain ways compared to working-class families (Ball, 2003). For Bourdieu, this paradigm (shaped by socialisation, enculturation) is located within the *habitus* of the social actor (Maton, 2008; Nash, 2003). Using Bourdieu’s framework, Hodkinson and colleagues assert that career decisions are located within the *habitus* of the social agents (Hodkinson, 1998b, 1998a; Hodkinson et al., 1996). With this understanding of career decisions being located within the *habitus*, or shaped by the socio-cultural upbringing, for this study I have considered a focus on subjective career decision making. The following section addresses one aspect of the research paradigm, namely ontology or ontological position.

4.2.1 Subjective Ontology

The focus of this study is on what influences the career decisions of public TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. To understand what influences these career decisions, I had to consider the reality of these students, and the nature of what can be known about this reality, that is, what is out there to be investigated. In research, such as educational research, the nature of knowledge, truth or reality is called ‘ontology’ (Berryman, 2019; Scotland, 2012). Ontology is the study of being, and it is concerned with reality and what constitutes it (Scotland, 2012). For this reason, researchers need to have ontological assumptions about the phenomenon they wish to investigate. These ontological assumptions reflect “a position regarding

their [researchers] perceptions of how things really are and how things really work” (Scotland, 2012, p. 9).

Ontological positions or claims are concerned with the belief of the researchers about reality. Since human participants are involved, it is important to consider how they perceive the world, as well as how they have come to know about their world. In research, therefore, researchers must ask about the nature of social reality to be investigated (Grix, 2002). An example of an ontological position is whether reality is regarded as objective, subjective or constructive (Grix, 2002). In this study, to understand how career decisions are made, I had to focus on the subjective perspectives of the students (the participants). This is because I believe that to understand how a social agent thinks, acts, and makes decisions, it is important to obtain that individual agent’s point of view. Each individual travels according to the map that they carry in their hands. The same can be said about career decision making. These decisions are not made purely technically, rationally or randomly, but are made from a particular position – horizon for action (Hodkinson, 2009; Rosvall et al., 2020) or horizon of aspiration (Maja, 2020).

Social actors make different decisions because their interpretation of the world is not the same. For example, they come from different family, religious, educational, economic and class backgrounds. It cannot be expected that these different individuals will possess the same knowledge of the world, and act in similar ways. For this study, therefore, I assumed an interpretive position (or epistemology) because it respects the different ways of perceiving reality. The following section looks briefly at the interpretive epistemology as applied in this study.

4.2.2 Interpretive Epistemology

Epistemology involves asking how one comes to know something, as well as the status or authority of such knowledge (Jenkins, 2002). Researchers need to make their epistemological position clear because it makes it easier to select a suitable theoretical framework and methodological approach (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009). Also, a clear epistemological position helps to clarify the entire research process and the methods and techniques employed. It also helps with all the decisions that researchers make when they conduct an investigation (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009).

It is important because methods and data analysis approaches do not exist in a vacuum; they are epistemologically guided. Moreover, an epistemological position does not necessarily limit ways of knowing but helps in creating and acknowledging that there are different ways of coming to know about the world (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009).

Epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with ways of knowing. Within this branch of philosophy, there are epistemological positions such as positivism and interpretivism (Grix, 2002). A positivist epistemological position is based on rationalistic and empiricist philosophy. It assumes that science measures independent facts so that the social world can be studied like the natural world. It assumes that enquiry is value-free, that is, it is independent of researchers' biases and influences (Taylor & Medina, 2013). Walsham (1995) contends that in positivism, reality is believed to be independent of human construction – external realism. Within interpretivism, reality is understood as a social construct that results from human interaction in a social field – internal realism. In short, positivist approaches understand reality to be based on facts, whereas interpretive approaches view reality as constructed by human experience (Taylor & Medina, 2013).

In this study, my epistemological stance is interpretivism. The interpretive position emerged in the 1970s and was mainly used in anthropology to learn about different cultures. It follows a process of researcher-participant interaction for the researcher to immerse him/herself in the research process and environment. It allows the researcher to be fully involved in the research process because the researcher is regarded as an instrument of data generation (Taylor & Medina, 2013). The term 'interpretivism' signifies research approaches that seek to develop an understanding of a phenomenon under investigation from the point of view of the subjects of research and the researcher.

Interpretivist research relies on exploring how social actors make sense of their world. It does not base its analysis on one reality, one truth, or one answer, but advocates for multiple realities. In this way, it has managed to gain recognisable influence in research, as it accommodates "multiple perspectives and versions of truths" (Thanh et al., 2015, p. 25). In addition, interpretive epistemologies do not rely on the idea of fixed reality, but rather consider that it is socially constructed and changes with time.

Human perception is not necessarily consistent over time but changes with time and social change.

To use an interpretive research paradigm is a declaration that there is a difference between the subject matter of the natural sciences and that of the social sciences. Interpretivists argue that a different methodology is required to reach an interpretive understanding or *verstehen* and explanation that will enable the social researcher to appreciate the subjective meaning of social action. The assumption is thus made that reality should be interpreted through the meaning that research participants give to their lifeworld (Fouche & Schurink, 2011, pp. 309–310).

In short, the world and the truth about the world can be discovered through an interactive methodological approach where I, the research student and the participants are actively involved. Interpretive research aims to make sense of the world, and understanding (*verstehen*) (Chowdhury, 2014) the meanings and interpretations of the researcher and those of the participants (Fouche & Schurink, 2011).

The concepts of ‘ontology’ and ‘epistemology’ are philosophically, theoretically and methodologically inclined (Bryman, 1984). For example, in the case of researchers who believe that reality is objective and can only be known objectively, their research methods do not involve direct interaction with research objects/subjects. They keep as much distance as possible to avoid influencing the findings. The current study is not concerned with physical laws, but with the social and cultural contexts that underlie the career decisions of public TVET college students. The approach was that of interacting with the participants *in situ*, that is, in their natural environment. Thus, the choice of an epistemological position tends to determine the preference for a research methodology, method and data collection techniques (Bryman, 1984). I found a qualitative methodological approach to be more suitable for this study. The following section briefly describes the qualitative methodological approach as used in this study.

4.2.3 Qualitative Methodology

Research decisions are not made aimlessly but are made based on “fitness for purpose” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 73). The choice of a methodological approach requires a careful and thorough consideration of all potential methodological

approaches that could be considered. It is well known that in South Africa, research in TVET, in general, is usually statistical (Vale, 2016), thereby leaving the methodological gap wide. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches have their advantages and disadvantages. Thus, a choice of an approach must be based on the fitness for purpose. According to Bryman, this is a highly seductive solution in that it would appear that whoever argues against it is likely to be implying the absolute superiority of one particular technique (Bryman, 1984, p. 76).

The notion of 'fitness for purpose' points to the idea that no approach is better than another, but they are fit for different research purposes. There are many approaches from which to choose, but not all are suitable for all forms of enquiry. The current study adopted a qualitative methodology. In this chapter, I discuss the qualitative research methodology from both instrumental/technical and philosophical points of view. I do this to break away from the narrow explanation that only looks at the technical process of enquiry (Bryman, 1984, 2008). To succeed in this endeavour, I take into account the historical development of qualitative research methodologies as a reaction to positivist approaches that dominated scientific enquiry throughout the 19th and 20th centuries (Niewenhuis, 2007). Qualitative research is, according to Niewenhuis (2007), an umbrella term for a range of research strands that developed over the years. Although qualitative research methodologies are now popular and widely used, it is important to bear in mind that they started gaining recognition not so long ago (Niewenhuis, 2007).

During the 19th and 20th centuries, research was based on "objectivism, rationalism and positivism" (Niewenhuis, 2007, p. 48). It was rooted in the belief that all incidences are governed by natural laws. These natural laws, it was believed, also determined human behaviour. Consequently, all occurrences were deemed to be a result of causality, that is, cause and effect, action and reaction. With this dominant understanding, the role of researchers was to uncover these universal laws by employing methods such as experimentation. Carrying out of these tests or experiments was based on the belief that there is an objective reality out there waiting to be discovered or uncovered objectively. Objectivity within this positivist epistemology implies that the natural laws are external to the human condition (Niewenhuis, 2007).

Qualitative research methodologies serve to broaden our understanding of how things in the social world came to be the way they are (Creswell, 2009). Quantitative research focuses on describing or understanding reality through general scientific laws whereas qualitative research focuses on how different people look at reality (Hancock et al., 2007). Qualitative and quantitative research methodologies differ in paradigm, that is, they vary in the reality they seek to investigate, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and how data is gathered (Brink et al., 2012).

It is fascinating to note that it is positivist or quantitative researchers who first started to doubt the validity of scientific experiments. Niewenhuis (2007) highlights that it was physics research conducted during the 20th century that revealed the need to go beyond objectivism, rationalism, and positivism. It brought to light the idea of relativity of all human enquiry and showed the limitations of the idea of the reality 'out there' waiting to be discovered through objective means. It is from that time that new understandings, what Niewenhuis (2007) refers to as the 'emerging worldview', began to emerge. This emerging worldview questioned the deductive reasoning employed by scientists in the old worldview. The emerging worldview made it apparent that reality is complex, and causality is not sufficient to explain it, because social interactions in the social field lead to both predictable and unpredictable behaviour and outcomes. As already alluded to, the emerging worldview brought with it some discomfort among positivist researchers.

Despite the long-held paradigmatic wars over the years, it is now accepted that this battle is both unnecessary and unproductive. Authors such as Creswell (2009) argue for mixed methods, pointing to the benefits of combining different research methods. Authors such as Robson and McCartan (2016) point to the idea of dissolving research paradigms by avoiding concepts such as 'qualitative' and 'quantitative'. Bryman (1984) argues that in most cases, a study can benefit from mixed approaches, but epistemological differences continue to stifle such research initiatives. Even data analysis, according to Sandelowski et al. (2007), can benefit from what they call 'metasummary' for synthesising qualitative and quantitative descriptive findings. The following section looks at gaining access to the public TVET college and the sampling process.

4.3 GOING TO THE COLLEGE AND FINDING PARTICIPANTS (SOURCES)

4.3.1 Gaining Access

In 2015, the DHET released a policy that governs the process of researching public colleges (RSA, 2016). This policy stipulates the process to be undertaken by the researcher to gain access to South African public colleges. The policy specifies that all researchers must use the standard application form if they intend to conduct research in public colleges. It further specifies that if the researcher wishes to conduct research in 10 or more public colleges, he or she must submit the completed standard application form to the DHET. However, if the researcher intends to conduct research in less than 10 institutions, he or she must submit the completed standard application form to the head/s of the college/s concerned (RSA, 2016)

In the case of the current study, I completed the standard application form and submitted it to the head of the one public TVET college concerned. In doing so, I also wrote a letter to the head of the TVET college asking for permission to conduct research at their TVET college [see Appendix 4]. I also attached the proposal of the research project at hand⁷, as well as a letter from the Nelson Mandela University, where I am registered for my studies, to show that my study adheres to the accepted ethical standards [see Appendix 5]. After two weeks, the college principal informed me that he delegated the responsibility of liaising with me to the Deputy Principal: Academic. I then started email communication with the Deputy Principal concerned. After a week, the Deputy Principal issued me a letter permitting me to conduct research at their college [see Appendix 6]. I then asked for a meeting to discuss the data generation schedule.

The Deputy Principal further delegated the responsibility to liaise with me to college campus managers who were informed via email. The Deputy Principal's personal assistant sent an email to all campus managers at the beginning of March 2018, informing them about my intentions. After her email, I sent an email to the relevant campus managers asking for a meeting to discuss the data generation schedule. I sent a second email a week later, to which two managers replied, indicating that I

⁷ The study proposal now forms part of Chapter 1 of this dissertation. It has been reworked to accommodate the structure of the dissertation.

should visit their respective campuses when they re-open in April 2018. I then refined the data generation tools and planned the logistics while I waited for the set dates. It was at this stage that the last campus manager responded and arranged for me to visit his campus and follow the same process as the other two campuses.

4.3.2 Finding the Sources (Participants): Sampling

To find the participants, I used purposive sampling (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007), where I specifically looked for registered students at the public TVET college. The main characteristic was that the participants must be registered. This is not to say that there were unregistered students at that college at that time, but it is to suggest that anyone who was registered would qualify for inclusion. . I specifically looked for full-time (or day) students for their availability. I also looked for diversity in the programmes for which students were registered. I also found a balanced number of men and women participants. However, the process of finding the participants relied on the willingness of the participants, rather than my ability to recruit. After spending several weeks visiting the college campuses to hold discussions with campus managers and heads of departments, I could visit classrooms. For this study, the level of study did not matter, programme of study was not important, and age was not crucial. These common categories did not matter because the study was not interested in the age, the programme, or level of study. The study was concerned about the perceptions of students on what influenced their career decisions.

When I visited classrooms, I was accompanied by the head of the department on each campus. I initially visited a maximum of three classrooms per campus. For every classroom visit, I was given a few minutes to introduce myself and the purpose of my visit to the classroom (or college at large). I introduced myself, explaining that I was a student who was conducting research that required human participants who study at a public TVET college. I shared the printed research proposal documents with the students. I also shared a letter addressed to students [**see Appendix 3**] as well as a consent form with them [**see Appendix 2**]. I explained to the students that participation was voluntary. On each campus, I was offered a room where I could conduct the interviews. I informed students that should they choose to participate, they would find me in that specified room. On one specific campus, I had to redo the process because I did not get the number I needed from the initial invitation. I also had a few students

who came, but when I explained further, they chose to leave. So, in these cases, recruitment took longer than anticipated.

In the end, the total number of students who chose to participate in the study was 33. The intended number of participants for the study was 21 and each campus was to provide at least seven participants. While there was resistance in the beginning, there was more interest later, hence the total of 33 participants. I then formed one focus group per campus in a total of three campuses, referred to as Business Campus, City Campus and Engineering Campus, to avoid using real campus names. The aim of the current study was not to have a representative sample but to gain an in-depth understanding (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Niewenhuis, 2007) of the dynamics that influence the career choices of TVET college students. In their study titled *Moving into FE: the voice of the learner*, Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) followed the same approach, as they were interested in the richness and diversity of the experiences of students. Powell (2014) also relied on a small number of college students who offered deep insights as to why they enrolled at the college as participants. Also, the duration of the study, as well as available resources, allowed for a smaller sample. The participants were a mix of both NC(V) and Report 191/NATED courses students, including two learnership students. The ages were diverse, ranging from 20 to 37. The main assumption was that these students, having enrolled at the college, had more to say about what influenced their choices to enrol for their respective programmes. In this way, I am of the view that the participants were rich in relevant knowledge.

4.4 DATA GENERATION PROCESS

The data generation process took six months to complete. I had planned it to take less than three weeks, but the plan had to be adjusted in the process of engagement with the management of the college and with the participants. I could not conduct interviews daily as I had initially thought. The college academic programme did not allow daily visits to the campuses. The assessment period, including tests and examinations, delayed the process. Furthermore, the recess period contributed to the delay. In addition to these, personal availability was yet another factor with which I had to be patient.

I first did a pilot study on 02 April 2018 with a different group of college students to see how the process was likely to unfold, and what needed to be improved. From the pilot study, on which I am not going to report here, I learned that before we talk about career choices, we need to first establish how participants understand and define the word 'career'. One part of the interviews was based on what 'students look for when choosing a career'. I learned from the pilot study that discussing 'career choices' before establishing some understanding of the word 'career' itself was not very productive. If we talk about the choice of something, then we must be able to define that which we choose. After the pilot, I was able to refine the field questions. I started the process with focus group interviews, followed by individual interviews.

4.4.1 Focus Group Interviews

In line with my interpretive epistemology and subjective ontology, I preferred interviews as instruments for data generation, starting with focus group interviews/discussions (FGD) (Fouche & Schurink, 2011). Focus groups are used to research in a mutually-beneficial fashion, benefiting both participants and researchers alike (Ryan et al., 2014). I used the FGD to encourage the participants to identify and discuss generative themes that have significance in their lives as TVET college students, as well as those generative themes that relate to their career decisions. FGDs were very instrumental in ventilating the issues by getting the students to share and build on what other students had said. Students would agree on several issues about career decision making, but would also disagree, thereby expanding their understanding and experience. I also learned a great deal from these discussions, although I did my best not to interfere with the discussions. While individual interviews allow a private conversation to take place, FGD allows diversity to be realised. I acknowledge that not everything can be shared in a group environment, hence the use of individual interviews. It is, however, important to note that group discussions have the potential to reveal issues that may be missed during one-on-one interview sessions. In the FGD, group members can share their views and learn more about each other as well (Fouche & Schurink, 2011). The combination of the two methods helped me to delve deeper into what influences the career choices of students in one TVET College in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

There were three sessions per group. The first session was an introduction to the topic and the people. The participants already knew one another as they studied together at the college. The other sessions focused on the research questions, but they were less direct than individual interview questions. The focus of the FGDs was on: *What are the most preferred careers? Why do other people influence young people in choosing their career paths? How do young people respond to such influences? How do other conditions, situations, circumstances, etc. shape how young people think about careers?* The first question was to get the participants to be excited about different careers that are out there. I learned from the pilot process that talking about preferred careers would be a good start. Students were indeed excited because they had a chance to talk about what they would have loved to do, compared to what they were doing. From this point, we were able to talk about how and why older people interfere with young people's career decision making. We further talked about why students end up doing what they do, whether it is by choice or circumstances, as well as the different dynamics that influence career decision making.

To conduct group interviews, I followed two processes, which have both advantages and disadvantages. For each group, the first session was divided into two. I would tell them the topics for the day, and they would split into two groups to discuss the topic for about 30 minutes privately, and they would later share and debate with the other group. This was good for the first meetings to get the students to gain some confidence. The weakness of this method is that people may now speak with one voice. But the strength is that the two groups may have differences, and a hot discussion may arise. In the second session, the whole group could participate at the same time, with everyone sharing their views. While this has the advantage of saving time and listening to individuals' views that have not been influenced by others, some participants tend not to contribute. Either way, I learned that participants adjust their views as they listen to other participants. Some participants were more vocal than others, but all managed to share their perspectives.

I had initially planned to record all interviews until a few members of one group indicated that they would prefer not to be recorded. Nevertheless, they agreed that I could take notes during the session. To make this doable, I appointed a competent person to help me with the notes. The same person is the one I appointed to transcribe

all the interviews. Where I was able to record, I facilitated the groups by myself. I also conducted the individual interviews by myself. From all those who participated in the group interviews, I further purposively selected 15 to participate in individual interviews [see Appendix 1 for biographical details]. This selection was based on their outspokenness and shyness. I selected those who are extremely open, as well as those who seemed to talk less, to participate in individual interviews.

4.4.2 Individual Interviews

In keeping with the tradition of qualitative research design and the interpretive paradigm, the current study used individual, face-to-face, in-depth interviews (Kvale, 2006). An interview can be defined as a conversation between a researcher and a participant. The interview aims to gain the perspectives of the participants regarding the research question. Interviewing “typically involves you, as researcher, asking questions and, hopefully, receiving answers from the people you are interviewing” (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p. 284). I used interviews because they move away from the notion that research is done to people, towards viewing participants as active collaborators in the knowledge creation process (Fouche & Schurink, 2011). Interviews are useful because they help researchers to understand the world from the point of view of the participants (Kvale, 1996, 2006). Interviews in qualitative research are necessary to build rapport between the researcher and the participants, thereby obtaining disclosure of the participants’ world (Kvale, 2006).

There are different kinds of interviews in qualitative research. Robson and McCartan (2016) identify at least three types, namely fully structured, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. In the current study, I used semi-structured interviews, organised around an area of interest, but also flexible. They are based on a set of pre-determined questions but allow for probing (Niewenhuis, 2007). It is advisable that researchers pay attention to the details of the responses of the participants as this will enrich the interviews. The line of inquiry in semi-structured interviews is defined by the interview schedule. The semi-structured interviews help the researcher to see the “social world from the point of view of the actor” (Bryman, 1984, p. 77). The interview schedule for the current study was based on eight areas of interest, namely (a) the programmes for which the participants are enrolled at the College, (b) why participants chose the programmes for which they are enrolled at the College, (c) why participants

chose to study at the TVET college in the first place, (d) participants' perceptions and understanding of 'career' and 'TVET', (e) participants' career aspirations, (f) personal background, for example, where participants were born and where they live/d, age, growing up experience, family life and structure, and schooling/educational experience/background. It is important to acquire as much background information about the participants as people have different and diverse identities.

The individual interviews were conducted based on individual appointments with the participants. Sometimes I would find them, but sometimes I would not. Sometimes they would agree to meet, but sometimes they would have tests, examinations, or other challenges. Ultimately, I managed to interview the participants. All the 15 individuals were interviewed in the first round, although some were not available for the second interview session. The interviews were held at the college, in the venue that was allocated by the College for this purpose. To ensure that interviews did not become tedious for the interviewer and the participants, they were kept to a maximum of 45 minutes per session, although a few overlapped to an hour. This duration has also been used in a similar study in the late 1990s (Bloomer & Hodgkinson, 1997). Contrary to this approach, Powell (2012) conducted in-depth interviews of approximately two hours each. This is justifiable where 45 minutes cannot allow for a deep interview. However, it is good to be careful not to overburden the participants, as they may react negatively. Also, participants must be willing to carry on for such long hours. To be willing, they must see the benefit of doing so. This avoids a situation where researchers use their power and privilege to keep participants in interview sessions for longer than necessary.

The important guiding principles are connectivity, humanness, and empathy in semi-structured interviews. I have indirectly articulated these principles earlier, showing that as much as the research project is initiated by the research student for academic purposes such as completing a qualification, the process cannot just be about the research student. The research process cannot just be about getting the information out of the 'subjects', but it must also be meaningful to them. I acknowledge that research cannot just be an activity of taking what we can from the research subjects but it must be a humane process, filled with empathy, where there is a deep connection

between the student researcher, the participants, and the research itself (Hall & Smith, 2000).

4.5 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data are usually analysed by using existing models, for example open, axial and selective coding. For this study, manual coding was the preferred method. Although it takes time, it helps to learn and practice the process of data analysis. In coding, I examined, categorised, and looked for similarities and differences in the responses given by participants (Neuman, 2006). One of the main outputs for analysing qualitative data is to identify the dominant themes that occur in the data while the coding of data attaches meaning to raw data through tags or labels that then enable data to be categorised within the different thematic areas. This process assisted in providing comprehensive, rich data for the study and then reporting patterns according to the data generated (Cohen et al., 2011). I was then able to explain emerging themes, which is the focus in trying to explain the experiences, perspectives, and reflections of TVET college students concerning their career choices. Theme identification and coding processes enable large amounts of data collected to be reduced to manageable and understandable texts that served as a basis for further analysis and interpretation.

Since I recorded interviews using a digital recorder, I played it repeatedly while I made notes, reflections and commentary on emerging issues and later compared both personal notes and transcriptions. To keep the data safe, I downloaded the recorded interviews to a computer. This process helped me to identify the emerging themes guided by the research sub-questions. It enabled me to embark on developing codes and checking if the codes were reliable by immersing myself in the data and summarising data to obtain themes. I then continued to code and link the different codes to identify themes and legitimise the coded themes. I organised the data into themes and then coded them in such a way that it was possible to display the data in a manner that is systematic and logical. I then compared (searching for commonalities and discrepancies) the themes based on the theoretical framework and literature study.

The manual process was done through a series of steps, although these were not in the chronological presented here. The first step was initial coding, where I read the transcripts and entered the codes. The second step required that I revisit the initial codes to be able to rename and condense the codes. The third step was to organise the codes into categories. The fourth step was to modify the initial list of codes. In the fifth step, I revisited the categories to identify redundancies. The sixth and last stage was about developing key concepts from the categories. Data got confusing at times, especially as I conducted semi-structured interviews, where no uniform pattern was followed. For this reason, the analysis process needed close attention and thoroughness.

Bloomer and Hodkinson (1997) point to the significance of starting the data analysis process as soon as data are generated. For the authors, data generation must go hand in hand with transcription and analysis. Doing this ensures that the researcher can identify areas of improvement and the focus of the next phase. After each session, I started with the transcription process while the discussion was still fresh in my head (Fouche & Schurink, 2011) because I needed to remember not only the words but the actions and reactions of participants – to determine the nature of reactivity. However, I must acknowledge that this was not always possible, especially when my teaching load was high and other faculty activities were taking place.

Fouche and Schurink (2011) advise that it is poor practice to leave data analysis to the end of the process. They argue that data analysis must be done from the time the data generation process begins. For the authors, data analysis that is parallel to data generation is useful to determine shortfalls of the research questions and data generation process. Analysing data from the first day of data generation helps the researcher to identify the possible gaps. It also helps the researcher to determine when repetitions occur, or when it is no longer necessary to focus on a particular area of the research question. For this reason, I was able to conduct follow-up interviews informed by initial analysis.

4.6 TRUSTWORTHINESS

Many critics of qualitative research are reluctant to accept the trustworthiness of qualitative research, although frameworks to ensure rigour in qualitative research have

been in existence for many years (Shenton, 2004). They are reluctant because qualitative designs do not necessarily follow the standard means for ensuring reliability and validity that are prevalent in quantitative research (Robson & McCartan, 2016). In *Criteria for assessing in naturalistic inquiries*, Guba (1981) outlines ways of ensuring the trustworthiness of qualitative research, for example, credibility and confirmability. Guba (1981) argues that research must portray a true picture of the phenomenon under investigation and not be biased towards the researcher's worldview. This study does not use concepts such as validity and reliability as these are associated with quantitative research but focuses on trustworthiness. Trustworthiness is in line with interpretive epistemology because it is not about one truth or reality but it is about multiple truths and realities, depending on the ontological position of the researcher and the participants.

The findings of this study are open to multiple interpretations, but I have reason to believe that my interpretation is trustworthy, given the whole process that I followed. First and foremost, I do not claim to tell the only truth, but I claim to share the perspectives of the participants. These perspectives are based on the participants' understanding of what influences their career decision making, as well as my interpretation of these perspectives. My interpretation is based on the Careership Theory, bolstered by Bourdieu's social theory, as well as Appadurai's cultural analysis. I do not claim that there is a perfect match between these theories and the experiences and perspectives of the participants, but I show that these theories hold the explanatory power of social action. Furthermore, I show that these theories can be used meaningfully to explain the factors that influence the career decisions of TVET college students in a South African context. I concur with Hodkinson and colleagues that telling a true story is impossible, but telling a story from one's perspective, with justified analysis and theorising, is helpful (Hodkinson et al., 1996).

The data collection instruments that I used also contributed to the trustworthiness of the findings. My idea was not necessarily to triangulate the findings (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Theron et al., 2011) with the hope that I would arrive at the truth. My idea was to get a broader sense of students' perspectives on career decision making. Therefore, the two types of interviews were instrumental in this regard. The individual interviews were instrumental in collecting the biographies of the participants, while the group

interviews were instrumental in indirectly discussing some parts of these biographies on an open platform. These two types of interviews complemented each other, thereby offering a trustworthy analysis of the participants' perspectives.

4.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethical consideration must be a priority for every research project to ensure that participants are not harmed by research, or where research is potentially harmful to participants, that the harm is minimal and reversible. Babbie (2005) warns that it is always advisable for every researcher to be aware of general ethical agreements which researchers and research institutions must observe. According to Bryman (2008), the four principal areas of concern in social research ethics are: no harm to participants; informed consent; no invasion of personal privacy; and no deception by the researcher. For potential harm to be minimised, participation needs to be voluntary and confidentiality needs to be ensured as much as possible (Babbie, 2005).

For this specific study, I ensured that the rights and wellbeing of participants were monitored, that risks were reduced, and that informed consent was sought and participation was voluntary (Bryman, 2008). Under no circumstance have participants' names been presented to a third party. Any information that directly links to the participants has been disguised and will be destroyed after the research process is complete. Lastly, participants were made aware that they could withdraw at any time without any consequences. Most importantly, it was made clear that there were no incentives for participating as incentives might influence the results (Babbie, 2005; Bryman, 2008).

The participants in the study were not under-age, and there was nothing that prevented them from responding to research questions with full understanding, for example, mental illness. The nature of the current study is not sensitive as the focus is not on revealing hidden information about participants. It is based on their perceptions as people who have been involved in career decision making. It is not going to expose sensitive information about the participants. Furthermore, I made every effort to use the words of the participants to explain their perceptions and experiences. Although the data analysis process goes beyond the purview of the participants, I ensured that I use quotations throughout the discussion chapters.

Ethics goes beyond the practical matters or the requirements of the university and other ethics bodies. Getting ethical clearance or approval is the first step, but it comes with a huge responsibility to ensure that the project does not harm the participants. Having completed data collection many months ago, I believe that I have, to a great extent, ethically completed the process. As part of the data collection process, I used college premises to make sure that students were interviewed in an environment with which they were familiar. Also, I did not in any way invade the privacy of the participants by getting to talk with them privately. I always made formal appointments to meet with the students for interviews. To this end, I can say that our relationship was more professional, although, admittedly, the participants were comfortable around me, and vice versa.

All the participants who took part in the study consented to do so. I must say that consent is a difficult part as it means participants can withdraw at any time, or they have every right not to avail themselves when I need to meet with them. In the first phases, I had a few people coming to participate, but as soon as they heard about the focus of the study, some of them left. There were a few other students whom I wanted to meet for individual interviews but who did not avail themselves. Being ethical meant that I had to respect when a student said he or she was busy and we could not meet; it meant I could not insist on an interview when the student said they had a test, an assignment or an examination; it meant that I had to respect when the student cancelled our meeting at the last minute. Although students had signed consent forms, my ethical considerations went beyond this practical requirement.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter started with a discussion of the ontological and epistemological positioning of the study and the researcher. This is important to understand the career decisions of students as explained by the students themselves. The students make career decisions based on their circumstances, knowledge, resources, and desired futures. These can be understood if explained from the perspectives of those who make career decisions. This is also evident in the studies that are framed within the Careership Theory, that career decisions can be best understood or approached from the point of view of those who make these decisions. Important to note here is that reality is subjective. However, this must not be taken to mean that a career or career

decision does not exist outside the individual. Subjectivity simply shows that the focus of analysis is not on the career itself, but on how it is meaningfully interpreted by the decision maker or social agent. What one social agent may see as a career; another social agent may not see it as one. The social structures do exist objectively, but it is the subjective experience that shapes and influences the reaction to these social structures.

This chapter described the interpretivist epistemology and subjective ontology as applied in this study. The interpretivist epistemology fits well with the qualitative approach, where data are based on the experiences and perspectives of the participants. These perspectives are generally subjective, meaning that they originate from the lived experiences of the participants. The perspectives of the participants are shaped by the presence of the social agents in society. This presence is influenced by social agents who share the social space with other social agents, interacting with one another. The meanings that social agents create are rooted in the social context in which they interact. Thus, the interviews used in this study sought to unearth the meanings that the social agents co-construct with one another, as well as those that get transmitted through the socialisation process.

This chapter also demonstrated that researching (with) human subjects is not an easy process. It takes time and requires patience and flexibility. Although it is a time-consuming process, it is important to remain focused and endure the process. In this way, the researcher will manage to conduct research within ethical boundaries, where the process is not just about the data, but also about the participants. The lives of participants must always be valued. Most importantly, the research process must be empowering. For example, one student commented that this study opened their eyes because they had never thought about what influenced their career decision. They just lived their lives, doing what had to be done, choosing a programme because it was available, not because they consciously thought about it. Also, it is rare for people, in general, to think about social influences in the form of social structures. So, the ethical benefit of this study was to awaken the participants' consciousness about what influences not only their career decisions but their life decisions at large. The following chapters present and discuss the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

HOW STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE CONCEPTS OF TVET AND CAREER

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter discussed the paradigmatic approach that was employed in this study. This study sought to understand what influences the career decision making of public TVET college students in one selected college in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro. Qualitative interviews, informed by the interpretive epistemology and subjective ontology, were used to generate data with the students. The findings of this study are presented and discussed in three chapters, namely Chapters 5, 6 and 7. Each chapter reports on and discusses findings related to each sub-question in chronological order of the sub-questions. In trying to answer the main research question, three styles are used. A more common approach would have been a presentation of findings, followed by an overall discussion, and then a conclusion. In this study, I chose a different approach because three approaches have been used to satisfy the main research question.

Three chapters present and discuss findings. Chapter 5 contains little literature and theoretical discussions since it sought to present the understanding of students of the concepts of TVET and career. This did not require much literature and theoretical discussion as it serves as the foundation of the findings. Chapters 6 and seven speak more to the question of what influences the career decisions of the interviewed students. Chapter 6 tries to infuse individual and group interviews to get a picture of these influences. Thus, Chapter 6 uses quotations from different students to try to understand these influences. Chapter 7 takes a different approach. It uses stories of selected participants to paint the picture even more. I did this to be able to look at the influence of life history, present circumstances and future aspirations. These three styles, while may seem inconsistent, were important to satisfy the main research question. Important to note is that there is a slight bias towards individual interviews because focus group interviews were used mainly to define concepts in an open space, while individual interviews were used to solicit the influences at an individual

level. In this way, individual interviews were built on focus group interviews and expanded from there.

The current chapter discusses the findings concerning the first sub-question, '*how do students understand the concepts of 'career' and 'TVET'?*' Two themes emerged, namely career as a form of '*economic inclusion and success*', and TVET as caught '*between a rock and a hard place*'. This chapter, with the aid of the sub-themes under the main themes, discusses the views of students concerning career and TVET.

The first section of the chapter looks at how students understand the concept of 'career'. The dominant view among the participants is that a career is a means to an end, especially an economic end. In this respect, the students maintain that a career holder must make a living or some form of livelihood. This view is associated with both the social and the economic rationales of education and training (Marope et al., 2015). Also, a career holder must be recognised formally through formal education qualifications. This implies that a career holder must acquire a certain level of formal education. This formal recognition is closely linked to the notion of human capital (Becker, 1975; P. Brown et al., 2020). Finally, a career holder must at least have passion for what they do, that is, they must love their chosen career.

The relationship between career and TVET is that TVET is one of the recognised forms of formal education and training in South Africa, which lead to formal recognition in the labour market. TVET has the potential to give an individual a career. Unfortunately, so far, TVET in South Africa continues to be hotly debated, hence the theme '*caught between a rock and a hard place*'. Between this rock and hard place, TVET is positively viewed as instrumental in the labour market by promoting employment and employability. Although it is seen as a route to the labour market, its association with public TVET colleges means that its stigmatisation persists even in the twenty-first century. When the students spoke of public TVET colleges, they did so in a binary fashion. On the one hand, they spoke of public TVET colleges as spaces that are not perceived positively in the public eye. On the other hand, and possibly because they have had some taste of these institutions, the students spoke of public TVET colleges as good spaces. However, what is also evident is that when students speak of public TVET colleges in negative terms, they seem to distance themselves from this negative perspective, thereby showing that it is not their experience, but it is a dominant view

in their communities. Most importantly, TVET, and not TVET college, is viewed by the students as superior education because it gives practical skills, which the students value more than theoretical learning.

5.2 'CAREER': STUDENTS' VIEW

The word 'career' can be narrowly defined as the work experiences of a person over their lifespan (NQF/CAS, 2013). Given the fast-changing nature of careers, a career can be broadly defined as the "sequence of interactions of individuals with society, education and organisations throughout their lifespan" (NQF/CAS, 2013, p. 9). This section considers how the participants in this study understand the concept of 'career'. Hodkinson contends that to understand a person's career, it is important to also consider a retrospective view because a career has 'past, present and future' (Hodkinson et al., 2008). The interviews with the students revealed that the students associate 'career' with economic inclusion and success. Consequently, the students look at 'career' in three ways, namely (a) you need a formal educational qualification, (b) you must make a living out of your career, and (c) you must be passionate about your career. In the following sub-section, I briefly explore the notion of economic inclusion and success as these relate to career and TVET.

5.2.1 Career is for Economic Inclusion and Success

The participants understand a career to be a path to success as it relates to upward mobility in the economy (Christodoulou & Spyridakis, 2016). "*It is a 'path' that you take so that you can be successful. It is a path you take towards success*" [Michael, FGD, City Campus]. While students could venture into careers that have not been ventured into before, there are careers that are well known, and students choose them because they know people within these careers. "*I agree, because sometimes by mere looking at those that have made it in life in that career, you also wish to follow that path*" [Sandile, FGD, City Campus]. This could be interpreted using Ray's idea that poor people do not look at other poor people to develop their aspirations but they look at those deemed successful (Genicot & Ray, 2014).

In the quote above, the student shows that there are many paths (careers), but if an individual is interested in a certain field, they are likely to be motivated by the success

of other individuals in that field. In other cases, when you see other people getting employed in a certain field, you may consider that field as well. For example,

So, when you look at people who do teaching getting jobs, you also want to do teaching, because when you apply for jobs, you don't know if you will get it. But in teaching, sometimes there is no interview if you have a bursary. They just tell you that you must go and work in this place or that place, and you go [Philiswa, FGD, City Campus].

This speaks to the notion that for many young people to start to aspire to study and to climb the economic ladder, there need to be locally available examples (Genicot & Ray, 2014). In this regard, the students also indicated that sometimes the career decisions that they make are based on what is dominant in the communities in which they live. The same can be said about the idea of success, that it is based on how success is defined in a given context.

The common notion of success is linked to participation in the economy, usually through employment. The relationship between employment and career also brings education into the picture, which implicitly denotes social advantage or disadvantage (Boxer et al., 2011). Career is usually not associated with the life and working experiences of the poor, but with those of privileged members of society (Reid, 2008). This notion is also evident in how the participants in this study define 'career'. They mostly associate this concept with formal employment in the labour market. This formal employment is associated with formal education and qualifications. This is not surprising because the main asset of ordinary citizens is their labour so, getting a job as a career is normal.

Linking education and career implicitly suggests that a career is not available to all, but only to those who acquire educational credentials (Perry & Smith, 2017). This notion is not foreign to this study because it was conducted in a formal learning space. Also, when the Careership Theory was formulated, it was concerned about the transition from formal education to the world of work and how this transition can be explained theoretically (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This is in part because the work of career guidance counsellors is mainly located in educational institutions (as well as in industry). Moreover, when how the students speak of both 'career' and 'TVET' is

sociologically considered, it becomes apparent that their understanding is shaped by their socialisation into the world. There are ideas that are already formed in their minds that cannot only be expressed through speech, but through action, for example how they make their career decisions, to what they aspire, as well as how they execute their career plans.

Within this economic rationale, career is viewed in three ways, namely: as an occupation that one is prepared for, planned for, or qualified for; what one does that serves as a source of livelihood (mainly in the form of income); driven by passion or love. The following sub-section discusses a career as an occupation that is formally planned for, prepared for, or qualified for.

5.2.2 You Need a Formal Educational Qualification

The career path that social agents walk is understood to lead to their idea of success, but what is important about this path is that one must study. When asked what career means, one student responded that it *“is a ‘path’ that you take so that you can be successful. It is a path you take towards success. Most importantly, you must study towards this path”* [Michael, FGD, City Campus]. This quotation is repeated here to emphasise the last part that one must study. At the heart of this path to success lies purpose. The economic rewards (linked to ‘success’), for example, that this social agent will receive, though extrinsic, are likely to contribute to the wellbeing of this social agent. For example, one of the students said that, *“a career is something you work towards to make yourself or your life better”* [Vuyo, FGD, City Campus].

The concepts that emerge are ‘success’, ‘studying’, and ‘improving one’s life’. These concepts show that a career is something that is expected to yield good results. So, when students make career decisions, their understanding is that they are making decisions that will transform their lives for the better. To transform their lives for the better, part of this process requires formal recognition and participation in the economic life of the country. For one to participate in the economic life of their country, they must be included, for example through employment. One student indicated that *“[...] you study and then you get a job towards what you studied for”* [Thuliswa, FGD, Engineering Campus]. Paid employment is identified as one of the dominant influences of career choices (Ayiah-Mensah, Mettle, & Ayimah, 2014; Kaneez &

Medha, 2018; Shumba & Naong, 2012). The idea of a direct relationship between a job and a qualification was common among students, as one said that, *“if it was possible we would not even study, but the problem is that jobs need a qualification”* [Vuyisa, FGD, City Campus].

The above statement conveys a profound message that speaks to the structures of society. Job seekers do not decide the requirements of the jobs they seek. The employers decide what the job seekers must know and the qualifications they must hold (Kraak et al., 2016). Being aware of this, the student quoted above spells it out that studying is not necessarily everyone's desire. People study because they understand that if they do not, the path to success is not smooth. In other words, studying can be viewed as wearing the right shoes for the path one chooses to walk. This is done as a means to an end; not studying for the sake of knowledge (Moodie, 2002). The idea of studying could also be viewed as a navigational map that the social agents hold (Maja, 2020). This map points to formal education as the key route to the career future of the social agents. Also, this could also be understood in relation to the horizon for action (Rosvall et al., 2020), that the students speak of studying before working because their horizons are limited to this. If they came from a different socioeconomic background, they would probably not feel the need to study.

For the students, it is understood that *“a career is more purposeful, you plan for it, and you get prepared for it”* [Asithandile, FGD, City Campus]. There are many views on the purpose of educational institutions. Although these views diverge, they also converge where it is believed that education prepares people for life and adult responsibilities (Johnson & Reynolds, 2013). In South Africa, explains the purpose of TVET colleges as follows:

[...] the main purpose of these colleges is to train young school leavers, providing them with the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary for employment in the labour market (DHET, 2013, p.11).

The White Paper for PSET also states that TVET colleges

[...] should constantly strive to be seen by their communities as providers of skills that offer a route out of poverty and that promote personal or collective advancement (DHET, 2013, p.11).

The two quotes above speak volumes about the idea of a path. The first quote speaks to the idea of training, which is equivalent to equipping social agents for the future. This future, as written in the White Paper, is the labour market, where employment is the goal. The second quote speaks about the route out of poverty. This speaks to the idea of moving from one point to another. So, those who are poor can be equipped with skills to use once employed in the labour market, and it is assumed that the economic rewards they will receive will lift them out of poverty (NPC, 2012).

The idea of education and training, and employment lifting people out of poverty is not necessarily a silver bullet. It is a human capital theory logic that has been severely criticised (Baatjes & Motala, 2014; Powell, 2016). In South Africa, the work of Lesley Powell and Simon McGrath criticises this *productivist* logic (approach) to TVET provision (Powell & McGrath, 2014a, 2019a, 2019b). With the rise of graduate unemployment in South Africa and the world, it becomes even clearer that the problem lies within the structures of the economy. The contributors to *Education, Economy and Society* (Vally & Motala, 2014) extensively criticise this capitalist and human capital theory logic. However, for those who have little to nothing in life, the disenfranchised of society, an opportunity to study brings hope and meaning to their lives. Their navigational maps lead them to the doors of educational institutions for possible empowerment. In the following sub-section, I share the views of the students on the relationship between a career and making a living.

5.2.3 You Must Make a Living Out of Your Career

An occupation is associated with financial rewards. “*You don’t want to study and stay at home after. Sometimes you even want more money, so you study that which gives you more money*” [Thabani, FGD, City Campus]. The part that ‘you don’t want to study and stay at home’ relates to unemployment. The goal, as presented by students in this study, is to use their qualifications for economic gain. Indeed, earning a living is crucial for the survival of households and individuals. It is not just money for survival that is seen as important but,

I also wish to have a lot of money and acquire my personal stuff. She [my aunt] always tells me not to work at places like [Gqeberha Supermarket] as there isn’t a lot of money.

But to study, whatever course it may be. She [my aunt] really is fond of a person that pursues education [Nomhle, Individual Interview].

After grade 12, Nomhle stayed for two years without studying at a post-school institution. I asked her why she chose to study.

I didn't want to work. It was obvious I would work at [Gqeberha Supermarket] because I do not have any qualifications to be able to work in a decent job. I would work at [Gqeberha Supermarket] or [Koega Supermarket] and earn very little money. What would I do with such money? So, I figured it was best I studied [Nomhle, Individual Interview].

Socio-economic status is revealed here concerning education. Nomhle is influenced by a significant other, to think about education. The fear to fall to the bottom of the economic ladder is presented in this as well. These upward mobility ideals are usually communicated alongside education and white collar occupations (Theron, 2016b).

After considering her options, she decided to go to Metro TVET college where she registered for Office Administration at NCV level. She believes that she is on the right track to earning a decent income when she completes her studies.

You see, now I want to do... study this course that I'm doing and complete my certificate. Then proceed to a Diploma. Then I will not earn little money with those in hand [Nomhle, Individual Interview].

As much as students talked about money as an important influence on their career choices, it is also because of their backgrounds that money is so important to them.

Poverty is a problem for many black people. Because of poverty, parents want us to get jobs after studying. So, if you do something like art, something that is not clear where you are going to get a job, something they don't know about, they don't like it [Michael, FGD, City Campus].

Here the student mentions the influence of parents. Parents want their children to get jobs. Employment is considered to be a way out of poverty. Once a person gets a good-paying job, their life may improve. More importantly, families benefit from the employment of one of their members. "*As blacks, we work to uplift our families. Coming from a poor background, you want to help your family*" [Thulani, FGD, City Campus].

It was common among the students to refer to or associate poverty with being black. For poor households, you do not just need money, but “*you need more money to improve your background*” [Thulani, FGD, City Campus]. Poverty cannot be emphasised enough in South Africa. Education has been cited as one strategy to get out of poverty but for many young people, access to post-school education and training remains a challenge (Maila & Ross, 2018). The idea that education is a route out of poverty is not only held by the students, but the government of South Africa shares the same sentiment as contained in important national documents (NPC, 2012). Apart from money, passion was also cited by the students as important.

5.2.4 You Must Love And Be Passionate About Your Career

In the interviews, there were some debates about money versus passion. While some students, because of their backgrounds, see money as more important, others believe that passion is equally important.

[...] not everything is about money, sometimes you have to... okay... not sometimes... you have to have a passion for what you want. Let's say I had done Analytical Chemistry, maybe I would not have succeeded in it because my reason for wanting it was to have money [Phumeza, Individual Interview].

Phumeza had a desire to study towards an Analytical Chemistry qualification, but things did not work out for her. At another TVET college, she previously did Primary Health for two years and dropped out. During the time of the interview, she had registered at the Metro TVET college, this time doing Education and Development, which focuses on education for young children. Two aspects can be identified here. First, Phumeza was attracted to Analytical Chemistry because she was exposed to this field at home. Her family member who works as an analytical chemist is financially well off, and this attracted Phumeza to this field. Second, she later followed her passion and enrolled for Primary health but she dropped out as she experienced what would be called a contradictory routine (Hancock, 2009).

Slightly similar to Phumeza, who chose passion over money, is Licebo, who chose Business Management at the college.

Since I have done Business Management before at Central Business College I thought why don't I finish off what I have already started? Then I entered into that course, and anyway Business has always been something that I admired. For example, I'm that type of person who used to sell at school in my neighbourhood. My father was also very passionate about business [sic] [Licebo, Individual Interview].

Passion is important because your chosen career is going to be a part of your daily life.

Career is when you know what you want and decide to go for it as your life because you will do that in the daily basis that's why it is important to do what you love a lot so that you don't get bored with that career [Licebo, FGD, Business Campus].

What does passion mean for someone whose career choice was made for her or him by family? This, according to the participants, requires self-introspection.

[...] it is a career in a family business, unless you don't like it. Career is a personal choice. It must define you, and you must define it for yourself, and you must love it. So, if your family chooses a career for you, you need to ask yourself if it is your career of your family's career. Sometimes you find that you don't even want to be part of your family business, so it is not your career [Aphiwe, FGD, City Campus].

The idea that one must have an interest in a particular field is also acknowledged in Careership Theory. Interests are not necessarily neutral but they develop in a social context (Hodkinson et al., 1996). This could be associated with the notion of habitus that explains how social agents express their histories and experiences that they have internalised. To be interested in something requires some knowledge of that something. For example, Phumeza indicated that she was interested in several careers because her family members work in those fields. Sindiswa was interested in Forensic Science because she used to watch forensic programmes on television. Without such exposure, the horizons for action are limited (Hodkinson, 2009).

5.3 TVET: STUDENTS' VIEW

The participants associate TVET with practical learning. This practical learning is considered important in the labour market because those who acquire practical skills are said to be better equipped for the world of work. This is not surprising as not only

in South Africa but throughout the world, TVET is associated with skills training and 'vocationalism' (Oketch, 2007). It is, however, important to note that 'vocationalism' is part and parcel of the entire education and training system, and it is a growing notion linked to the human capital approach (Grubb & Lazerson, 2009). The students also understand TVET as a second-class form of education. However, it is important to note that the inferiority of TVET is associated with public TVET colleges rather than with the education that these institutions offer. The following section discusses 'TVET' in terms of what it is, that is, the kind of education and training associated with its name.

5.3.1 TVET Is Related to the Labour Market

The dominant understanding that the students shared is that TVET is a form of education associated with skills training, which is necessary for employment in the labour market. In this respect, TVET is habitually juxtaposed with university offerings. For example, *"TVET has more practical than the university, for instance, it offers 30 % practical and 70 % theory"* [Thulani, FGD, City Campus]. There is no single view on the division between theory and practice in TVET, as others think that *"on the NCV part it's half practical and half theory"* [Asanda, FGD, Engineering Campus]. This chapter is not concerned about the quantity of practical learning versus theoretical learning, but it is concerned about the articulated goals of TVET that are linked to preparing students for the world of work.

The practical component of TVET is understood by the students to be suitable for certain personalities, for example, it *"fits more to such individuals who like to work with their hands and to be exposed on the work that's on the ground [sic]"* [Bongiwe, FGD, Engineering Campus]. Practical learning is perceived as important because *"[...] you need the practice, not the theory-only-side of this engineering. You want to be in the ground level [sic]"* [Bongiwe, FGD, Engineering Campus]. These ideas correlate with one of the four types of characteristics of vocational education and training's identity (Moodie, 2002). In *Identifying Vocational Education and Training*, Moodie identifies four types of characteristics, namely epistemological, teleological, hierarchical and pragmatic (Moodie, 2002). The understanding of TVET shared by the participants in this study correlates with the epistemological characteristic concerning TVET as ways of knowing, ways of learning and a field of knowledge. This is further emphasised by

the participants when they juxtapose TVET and university education, and highlight the dichotomy between theory and practice.

5.3.1.1 Employability and Employment

TVET is also understood concerning what it does; namely, its perceived social function. In this respect, it is understood to promote employability or at least to lead to employment. As one student, referring to a TVET college said that *“it’s where you are going to study and get a qualification and do practicals in order to get a job [sic]”* [Mandisa, FGD, Engineering Campus]. This is a common understanding of TVET, and throughout its history in South Africa, it has been associated with employment in industry (Malherbe, 1977; McGrath et al., 2010; Papier, 2017). Even at the policy level, there is a perception that more and better TVET will solve the unemployment and socio-economic problems of the country (DHET, 2013).

Two key points are important to note from the above quotation, namely (a) to ‘get a qualification’ and (b) ‘to get a job’. Central to learning and obtaining a qualification is the practical component. This practical component comes through training, hence *“TVET is generally a place where you get training on how to do work”* [Licebo, FGD, Business Campus]. Three aspects emerge here, (a) ‘you get trained on how to do work’, (b) you ‘get a qualification’, and then (c) you ‘get a job’. This understanding is rooted in the simple logic of vocationalism that requires formal recognition of skills and knowledge as a screening mechanism for employment (Grubb & Lazerson, 2009). Even the NQFs of various countries are built with the labour market in mind (Allais, 2017). This line of thinking is associated with the Human Capital Theory whose assumption is that an educated and trained workforce is more productive than its uneducated and untrained counterpart (Brown et al., 2020).

What the students point out here is that for a person to get a job, they need to prove that they can do the job. To prove that they can do the job, they need credentials (qualifications). To get the qualification, they must be trained. This training must not be random but must relate to the field that they want to enter. Hence, *“in my understanding it [TVET] is a skills development program, where this programme grooms you for the career you want to pursue [sic]”* [Thabani, FGD, City Campus]. In

fields such as Sociology, educational credentials are associated with the idea of symbolic capital (Alvarez & Moraes, 2013), because,

When an educational credential works as intended, it provides uniform expectations among all participants. Employers specify the competencies they need; education and training programmes use credential requirements to shape their curriculum and motivate students; and students know what competencies they must master to become marketable (Grubb & Lazerson, 2009, p. 1798).

TVET is seen as a mechanism to derive this kind of capital. The students see a direct relationship between what TVET colleges offer and the possible employment. So, career decisions are important because they influence the kind of capital to acquire, as well as where to trade with such capital. The participants in this study see TVET as important for employability, and they believe that once they acquire their qualifications, they must either be employed or at least be employable. The participants speak of employability concerning the skills that they must acquire.

The evolution of employability in practice is seen to have at least three parts (McGrath et al., 2010). First, it is linked to the decline in industrial production in the developed world, which brought with it new ways of training the workforce. Second, it is linked to employability, with the pervasive dominance of neoliberalism. (McGrath et al., 2010) argue that even the parties who earlier on supported 'welfarism' were pushed to embrace human capital notions such as using education as means to alleviate poverty and social exclusion. Third, and last, the authors link employability with the idea of lifelong learning, arguing that for those who embrace it, there may be opportunities ahead (McGrath et al., 2010). Employability focuses more on what the individual can do to remain employable and to climb the economic ladder.

Employability is often defined in terms of individual skills to be acquired for work and reveals a shift of discourse from employment as a social issue to employment as a person's problem (Bonvin, 2019; Wedekind, 2013a). In this policy environment, an individual is responsible for their employment, but the government can intervene by offering relevant education and training that seeks to enhance one's employability. Whereas in the past employers carried more responsibility for employment, this responsibility is now shifting to individual potential employees to make themselves

employable; that is, to make themselves more attractive in the eyes of employers. As a policy notion, employability is perceived as an attempt to influence the supply side of the labour market by promoting training and placement programmes, as well as other ways to help individuals to acquire and maintain employment.

There is an expectation that educational institutions must respond to the imperative of employability (McGrath et al., 2010), and TVET colleges and universities are encouraged to transform their curricula to encompass responsiveness (Baatjes et al., 2014). In South Africa in particular, the public TVET colleges have been powerless in this regard, as the employability imperative was met with the sharp decline in apprenticeships and college-business training partnerships (Gewe, 2016). Even without these college-business partnerships of the past, the public TVET colleges are expected to make their students employable in the labour market. The changes that have taken place in the TVET sector since 1998 have been shaped by the changing political and ideological imperatives of the South African government (Gewe, 2016). For example, the push for employability is one of the factors behind many changes in the curriculum of colleges, as well as market-led delivery and autonomy. According to Gewe (2016), these imperatives conflict with other governmental agendas such as equity and redress.

Governments around the world put in place measures for participation in the formal labour market, which are regulated through the NQFs (Allais, 2017). The NQFs are mechanisms through which knowledge, skills and individual abilities are measured. As the learners move through the education system, the NQFs are used to determine promotion to the subsequent levels. This progression is associated with preparation for adult roles, including but not limited to work. Those who fail to satisfy the requirements of the NQFs are retained in their current levels and some end up dropping out. Also, performance at each NQF level determines future progression, for example to post-school institutions. It is unfortunate that as the educational journey proceeds, many young people get left behind (Kariem & Mbete, 2012). As they get left behind, their chances of success, for example in employment, are also hampered (Kariem & Mbete, 2012).

The common and dominant understanding of TVET as a bridge to employment can be characterised by the teleological characteristic (Moodie, 2002). Drawing from

Aristotle's *The Metaphysics*, Moodie demonstrates that another identity of vocational education and training is its extrinsic value, that is, what it can do for the individuals. Employability (Wedekind, 2012, 2016) and escaping the scourge of poverty (DHET, 2013; NPC, 2012) are the most commonly-articulated purposes of TVET in South Africa. It is, therefore, not surprising that the participants in this study understand TVET concerning what they think it does and what they think it will do for them and others who obtain TVET qualifications.

Even the concept of 'work' has been under serious scrutiny and criticism, especially when it is associated with employment or jobs. Powell (2016) challenges the concept of 'work' on the basis that it creates binaries between 'employed' and 'unemployed', and 'poor' and 'not poor'. The idea that employment, accompanied by earnings, will eradicate poverty is impoverished thinking as many people are employed but remain poor. Also, the idea of work as employment or job reduces human beings to the notion of *homoeconomicus*. The notion of employment as a way to reduce poverty fails to recognise that there are various forms of livelihoods that people rely on, other than paid work. Also, the idea that once employed, one is not going to be poor anymore, is too simplistic to address the problem of poverty and economic growth (Powell, 2016).

A recognisable shift or contribution to literature is in the adoption of Amartya Sen's 'capability approach' to understanding the role of vocational education (Powell, 2016; Powell & McGrath, 2014b) as a way of critiquing the employability notion. Sehnbruch (2008) argues that the capability approach helps us to focus on the freedom and well-being of individuals as opposed to the labour market's functions. This freedom includes both opportunity freedom (available work opportunities) and process freedom (participation in job design) (Bonvin & Galster, 2010). This implies that we need to go beyond policies and ensure that opportunities are provided in practice. Similar to the students who were interviewed for the current study, Powell (2016) and Powell and McGrath (2014b) found in the study of South African TVET College students that there is more that they want from their education and training than merely acquiring jobs. In addition to acquiring jobs, the authors reported that students seek education and training because they believe it will help them to make meaningful contributions to community development, raise self-esteem, as well as expand their life horizons.

Regardless of the arguments against the role of education and training as a panacea for employment and economic growth, some scholars see a definite benefit of education and training policy. For example, Field, Musset and Alvarez-Galvan (2014) argue that effective vocational programmes can be an answer to the challenges of poverty and unemployment by providing practical training linked to jobs to help young people transition smoothly from school to work, and consequently to achieve employability. The growth of the TVET system in South Africa has come as a response to the problems of unemployment and poverty, but it must be noted that these issues have not lessened. It is claimed that the need to increase responsiveness and employability is imperative if young people are to be prepared for successful and productive participation for the working life in a competitive global economy (Baatjes et al., 2014). The dominant view that college students are solely interested in securing jobs in the formal labour market needs to be intensely interrogated. It needs to be interrogated because it is biased towards the economic benefits of education, and ignores other socio-cultural roles that education plays in society.

5.3.1.2 TVET Is Good, But Public TVET Colleges Are Not That Good

The students who were interviewed speak of TVET not only as a type of educational offering but also as a physical space⁸.

As soon as I read... as soon as I read the word that says TVET, what appears in my mind is a college. I can't think of TVET and appear... comes a picture of university. I always associate TVET with college. [Mike, FDG, Business Campus].

Duncan (2016) distinguishes four aspects that are deemed necessary to get a job in the modern labour market, namely technical, occupational or vocational skills, current workplace experience, workplace behavioural skills, and (social capital in the form of) connections to employers (Duncan, 2016). He argues that only one of these is found in or can be offered by the TVET colleges, namely technical and vocational skills. The

⁸ It is common occurrence that a particular way of speaking about something may emerge in everyday speech. For example, when people speak about TVET colleges in general, they often omit the word 'college'. So, someone who is not familiar with this manner of speaking would assume that people are speaking about TVET (the form of education offered in TVET colleges) rather than the colleges themselves. Public TVET colleges are usually the most accessible spaces for many young people so, one would expect that when they say 'I am going to TVET', other people should understand that they mean they are going to the TVET college.

rest of the skills and attitudes can only be found in industry (Duncan, 2016). Consequently, employers tend not to employ TVET college graduates because they do not have the so-called employability skills (Wedekind, 2016). Nonetheless, as ordinary citizens, students tend to see TVET colleges as representing TVET mainly because this is what is available to them.

5.3.1.3 ‘TVET’ Is Not The Same As ‘TVET College’

Public TVET colleges are the largest provider of this kind of TVET education, but when one speaks to ordinary students like the participants in this study, there is a sense that the word ‘TVET’ is used as a synonym for ‘college’, and public college to be specific. It is from ordinary (everyday) speech that social agents derive their understanding. However, this way of talking is also found in news headlines like ‘*Developing the country's TVETs one college at a time*’ (Mphamphuli, 2020). This kind of talk or writing tends to synonymise colleges with their programmes or the type of education that they offer to a point where it comes as natural that when one says TVETs (instead of TVETCs – the ‘C’ representing ‘college’, and the small letter ‘s’ representing the plural form of the ‘colleges’), they are referring to the colleges that offer TVET. For example, there is a university research project focused on,

Tackling youth unemployment through TVETs, greening TVETs, work-based learning systems in TVETs, entrepreneurship and emerging trends in TVETs, quality assurance and monitoring in TVETs, and leadership in TVETs (Mphamphuli, 2020, para. 3).

In the earlier quote, the student specifically states that “*as soon as I read the word that says TVET, what appears in my mind is a college*”. It is important to note that what appears in the mind of this student is a college, not what the college does. In their understanding of TVET, very few students mention ‘on-the-job training’, ‘continuous development’ or ‘updating obsolete skills’, ‘expanding one’s skill sets’, and ‘learning an additional trade’, that organisations that promote TVET would mention (Hiebert & Borgen, 2002). The significance of pointing out that the students think of TVET as a college is because they do not mention universities, universities of technology, or trade schools, as institutions that offer TVET, even though all these types of institutions have been and continue to be vocationalised (Grubb & Lazerson, 2009). Notably, public

TVET colleges seem to hold a certain status that is separate from the education and training that they offer.

5.3.1.4 Its Status Is Questionable Sometimes

TVET is associated with a physical space, a place that is associated with certain qualities of people who attend such institutions. *“For me, I associate TVET with a place where students who don’t meet the criteria to study at university are being trained”* [Mike, FGD, Business Campus]. This explains why students perceive public TVET colleges differently from universities of technology or trade schools. Generally, a university is associated with completion of grade 12 and obtaining a certain level of a pass (Wedekind, 2013b). Public TVET colleges are open to a diverse range of students, with a diverse array of prior qualifications. This includes those who achieved low marks in grade 12. As a result, this raises a perception that public TVET colleges are made for low performers. For example, *“I think it’s a college made of people who have passed with low points”* [Mike, FGD, Business Campus].

The association of TVET with college is not to be disconnected from the social status of these public TVET colleges, for example, Bongiwe claimed that,

It’s an institution for training students coming from... to train students practically... who come from high school... who don’t have...no, I don’t like this idea... I don’t like this idea... I wanna put it in a different way. But it’s for training students from high school who are not able... who are not able...to do things with their hands. But... I think my explanation is there... [Bongiwe, FGD, Engineering Campus].

As much as the student mentions that *“I don’t like this idea”*, her vocabulary fails to present her understanding in more positive terms. She highlights that the students who go to public TVET colleges are those *“who are not able”*, without mentioning ‘able to do what’. But she mentions that these students ‘who are not able’, go to TVET to learn ‘to do things with their hands’.

This idea is associated with the dominant perception in society that TVET is for certain groups of people, usually the poor and academically weak people (Baatjes et al., 2014). In *“Getting the right learners into the right programmes”*: An investigation into factors that contributed to the poor performance of FET college learners in NCV 2 and

NCV 3 programmes in 2007 and 2008 - reasons and recommendations, Papier presented the views of high school learners, teachers and principals on TVET⁹ colleges (Papier, 2009). The findings presented by Papier indicate that most high school respondents believed that those who transferred to TVET colleges did so because they did not cope with academic content, content load in the mainstream, or they want to follow a non-academic career that offers something more skills-based (Papier, 2009). The responses of the teachers and the principals of high schools were similar to the responses of the high school learners. Principals and teachers also believed that TVET colleges are suited for learners who struggle in school, those who have learning problems, and those who are slow but dedicated learners (Papier, 2009). Most respondents indicated that they were not familiar with the NCV programme, but offered the advice that TVET colleges must improve their image, and must educate the public about their programmes and curricula (Papier, 2009).

5.3.1.5 Admission Policies Add to Its Questionability

The perception that public TVET colleges are inferior institutions also emerges from the strict admission practices of universities as opposed to the more flexible admission requirements of TVET colleges. Additionally, the fact that those who do not qualify to study at university find their way into the colleges may portray these institutions as rebound places.

You want to be an engineer but here comes January you don't have points to go to university. So, that's when you come to TVET and do NATED instead of NCV because you do have grade 12 but your points from grade 12 don't allow you to go and do a B. Tech. at University of the Eastern Cape¹⁰ [sic] [Zolani, FGD, Engineering Campus].

TVET colleges are commonly compared or contrasted with universities, and this is where the idea that the latter is better than the former is mentioned.

I would say there is university, and there is TVET. If I can make an example, if you are recently done... maybe your grade 12, let's say you have 19 points, you don't meet

⁹ In 2009 when this research was conducted, TVET colleges were called FET colleges in South Africa. The word TVET college is used here in line with current usage.

¹⁰ In South Africa, the academic year normally commences in January. Before COVID-19 times, it was common practice that in January, students would still be applying for admission. It was also common practice that one student would move from institution to institution, trying to gain access.

the criteria to study at university, but you need to study. Where do you go? I go to TVET college. Then it's my choice if I have exemption, to go to college. But that place for me, it's meant for people who don't meet the criteria [sic] [Mike, FGD, Business Campus].

The way the education system is currently structured in South Africa breeds some stigmatised views about the social position of the different kinds of education and training institutions. Due to the understanding that the admission points score (APS) is an indication of a student's intellectual ability, students tend to associate their choice of a post-school institution with their high school performance.

Maybe like at University of the Eastern Cape you find people who passed with seven distinctions. You will never find such a person at college... they think about their status that 'hey, I passed with seven distinctions, what am I doing at Metro TVET College' because at Metro TVET College you find like... average marks [sic] [Mike, FGD, Business Campus].

This understanding is also enforced by institutional practices.

At University of the Eastern Cape people stand at the gates and are told by some woman they do not qualify. I had gone there [with our organisation] to help learners from matric to apply, and there was a woman who was asking what their child should study, she was told by the woman [at the gate] that the child should go apply at a college, and that was hurting as the student didn't want to attend at a college [Nolubabalo, FGD, Business Campus].

When students attempt to go to university, they are confronted with entry challenges and stiff competition. When asked if it is true that being accepted at a public TVET college is easier than at university, Nolubabalo responded:

[...] think it's true because at university, you guys want more points. Your entry requirements are high. But when we come here [to the college] ... when we come here, they accept you, you see! Many students move from University of the Eastern Cape because from the gate, before they even enter the premises... from the gate they are told that they are not qualified to be in the university [sic] [Nolubabalo, FGD, Business Campus].

5.3.1.6 Insider Views Versus Outsider Views

The view that TVET is inferior is not associated with the type of education and training that is offered at TVET colleges, but with the institutions that offer it, especially the public TVET colleges. This perception is in line with the impression that TVET is a place where certain types of students study. Those who have positive views about TVET do not necessarily commend the institutions that offer TVET but the type of education and training that TVET colleges offer. In terms of the type of education and training offered by different post-school institutions, they tend to praise TVET and criticise university education.

But sometimes when it comes to Engineering, then someone at Metro TVET College has a better chance than someone at varsity because they are the practical side of the studies as well [Abongile, FGD, Engineering Campus].

As much as universities are perceived as the place to be, students believe that they focus more on theory than practical skills.

[...] university only offers you theory, of which it can be a disadvantage when you finish the course because you will not be equipped enough for the job you want to apply for as compared to the TVET college. For instance, on the automotive side, when you want to strip off the car and check the gear box you will know it from theory but not practical, so you will not know which screws to take off before you get to the gear box, that is how I know it [Sindiswa, FGD, Engineering Campus].

Because they recognise that TVET has its advantages, they tend to see it in a positive light. Based on this insider knowledge, some students believe that TVET is not a fall-back position, but a conscious choice.

Now I was saying that, neh, I don't like the... the... the perspective that people have, that people go to the TVETs because they can't go to university. You can have the points required at university, but you need the practice, not the theory-only-side of this engineering. You want to be in the ground level. So, I wonder... I find many people treating college as a waiting room because they can't go to university, and then they go to college. But a person has an option even if they qualify to be there at university [Bongiwe, FGD, Campus C].

The participants in this study have witnessed this waiting room mentality in action, but it is a practice that they do not support.

But I like what my colleague has said in that TVET college is not a place of... it's not a creche where a person doesn't know what to do or has no other option to come to TVET colleges [Thobani, FGD, Engineering Campus].

Based on the responses of the students, it is apparent that they, as insiders, view TVET colleges more positively than other people do.

Hey, I also agree with everything because speaking from my own experience, it happened to me at home. They were like "how do you take 'B' to a college? [...] They don't support that I'm at the college because they say college is for only those who get D and H and all of that. So, they are against the whole idea of... they say, "how do you take such marks to college"? So, that's their mentality [Zukiswa, FGD, Engineering Campus].

The negative perceptions put public TVET colleges in an awkward position where they must 'show and tell' to gain recognition (Appadurai, 2004). As I have gathered from the group and individual interviews, there is a tendency among students to want to go to university as the main choice. Universities do not necessarily compete with TVET colleges for the best-performing students. Public TVET colleges must always prove their worth through what Appadurai calls 'show and tell' (Appadurai, 2004). For these institutions to show and tell, they need students to first experience their programmes. It is these insider views that can be used to advocate for TVET colleges as a viable post-school alternative. Nonetheless, the dominant-negative perception is also strong and hard to eradicate.

As much as students want to distance themselves from the negative perception of the TVET colleges, they seem to subconsciously hold the view that college education is not whole; it cannot be all you have.

It's not that I didn't qualify, it's just that I qualified for a course I did not want to do so, rather than doing something that I will regret and later drop out after a few years, then why not equip myself from the basics and then at a later stage, I go to varsity and then now I do it at an advanced level [Zukiswa, FGD, Engineering Campus].

Here the student describes TVET as the basics, and university as an advanced level. This view is common among students. Even though they distance themselves from this 'waiting room' idea, in practice they tend to see TVET colleges in this way, especially when their desire to go to university is not realised.

So, instead of staying at home and do nothing, you come to TVET... start from N1 or N2 until N6. After N6, you do 18 months of training and get a diploma. After the diploma you can go if you want to proceed with engineering and do B. Tech [Zolani, FGD, Engineering Campus].

The idea that they can start with a TVET qualification and later pursue a more advanced university qualification can be viewed in at least three ways. Firstly, it can be viewed as being influenced by the perception that TVET college education is not good enough and that once they have acquired a TVET college education, they need to go to university to upgrade their qualifications. Secondly, it can be viewed as part of the expanded and integrated education and training system that the White Paper for PSET talks about (DHET, 2013). This view is a significant departure from the perception of TVET as 'the waiting room' and it positions TVET as part of the expanded and integrated post-school system, which therefore suggests that there are no dead-ends in the system.

Thirdly, it can be viewed as a natural process of growth where one achievement must lead to the other. The same can be said about those who acquire bachelor's degrees from universities in South Africa, who continue to do honours, masters and doctoral degrees. They do not do this because they despise their bachelor's degrees, but they do so because that is how the academic route moves. Therefore, when TVET college students want to do the same, their intentions must not be treated with suspicion. TVET colleges do not offer qualifications beyond NQF level 6, and therefore if TVET college graduates wish to further their studies beyond their initial qualification, they have the option to either go to university or a university of technology.

Social agents typically have ambitions to go further, to do better, and to always improve their lives. If all institutional types could lead to similar articulation routes, Allais suggests that perhaps there would be less disparity (Allais, 2003a). For Allais, articulation and progression are important. If all qualifications, regardless of where

they are offered, could articulate into higher qualifications, and if all students could progress equally, then all qualifications would probably receive equal recognition. Allais is careful not to say this as an absolute because there are other factors other than articulation and progression that affect TVET (Allais, 2003a).

This perception of TVET education as being inferior to university education extends beyond the education and training institutions to the labour market.

Even with internships... internships are for... we do apprenticeships because we want trades... but you'd find out that our 'apprentice' pays up to R2500, but internships pay up to R7000. So, there's quite a difference so, I think it also contribute... [sic] [Sindiswa, FGD, Campus C].

The disparities in the labour market contribute to the perception of TVET as low-status institutions, and this implies that TVET graduates have a lower status in society compared to university graduates. The students expressed the view that there is poor recognition of TVET in the labour market.

Also, if you check job advertisements, let's say on the engineering side at ABC Car Company or A-Z Motor Company, you'd find that when they put the requirements, they'd put engineering degree, and here we don't find things like engineering degree [Thobani, FGD, Campus C].

The comparison of levels of earnings between TVET college and university graduates can be described by hierarchical classification (Moodie, 2002). In the case of South Africa, a graduate who has completed engineering at university is likely to be called an engineer, whereas a TVET college graduate in the same field is likely to be called an artisan. The expectation is that these two candidates have different skills and knowledge and that their roles are different. In one individual interview, Sindiswa clearly defined the difference between university and TVET college programmes. Concerning electrical engineering programmes, she highlighted that at the TVET college level, the students are not expected to make or design electrical circuits, while university students are expected to do so. In her view, university students cover more in their programmes than TVET college students. Although the world has moved far away from Plato's idea of education for the slaves versus education for the freemen,

one of the embedded characteristics between university and TVET college education is that of hierarchy in terms of expected intellectual demands (Moodie, 2002).

Due to this hierarchy, people with different levels of education tend to value different institutions differently. A study conducted among the European Union member states points to the importance of considering whether the people who say something positive or negative about TVET have taken this education themselves or not (European Commission, 2011). The report indicates that those who left school early tend to see TVET in a positive light compared to those who stayed longer in school (European Commission, 2011). Also, those who have taken TVET see it as important for labour market entry. This could be observed in the attitudes of the participants of the current study as well. Their parents, family members and school teachers who discouraged them from going into TVET colleges do not have insider knowledge. Their negativity towards TVET is not informed by their bad experience in the colleges. When the students, who are in the TVET college system, speak of TVET, they speak from lived experience. This is one of the reasons that the findings of Papier indicated that good marketing would improve the image of the TVET colleges (Papier, 2009).

5.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shared what the students understand to be the meaning of 'career' and 'TVET'. Although not entirely new, the views of the students bring a fresh look at these two concepts, especially as they relate to the functions of public TVET colleges. The students have a diverse understanding of career, ranging from economically meaningful activity, to a socially and personally meaningful activity. It is, however, important to note that the views of students do not emanate from nowhere, but are part of their everyday social interactions. For example, their understanding of career as an economic activity is influenced by the need for people to work and earn a living. This understanding is also informed by the lived experiences of social agents, especially those to whom employment is the main route out of poverty. This understanding is therefore shaped by the unequal character of the social structure. From a Careership Theory perspective, it can be claimed that these understandings are located in the habitus of the social agents (Allin & Humberstone, 2006) and they manifest not only in how the students speak but also in how they make career decisions.

The notion of horizon for action (Rosvall et al., 2020) can be associated with the notion of navigational capacity (Gale & Parker, 2015). The students speak of going to college to get qualifications so that they can get jobs. While this is a practical process, a decision to study is made cognitively and that is a process that requires a social agent to consider their position, that is, their horizon for action (Humberstone, 2004). Likewise, how the students think about this process, reflects their knowledge of the process, that is, their navigational capacity (Maja, 2020). So, as they discuss what TVET can do for them, it is possible to understand the types of navigational maps they carry, as well as their points of departure, that is, their horizons for action. The following chapter explores the social structures that influence the career decision making of students, from the perspective of the students.

CHAPTER 6

INFLUENCE OF SOCIAL STRUCTURES ON CAREER DECISION MAKING

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter addressed the sub-question *‘how do students understand the concepts of TVET and career?’* The current chapter focuses on the second sub-question, *‘what social structures influence the career decision making of public TVET college students’ in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro?* Chapter 2 presented literature on career decision making, which shows that the educational field continues to be influenced by vast inequalities. Chapter 2 also shows that career decisions go beyond individual interests and rational calculations but are influenced by the context in which they are made. Chapter 3 presented a sociological perspective on career decision making. This sociological perspective shows that one’s position in society influences the decisions and these decisions are influenced by the unequal distribution of resources. It is important, however, to be careful not to claim that people within the same socio-economic group think and act in the same way. Based on this acknowledgement, Chapter 4 presented a paradigmatic approach that is informed by subjective ontology and interpretive epistemology. This was important to understand what influences the career decision making of the students not only as a group but also as individuals.

In sociology, the concept of social structure is used to explain how regularities are formed, as well as how culture and social life are produced and reproduced. Family, education system and social class are among the most cited. Although the social structure is at the core of social sciences at large, it is also a difficult and elusive term to define (Leyton, 2014). This chapter looks at the findings from the interviews with the students from the perspective of social structure not as static and unchangeable, but as relational and process-driven. Social structure is considered here as neither top-down nor bottom-up, but as a dialectic relation between determinism and free will, mediated by the habitus. The chapter focuses on three main themes, namely gender, family and education, and how they influence the career decision making of the students who were interviewed for this study.

At inception, the study did not focus on gender and race, but these were significantly revealed as worthy of consideration. This study focuses less on race because it was not designed to look at racial categories. Nonetheless, and given that all the students who participated were Black, there were some comments about race, poverty and education, which have been noted in the previous chapter as well. Gender is also considered at length in this chapter because the experiences of gender that were shared demonstrate the significant influence of gender on career decision making. While the concept of class is commonly used in sociology, it is important to note that class is very specific, and its use requires in-depth class analysis. So, although I cite the word class as used by various writers, I focus more on the socio-economic status/background for the analysis. This makes it possible to accommodate the perspectives of Appadurai and Ray that have been discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

6.2 GENDER, RACE AND CAREER DECISION MAKING

In this section, I look at how gender and race influence the career decision making of students, especially Black women students. The Careership Theory does address the issue of gender and its influence on career choices, but mainly concerning male-dominated versus female-dominated occupations (Hodkinson et al., 1996). This chapter sympathises with the experiences of women whose lives were not easy. Some of the things that happened to them would not have happened if they were men, for example, rape and pregnancy. The things that happen to women play a huge role in their decisions in life and education.

6.2.1 Does Gender Matter In Career Decision Making?

Students acknowledge that socio-economic background plays a significant role in their career decisions, as to be discussed in detail later in this chapter, but gender is not given equal emphasis in expression. There is a view in the literature that young men and women tend to choose careers associated with their gender (Andrew & Flashman, 2017; Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014; Rosvall et al., 2020). The participants in this study dispute this idea verbally, although I show later that gender does have a huge role to play in career decision making. This is evident in some of the responses given to questions about the relationship between gender and career choice.

I don't really weigh myself down to that and say, 'this is for males and this is for females'. I chose this because I wanted to, not because I'm a woman [sic] [Licebo, Individual Interview].

Although some studies have found that women and men tend to choose different careers depending on social and cultural norms (Gudyanga et al., 2019; Mtemeri, 2017), the responses of students in this study seem to indicate that things are changing in society.

You would get those people that think that women cannot do... like for example, engineering and stuff. Yes, you would find women there but before, that was not the case, they were mostly male-dominated. Most women think that they ought to do softer jobs, an office you see, not hard labour. But now things have changed, you get women doing hard labour, building houses, all of that [Licebo, Individual Interview].

The notion that only men can perform labour that requires physical strength seems to be based on perceptions rather than facts.

It shouldn't be like that, because most of the time we can do what you [men] can do. I can do the installation normally but if we can go to submit our CVs at [City Power and Energy], always they prefer the guys because they think he can step on the ladder ... he can carry... you see! It's always the case. Even the lecturers here do that. When we do practicals they tell you that 'you know what, don't carry that'. Who's gonna carry it for me if I don't? [sic] [Sindiswa, Individual Interview].

Even in the so-called male occupations, as a woman, *"if you put your mind to it, you can do it"* [Sindiswa, Individual Interview]. There is a general perception that women are not physically strong enough to push a wheelbarrow in construction work, but when one comes to think of it, this is not true because *"[w]e do that at home"* [Sindiswa, Individual Interview]. So, the idea that women cannot perform certain physical tasks is not true, *"it's in the mind. It... it... I don't know but it's been there... it's patriarchy"* [Sindiswa, Individual Interview]. In other countries though, it was found that gender stereotypes continue to influence career choices (Rai & Joshi, 2020). In Careership terms, when women do not see themselves certain careers, any career guidance that seeks to persuade them in that direction is not successful because such career choices are not in their horizon for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). This can also be viewed in terms of navigational capacity, whereby it can be argued that social

agents must perceive it in their minds before they can undertake to pursue such goals (Maja, 2020).

During the time of the interview, Sindiswa was part of the student representative body, and her view is that there is gender balance in classrooms.

It's balanced. You don't find a class that has more women than men. One would expect to see more men than women because it's an engineering campus, but it's actually balanced [Sindiswa, Individual Interview].

When we look at the writings of scholars such as Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), Hodkinson (Hodkinson et al., 1996; Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993), as well as other recent writings (Gudyanga et al., 2019; Mtemeri, 2017) we must bear in mind the context in which they were written. The world has moved on from the cultural behaviours presented by Bourdieu in his writings, but traces of these remain. A study conducted in Nepal shows that through commitment, willingness and motivation, women can break the barriers and succeed in the careers that are traditionally regarded as men's careers (Rai & Joshi, 2020). Nonetheless, it is important to note that gender continues to play a significant role in the life choices of individuals. Although one cannot always say that 'I chose A or B because I am a woman' or 'I did this or that because I am a man', the experiences of men and women are different, and these experiences influence individual actions and choices differently.

If one looks at pregnancy, for example, women are likely to drop out of school or to delay going to college because they have a newborn baby. In the case of countries like India where marriages are pre-arranged, women who do not do well in school are likely to drop out early (DeJaeghere & Arur, 2020). While this is no longer common in South Africa, one of the participants in this study, Nolubabalo, had strange experience of being sold off to a man once in her life. This and other events that took place in her life interfered with her education, despite that she was a bright learner. It can be argued that while South Africa does not have a caste system like India, poverty plays a huge role in disadvantaging social actors in their life and educational pursuits. The following section looks at the experiences of women (who were interviewed for the purposes of this study) in career decision making.

6.2.2 Being a Young Black Woman, Education and Career Decision

One of the major turning points in the lives of women or girls is pregnancy, childbirth and childrearing. The education system is designed in such a way that one needs to delay certain turning points like having children. While childbearing can be just a turning point among many other turning points, it has more impact on young women than it has on young men. So, instead of maintaining that a woman is more likely to choose a female-dominated career, it is safe to focus on the circumstances that lead to their career decisions. I use two women participants as examples, namely Nomhle and Licebo.

During the time of the interview, Nomhle was 24 years of age. She was registered for Office Administration at NC(V) level 2 for the first time in 2018. She had two children at that time, one born while she was still at school, and another born the year after completing grade 12. At school, she did commercial subjects. Her childhood career aspiration, which she still holds, is to become a police or military officer. The Careership Theory views completing high school as a structural turning point shaped by the education system (Hodkinson, 2009). On completion, the lives of individual social actors take different directions, such as college, university, employment or unemployment.

I did Grade 12 in 2015 then failed [sic]. In 2016 I had a child and returned in 2017 to improve on two of the subjects I had failed at Metro TVET College. I passed [Nomhle, Individual Interview].

When asked how it feels to have a baby, she responded that,

I was hurt because I was going to start school that same year. I was unable to do so and stayed behind the entire year, only returning in 2017. Upon my return to school, she [the baby] would stay with my cousins. I was usually present during the day and would attend school in the evenings – and leave her with whoever would be available at the time [Nomhle, Individual Interview].

When the baby was very young, she needed more attention from the mother, but as the child got older, Nomhle was able to go to Metro TVET College to upgrade her matric results. This was another turning point in her life, although some elements of

routine can also be identified (Hodkinson, 2009). Luckily for her, classes for second-chance matric were held in the afternoons so, her cousins would be back from school and would help to look after the baby. Although she believes in the popular idea that children are a blessing, she has a view that “[...] *they slow one’s progress*” [Nomhle, Individual Interview], because women are generally the ones who have to stay at home and care for their children. It is important to note that “[t]een pregnancy among school enrollees leads to subsequent school dropout, though, in the South African context, teen pregnancy is not completely incompatible with further schooling” (Rosenberg et al., 2015, p. 929). Nomhle was able to return to school to further her studies despite that this process was delayed. The experience of Licebo, who comes from a different background, is rather different.

Licebo was 31 years of age when I interviewed her. When she introduced herself, the first thing she mentioned was her name, followed by her age, and then added that “*I am a mother of two - a girl and a boy*” [Licebo, Individual Interview]. After high school, she stayed at home, neither studying nor working. Later, she had her first baby, and it was a tough experience.

I was very unfortunate. The first time I got pregnant in 2009, the father of the child refused to accept the pregnancy. [...] It was just drama, with my mother full of drama herself, it was dramatic. I got the beating from home; my granny was alive back then, so she stopped the beating. The baby’s father, after he denied, he was working and refused to take care of the child, so I had to go find work. Fortunately, I was done with my matric. I was in a process of finding work anyway. I worked at Mobile Network so I was able to provide for the child. The child’s father played hide and seek until he vanished. I filed for child maintenance against him; he got rude and did all of those things; he got rude and in that maintenance issue there was also no luck. I ended up leaving everything, so my mom supported me in terms of buying clothes and all those things that she needed up until the age when she started school. Then my baby two’s daddy was also another drama [Licebo, Individual Interview].

When she fell pregnant for the second time, the situation got worse. Her boyfriend denied being responsible for the pregnancy.

When the family was there for the damages, he told them things, silly things, like embarrassing you in front of your family, things that do not exist. Fortunately, my

stepdad knows me very well, what type of a person I am. I'm not the type of person this young man displays me to be in front of them. Like saying nasty things in front of your family, things like "you were sleeping around; you must go around looking for the father of your child", all of those things. I was quite shocked, this person knew my experience with the first baby daddy, everything, he was supportive of everything and told me this and that. He did worse than the first one, at least the first one denied and never said anything after that, but he denies and says nasty things [sic] [Licebo, Individual Interview].

When she fell pregnant, her life went through major turning points and giving birth and raising children brought in another routine, where she had to stay at home. As much as this was a turning point in her life, it was a long turning point, which had characteristics of a routine. It is sometimes difficult to differentiate a routine from a turning point (Barham, 2013; Hodkinson, 2009). A few things changed in Licebo's life; for example, she could no longer spend time with friends anymore. When she had her second child, she once again withdrew from many activities, including political activities. Nevertheless, she later studied through NC(V) and NATED. She had to work to support her children because she came from a low socioeconomic status household, with both her parents moving between employment and unemployment.

The experiences of both Licebo and Nomhle reveal a possible stumbling block, especially for those who come from poor backgrounds. As we will see later, some girls do give birth at a young age, but the burden of raising children is taken by their families. In such cases, they can continue with their lives, albeit with some minor changes. There are two points to note in the experiences of Licebo and Nomhle; namely that having a baby while still young can be a stumbling block, but it can also be a source of motivation to do well, to work hard, and to develop a sense of agency and purpose. That sense of agency and purpose may be driven by desperation.

Like I've got things that I wanted to do, like my heart desires. My desire, first of all, I want to get a job since I have kids. That was my desire even when I did not have any kids [Licebo, Individual Interview].

Under desperate circumstances, anything that comes is acceptable.

This moment in time I'm desperate to any type of work [sic]. You know, actually, I was working at... it was a project. In fact, look, there was a job in these EPWP projects like I applied for an internship programme but they called me for litter picking. I was surprised because I applied for internship from EPWP, not litter picking. Like I was hurt at first, but the way that I was so desperate for a job I did not mind. I worked and swallowed my pride and went to work [Licebo, Individual Interview].

Career choice is made from a position of either weakness or power; plan or desperation. The Careership Theory deploys the concept of horizon for action, which describes the extent to which a social agent's actions are influenced by their knowledge and resources (Lundqvist, 2019). In the case of both Licebo and Nomhle, their programme choices were constrained by availability. What was available to them was influenced by their prior experiences and what they could bring to the choice table. Their matric results were not impressive. They were not getting any younger either. At that time, they had to write the narrative of their lives from the position and circumstances they found themselves in. Some parts have already been written (their previous experiences), and a new narrative had to be written from that point onwards (Hodkinson, 1995). To continue with the script, they both had to exercise agency, where they had to look for other options (Groener & Andrews, 2019; Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014).

To understand career decisions, we also need to understand the life experiences of the social agents making the decisions. The Careership Theory contends that life is a holistic experience and it must not be fragmented or treated as segments, and career decisions are part of the whole life of the social agent making the decision (Hodkinson, 2009). Career decisions, made pragmatically rationally within routines and turning points, also influenced by routines and turning points, are rooted in previous routines and turning points (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Licebo and Nomhle could not choose any programme because their prior life experiences had already limited their choices. For example, their poor matric results limited their choice of institutions, and the available institutions limited their choice of programmes. Hodkinson gives an analogy of a career as filling out a blank page.

The horizons within which they are made and the actual choices themselves depend upon the existing habitus of the person making the decision. The page already has a

script upon it. That script can evolve and change, but the page can never be blank and the script cannot be 'unwritten'. That script enables one range of possible actions, whilst preventing others (Hodkinson, 1998a, p. 161).

These horizons for action (Rosvall et al., 2020) can also be described as horizons of aspiration (Maja, 2020). It is important to acknowledge that Licebo and Nomhle, and all the other participants, have aspirations, but their previous educational experiences have not equipped them sufficiently to realise these aspirations. Due to low entry points, they could no longer enrol in the institutions in which they wanted to enrol when they were younger. Now they are forced to make some sacrifices, to make alternative career decisions. This must, however, be viewed as an exercise of agency, because they did not close off their options (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014).

It can be seen from these accounts that the students who were interviewed for this study act with agency, although there are stumbling blocks in their way. It is visible that they do not come from elite homes. They did not attend affluent schools. They did not perform so well. Other life circumstances like falling pregnant befell them. These circumstances prevented them to pursue their career goals, hence going to college for them was delayed. These are some of the dynamics that must be considered when talking or writing about what influences career decisions. These accounts show that life does not come in boxes, but routines and turning points happen at the same time, and it is difficult to separate these two neatly (Barham, 2013). For young people to overcome some of their challenges, the role of the family must be recognised.

6.3 THE FAMILY

The literature presents the family as one of the main influences of the career decisions of students (Ayiah-Mensah et al., 2014; Lundqvist, 2019; Moniarou-Papaconstantinou & Tsatsaroni, 2012; Mtemeri, 2017; Shumba & Naong, 2012; Zipin et al., 2012). The family is associated with early socialisation of children, and this process includes the deployment of capital, such as cultural, economic and social (Reay et al., 2009; Reay & Lucey, 2003). At the centre of the role of the family in the career decisions of students is its socio-economic status. It is argued that wealthy families provide more, informed and guided support to their children concerning their career and other educational choices (Galvaan, 2010; McMillan, 2014; Reay, 2018).

6.3.1 Family background matters

During the time of the interview, Phumeza was 25 years of age and registered for Early Childhood Development programme at Metro TVET College. This was not her first attempt at college education as she was first registered for a three-year learnership programme in Primary Health at a different public TVET college. She withdrew from this programme when she realised it was not what she thought it would be. During her high school years, she was interested in at least five career paths, namely Analytical Chemistry, Botany, Environmental Health, Medicine and Nursing, but when she got the opportunity to study Primary Health, she did not mind.

The reason why I chose Primary Health is because okay... it was chosen for me by my mom, and I saw that okay, like, there's nothing wrong with it, it's the same as nursing [Phumeza Individual Interview].

Changing career decisions is not strange in career decision theories like Careership. It is not strange because young people are considered to be developing, therefore, stating that they want to study towards a certain career path at a young age does not guarantee that they will do so later in life (Hodkinson et al., 1996). Young people do not necessarily have a clear view of the future. As they grow, they learn about themselves and the world around them. Concerning this, a concept such as 'learning careers' was developed to account for this process in theory (Bloomer & Hodkinson, 2000a). As they learn and change their career goals, they undergo different kinds of routines. For example, Phumeza felt at home when she started doing early childhood development, thereby going through a socialising routine (Hodkinson, 2009).

Although she was not very certain what she wanted to do after high school, she chose Mathematics and Physical Sciences because she believed that these subjects would open up future opportunities for her. "*I saw that with Physics and Maths, I can do many other things*" [Phumeza Individual Interview]. Choosing school subjects can come as a guessing game, especially if the learner is not sure what they want to do in future because "*Knowing that I've got good subjects, so I can do anything, it doesn't matter what it is*" [Phumeza, Individual Interview]. Although she comes from a well off family, she was not very sure of what she wanted to do. This can be interpreted against the theoretical perspectives that promote the notion that social agents from affluent

backgrounds always know what to do. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge that people from higher socio-economic backgrounds do not necessarily act the same, and do not exert their influence on their children in the same way. Although her career desires changed dramatically, the main source of influence remained her family.

I've got a cousin who did Analytical Chemistry. My aunt did Environmental Health and my sister did Environmental Health as well. So now, it's obvious because they do some of their work at home. So, I'd always see that those things are familiar to the things I did at school, for instance there's Physics in Analytical Chemistry [Phumeza Individual Interview].

Her father also had an influence on her subject choices.

First, my father loves Physics and Maths... So, everytime when he talks, he talks about things related to Maths and Physics, it's always like that... He likes those things so, like, he would always ask, 'don't you need help with your homework? Don't you need help with anything?' So, you see, he is always willing to help with anything to do with Physics and Maths [Phumeza Individual Interview].

Since *"he's an engineer" who "[...] owns an engineering company"*, he played a significant role in influencing Phumeza's educational life. *"So, this whole idea of Physics and Maths comes from him"* [Phumeza Individual Interview]. This is a direct role played by immediate family members in influencing a young person's career choices. There is also an indirect influence, especially where the young person is interested in what older family members are doing. McMillan explains this in terms of habitus and cultural capital. Some young people have the privilege of being socialised into an educated culture, while others do not have such a privilege (McMillan, 2014). McMillan argues that young people have different kinds of information at their disposal, and this difference is linked to their backgrounds. Similarly, Kiyosaki argues that poor parents have little to offer to their children in terms of cultural, economic and social capital (Kiyosaki, 2011). In this case, it can be claimed that Phumeza did not necessarily follow in the footsteps of her family, but this may also be the result of her not-so-good matric results.

Phumeza had somewhat a clear vision of what she wanted to do. She also had support from her family, but this advantage does not always translate into better choices. What

is clear, despite that she had challenges choosing her career, is that she was calm. She was calm mostly because she was not desperate to study. For her, studying is something that she must do, not because there was nothing else she could do. If she was desperate, she would have been likely to complete her Primary Health programme, despite going through a dislocating routine (Hodkinson, 2009). Although she a clearer map, her options were limited because he matric results were not so good to do what she wanted to do.

6.3.2 When the Family Is Not Literate

Vuyisa was born in Kimberley, a small town in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. He is the firstborn of his mother's four children and his mother lives and works in Johannesburg. His desire to uplift his family motivated him to further his studies.

[...] since I grew up with my grandmother, like there was no one ... great financial support throughout so, like you see! I said 'no man, let me go and study you see, and be the better person that can be able to provide better things for my little brothers'. That was the main thing that made me... that motivated me to go and study further [sic] [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

Drawing from his statement above, it is safe to say that instead of saying 'let me just look for a job', Vuyisa considered investing in education, intending to achieve an economic or financial outcome at the end of the journey. Unfortunately, his grade 12 results were not good enough for him to pursue a legal or medical career, as he had wished when he was younger, so he had to consider other options.

So, when I failed my grade 12 in 2012, my grandmother sent me to her hometown, which is Komani. I went to Komani and I had to re-do my subjects that I failed, which was Physics and Maths, you see! And then after that I did not pass actually, I don't even know because I didn't go back to fetch my results because it was an upgrading school that was called Komani Business Academy what-what school. [...] So, when I failed the September trial examination on [sic] 2013, my mother¹¹ sent me back at

¹¹ In the second interview with Vuyisa I asked for clarity on the difference between his mother and grandmother. His mother does not live with them so, the grandmother is referred to as 'the mother', and the mother is referred to sometimes as 'sister', mainly because she has not necessarily been home with her children. So, there is no mother-to-son relationship between Vuyisa and his biological mother, hence he calls his grandmother 'mother'.

home at Kimberly [sic] where she is staying. And then she was 'no man', since I'm not serious in Physics and Math, so how about I stay at home, you see! [sic] [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

After staying at home for some time, he *"decided that I had to look out for a job, a holiday job and then I started working at Daddy Cool Restaurant as a waiter as from 2013, 2014"*[sic] [Vuyisa, Individual Interview]. By December of that year, he had saved some money from the tips that he received from customers because he wanted to study. His grandmother persuaded him to go and study in Bloemfontein, but he preferred Kimberley.

I told her that I'm not interested in studying in a place that is two hours' drive away, like everyone from Kimberley goes to Bloemfontein and I know Bloemfontein in and out because each and every time when I do shopping I go to Bloemfonteni [sic]. So, I'm like 'no man, I have my cousin who is studying in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro, how about I join her in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro?' And then she was like 'how sure you are that you wanna go study so far?' [sic] [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

He ultimately managed to go to the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro to apply for admission at Metro TVET College, but he was not sure what he wanted to do.

So, when I came here... that was 2014, I had no matric, so when I got to the City Campus [one of the campuses of Metro TVET College], they asked me what course do I wanna study? I wasn't sure which course to study because I didn't wanna do I.T, because I.T wanted student who has done pure Maths and of which I did pure Maths but I failed it you see! They tried to persuade me to do I.T and I was like 'no, I'm not even interested in doing I.T because I don't even know what I.T is you see!' [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

The college staff presented him with more options from which to choose.

And then they said there is Hospitality and Marketing and Tourism, that are three courses that are available [sic]. That was a day before I've registered [sic]. I asked them okay, 'Can I go home with the brochures just to make sure that I don't wanna register myself to something that I don't even know you see?' I went home with the brochures, and then I found Marketing more interesting than Tourism and Hospitality. And then the following day I came to register and then I wrote entrance tests [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

He decided to study Marketing, although he did not know the NQF level of the programme at that time.

I passed them [entrance tests] and then I was registered as a Marketing student. So, from there I only found out inside that this course I'm doing is for three years and is equivalent as matric [sic]. So, I was like 'okay, since I don't have matric, I might as well go with the flow and then I did that three-year course [...]' [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

He finished NC(V) Marketing in 2016 and went back home for six months. During the first six months of 2017, he returned to work as a waiter at the Daddy Cool Restaurant.

I tried to apply but to be honestly [sic] all the places that I have been applying at were like 'you have Level 4 and there's a lot of people who are having matric, and your qualification it's [sic] more or less matric of which most people have matric. So how about you go back and study further, do N4, N5 and N6 and then you can come back and look for a very great job' [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

Although he had decided that he would go back to Metro TVET College, he had to first convince his grandmother.

Still, my mother refused to send me back here because she was like 'I wasted almost three years for you to go and study and now you already got a certificate, why don't you go and look for a job?' Like trying to persuade, like explain, my grandmother, she's a very old person, she doesn't understand the difference between NC(V) and NATED, so I had to force her to understand the difference between NC(V) and NATED, like which one is the greatest you see! Okay, I managed to persuade her but still she didn't want me to go [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

Although his grandmother was opposed to the idea of him going back to college, he decided to go anyway. His motivation for wanting to back to college was to obtain qualifications that would enable him to find a job that would meet his standards.

And I told myself that I'm not gonna give up on this 'cause I wanna have a diploma and then start looking for a great job you see! That's when I came back last year. I stayed at home for the whole six months last year trying to figure out what to do, should I go back to NATED or should I carry on working as a waiter and that's when I realised that no man, I can't be a waiter for the rest of my life. I already have a qualification that I can upgrade and be a better person than sitting at home and being a waiter each and

every school holiday... So, I'm like 'no man, I have saved up so I might as well go back to college' [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

During the time of the interview, Vuyisa expressed his passion for Marketing.

I've grown passion from learning it 'coz automatically I know what was marketing, what it's all about up until I went in-depth and then I get to explore new things inside Marketing... what kind of opportunities are out there, that you can still do with Marketing [sic] [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

This experience debunks the notion of rational career decision making. This is not to say that Vuyisa was not rational in his decision. His decision was rational but this rationality was bound to a context of limited choices. His decision had very little to do with his career interests but more to do with what was available. These experiences can, therefore, be interpreted in many ways. The notion of routines and turning points can be applied in the sense that not passing matric well was a major turning point for Vuyisa (Hancock, 2009). As soon as he registered for Marketing at Metro College, he became socialised into a new routine, and he adjusted well. The interaction with college staff members also played a role in his decision to enrol for Marketing.

Looking retrospectively, Vuyisa realises that he had very limited information about the wide array of occupations that he could choose from.

Actually, what I think from my perspective, when I was growing up there, were like okay, do you see this thing of growing up in a perspective that when you grow up you will be a teacher, you will be a doctor, things like that [sic]. So like okay when you go to college you gonna be a police officer, or a nurse, or a social worker, you see all those serious occupations [sic].... You know when we were growing up you would swear like those were the real careers to choose [sic] [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

Family is very important to the development of the child. The views shared by the students above reveal how family contributes to the educational life of young people. The Careership Theory speaks of significant others in career decision making, including parents and other family members (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The educational levels of the family members and the involvement of parents influence young people's career decisions.

Career decisions can only be understood in terms of the life histories of those who make them, wherein identity has evolved through interaction with significant others and with the culture in which the subject has lived and is living (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997, p. 33).

Vuyisa presents different versions of himself. At one point he was a young man in high school for whom subjects choices were made by teachers. He later became a victim of failing matric. He also presented himself as someone whose decisions were made by his grandmother. He also presented himself as someone who worked hard to make money to go to college. He further presented himself as someone who was not sure about what he wanted to do. Through all these presentations of himself, he ended up enrolling at Metro College. Various conceptual tools can be applied to analyse his journey.

The interaction between capital, field and habitus is evident in his life-course (Hodkinson et al., 1996). His family did not give him much capital (cultural, economic and social) to succeed in education. His school did not do much to socialise him into the educational culture. As a result, his habitus was limited, thus his approach in the social field was not clear and confident. This is what happens when a child grows up with illiterate parents. They feed children, but as Kiyosaki says, there are many things that they do not know about the world (Kiyosaki, 2011). Ray extends this notion to argue that young people who grow in poor communities have limited aspiration windows because there are no role models around them (Genicot & Ray, 2014). It is, however, important to note that life circumstances are changing, and the role of the family is shifting as well. There are other institutions, for example, the education system, that influence the career decisions of the students.

6.4 EDUCATION SYSTEM

Students' educational backgrounds and experiences play a key role in the career choices that they make along the way. To proceed to post-school education and training institutions, students are required to have first gone through primary and secondary schooling, at least until grade 9. In this sub-section, I explore the role that the education system, as part of society, plays in influencing the career choices that the students make. I consider three aspects; namely, the types of schools that

students attend, the high school subjects that high school learners choose, as well as their academic performance. Linked to these three aspects are cultural, economic, social capitals () as well as habitus (in the form of secondary socialisation) that different schools bestow on their pupils. Inequality in education starts from the different geographic locations where different families live, the resources they possess, as well as the knowledge that families pass on to their children.

6.4.1 Primary And Secondary Schooling Matters

The story of Thandi (Kariem & Mbetse, 2012) that was used to explain why the government of South Africa needs a planning function (NPC, 2012), outlines the life of a typical female child in South Africa from childhood, to youth, to adulthood and through to old age. The story of Thandi concludes with the indication that the only time Thandi, a typical Black rural female, is likely to be free from the chains of poverty is when she reaches the age of 60 and qualifies to earn the government old age grant (Kariem & Mbetse, 2012). Social grants help where they are needed the most, but it is not a common occurrence to find a young child aspiring to be a social grant recipient when they grow up.

Primary and secondary schooling is a foundation for a young person's career. For this reason, the quality of schooling, which is itself influenced by material resources, influences the educational experiences of learners. For example, Lutho explains that her schooling was not useful in giving her a clear direction in life.

I grew up in public local school obviously with less resources where our teachers I can say are less informed, like they're not advanced and whatever, uneducated and stuff. We grew up where we were taught English in IsiXhosa, where we were never explained [sic] that... there're no career exhibitions... this is a career for you and these are the subjects you must do... you're only told according to opinion and your appearance and whatever and this is the class you should fit and so, my career is driven by that, not because I want to become anything specific. Our teachers of that time would choose subjects for us based on whose favourite you are, your popularity at school and whatever so... [Lutho, Individual Interview].

Educators are not only expected to teach educational content but to socialise young people into how social structures society work. They are expected to equip young

people with the tools to succeed beyond high school. They are expected to be the forerunners who know what lies ahead. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. The poor-quality teachers portrayed in the quotation above are associated with poorly-resourced public schools that cater for most children in South Africa.

The schools that the participants attended do not offer the type of career guidance that is portrayed in various writings (Brown & Lent, 2013; NQF/CAS, 2013; SAQA, 2009; Watts, 2009). The students interviewed in this study did not cite the one-to-one career counselling and guidance that dominates career psychology texts (Albien & Naidoo, 2017; Savickas, 2013; Watson, 2013). When students talk about career guidance, they refer to mass career expos or exhibitions.

Yes, I knew about them because there was a person from the University of Ibhayi who came to our school to tell us about them [entry points]. They told us that if you got certain points... there are tests to be written... all those things we were told. There was also someone from Darling Private College who also told us, and people from the University of Ibhayi when we were in grade 12... what is that thing? Career expo... we also went to the University of Ibhayi to see [Sandile, Individual Interview].

Poorly-resourced schools, coupled with poorly trained educators have a negative influence on the educational experiences of learners.

6.4.2 School Subjects Matter

There are different reasons why learners choose different school subject combinations. Some learners choose certain school subjects because they believe these subjects hold a future in their career plans. Some simply believe that some school subjects are better than other subjects. No matter what school subjects learners do at school, their future careers are shaped and influenced by these choices, be it a forced or personal choice. As soon as a learner takes a particular stream, her or his future education is likely to be influenced or shaped by this earlier choice.

During high her high school years, Phumeza held a negative perception about subjects like Mathematical Literacy and History, although her perception of History changed later in her life. She never chose History as one of her school subjects.

[...] 'cause back then they used to say that if you do History... you would struggle to go to university and things like that. So, I thought there is no way I would go and do History [Phumeza, Individual Interview].

As high school learners, they did not perceive History as a worthwhile option.

[...] among us, you know when we talk as students that... no ways I can't choose History because it goes with Maths Lit... and Business [Phumeza, Individual Interview].

Mathematical Literacy is also one of the subjects that learners undermine.

[W]e'd say 'yoh, I'm not going to do Maths Lit. 'cause they count eggs and stuff'. So, [...] we grew up with the idea that Maths Lit. is not right, Maths is right [Phumeza, Individual Interview].

According to Phumeza, the idea that some school subjects are not good comes from the students themselves.

[...] comes from students because it has never happened that a teacher said that 'don't choose Maths Lit'... the teachers have never said that... but it's those small talks that 'I can't do Maths Lit. 'cause they count eggs and all that' [Phumeza, Individual Interview].

Some students avoid certain subjects because they dislike or fear those subjects. For example, Licebo opted not to do Mathematics at school.

Okay my subjects were Business Economics, Home Economics, Biology and what else? History. This was rather a structured choice because the school [...] would tell that [sic] we have got course A, B, C, you would choose from those courses you... get to choose that you want certain subjects. You are stuck with what you chose; you will do it till the end [Licebo, Individual Interview].

She chose group C subjects rather than group A subjects because she hated Mathematics.

'A' had Maths and Physics and I hated Maths... I really hated it, maybe it is because in fact I started hating it in grade 9. We had this teacher... things started to be tense in grade 9. It was easy from, at first, when I got to grade 9 I got the real deal. Like back then there was pure Maths, it was mixed but like what they do now you choose between

Maths Lit. and pure Maths - it did not exist. You would get teachers that do not want to explain. I'm that type of person who takes time understanding but when I catch it, it sticks for good and it must be something that I do every day until I get it and then when I'm used to it... but that teacher got fed-up. When you spoke about Maths to me it was like you were speaking another language. But I passed, I don't know how but I did. The following year when I chose subjects, Maths was my enemy [Licebo, Individual Interview].

In Licebo's school, learners could make their choices based on the three streams provided, unlike in Vuyisa's school where learners were grouped according to their perceived abilities.

Okay, from grade 8 and grade 9 what they would normally do is when you are in grade 9, at the end of the year when you are in grade 9, they would come to class you see, and then they would choose people that got best marks in the class you see, and they would say 'okay, you, it's either you gonna do Physical or Science, it's up to you'... I mean Physics or Economics [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

After the students who were seen as academically strong were chosen for Economics and Physical Sciences subjects, “[...] *then the rest will go to Tourism. That was the system that was used that time...*” [Vuyisa, Individual Interview]. According to Vuyisa, if there had been no such system in his school, “*I think I would have done Finance if not Tourism, but Physics was not my main*” [Vuyisa Individual Interview]. Unfortunately, “[b]ecause I had good marks from grade nine I was forced in grade ten, I had no time to change” [Vuyisa Individual Interviews]. The school might have believed that this system was good.

[I]t wasn't because I ended up, okay it wasn't a good thing cause first you don't get to do... you don't get to choose which subjects you want to do because at the end of the day you're the one who is gonna be studying those subjects [Vuyisa, Individual Interview].

Students normally choose their subjects because they believe that they are likely to succeed in those subjects or because the subjects are in line with their career aspirations. In one of the cases cited earlier, Phumeza was struggling with Mathematics and Physical Sciences, but she believed these subjects would give her access to a wide range of career fields. The presence of family members who had

good jobs kept her hopeful that with those school subjects, she was likely to land in a good career path. Unlike Phumeza, Licebo chose business-related subjects because she hated Mathematics, while Nomhle was just scared of Mathematics from the word go.

When a learner chooses school subjects, their career options are automatically narrowed. Choosing school subjects comes as part of the structural turning point associated with progression expectations in the education system (Hodkinson, 2009). Their perception of their ability to succeed in particular subjects is shaped by their previous performance, although Licebo hated Mathematics because he did not have a good Mathematics teacher. As learners move up the educational ladder, their focus shifts and their academic performance might change. For this reason, some students pass grade 12 well, while others have mediocre results and others do not pass at all. Some learners do not even get to grade 12. Therefore, one can choose school subjects based on what they want to do in future, but this is not the only element that matters. Ultimately, no matter what subjects a learner chooses, and no matter what career path they wish to follow, they must be competent in their chosen area of study, because there is stiff competition for entry into post-school education and training.

6.4.3 Academic Performance Matters

The highest grade completed plays a big role in the career choices of students when they get to college. First, students with no grade 12 are forced to settle for the NC(V) or N1 programmes when they go to TVET colleges. Those who have grade 12 are more likely to choose NATED, but this is not always the case, especially in Engineering, where TVET colleges do not offer the practical component in the NATED programmes. Sindiswa and Asanda are Engineering students who chose to do the NC(V) because they wanted the practical component. They understood from the beginning that the NC(V) programme is equivalent to the high school FET phase, but insisted that they wanted nonetheless.

Sandile was born in Motherwell in 1994. He failed grade 12 in 2012 and stayed three years at home without studying, although occasionally his brother would call him to work in a construction company for brief periods. Because he believed that he needed good grades to study further, he wanted to upgrade his Matric performance.

I thought I could upgrade my grade 12, but when I got to the upgrading school, it was full... the place in Bethelsdorp [Sandile, Individual Interview].

After three years of staying at home, Sandile went to the TVET college to register for a course in Marketing but ended up registering for a Finance programme. His first choice was Marketing because that was the only programme he had some information on before going to college.

[S]ince I think... another thing is that my sister did Marketing here, so, in my mind I thought 'mxm', let me go and do Marketing also [Sandile Individual Interview].

Although he wanted to do Marketing when he first went to the college, he was allowed to explore a different programme.

Okay, you see, before you choose, my brother neh, [...] There's a test that you write [...] there is a lecturer called Mrs Bones; she looked at my test results and she also looked at my grade 11 report, she said 'look, you were doing Accounting, and the things you wrote here', the questions that I answered say that I love Accounting. Was it Accounting and what else? I think there were three things that said 'you... you love Accounting, you see, and in your grade 11 report you didn't do badly, you see!' [Sandile, Individual Interview].

Because he struggled with Accounting in grade 12 and failed it, he was scared of doing Accounting, although the aptitude test proved that he would do better in Accounting. When he was informed by a lecturer, Mrs Bones, that he had the aptitude to study accounting, he was not convinced.

[...] I said no ma'am, Accounting is difficult. She said that Accounting starts at the basic level here, you can't just be given difficult Accounting just like that. So, I thought okay man, let me do it if we are going to start with basics [Sandile, Individual Interview].

He had arrived at the college with his mind made up that he wanted to do Marketing, but after a brief conversation with a lecturer, he changed his mind.

[I]t took a few minutes, not even a day... few minutes and then I went downstairs and the senior lecturer for Finance came and told us the things that we will be doing. He asked is we were sure about this... if we don't want to change, and we said 'yes', and then he wrote 'Finance' [Sandile, Individual Interview].

This story contradicts the view that students choose programmes based on their primary interests, and that the subjects that they choose at high school limit what they will choose when they get to post-school education and training institutions. High school subjects can serve as a guide, but may not always be a determining factor. Sometimes a bad experience with a school subject may mean that a learner will avoid anything related to that subject.

It's what I've been telling you that I chose Marketing though I know I want Accounting, but Accounting is difficult. So, I told myself that I must just go and do Marketing, you see! I didn't know what kind of a thing it was, I know it's about marketing, advertising... all those things, but I didn't know what I'd do after completing Marketing... or what to do [Sandile, Individual Interview].

6.5 CONCLUSION

The findings presented in this chapter show a mixture of circumstances. One group consists of students who do not hold grade 12 at all and therefore had limited chances of pursuing post-school studies that would ultimately lead to their dream careers. Some have completed grade 12 with a diploma status and could access TVET college education. This situation has led to a general perception that TVET colleges are for those whose Matric results are not good enough for them to gain university admission. This issue is covered quite extensively in the literature, pointing to the fact that although most students in TVET colleges did not do well in high school, that does not necessarily mean that TVET colleges are for poor academic performers. It can, however, mean that in South Africa, there is an understanding that the 'traditional' academic expectations are exclusive in both nature and application. Unless significant changes are made, education and training will continue to favour those who come from wealthy and middle-class backgrounds whose schools offer a good enough education to set them on their career paths.

This chapter also looked at structures, such as gender, family structure and the education system, that influence students' career choices. The dominant view of gender is linked to socialisation, thereby leading to the idea that women and men choose gendered career paths. The participants in this study did not agree with this

perception, but a careful consideration of their life stories reveals significant differences between the experiences of men and women. Because of their different life experiences, men and women tend to make different career choices. Also, their family backgrounds (for example literate versus illiterate families) play a significant role. Culturally, young people develop differently, and they are prepared differently for the future. The contribution that these findings make in the literature on career choices is that family background, gender, the schools that learners attend, and all their life experiences affect their career choices. In line with Careership Theory, understanding the full background of the social agent making the choice is a vital step towards understanding their career choice.

The findings of this study go beyond the simplistic notion that working-class children are destined to pursue working-class careers. Poor and working-class children aspire, but their choices in life are limited by the economic resources at home, lack of access to social networks, the quality of schools they attend, as well as their performance. Their limited access to knowledge and resources, in general, affects what they come to know, and what they come to see as possible. In short, the odds are stacked against poor and working-class children and in favour of the middle and upper-class children. However, I must emphasise that my intention is not to claim that the poor will remain poor, and the rich will remain rich. Poor and working-class people achieve beyond expectations through the exercise of agency. It is, nonetheless, important to note that although all social agents are travellers, doers, choosers, and actors, they do not possess the same capacity to do so. The following chapter dwells more on this debate around agency and structure, as well as navigational capacity.

CHAPTER 7

AGENTIALLY NAVIGATING SOCIAL STRUCTURES

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents and analyses the findings associated with the last sub-question: *'how do students agentially navigate social structures'*? This chapter is presented at four levels of analysis. The first level is linked to the data itself, where three participants are quoted at length. The second level involves an analysis of these findings with the aid of relevant and related literature. The third level involves analysis using the Careership Theory, particularly the routines and turning points, horizon for action, and serendipity as well as Bourdieu's idea of agency and structure, which is linked to habitus, field and capital. The fourth level is a theoretical shift from determinism, which is associated with Arjun Appadurai's idea of the capacity to aspire (or navigational capacity).

This chapter presents one theme, which is supported by three sub-themes. The main theme is 'it is not easy, but it is worth trying'. When I look at the responses of the participants and concerning the research sub-question *'How do students agentially navigate social structures'*, the recurring idea is: it is not easy. Going to a post-school institution is a difficult mission. It is a journey whose path is a boulevard at a young age but becomes a narrow footpath as students grow older. Two sub-themes also emerged, namely 'down and out', 'enough is enough'. I use these sub-themes to later bring in the notion of navigational capacity (Appadurai, 2004).

7.2 DOWN AND OUT: LIFE EXPERIENCE OF NOLUBABALO

For some young people, life is not easy. The case in point is Nolubabalo who, despite her difficult life, kept on moving forward. Although she was studying at Metro TVET College in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro during the time of the interview, she was born in a different province.

I was born in Johannesburg in Zone 4 in Soweto. On my mother's side, I'm the one daughter and the only daughter. I was born in 1989 the 1st of January. And then, the name of my mother is Bukeka Balfour who passed away in 1996, the 1st of January [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

When her mother passed away, she moved to KwaZulu-Natal to look for her father.

I moved to KwaZulu-Natal for the first time to look for my father. They told me that he lives in Maqonqo in Pietermaritzburg only to find out that he live [sic] in Durban at a place called Cato Crest, which is a squatter settlement [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

To carry on with education, she attended Cato Crest Primary School and because she did not have a report, she was made to repeat grade 7. She did not complete that school year.

[...] because we never stayed in peace with my father, my father was physically, sexually, emotionally abusive to me, then I moved to Bergville. I run [sic] away from home and went to stay in Bergville because I couldn't handle him because he was smoking weed... marijuana, and drink alcohol. Then I moved away, then from [sic] Bergville, I started to grow up because I was like 13, and then 14... at the age of 14, I started to face the reality and the life [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

She could not return to Johannesburg.

[...] that side, my mother's father is in the side of North West or Botswana. So, she's from there, because firstly, my grandmother was married, then she got my mother and my uncle, and then she divorced, and then she got married again. So, that family in Johannesburg, it's not actually my family. So, the fact that my mom passed away and my uncle passed... so, I don't have a family anymore. She's sick so, she cannot let me stay there anymore. So, I have to look for my father and my father's family [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

It is unfortunate that her father, who was her only remaining biological parent, was not able to take care of his daughter. Many issues come into play here. One of the issues that stand out is being homeless and having no family support. She was a young girl, moving from one province to another on her own. She had to drop out of school twice before the age of fourteen because of her predicament. When her mother was alive,

she experienced periods of routine where her life progressed without major interruptions. Unfortunately, her life took a sharp turn when her mother passed away, and several turning points could be observed in her life.

Having to leave her place of birth and the only family she knew at such young age was a major turning point in her life. Other turning points followed. She managed to find her father who lived in a shack with his girlfriend and their two children. Just when she thought her life was getting back to normal by returning to school, she experienced various forms of abuse, including sexual abuse, from her biological father. She had to run away from her father, thereby experiencing another turning point in her life. At that time, she became fully aware that indeed, "I don't have a mother and my father is a junky; he drinks; he is the person who is so abusive and he is a drug addict" [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

She ran to Bergville to members of her father's extended family.

[...] extended family that raised my father, and there was grandmother and grandfather. So, here and there, the way I was treated, because I'm the outsider, I was treated as an outsider. They told me that I have to pay them, which means I have to work for everything that I get, you see! So, it's not like I'm getting paid for [sic] money, I'm only getting paid for food [sic] [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

Although she thought she was at home, troubles did not cease to follow her. A chain of events that took place further shaped and reshaped Nolubabalo's life. She was not treated like a child in her newly-found grandparents' home. She explained that she had been raped many times by her father, grandfather and other people.

[...] from grade 10 I went to Mnambithi at Saint John's [School]. I studied there... by June, because I stayed with some people... it was someone who saw that I was a hard worker, how I clean the house, how I take care of the house, and then decided that I could be her domestic worker, but offer me education. It was at the age of 16. I studied there in Mnambithi. From Mnambithi... by June, they decided that I must stop working [as a domestic worker], because I fought with their child. So, in 2006, I left grade 10 in the middle of the year, I didn't continue studying [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

When she returned to Bergville, the grandmother arranged forced marriage for her. She escaped from this forced marriage and went to stay with another distant relative in New Castle. Unfortunately, this female distant relative died within a few months, but she kept on staying with her family. The husband of Nolubabalo's female distant relative married another wife. During the year, the house was occupied by Nolubabalo and another young girl. Tragedy struck.

So, it was just the two of us, we stayed the whole year together, and going to school. Then, both of us got raped because you see, gangs knew that there were two girls living alone. So, they broke into the house, and they beat us, then they raped us, and we both fell pregnant at the same time [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

After she gave birth to her daughter, she had to work. She worked in the Northern Cape and Free State provinces as a domestic worker. She also worked for a music band as a singer. Her new family also established a hair salon where she would also work. While she was working at the salon, the new wife of Nolubabalo's late distant relative's husband advised her to study.

So, I stayed with her for some time and then she asked what I wish to be, or what I want to do in life because I can't be sitting in her salon forever. I told her that I wish to go back to school. So, in 2014, we started to look for a school. I went all around Durban, Johannesburg and other places but apparently, it was late when I got there. So, in 2014, I didn't find a place to study so, I went back to the salon. I raised another money for myself and then in 2015 I came here to find a place to study since I had come in October to apply. Then in January, I came again only to find that my application was approved since I applied last year. So, I started here at school in 2015 doing Generic Management, now for three years I have been studying [Nolubabalo, Individual Interview].

Choosing a career is important in the lives of young people and adults (Mengistu, 2017). When social agents make choices, they do not choose the conditions under which they make these choices (Marx, 1852). In the case of Nolubabalo, making a career choice was not easy. She wanted to be an artist (a singer) and a drama performer. She used to sing and perform at school. She also worked for about four months for a music band, but there was no money. She has a child and a family that she is not biologically related to. Experiences such as that of Nolubabalo can be

explained from the Careership theoretical perspective concerning Bourdieu's notion of capital, be it cultural, economic or social, to explain why some young people are in a better position to follow their dreams, while others are disadvantaged (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). In the Careership Theory, capital (cultural, economic and social) is accumulated over time. In this way, the Careership Theory treats career choices as heavily influenced by past experiences.

From a careership perspective, Nolubabalo's poor background did not give her enough capital. Because of this, the field was not smooth for her. Her horizon for action was very limited. Looking specifically at the role of the woman she now calls 'mother', the role of significant others is also evident and recognisably important. It is, nonetheless, important to acknowledge that Nolubabalo's life has not been easy and that her life experience may have instilled in her a spirit of resilience. She may pursue her dreams and succeed, not because her family laid a life foundation for her, but because her life experience serves as a springboard.

The Careership Theory asserts that students cannot choose careers that they do not see themselves fitting. It further asserts that students cannot choose programmes that do not exist or programmes that are out of their horizons for action (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1993). Choosing, therefore, is linked to the knowledge of what to choose. The Careership Theory also addresses the idea of chance or serendipity, where a student happens to be lucky. More importantly, the theory outlines different types of routines where students adapt and adjust to their choices. The Careership Theory further explains that students do not always have the knowledge they require, hence their decisions are not always technically rational (Hodkinson, 2009). There comes a time in one's life when life seems impossible. According to Maja, this can be likened to empty navigational maps, that is, maps devoid of navigational information (Maja, 2020).

Being stuck in this regard means you do not know whether you are going or coming. Your life is no longer driven by a dream of tomorrow or the future. Your life is just in the present, what may be called *stuckness* (Mnqwazi, 2015). You can be so stuck in poverty that you stop dreaming about the beautiful future. You can lose all your dreams. This goes beyond habituation and *doxa* (Galvaan, 2015; Myles, 2004). It goes beyond accepting one's circumstances as normal and not to be questioned. You may

remain aware that you are stuck in poverty. You may fight to get out, but you may get discouraged after many attempts. Despite all these, it is important to note that Nolubabalo's lack, her poverty, and her unfortunate circumstances, have awakened the resilience and agency in her (Laughland-Booÿ et al., 2014).

Nolubabalo has a grade 9 school report that she used to gain access to the college. When she mentioned that she does not have a mother and that she had to accept her reality, especially that she had been mistreated and abused, both the power of microstructure and agency could be identified. Here is a young girl with no parents, with no home, with no resources of her own, who tolerated all kinds of ill-treatment so that she could have an education. She had the agency to initiate contact whenever she was desperately in need. Unfortunately, though, most of her life was in other people's hands. Her relations with other people, both those who were good and generous to her and those who were abusive towards her, influenced her life. She could not complete school, not because she did not have the intellectual ability to do so, but because her life circumstances did not allow her.

It is important to emphasise here that career decisions are made with the help of other social actors in the field. For Nolubabalo, it was through her newly-found mother that she was able to see the possibility of going to the TVET college. It was through her support that she started to aspire to study once again. Although she did not find what she was looking for, TVET college staff talked her into taking up Generic Management. It is also important to highlight that it was through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme that she was able to study. This demonstrates that, while there are disenabling social structures, there are also enabling ones. It is this kind of assistance from the government that goes beyond adding hope to the poor and the marginalised, to offer practical assistance. As much as this government welfare approach may not bridge the gap between the poor and the rich with immediate effect, it is meaningful to individual actors.

Nolubabalo settled for the NC(V) programme because that is the level at which she could be admitted. She understood that she would be completing a qualification that is equivalent to completing high school. She was determined to do that, to walk that path. For her, it was a great opportunity just to be studying. Looking at her life experiences, her educational choices and her navigational capacity were limited. This

is evident in how she looked for a college to enrol in. Even her choice to do Generic Management was informed by the availability of space. So, the four A's - availability, accessibility, achievement and aspiration (Sellar & Gale, 2011) come into play. Her academic achievement was low, the availability of programmes was limited, but she had the aspiration to study, and access was made possible by the NSFAS government bursary scheme. In the following section, I examine the life experiences of Lutho, a 37-year old female student at Metro College.

7.3 ENOUGH IS ENOUGH: LIFE EXPERIENCE OF LUTHO

TVET colleges cater for a diverse range of students, and those who need a second chance in education can find a home there (DHET, 2013). Although she is a “mature student” in terms of age, Lutho was excited about studying at Metro College. For her, “education liberates a person’s mind” [Lutho, Individual Interview]. Going to the TVET college to study after fifteen years of marriage gave her a sense of freedom. As I have already discussed in Chapter 6, women have unique experiences that shape and influence their life choices. The issue of gender goes way beyond the general notion that some careers are for men, and others are for women.

Lutho was born in Khayelitsha Township in Cape Town, in the Western Cape Province. During the time of the interview, she was 37 years of age. She describes her township as ‘rough’. Many townships in South Africa are perceived to be ‘rough’, meaning that they are dangerous. They are associated with crimes such as mugging, break-ins, fighting, stabbing, shootings, gangsterism, and drug and alcohol abuse. Research studies conducted in some parts of the Western Cape quote students talking about crime and violence (Galvaan, 2015; Powell, 2014). Even in the interviews conducted in this study, students mentioned crime in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

Lutho and her older sister were brought up by their mother, who is a divorcee. Although they were smart learners, there has never been anyone who motivated them.

Education was never in my family. My mom was never a person who’s involved in our education, so though we were clever there’s no one to motivate us or to encourage us in matters related to school, we just moved on our own and stuff [sic] [Lutho, Individual Interview].

This lack of support may be a result of her mother's role in the family.

I think basically or it's based on that the fact that my mom is uneducated maybe that is why she was not involved. My mom is that person with tough love, she's emotionally connected to us, she's that kind of parent who thinks she has to put food on the table and to cater for needs your needs, that's about it, we don't have that connection of White people's, bond whatever [sic] [Lutho, Individual Interview].

The public schools she attended were under-resourced.

I went to public schools where our teachers were less informed, like they are not advanced and whatever uneducated and stuff. We grew up where English was taught in IsiXhosa, where we were never explained how to choose a career, there are no career exhibitions, this is a career for you and here are the subjects you must do. You are only told according to opinion and your appearance and whatever and this is the class you should fit and so, my career is driven by that not because I want to become a particular something [Lutho, Individual Interview].

In her teenage years, her academic performance was affected by typical teen behaviour.

I did my matric there [in Khayelitsha]. I failed because I was in my teenage 'what-what', partying and doing all sorts of things so I decided I was not going back to school [Lutho, Individual Interview].

After failing Matric, her challenges were compounded.

So, I was about eighteen or nineteen, I fought with my mom and ran away from home [laughs], that's when I met my husband. I ran away from home because I just wanted to get away from that house so I met my husband, he was my boyfriend then so I was nineteen. [...] I took all my stuff and left... moved from Cape Town, I didn't know where I was going and I was with my friend and I told her I'm going to Jo'burg to start a new life [Lutho, Individual Interview].

She got married at a very young age.

On our way we ended up in Bluelilliesbush [laughs] and that's where I met my husband in Bluelilliesbush and that's where we started dating and all that. Within a year's time we got married with my husband and we started a new life 'coz basically I got married

for only one reason only, to get away from home. The idea of someone wanting to marry me and then I'm thinking "yes this is what I want", at least I'm leaving home and I wasn't thinking about anything else, which is I was naive and I was young at the time and I got married. I was in love at a young age and this guy was crazy about me [Lutho, Individual Interview].

In the second interview with Lutho, I asked more about why she ran from home in the first place.

She's [stutters] (my mother) emotionally abusive neh! And there is my sister; my sister and I didn't get along together and stuff you see so, things were like very very very bad! Also, I was in, I was a teenager so, I ended up being rebellious and stuff (cellphone alert) so, I resorted to 'I don't care attitude', and I said 'let me just leave 'cause my mom was not home, and her emotional talks, yoh, my mother is a very very very emotionally and verbally abusive. So, she would say something like 'I hate you', 'I wish you were not alive', 'I wish you were dead', 'I wish this...' and all those things. So, I decided that, 'you know what, let me take the things she's saying and make them a reality for her by leaving her, and that's what happened [Lutho, Individual Interview].

Lutho's mother had also experienced abuse in her marriage and she had several miscarriages as she was physically attacked by her husband. She therefore never wanted Lutho to see her father. Lutho also explained that by the time she was nineteen years of age, she had attempted suicide three times. She realised that suicide was both not working and painful.

Two times I was not caught and it was not successful. The third time I was caught and I was in coma for about three weeks, yes, and that's where me and my mom started talking about how I felt about the things she was doing. So, it started there when I was undergoing therapy {burps}, sorry! We were going there together so, they wanted to understand what really happened because I swallowed all the pills that were in the house. It was bad, it was really bad, I almost died, it was really bad. She would come to my bed... I was confused... she would cry and all. I was confused hey! I didn't understand, 'you act like you hate me, like now I'm at the verge of dying and then like you show love. I was confused, really confused. After I survived I told myself that I'm not going to try and kill myself anymore. What I will do is, I will just leave. I love movies, I would watch movies and see people packing their clothes and leave. I told myself I'm gonna do this one day. This other day my mother came from a night shift and went to

sleep, my sister was at school, I took her money. I knew where she kept it. I think it was around R300 and something like that. I took that money, I had already packed my bags the previous day and kept them at my friend's house, my suitcase and stuff. And then I just packed my stuff and told myself that I'm leaving, but I was going with one of my friends... she was not really my friend because she was older than me [Lutho, Individual Interview].

Her life in Bluelilliesbush was different from her previous life in Cape Town.

I got married in a rural area. Being a location girl, things were tough, we fetch water very far, we work hard in the field, 'what what' and hey, life was terrible, poverty like I experienced poverty, it was my first time to experience it in first degree, it was like wow! [Lutho, Individual Interview].

Her marriage did not work out.

So, I think I stayed there for about 5 years in the rural area, and I was like "no, this is not the life for me", my marriage was like... I was in a very abusive marriage, very abusive in every way you can think of the word "abuse", every category there is [sic]. I and my husband moved, that's how I got to Port Elizabeth. My husband got a job offer this side and then we moved and stayed here in Port Elizabeth. I think it was 10 years later when I realised that no, 'coz my husband was a controlling freak. He didn't want me to work and stuff and I always wanted to go back to school, I thought that I used to be someone who wanted to go back to school, I said "I want a career and stuff" but my husband wouldn't allow me and stuff, now when I saw that my marriage was ending, so I forced matters and I said to him "I'm going back to school" and that's how this whole thing started up. So, I started owning up to my own life and started taking decisions for my own life and all that, so I didn't care about anything or whatever. So, I came to Metro TVET College to enrol. That's how I got here at Metro TVET College [Lutho, Individual Interview].

In career counselling and development there is a dominant view that proper guidance enables the client (student) to make an informed decision about what career they want. From the Careership Theory perspective, it is neither wise nor advisable to judge the success of career guidance intervention in this way because intervention can happen either too late or too early to have the desired effect (Hodkinson et al., 1996). It is generally expected that students must be able to articulate why they choose a

particular institution over another, and why one programme over other programmes. Where to study and what to study is dependent on the horizon for action (Rosvall et al., 2020). In Lutho's case, her choice of both college and programme has nothing to do with planning and choosing carefully. She just wanted to study. Her options were also limited by the fact that there are only two public TVET colleges in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

During the time of the interview, she was doing N6 in Public Management. She started her college education at NC(V) Level because she does not hold a grade 12 certificate. She is doing Public Management because she feels that it speaks to her political ambition. Also, she thought that this course would enable her to find employment in the public sector as she does not want to work in the private sector. She would prefer to work for the government, so she believes that a diploma in Public Management has the potential to get her a job in the government. She sees Public Management as a way to earn a living. She needs a job to earn a living, and then she can pursue her real passion.

I have this thing that says when I have completed my diploma, I must pursue Theology [...], but I will never study full time ever again, it will always be part time from now on... but thing is maybe I'm scared because I came out of marriage bare hands[sic]. I don't want anything and stuff, now I have a challenge, it's like I'm starting afresh, so I'm scared that if I'm rooting myself into Ministry, I don't want to subsist on people's monies, hence now I want a diploma of my own and work, I need to have stability, you see? Because I don't want to be those people who are crazy, 'tithe tithe! [laughs] If you don't tithe God is gonna be angry', because I'm hungry, I don't want that, I want to preach the Gospel not under pressure, preach it as it is pure [Lutho, Individual Interview].

What influenced Lutho's career choice? This question sits at the centre of this study. I wish to emphasise that inequality plays a major role in how social agents act. Unequal power relations mean that some social actors, for example, Lutho's mother and husband, have a certain degree of control over other social actors' actions. As a child, she felt that she would be better off away from home because of ill-treatment. She was in an abusive marriage for fifteen years, unable to work or study. She explained why she stayed in an abusive relationship for a long time.

Hence, I stayed for so many years, you see, you pray, you hope that things will change, try to talk to him that please change ABCD, that's what most women do when they are in abusive what what [sic]. You pray and hope that things will change. Because first of all, you love this person, you don't see a rapist, you don't see an abuser, you see this man that you love so much that you desperately want him to change. You would do anything hence I prayed, I start praying about it, what what [sic], but I could see that this person is not interested in changing. He enjoys hurting another person, that's whereby [sic] I saw that I'm being unfair to myself now, you see! I then told myself that before I fall in love, that's my new motto, now before I fall in love with anybody else, I love myself first before I love you, that's why I know that ABCD I will not tolerate because I love me first, I love you second [Lutho, Individual Interview].

It is important to focus on where the person comes from, what they have gone through, to understand where they are going, as well as why they are going there. Without understanding this life experience, it would be hard to understand why Lutho chose Public Management at the TVET college. Her story is that of agency, as much as it is of oppression associated with patriarchy. She had to fight not just an individual to get her life back, but she had to fight an abusive partner, who had been socialised within a patriarchal society, who felt entitled and justified to decide whether another socialised being could work or study, or not. Women are forced to fight to do what they want with their lives because as much as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa says that all people are equal, gender-based violence hinders many women from exercising their rights.

Since she stayed in the marriage for many years, her options shrank. She was 37 years of age during the time of the interview, so she falls outside the category of youth that the country's policymakers are concerned about. She does not have a matric certificate. Her options are limited to programmes that do not require a matric certificate. She was young when she decided not to do matric again, but considering her home situation, it is understandable why she had to make certain choices at that age, for example getting married. Her story shows agency. It shows an agency that was later met halfway by an enabler through the government bursary scheme. She can study, knowing that her fees are covered by the state. Had she not initiated a move to the TVET college, the bursary would not be relevant to her. While women experience hardships, men also experience other forms of hardship.

The experiences of these two participants can be interpreted from the broader sociological framework. As already indicated, these experiences, and those shared in Chapter 6, do fit within the Careership Theory concerning capital, field and habitus, routines and turning points, as well as pragmatical rationality. Bourdieusian analysis comes to the rescue as it helps to unpack the hidden social structures that perpetuate inequality and its reproduction. These experiences can also be analysed using the notion of the capacity to aspire, concerning whether aspirations fail or not. Appadurai would speak of failed aspirations (Appadurai, 2004), but Ray would speak of aspirational windows, arguing that aspirations do not fail (Genicot & Ray, 2014). In Ray's scheme of things, aspirations are always there, the only thing that fails is the capability to pursue these aspirations. It is also evident from the shared experiences that the students have high hopes and aspirations, but their lived experiences limit them to certain kinds of career pathways.

These experiences further show how gender inequality and gender-based violence impact the lives of women. It is argued that in South Africa, gender-based violence is more prevalent despite the constitutional rights and laws about equality (Graaff & Heinecken, 2017). It is also claimed that gender-based violence is prevalent all over the world (Itegi & Njuguna, 2013). Women are most affected by gender-based violence aspects such as sexual exploitation, forced marriages, inequality in marriages, and other forms of violence against women. This violence against women is also evident in education whereby women are forced to drop out of schools, perform poorly, and struggle to access post-school education (Itegi & Njuguna, 2013). Concerning the current study, the participants whose lives, and consequently their career decisions, were influenced by gender (and its related challenges), are Lutho, Licebo, Nolubabalo and Nomhle.

7.4 CONCLUSION

What stands out in this study is that making a career choice is not easy, and for some young people from poor (low socio-economic status) backgrounds, it can hardly be called a choice. The significance of this chapter is that it moves beyond the original conception of the Careership Theory. It acknowledges that the Careership Theory provides some explanations, but that with changes in society, the analysis must also change. Even the concepts deployed by Bourdieu have transformed over the decades

to try and explain changing circumstances. What I may consider new in this dissertation is the combination of Appadurai's navigational capacity and Hodkinson's careership. In past studies, navigational capacity has been explored concerning Bourdieu's social theory, but not concerning the Careership Theory. The stories shared in this chapter show how coming from poor and working-class background limits a person's capacity to navigate in life. The maps that young people from poor and working-class families carry are often not very useful, and in some cases, these maps are almost absent. The model that has been conceptualised in this study will be explained in more detail in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 8

THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous three chapters shared the views of students on several matters regarding the three research sub-questions that guided the inquiry of this study. This chapter seeks to consolidate the findings presented in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This chapter covers several theoretical explanations of the influence of career decision making. From the perspective of the Careership Theory, the chapter shows how the students in this study made pragmatically rational career decisions within their horizons for action. The chapter further shows how these pragmatically rational career decisions are located in the habitus of the social actors, and how they are influenced by capital and field. These pragmatically rational career decisions are also influenced by routines and turning points. The chapter then proceeds to consider a broader Bourdieusian perspective on how career decisions are made, including through the influence of gender, family and educational institutions. The chapter further presents an acknowledgement that the Bourdieusian approach could be enhanced by considering Arjun Appadurai's notion of capacity to aspire, and the complement of Ray's aspirational windows. Most importantly, this chapter shows the synergy between all these theoretical conceptualisations. In this way, this chapter demonstrates a unified model of career decision making.

8.2 FROM HODKINSON AND BOURDIEU TO APPADURAI AND RAY

Chapter 4 attempted to unify Hodkinson's Careership Theory (and its Bourdieusian affiliation) with Appadurai's capacity to aspire. It also acknowledged the synergy between these theoretical approaches to social action. This chapter, as already alluded to, seeks to add the views and experiences of the students/participants into these theoretical explanations. This is done to add a fresh and localised perspective of these foreign theoretical approaches to career decision making.

The starting point of the Career Theory is that social agents act with intent; they plan their actions, and they think about the consequences of their actions in pragmatically rational terms (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). The findings of this study reveal something about this pragmatic rationality, for example, the students did not explain their career decisions as some grand plans where they considered every option, every route, and all advantages and disadvantages. They were not fully knowledgeable about what lay ahead so their navigational maps were not fully equipped with navigational information. They ended up in programmes that they had not thought of while they were still in high school, thereby experiencing different kinds of routines. Their career decisions had less to do with proper career planning and more to do with finding what was available or what was possible within their horizons for action.

For all the participants, except for Vuyo, poor matric results limited their possibilities. Also, their limited knowledge about the post-school education and training sector limited their capacity to explore more career options. Because of their backgrounds, the participants did not have much knowledge of what ought to be done. Their families, schools, and communities did not prepare them adequately for the world beyond school. With limited knowledge of what lies ahead, career decisions are bound to be restricted. These decisions are made in the field, which is influenced by capital and habitus.

Career decisions are influenced by the backgrounds of social agents. Some of the studies conducted in South Africa approach career decision-making from a Bourdieusian perspective (Galvaan, 2015; McMillan, 2014). These studies use the concept of habitus to explain why young people from different backgrounds make different career decisions. Part of the explanation lies in what their families and networks have to offer. Habitus does not emerge from a vacuum, but it is shaped and influenced by the cultural, economic and social conditions of the social agents. Primary and secondary socialisation is influenced by the cultural, economic and social environment. The role of older members of society is to help the young to learn the values, beliefs and norms of society. The involvement of parents in their children's education goes beyond helping children with homework and extends to helping children to plan for their future careers. Socialisation includes not only what children

are taught directly, but also what they see in their families and surroundings, as well as how they experience life. The students pointed out that studying drama and performing arts was not something they would consider, given the urgency to work and support themselves and their families.

It is important to note that habitus does not determine all actions and choices. It is subject to change with time and experience. Habitus is shaped and influenced by resources. Cultural, economic and social resources give birth to life experience. A person's background is very important for their socialisation, and their socialisation is very important for their actions and choices. When a social agent speaks, they articulate what they know; they are guided by their history and their internalised experiences. How we think reveals how we were raised. This is not to say that one does not change and think beyond their socialisation. When one thinks of habitus, one must think of it as durable, but not permanent (Maton, 2008). This habitus is influenced by the resources and experiences in the field.

When students enter the post-school education and training field, they enter with different capitals and habitus. Some come from family and school backgrounds that have equipped them with adequate cultural capital, whereas some lack the relevant social capital. The post-school education and training field is not a level playing ground. Some students have more knowledge of the field than others. Some have more resources with which to compete than others. Some can pay for their studies, while others rely on government funding. So, when we think about students' career choices, it is always important to look to consider where they come from, the resources they bring, as well as their subjective perceptions about where they come from, where they are and where they are going. As they journey through the different social fields, they experience both routines and turning points.

Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997) identified five types of routines, namely *confirmatory*, *contradictory*, *socialising*, *dislocating*, and *evolutionary*. A confirmatory routine happens when a student makes a programme choice that confirms their original interest. Among the participants in this study, Manelisi was not sure about what he wanted to do. When he enrolled on Office Administration, he discovered that there was a computer subject in the programme. For him, this part of the programme made him feel at home because he has a passion for computers. When he initially became

aware that he was not going to become a manager as he had thought, he was discouraged. Although the computer subject is just basic office administration related, it made him feel more at home. His identity started to develop positively towards his chosen career path.

In some cases, the routine might contradict the original choice. Students are likely to change from one programme to another or to develop a negative attitude towards their programme of first choice (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019). Phumeza is one of the students who felt this contradiction in her first programme to such an extent that she dropped out. Other students adapted well and started to enjoy their chosen programmes, except for Nomhle who did not like the computer subject in Office Administration. She was planning to continue with the programme to a higher level although she does not see herself as an office person, thereby going through a dislocating routine. Due to some structures of the education and funding systems, students choose to stay in the programme, even if they do not have an interest in the programme.

In some cases, the student can develop a new identity, thereby going through an evolutionary routine (Andersson & Barker-Ruchti, 2019; Hodkinson, 2009). Sindiswa, Phumeza and Nolubabalo are cases in point here. When she was still in high school, Phumeza thought she would do Environmental Health, Analytical Chemistry, Medicine or Nursing. She ended up going to a TVET college to study Primary Health. She did not like the programme and she dropped out. When she went to Metro College, she enrolled in a programme in Early Childhood Development, and she liked it very much. A new identity emerged. She was so motivated that she even started to volunteer at a daycare centre. Sindiswa had previously never considered Electrical Engineering, but while doing it, she started to enjoy it to such an extent that she said she would not trade it for any other career path. She even wishes to start a business in this area, and she wants to pursue the same area of study further at university. Nolubabalo wanted to do performing arts or drama but she never got an opportunity. As she studied a management course at the college, she started to develop a passion for it.

For Licebo, her passion for business was revealed when she enrolled in Business Management. She had always run a small business from primary school, through to high school. She currently has a small company that is not doing well, and she is motivated to have a thriving business of her own in future. She went to the TVET college to register for something that would help her to get a job. Business Management was the only programme available so, she did not choose it. However, doing Business Management confirmed her inner desire to become a business owner. It is difficult to confirm these routines at the TVET college level because the students have not experienced their careers in the labour market. Routines can be experienced at any time in life, for example during high school years where life is constant. These constant moments can be interrupted by turning points.

Turning points can be structural, self-initiated or forced by circumstances. Turning points might not be understood over a short period but can be well appreciated over an extended period. Turning points refer to times when an individual's life goes through transition or change (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Due to these turning points, a person's worldview changes, and so do their choices. A self-initiated turning point refers to a change or transformation in one's life where the individual concerned is proactive in the instigation of a new life course. When I look at all the participants, at some point they had to take the initiative of going to the TVET college. The level of initiation is not the same. For some, it was a matter of going through a structural turning point, like completing grade 12, and post-school education and training was next. Nonetheless, since life has not been easy for most of them, they had to take extra steps and push hard to get to the TVET college, apply, stand in queues, and finally register.

If the participants' lives were to be put on a timeline, these turning points would be more visible. Looking at Nolubabalo's life, forced turning points are evident. She was forced to leave her home when her mother passed away. She was forced to run away from her father due to abuse. She was also forced to run away from her step-grandparents after they sold her off. She has been forced by the circumstances to live with strangers. As much as she was forced, she also had the agency to initiate an escape. Some children would have stayed but she chose to escape. She chose to initiate a new family with strangers. She moved from one city to the next looking for

work. Even her going to the TVET college required a lot of initiating, albeit with some assistance from her new family.

Licebo has two children whom she must support. Her parents are struggling financially. She worked at different places. She was abused and mistreated at work to the point where she decided to quit. She could have stayed in that job for the sake of money, but it occurred to her that if she had a formal qualification, she could get a better job. At least she had completed matric, so going to the TVET college was possible. To initiate sometimes requires an enabler, like grade 9 or grade 12. Those with even lower academic credentials may need to attend adult or community education classes if they wish to study. People are different, and they act differently, even when faced with similar situations. They have been socialised differently. They think differently. People act according to how they perceive the world, and these perceptions are different for each person.

Apart from socialisation, difficult life experiences also influence the decisions that social agents make. Among the participants in the current study, there is one recurring notion, that is, being a woman comes with challenges. This is not to say that being a man is easy, but that certain experiences affect women more than men. Among the women participants, only three did not have children during the time of the interview. Those who had children had to put their educational journeys on hold at some point to take care of their children. Licebo and Nolubabalo had to work to support their children. For some women to finally enrol at a post-school education and training institution is a miracle that requires extraordinary agency on their part.

Due to their life experiences, there comes a time when they lose their dreams or be desperate enough to accept anything that comes their way. Although there is some recognition that women must be empowered, their life experiences may dictate otherwise. For example, the government provides bursaries and loans but for anyone to access these bursaries and loans, they must be eligible to study at a post-school education and training institution. Nolubabalo, Lutho, Licebo, and Nomhle were born in poor families. They attended local public schools. Their academic performance at school was not good. The government promises NSFAS to potential students like them, but without good primary and secondary schooling, plus the additional responsibility of raising children, they were not able to qualify to go to university. During

that time, they could not even go to public TVET colleges. In the case of Nolubabalo, the man who raped and impregnated her furthered his studies at an institution of higher learning. Lutho was in an abusive marriage for fifteen years. Her husband worked, but he did not allow her to do the same. For the sake of saving her marriage and keeping the peace, she followed his instructions although they were detrimental to her aspirations.

Lutho had to fight her husband so that she could study. This is an example of unequal power relations based on the social structure of patriarchy (Rai & Joshi, 2020). No person should require permission from another person to study and improve their life. Looking at gender from the perspective of advantage and disadvantage helps to discern more complex and subjective ways in which gender influences career choices. The main question of this study is ‘what influences the career decision making of public TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro’? Given the deliberations on gender, it is important to note that among the numerous possible influences, gender needs to be looked at in greater depth from different perspectives, including feminist viewpoints.

8.3 FAMILY: AGENT OF PRIMARY SOCIALIZATION

Children are born into families that become their primary areas of socialisation. The culture of the family, whatever its constitution and structure, is important for the development of the child. So, it is important to know where students come from to understand where they are going. Students are born into families and have other extended relations with members of the community. Parents play a pivotal role in the lives of their children, and this role can be extended to career choices. This influence can be both direct and indirect. In cases where parents are well versed in the education system, their influence is likely to be more direct. However, some parents have little or no knowledge of the education system (Ngozwana, 2018). In this case, their influence is likely to be indirect. These parents may have very little to offer in the manner of advice. If we consider the notion of capital, especially cultural capital, educated parents are likely to exercise more influence over their children. For example, Phumeza’s family members are well educated, and therefore getting to know about possible career options was something she could access at home. Participants like

Lutho had little to no access to this kind of knowledge; hence she mentioned that she did not even know what she wanted to do.

Career decisions are made in the field, and they depend on the capital that social agents bring into the field. The types of families that young people come from make a difference (Ball et al., 2000). This is also acknowledged in Bourdieu's social and cultural reproduction theory (Fataar, 2012; Goldthorpe, 2007; Rogošić & Baranović, 2016). Although we still have families of different socio-economic statuses, talking about class today is not the same as during Bourdieu's time. Therefore, the students of today are not Bourdieu's students of the 1970s; rather, some of them are those described in Maja (2020).

The notion of capacity to aspire is presented in *Youth self-formation and the 'capacity to aspire': The itinerant 'schooled' career of Fuzile Ali across post-apartheid space* (Fataar, 2010) and *South African Black Urban Youth Capacity to Aspire* (Maja, 2020). Fataar (2010) and Maja (2020) focused on Appadurai's notion of capacity to aspire. The attitudes that the participants in this study demonstrate are different, and these can be traced back to where they come from, their childhood experiences, the schools they attended, as well as their unique life experiences. For example, some participants had to work to support themselves and their children, whereas others did not have to work or perform adult responsibilities. For instance, Nolubabalo, Licebo, Phumeza and Nomhle all have children. Nolubabalo and Licebo come from family backgrounds where they had to work to support their children. Although Phumeza and Nomhle come from different backgrounds, both of them were not forced by the circumstances to work to support their children.

In *Practical matters: what young people think about vocational education in South Africa* (Needham & Papier, 2011), it was found that young people claim to want to pursue entrepreneurship or business, but they note that they speak of business in vague terms. The participants in this study also spoke of wanting to start and run their businesses, but in a vague manner. Only one student, Sindiswa, had confidence in her idea of business. This can be explained in multiple ways. One of the ways to explain this is first by acknowledging that young people know what is considered a good or bad life. Being a business person is appealing, and although most people are not business-oriented, they believe that being in business would give them a good life.

At a young age, children are more likely to pronounce that ‘when I grow up, I want to be a doctor’ because this is considered to be a good career. It is hard to determine if the young people who say they want to pursue businesses truly want to be in business or not. If they do indeed want to pursue a business, the reason they are not in business now is likely because they do not know where to start. They do not have a navigational map (Maja, 2020) towards a business direction. When asked, young people are likely to say that they want to be in business, even if they have never attempted any kind of business in the past, no matter how small. Some young people have never been socialised into business, so as much as they like the idea of business, their map towards this direction has limitations.

In South Africa, academic performance is important for academic progression. For example, university entry is based on the successful completion of grade 12 or equivalent. So far though, public TVET colleges have been lenient in their admission requirements, mainly as a form of social redress, to help those who never completed schooling as well. In the current study, the participants have shown that one of the reasons they ended up at the TVET college is the poor academic performance at high school, which led them not to be accepted at university. The only exceptions are Vuyo, who dropped out of university and Bongwiwe, who completed a diploma at university. The following sub-section looks at

8.4 THE INFLUENCE OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

In the South African education system, tertiary institutions use a point system for admissions, thereby making academic performance a key influence in career decision making. When students get to high school, grade 10 in particular, they go through a structural turning point where they must choose subjects. In this case, these subjects represent a possible career pathway to be chosen. School subjects do not determine the career choice to be taken but shape it, influence it, and make certain choices possible and others impossible in future. Also, other dynamics are not in the learners’ control, for example, admission requirements. When we talk about career choices, we must understand that learners can be as rational as possible, plan as much as possible, but if the institution where the programme of their choice is offered does not admit them for academic or other reasons, the learner may find themselves doing something else, somewhere else, and at another time.

Some young people have no maps at all; some have empty maps; and others have good maps to navigate (Maja, 2020). The type of map that one possesses is influenced by their experience, for example, home, school, and community life, as well as their social interactions (social capital). The education system stands out as one major influence, but it is also influenced by other structures. Research generally looks at how the schools, school culture, academic performance, and other services offered by the school, influence career choices. In Bourdieusian literature, this is called institutional habitus (Reay et al., 2001). Institutional habitus is a term used to refer to institutional influences, for example, how institutions like schools shape the character of the learners.

A child does not choose where they are born; they do not choose their families; they do not choose their sex; they do not choose their looks; they are just born. At a young age, a child does not choose whether to go to crèche or not; they do not choose whether to go to school or not, at least until grade 9. During these elementary years, parents and guardians make most of the decisions that affect the lives and the futures of the children. Ideally, parents should choose good schools for their children, but this is not an option for all parents. Some parents and children do not even think of schools outside their villages and townships because they are out of their horizon for action. It comes as a given that their children will attend local schools, whether these schools are good or not.

There is a relationship between socio-economic status, the school one attends, academic performance, school subjects, and the choice of a career path. The characteristics of the participants in this study are not different from those studied by Powell (2014), the urban youth studied by Maja (2020), the life of Fuzile Ali (Fataar, 2010), and those poor and marginalised youth with poor access to education and training (Baatjes, 2018). These studies reveal one important aspect that can be explained via concepts like poverty, marginalization, disadvantage, social exclusion, social injustice or symbolic violence. One of the explanations is that due to poverty, many young people in South Africa attend poor schools. As a result, their school subject combination and their performance are also poor. Therefore, their career prospects are limited, and this is an example of symbolic violence (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Everett, 2002).

In addition to the types of schools that young people attend, their performance is also worth considering. It is clear from the interviews conducted in this study that one major reason the participants ended up in the TVET college was their high school performance. A recent survey shows that few students in the TVET colleges passed grade 12 well (Papier et al., 2017). The authors are careful to state that this does not mean that TVET colleges are for those with poor academic track records, a point emphasised elsewhere (Powell, 2014). The government acknowledges that there are young people for whom attending school is a challenge. It acknowledges the existence of social and economic disadvantages. The schools are divided into quintiles for this reason. To proceed to a post-school education and training institution, previous academic results are required. Structurally speaking, young people are screened and sifted as they move along. As the participants in this study have emphasised, without good high school results, one's chances of furthering their studies are limited. This is what in Careership Theory is called a horizon for action (Rosvall et al., 2020). This is where structure clashes with the agency. The education system is structured like that. This is the reason we have the NQF in South Africa and elsewhere. The same can be said about the school subject combination.

The choice of school subjects has an obvious influence on career choices. To pursue a career in Engineering, it makes sense to do school subjects like Mathematics and Physical Sciences. The participants in this study were aware of this, but they also considered their abilities. Only two participants, Lutho and Vuyisa, indicated that they did not choose their high school subjects. The school decided for them. In some schools, there are a limited number of subjects from which to choose, so the combination of the type of school attended, academic performance, and the subject combination can have a huge effect on the career pathways of students.

8.5 AGENCY AND STRUCTURE

There are structural factors that influence the career decisions of students, but the students also act with agency to break the structural boundaries. Different theoretical approaches can be used to explain this relationship, for example Bourdieu's notion of capital, field and habitus (Bourdieu, 1993a; Nash, 1990), as used in the Careership Theory (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997), along with Appadurai's notion of navigational capacity (Fataar, 2010; Gale & Parker, 2015; Maja, 2020). The Careership Theory

makes several assertions about career decision making. It asserts that career decisions are located in the habitus of the social actor, and these pragmatically rational career decisions are influenced by the capital (cultural, economic and social), as well as by the relationships in the social fields (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997). Although this theory, along with its allegiance to Bourdieu's theory of practice, emphasises cultural and social inheritances as more influential, it does offer some explanations.

Career decisions, as seen in the explanations of the participants in this study, are located within the habitus of the social agents making the decisions. The habitus is formed at an early age and develops as the social agent grows and experiences the world (Christodoulou & Spyridakis, 2016). As social agents live in the world, the world also lives in them because they learn to think, feel, and act in the world, through interactions with other social agents. For example, one comes to learn of their gender and gender expectations, what is good or bad, what is desirable or not, in relation to other people in the world (Schoon & Heckhausen, 2019). The life that a family can give to their children influences what the child knows, as well as what the child is likely to be interested in. According to the Careership Theory, when young people make career choices, these career choices are not innocent but reflect their history, social class, as well as their educational background (Hodkinson et al., 1996).

The habitus described above represents the internal and subjective structures, but it is informed and influenced by the external (objective) structures. The horizon for action is enabled by this subjective structure because a social agent can only act in line with their knowledge and their perception of likely success (Hodkinson et al., 1996). In addition, the objective structures associated with the social fields and capital also play a significant role. It is important to note that life experience is influenced by one's position in the social field, or in society in general. Those with more economic resources tend to have access to various avenues compared to those with inadequate economic resources. For example, the schools that are considered to be good are likely to be afforded by those with the money to pay. These schools usually provide various opportunities for their learning, for example, career development opportunities. The culture that wealthy families cultivate, along with the culture of the schools that their children attend, is more likely to be in line with future career expectations.

According to Maja, middle-class families tend to equip their children with richer maps than their working-class counterparts (Maja, 2020).

Another view could relate to how reliance on capital to explain career decisions may portray pessimism. Concerning Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital, Hart shows that social agents may be viewed in more pessimistic or hopeless terms (Hart, 2019). It is argued that,

Perhaps a key tension between Bourdieu and Sen is that Bourdieu seems more pessimistic regarding the static nature of structural inequalities and the limited power of individuals to eliminate their unjust effects. Bourdieu positions education systems as guilty parties in the perpetuation of a cultural arbitrary and as purveyors of symbolic violence¹² that serve to maintain and reproduce the status quo (Hart, 2019, p. 594).

This quotation reveals that even the notions of navigational capacity (Fataar, 2010; Maja, 2021) and aspiration windows (Genicot & Ray, 2014; Ray, 2006) may still be located within a deterministic frame. While Hart (2019) does not speak to these concepts directly, it is important to note that the focus of navigational capacity and aspiration windows remain within the frame of inequality, capital and symbolic violence. Though they advance social theories, they continue in the same line of argument that positions social agents within the dichotomies of inheritors and newcomers (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). The inheritors continue to enjoy the privileges of clearer and richer navigational maps while the newcomers endure maps devoid of navigational tools and information. Despite these disparities, it is worth noting that for all social agents, life presents challenges, ups and downs.

For all social agents though, social life is not always smooth, but it has both routines and turning points (Hancock, 2009). These turning points are evident in all the participants in this study. A major turning point for all participants is either when they complete either grade 9 or grade 12. Some participants did not get to grade 12, while the rest did not do well in grade 12. It was at this point that they all had to reconsider their career choices. Some went to the public TVET college after high school, while others took some years completely lost or trying to figure out their lives. What is evident, though, is that despite the difficulties that they experienced, the participants did not give up, but were resilient, and agentic in their quest for education.

8.6 PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

When the Careership Theory was developed in the early 1990s, the Social Theory of Bourdieu was the one available to adequately explain the transition from education to work to the satisfaction of the careership authors (Hodkinson et al., 1996). Sociological theorising in career guidance and development was not in fashion at the time. Although sociological theorising is growing, it continues to face the criticism that it is deterministic in approach (Artess, 2014, 2015). In this regard, the argument against sociological theories in general, one of which is Bourdieu's social theory (Bourdieu, 1977), is that social structures are presented as more powerful than social actors' agency. In this way, these theories seem to present social agents as passive actors who bend to the demands of the structure. While there is some truth in both the power of agency and of structure, it is important to understand the dynamic nature of cultural life (Rao & Walton, 2004).

The students whom I interviewed have aspirations and these aspirations are linked to their interest in studying at the TVET college. Drawing from Bourdieusian thinking, I note that these aspirations are not random; they are not formed in a vacuum but are formed and developed in dynamic social and cultural contexts. So, talking about a career choice is also to talk about social action that is shaped and influenced by the social actor's life experience, knowledge of the field, as well as what the actor sees as possible or impossible. Although some participants in the study decided on their own what to study because parents were either unavailable or do not have the capacity to help their children with such choices, the involvement of other stakeholders (significant others), is evident.

In his popular book *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Bourdieu uses the concept of 'taste' to explain why people from different social class backgrounds have different preferences (Bourdieu, 1984). These preferences or tastes go beyond food, art and music. For Bourdieu, taste is a cultural element. He talks about the poor as living at the level of necessity, and he uses the type of food that they eat to explain why they prefer heavy filling meals to light meals. They do this because filling their stomachs is what they need. The rich, on the other hand, live beyond necessity. They do not have problems of hunger, so eating for them is more of an aesthetic experience (Bourdieu, 1984). The same can be said about the

aspirations of both the poor and the rich. Their aspirations do not necessarily differ, but the need to earn an income now, to eat now, is a pushing factor for the poor as compared to their wealthy counterparts (Greenbank & Hepworth, 2008).

Using the concept of habitus, Bourdieu attempts to explain why the cultural background of students plays a role in their choices. The power of background in career choices is explained in detail in *The Inheritors: French Students and Their Relation to Culture* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979). Here, it is shown how family background plays a major role in directing the future of young people, the institutions in which they are likely to enrol, the programmes they are likely to choose, as well as the types of jobs they are likely to go for. This idea is popularly associated with Paul Willis's work on class and education (Willis, 1977). This is deemed a deterministic view of the way of life or culture. It is claimed that,

Habitus is constituted by an individual's embodied dispositions manifested in the way they view the world. Thus different individuals may judge different aspirations, and in turn different combinations of functionings, as more or less appropriate (Hart, 2016, p. 333).

In this way, as the above quotation suggests, social agents act differently because they see the world differently. Indeed, social agents make different judgements of the different combinations of functionings and aspirations (Hart, 2016). It is important to note here that aspirations are not only economic but cultural as well (Appadurai, 2004). This is the point where Appadurai shows how aspirations are usually associated with economic ambition, and culture with pastness (Appadurai, 2004).

It is for this deterministic, backwards-looking notion and seeing culture as pastness, that cultural theories are criticised (Rao & Walton, 2004). This is generally associated with a dichotomised perspective between economics and culture, with culture seen as backward, and economics as forward-looking. This is generally a result of the cultural theory being the province of anthropologists, whose main occupation is to study societies that are considered backward or cultural. Economists, on the other hand, are preoccupied with the future. Aspirations are also generally looked at in economic terms to a point where if a social agent does not seem to have economic interests, they are seen as having no aspiration (Rao & Walton, 2004). Based on some Indian examples,

Arjun Appadurai proposes the expansion of the notion of culture to show that culture is not pastness; it is not backwards-looking, but it is also forward-looking (Appadurai, 2004).

The understanding of culture as forward-looking does not dispute that the accumulated capitals play a role in influencing the future (Appadurai, 2004). Appadurai uses the concept of navigational capacity to account for cultural capital (Appadurai, 2004). He uses the analogy of a map during a tour. This idea is taken forward by others to explain the inequalities in education (Gale & Parker, 2015). It is explained by others as either 'fish in water' (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014) or 'fish out of water' (Morrison, 2017; Reay et al., 2009). Whatever analogy is deployed, the argument is that social agents with different backgrounds navigate the social structures differently. They have different knowledge and approaches to life (Gale & Parker, 2015).

Using the idea of a tour as an analogy, it is claimed that some travellers have so much knowledge of the journey that they do not need to carry a map or need a tour guide (Appadurai, 2004). These are the kinds of people who could be considered to be fish in water (Edgerton & Roberts, 2014) because they feel at home when they enter a post-school education and training institution (McMillan, 2014). Their home backgrounds give them enough knowledge about post-school education and training. They have ample opportunities to even visit these institutions. They have prior experience of the journey, and going to study is not their first experience of post-school institutions (Bunda et al., 2012; Zipin et al., 2015). Contrary to this experience, the fish out of water experience is associated with the new entrants to the game.

The fish in water navigate freely, with prior knowledge, and they know different routes to the desired destination. Contrary to this, the fish out of water, know what they want, but their knowledge is not wide enough to allow them to take more flexible routes (Gale & Parker, 2015). For example, in this study, only two participants (Phumeza and Sindiswa) had a clear vision of what they wanted to do. Phumeza comes from a family of well-educated people. She always received support from her family. Some of her family members would bring work home and she got an insight into what they were doing. In this way, she developed real interest, based on something she had access to. Sindiswa comes from a family of well-educated people as well. For her, studying

further was not even a choice that her parents were giving; rather, it was a natural step in life that could not be questioned.

Unlike Sindiswa and Phumeza, for other participants like Licebo, Ibanathi, Nomhle and others, going to the TVET college was a mystery. For them, going to study was a necessity and they were willing to take whatever was on offer. Licebo completed matric with a diploma endorsement, but her poor family background, as well as her life experiences, reduced her navigational capacity. She has great aspirations, but aspirations require knowledge and resources. For Ibanathi, Nomhle and others without a matric qualification, what is desired may not be in sync with what is possible. Even culturally speaking, these students have little knowledge of post-school education and training.

8.7 NAVIGATIONAL CAPACITY METAPHOR

The Careership Theory uses some concepts borrowed from Bourdieu. One of these concepts is cultural capital. The way this concept has been used, especially concerning the accumulation of less or more capital, has often suggested that what a person accumulates in history, determines their future. It has been said to be deterministic because it assumes that those with more cultural capital always win; and those with little cultural capital are doomed. For Appadurai, cultural capital can also be used to look into the future by considering it as a cultural capacity. In this way, Appadurai employed the concept of navigational capacity to account for the futuristic or forward-looking aspect of culture (Appadurai, 2004).

Navigational capacity has been explored in detail by Maja in his recent doctoral thesis (Maja, 2020), which was also turned into a book titled *Black Youth Aspirations: Imagined Futures and Transitions Into Adulthood* (Maja, 2021). Maja uses the analogy of a map. To know where one is going, they need a map, but a map is not very useful if it does not have navigational tools. Some maps are blank, while others have incomplete information. Some map bearers have little to no knowledge of maps. Some map bearers do not have additional navigational tools (Maja, 2020). This speaks to cultural capital. Some people have knowledge of the field, and their navigation in the field is smooth. Some people navigate because they must, not because they know

what they are doing or where they are going. All they know is that they must make a living; they must survive; and to do this, they must study or work.

The participants in the study match the description of travellers with either poor maps or limited navigational tools. In McMillan's perspective, they do not know what is going on (McMillan, 2014). In Galvaan's perspective, 'it's is like that' - habitus (Galvaan, 2015). They want to study but they have not explored the post-school education and training before. For some participants, even their parents or guardians have limited knowledge of this field, so they cannot offer useful cultural maps. It is not that they do not aspire, but to aspire requires knowledge of what to aspire to, as well as how to aspire to achieve it. As students navigate social structures, they go through routines and turning points. In what follows, I present a possible Careership model as informed by the analysis done so far.

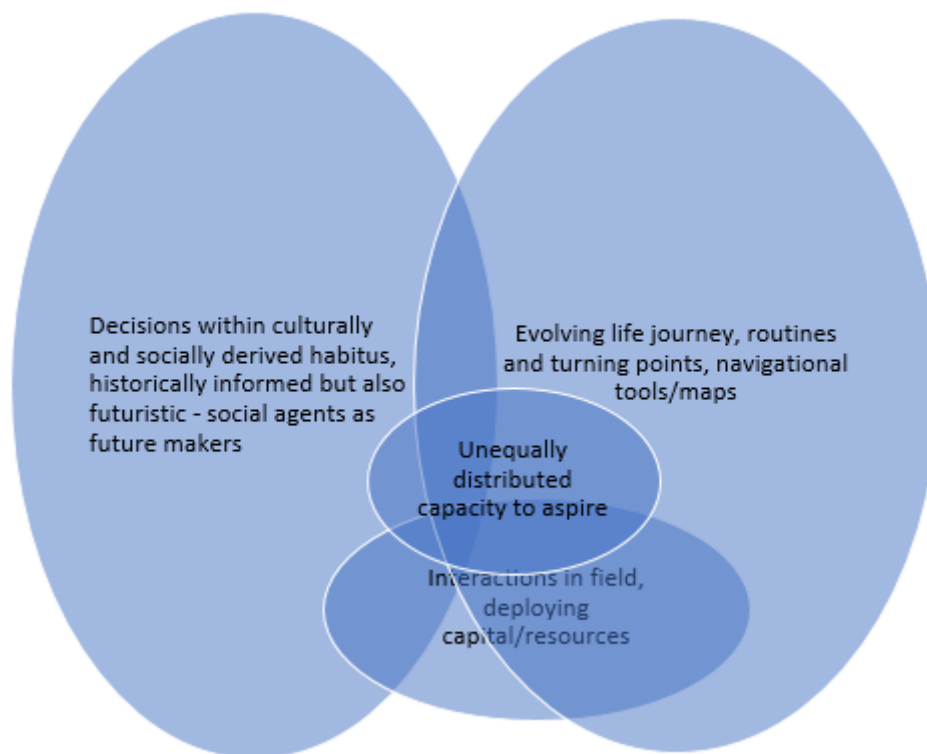


Figure 8.1 Careership: Proposed Working Model

Figure 8.1 presents a model of careership that could develop as informed by the findings of the study. It draws from the original careership model of Hodkinson et al. (1996), which relied on culturally derived habitus to explain the source of action and choice. This approach is ineffective when socialisation is treated as the main source

of identity, taste and action. It is claimed that this Bourdieusian sociological approach looks at culture as pastness, and not forward-looking (Zipin, 2009).

This pastness is in relation to the concept such as habitus that suggests internalisation of culture and experience. It is argued that,

Habitus is constituted by an individual's embodied dispositions manifested in the way they view the world. An individual's habitus is developing from the beginning of life in relation to the social milieu of their home and family life (Hart, 2019, p. 586).

This quotation speaks to navigational capacity (Maja, 2021) and horizons for action (Rosvall et al., 2020) in that life experience shapes one's vision. Social agents see with their minds that which is possible and achievable. Some social agents inherit a clear vision from their families, whereas some families do not provide such visions in full as they lack the resources to do so. In this way, some social agents have the resources and commodities to convert into freedoms or capabilities, whereas other social agents face limitations in this regard (Hart, 2019).

Within the South African context, therefore, instead of looking at how people from different classes act based on their capitals or resources, their capacity to aspire or to navigate the structure is important to consider. This will at least look at the power of habitus differently, that is, habitus as not always determining social action, but as transformative. The idea of navigational capacity brings to the Careership Theory the idea that young people do not just choose from what is there, but they dream, they aspire, and they strive to achieve. However, like the original careership model, and concerning South Africa, the idea of navigational capacity shows that there is always a handicap for the less privileged members of society. This disadvantage is multidimensional and includes socialisation, resources, including social resources such as social networks, affiliations and other significant actors.

Applying the careership model to TVET in South Africa brings with it some explanatory advantages. First and foremost, South Africa is a fertile ground for a sociological analysis of inequality, a central feature in the massification of post-school education and training. Instead of looking at career decision making as a neutral act, as based on freedom of choice, it looks at it from both a point of advantage and disadvantage.

Hodkinson's analogy of a page is useful here. A page is likened to a life journey. Writing on the page is likened to making decisions and acting on these decisions. There is always something written on the page. What is already written on the page reflects the past of the social agent. The past cannot be ignored, but social agents can move past it. The past influences but does not determine. The past leads to the present.

In the present moment, the social agent sets out to write her or his future. As they do this, they realise that their scripts are not empty. Their scripts contain their history. For example, a student who wishes to enrol on an engineering programme at a college may realise that their high school subjects are not suitable. They may be forced to go to the NCV programme to start at the bottom and move up. A student who has not completed grade 9 may be required to register for an adult education certificate programme before they are eligible for college. Previous experiences, successes and failures influence present decisions and future possibilities.

The starting point on the page is not from the top, but from the middle, as there is content already written (Hodkinson, 1998b). This content cannot be erased, but a different narrative is possible. This narrative is written in a context (environment) that is structured. For example, the field of education has rules and regulations (Bathmaker, 2015). To participate, to enter this field, play and succeed, some forms of capital are required. This is where the unequal distribution of resources becomes evident. This is where the map to navigate is tested (Maja, 2021). Agency is required to do this, as well as knowledge to do this. The future may not be certain, but with agency, capacity to aspire, and the right tools, social agents make can move forward. To get to the public TVET college is a journey, and to make a career decision, to choose a programme, does not start at the college, but it is built on previous experiences, success and failures, hopes and dreams, and what the present circumstances allow or disallow.

This suggests that aspirations do matter for several reasons. One of the reasons aspirations matter is that they tell us what is important and valuable to both individuals and groups (Hart, 2016). This speaks to the notion that although aspirations are individualistic, they are also collective. Whether private or public, aspirations are shaped by the habitus (Hart, 2016), hence pragmatically rational decisions are located

within the habitus of the social agents who make such decisions (Hodkinson et al., 1996). Here, Bourdieu's social theory helps us to identify the location of aspiration, while Appadurai helps us to see this location as future-oriented, rather than that from the past. All the theoretical concepts applied here show that a social agent has the past, present and the future, and it is the interaction of these that shapes aspiration and action. Therefore, talking about career decisions goes way beyond an individual actor, as an individual acts in relation to others. In this way, structure is viewed as relational, and it is both objective and subjective.

8.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter has consolidated the findings outlined in the last three chapters to explain, from a theoretical perspective, what influences the career decision making of students. The chapter shows that career decision making is complex, and requires us to look at the past, the present and the future. To understand what influences the career decisions of students, we need to acknowledge that career decisions are influenced by both external and internal structures. The order of theoretical concepts used in this chapter do not suggest that the old (linked to Bourdieu) and the new (linked to Appadurai) are in conflict with each other. Adopting the notion of navigational capacity does not imply casting the notion of capital away. It is simply to show that a focus on capital hinders us from looking at individuals as future-looking and future-making. It keeps us in the reproduction of social and cultural life theoretical zone, and may fail to suggest possible solutions. Also, doing so continues to perpetuate the idea that structure is more powerful than agency.

Even with the idea of capacity to aspire and navigational capacity, as well as aspiration windows, socialisation remains important. The navigational tools come from socialisation, which is informed by the types of capitals that families give to their children. If Bourdieu were to speak back, he would remind us that inequality continues because systems of education and economy are built on inequality, and access is shaped by various forms of exclusion. He would also remind us about the transposability or changeability of the habitus, but we would also point us back to its power. Appadurai would acknowledge this position but would warn against the effect of this position on how social agents would be portrayed as those from the past, acting according to their history, and not as agents of the future. Therefore, bringing these

theoretical perspectives together helps us to avoid the pitfall of determinism and total free will. The following chapter articulates the conclusion reached by this study, as well as the contributions that this study has made to this field of study.

CHAPTER 9

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

9.1 HOW IT BEGAN

This study aimed to explore the views of public TVET college students (in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro) on what influences their career decisions. The main research question was *What influences the career decisions of public TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro?* The three research sub-questions were: (a) *How do students understand the concepts of 'TVET' and 'career'?*; (b) *What social structures influence the career decision making of TVET college students?*; and (c) *How do TVET College students 'agentially' navigate these 'social' structures to pursue their careers?* To answer these questions, qualitative interviews were conducted with students at Metro College.

To answer the research question(s), the study deployed a paradigmatic approach guided by interpretive epistemology and subjective ontology. It was also informed by the qualitative methodology. Individual and group interviews were used. These interviews were analysed using thematic analysis. The sample consisted of public TVET college students in one selected college. There were three groups spread across three campuses. The total number of students who participated in group interviews was 33. Of these 33 students, 15 students participated in individual interviews.

Through this process, the main research question was answered. Career decisions of the interviewed students are influenced by multiple factors. These multiple factors can be explained in concerning the socio-economic status of the individuals, their social and cultural backgrounds, gender, schooling experience, life histories, present circumstances, as well as future aspirations. Careers are out there for anyone to choose, but to choose requires knowledge of what and how to choose. The study found that students do not operate in a level field, and their capacity to move through social structures is not equal. In brief, the study found that career decision making is located between structure and agency. The following section summarises the contribution of this study along with its findings.

9.2 STUDY CONTRIBUTIONS

Concerning the understanding of the students of the concepts of 'career' and 'TVET', a diverse range of ideas was shared. The interviews with the students show that students have a diverse and varying understanding of these two concepts. Despite these varieties, some understandings are commonly held. The students shared some common and dominant views as well as non-dominant views. The dominant views include the notion that TVET colleges are rebound institutions for those who fail to enter universities. Such a perspective is ingrained in society that it has become the fallback position when students speak about TVET colleges. Despite the dominance of such negative views, the students see a lot of positives about TVET colleges.

That TVET colleges are designed to offer a combination of theoretical and practical learning is viewed by the students as a positive. Practical learning is viewed by the students as a positive. Practical learning is associated with know-how rather than know-what. The students were positive about the know-how that signify the identity of TVET colleges. Regarding this, they tend to contrast TVET colleges with universities, stating that the practical component is more important than the theory-driven learning at universities. Although the level at which TVET college and university differ in practical versus theoretical learning is not determined here, it is important to take into consideration the different purposes and roles of both institutions.

TVET colleges are charged with the responsibility to produce artisans and other skilled workforce with requisite knowledge and skills to enter the world of work. The students in this study understand TVET to be this kind of education and training. For this to happen as desired, these skills and knowledge must be transmitted in a certain way. TVET colleges are understood by the students to be better positioned to do this. Concerning this role of TVET colleges, the students tend to applaud the colleges for equipping them with the necessary skills and knowledge. Despite this positive element, the students were concerned about the perceived inequality gap between college and university graduates. They spoke of the disparities concerning stipends and salaries for college and university graduates, whereby it is claimed that university graduates receive higher stipends when they do internships.

It is difficult to comment on the stipend and salary disparities of college and university graduates when they enter the labour market. To do so requires some research into the issue. It is, however, important to consider that colleges and universities serve different purposes in society, and they offer qualifications and programmes at different NQF levels. These NQF levels are associated with varying levels of skills and knowledge and are recognised and rewarded differently.

An interesting perspective that emerged had to do with the differentiation between TVET as a social space and a physical space, and TVET as a type of educational offering. TVET as a social and physical space is associated with some level of inferiority. This notion is linked to the clandestine belief that TVET colleges are tertiary or higher education institutions. Once viewed in equal terms with higher education institutions, comparisons are drawn, and if disparities are found, colleges are treated with suspicion. But TVET as a type of offering is regarded highly by the students. This is linked to its perceived direct knowledge incentives.

To a greater extent, the views of students on TVET have some bearing on their understanding of career as well. They understand 'career' in more common and dominant terms as it relates to occupation, paid employment, or doing something to earn a living. At the centre of this understanding is the notion of success. Even here, their understanding is not necessarily unique as it is associated with the common and dominant view of upward mobility, which is also linked to the ideals of paid employment and employability. The influence of human capital thinking can be detected here. Apart from the economic and human capital logic, the students also spoke of 'career' concerning love and passion.

It is apparent from the interviews that the participants did not think of TVET colleges before they completed matric. Those without matric certificates did not think much of post-school education until the idea of a TVET college was presented to them. So, when students spoke of career as passion, it must not be evaluated against their career decisions that they have made because there is a possible mismatch between the two. Their understanding and views must be evaluated in abstract terms concerning what career means to them. For example, that a student made a career decision for which they are not passionate about does not stop them from saying or believing that a career should be driven by passion.

It was not the intentional design of the study to interview Black students only but they were the ones who were available and also in open view. Although I do not focus on statistical significance in this study, it is worth noting that the number of Blacks has increased in public TVET colleges over the years (Republic of South Africa, 2020). The students shared their views on how they made their career decisions. Some of the experiences that were shared are sad and painful. This is a reminder that career decision making cannot be taken for granted or as a given in academic literature because it is a field of struggle and symbolic violence. The interviews with the students revealed that moving into the post-school sector is neither natural nor linear. It is a struggle that goes beyond the fantasy of 'when I grow up, I want to be...'. The revelations from the students shed some light on why South Africa has a growing number of NEETs – because 'it is not easy'.

One aspect of career decision making to note is the influence of gender. There is some novelty in this study concerning the influence of gender. Gone are those days when women chose the so-called gender-appropriate careers. Women are free to choose any career path without difficulty or prejudice. I acknowledge that speaking of gender must not be limited to women, but due to the touching experiences shared by women, I am of the view that their experiences of career decision making must be emphasised. Women experience hardships that men do not, for example, some participants shared how they had to work because they had to take care of their babies, and how some had to pause their educational journeys because of pregnancy and childbirth. The experience of Lutho has nothing to do with pregnancy and giving birth, but it has more to do with patriarchal relations. I mention this to point out that women's experiences are diverse and go beyond taking care of children.

The views and experiences shared by the participants reveal that career decision making is located in the dialectical relation between agency and structure. Students are neither driven by free will nor by unmovable objective social structures. The sociological approach to career decision making is a useful tool to unpack these structural relations. Regarding this, the starting point in this study was Hodkinson's (2009) Careership Theory and its association with Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992) social theory. To move beyond the limitations of the Bourdieusian framework, the theoretical base was extended to include the conceptualisation of Appadurai's (2004),

which is also complemented by Ray's (2006) notion of aspiration windows. Considering Ngcwangu's (2016) claim that theorising does not end and that the purpose of theory is to be extended and enhanced, the theoretical conceptualisations mentioned above were brought together to offer analytical power and advantage. Together, these theoretical conceptualisations painted a sophisticated picture of career decision making as experienced by the participants of this study.

The sociological approach to career decision making is rooted in a simple logic of the relationship between capital, field and habitus. According to this Bourdieusian logic, career decisions take place in social fields, such as an educational field in this case. The field is characterised by social relations, which are also influenced by the capital (resources) that social actors bring into the field. These capitals are distributed unequally because they depend on the economic backgrounds of families. These unequally distributed capitals influence the development of habitus. Although the participants in this study do not resemble Bourdieu's inheritors of the 1970s France (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1979), their socio-economic status has a bearing on how they navigate through life. Their dreams and aspirations seem to be limited by what they believe is possible given their circumstances, both past and present. They aspire to do great things in life but what lies within their horizon for action is what they focus on.

The limited scope of what one can choose or do can be explained in other terms as well, such as the notion of capacity to aspire, drawn from Appadurai (2004), and Ray's (2006) aspiration window. Although Ray developed his idea from Appadurai's capacity to aspire, Ray proposed that aspirations do not fail, but sometimes the aspiration windows are too large for social agents from low socio-economic backgrounds, thereby causing frustration (Genicot & Ray, 2014). This can be linked to the notion of the horizon for action as linked to social agents' perception (Rosvall et al., 2020), as well as that of navigational capacity as it relates to the possible pathways that lead to future success (Golding, 2013).

One of the contributions that this study has made is to bring to speed the Bourdieusian perspective with more forward and future-looking perspectives. There is a close relationship between the notion of field and that of aspirational maps (Golding, 2013). As social agents navigate through social fields, deploying their capitals, their navigational capacities are strengthened because future success is built on previous

success. It is here that the relationship between 'habitus', 'aspiration window' and 'capacity to aspire' meet (Golding, 2013). There is complementarity between habitus and capacity to aspire because they both focus on how social position (in field) influences perceptions and actions (Naveed, 2021). Since habitus represents the embodied (internalised) dispositions, it helps us to understand how aspirations are formed, as well as how social agents adjust these aspirations to their lived experiences (Naveed, 2021).

9.3. LIMITATIONS OF STUDY

Like any other study, the current study has its own limitations. These limitations are associated with the nature of the project, duration, resources, setting, sample and methods of data collection. This study is a non-funded doctoral degree that should be completed within three years of full-time study or six years of part-time study. This duration dictates how long data collection can take, and what methods are appropriate to complete within this restricted period. Being a non-funded project meant that I could not get enough assistance. I could only find someone to help with group discussions, as well as transcriptions, and I had to pay them. This, to some extent, affected the speed at which I could work. If I had more resources, I could have conducted a broader study where I could have interviewed more students.

The setting was also a challenge. The choice of the college was guided mainly by my location concerning where I work and live. This is not the best reason but without financial resources, I could not choose a faraway college. Despite this, it is good to work with a local college because reporting back is easier, and I can initiate an engagement project with the local college without incurring costs. This engagement project can help to inform college practices based on the findings of the research project.

This study could have benefited from a narrow sample because it is specific. Usually, doctoral students choose to focus on a narrow sample, for example 'experiences of women in engineering studies', or 'how first year electrical engineering students choose their careers'. I could have done that, but I am not a specialist in any field. I do not have an interest in understanding a specific group. My intention of doing this project was to gain knowledge about how students make career decisions. I want to

use this knowledge to help my children, my community members, and other young people to whom I may become a significant other. I knew from the beginning that this could be critiqued by examiners but it makes sense because the focus is not on a specialization, but it is in the act of making a career choice.

While I am satisfied with the sample, I can say that I believe the methodology could have been different. Given the duration and resources that I had, it made sense to conduct qualitative interviews. One of the major criticisms of the Career Theory is that it has never been tested on a larger sample. I do believe that this study could have benefited from a larger sample and some quantitative data collection methods. I address this issue further in recommendations for further research.

9.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Having completed this study for academic purposes, I have realised that research does not end. To keep up with the changes in the world, we must continue to investigate. I acknowledge that one research study cannot cover everything within a certain topic area. Therefore, I wish to make some recommendations for future research, some of which I wish to conduct on my own in the future. Below are some of the recommendations:

Special focus on gender – In this study, gender came up as unexpected as it was not the focus of the study. But the influence of gender seems to be huge and must be understood more. A research focus that looks at gender and gender-based violence, and their relations with career decisions, would be of great benefit to the TVET sector. In my next research project that will start in 2023, I want to pay special attention to this area. I will focus on both men and women concerning their experiences of making career choices.

Grounded theory research to establish a localised theory – I struggled a lot with theory. Initially, I thought any theory would do. I tried Albert Bandura's self-efficacy model, human capital theory, but they could not explain these issues strongly. I ended up on Hodkinson's door, who also relied on Bourdieu, who is severely criticised. I moved from Hodkinson, through to Bourdieu, through to Appadurai, and later to Ray, just to gain some explanatory advantage of what influences the career decisions of students.

I acknowledge that the concepts used here developed in a different context. So, a grounded theory approach may be a good starting point to develop a theory that is more locally relevant. While I do not have an idea of where to start with this, I do intend to divert my research focus to more localised theories. I want to continue researching career decisions, but with a focus on African theories, or at least try to Africanise the ones that I have used in this dissertation.

Mixed methods research to include larger samples, which may also consist of parents, teachers, college staff, etc. – One major criticism of the Careership Theory is that it has never been tested on larger samples, thus it should not be qualified as a theory. The Careership Theory has its advantages and extending and enhancing it is ideal. So, should I continue working with this theory, I would consider larger studies where different methods and large samples of participants are involved. Even if I use a different theory, I want to pursue a long-term study of this nature. Some of the outputs will be in the form of videos and reader-friendly reports and flyers.

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Appendix 1: Biographical Information of Participants Individually Interviewed

Pseudonym, Age, Gender, Residence	Family Social Status	Schooling Background	School Subjects	Career Fantasy at young age	Reason for Studying at College	Prior and Current Educational Pursuits	Employment History	Life Turning Points
Nomhle Age: 24 Female Born: Cofimvaba Live: Motherwell	Single mother; 2 children; working-class – mother employed	Rural Primary School; Former Model C High School	Commercial subjects	Police or Military Officer, as well as Construction and Maritime Studies	Points low for university	Prior: Upgrading grade 12 Current: NC(V): Office Administration	None	Falling pregnant (2 children-girls); doing badly in grade 12; going to college; death of grandmother
Nolubabalo Age: 28 Female Born: Khayelitsha Live: Gcuwa	No home of her own; living with strangers (significant others)	Township and rural schools	Not applicable as she stopped schooling early in life	Drama or Performing Arts	No grade 12 [Horizon for action allows access to college]	Current: NATED/Report 191: Public Management	Salon; Singing; Performing Arts	Mother, uncle, grandmother's deaths; leaving Western Cape; rape and pregnancy (1 child-girl); precarious employment; going to college
Phumeza Age: 25 Live: Motherwell	Middle-class family; father Engineer; aunt Lecturer; siblings employed with bachelor's degrees & beyond	Briefly attended a rural primary school in Alice, to be moved to a private school, and has attended former Model C schools ever since.	Science and Mathematics	Analytical Chemistry, Environmental Health, Medicine, Nursing	APS Points low; found passion in ECD offered at College	Prior: Dropped out from Primary Health Learnership programme Current: Learnership: Early Childhood Development	Restaurant – waitress	Failing grade 12; dropping out of college; pregnancy (1 child-boy); restaurant job; returning to education; mother's death
Nozipho Age: 21 Born: King Williamstown Live: King Williamstown and New Brighton	Middle-class family: Mother and father pensioners from government [parents hold post-school qualifications]	Briefly attended township primary, to be moved to a former Model C school, and later to a boarding high school.	Life Sciences, Maths Literacy, Economics and Information Technology.	Medicine, Nursing	APS Points low; need to do something	Prior: Upgrading grade 12 Current: NATED/Report 191: Management Assistance	None	Failing grade 12; upgrading grade 12; going to college

Pseudonym, Age, Gender, Residence	Family Social Status	Schooling Background	School Subjects	Career Fantasy at young age	Reason for Studying at College	Prior and Current Educational Pursuits	Employment History	Life Turning Points
Sindiswa Age: Live: Matatiele	Middle-class; mother Nurse; 'father' high profile politician	Attended all her schooling in Matatiele, a rural town in KZN.	Mathematics and Science	Forensic Science	APS Points low for University; Needed something to do	Prior: Did NC(V) before NATED/Report 191 Current: NATED/Report 191: Electrical Engineering	None	Biological father's death
Licebo Age: 31 Born: Motherwell Live: Booyens Park	Poor/Working-class family; father in an out of work; mother domestic worker; herself piece jobs	Attended many primary schools in Motherwell, township, and one high school in Cleary Park.	Commercial subjects, including Home Economics, Business, Economics, and History.	Athletics, Interior Design, Social Worker, Nursing, Law	APS points low; rejected at university; desperate to study	Prior: Incomplete Business Management certificate at private college; completed NC(V) level 2 Current: NATED/Report 191: Business Management	Volunteer; restaurant; street vendor; government piece jobs	Rejected at university; pregnancy (2 children-girl and boy); precarious jobs; going to college
Lutho Age: 37 Born: Mdantsane Live: Mdantsane	Poor/Working-class family; mother domestic worker; single parent household	Attended schools in Mdantsane, East London.	General subjects such as History, Biology, Business Economics	Nothing. Did not really focus much on careers during high school.	No grade 12	Prior: NC(V) Levels 2-4 Current: NATED/Report 191: Public Management.	Clothing industry – sewing machine operator	Failing grade 12; running away from home; getting married; divorce; going to college
Asanda Age: 25	Poor/Working-class family; stepfather unemployed; mother works at hotel as general worker	Rural primary school in Cofimvaba, later township school in Zwide.	Mathematics and Physical Sciences	Nursing	APS points low for university; time ticking and feeling left behind	Prior: 3 months fashion designer certificate; NC(V) Levels 2-4 in Construction NATED/Report 191: Electrical Engineering Current: Apprenticeship in Electrical Engineering	None	Not doing well in grade 12; rejected at university pregnancy (1 child-girl); registering and deregistering from college

Pseudonym, Age, Gender, Residence	Family Social Status	Schooling Background	School Subjects	Career Fantasy at young age	Reason for Studying at College	Prior and Current Educational Pursuits	Employment History	Life Turning Points
Bongiwe Age: 32	Living alone at her own house; independent; receives maintenance from father; receives child social grant for own children	All township schools in KwaZakhele.	Mathematics and Science	Pilot	Desire to do Civil Engineering	Prior: Information Technology Diploma; Plumbing at private college; Current: NATED/Report 191: Civil Engineering	None	Discovering that her weight is hindrance to becoming pilot; going to university; looking for employment; pregnancy (2 children-boy and girl)
Sandile Age: 24 Live: Motherwell	Single mother; middle-class family; four children employed; mother retired teacher	All township schools in Motherwell and Uitenhage.	Commercial Subjects, e.g. Accounting, Economics, Business Studies	Doctor/Medicine, Accountant	No grade 12; went to college by chance	Prior: NC(V): Financial Management Current: NATED: Financial Management	Once in while construction work at brother's firm	Failing grade 12; going to college
Vuyo Age:	Single mother; retired teacher; middle-class family	All rural schools in Cofimvaba.	Commercial subjects like Accounting, Business Studies	Nothing specific, other than wanting to be an influential person, e.g. president	University dropout; went to college by chance	Prior: incomplete Accounting degree – university drop-out Learnership: Current: Information Technology	Restaurant – waiter and cashier	Going to university; dropping out of university; moving to NMBM; working at restaurant; going to college
Vuyisa Age: 24 Born: Colesberg	Middle-class; mother retired teacher; three children employed, 2 studying; single parent	All township schools in Colesberg.	Mathematics and Physical Sciences	Lawyer or Doctor	No grade 12; advised by cousin to go to college	Prior: Upgrading grade 12; NC(V): Marketing NATED/Report 191: Marketing Current: WBL - Marketing	Waiter at restaurant	Failing grade 12; upgrading matric; discovering that upgrading school is fly-by-night; working at restaurant; going to college

Pseudonym, Age, Gender, Residence	Family Social Status	Schooling Background	School Subjects	Career Fantasy at young age	Reason for Studying at College	Prior and Current Educational Pursuits	Employment History	Life Turning Points
Onika Age: 20 Live: Tsomo	Middle-class; divorced parents; mother teacher; father works in health; middle-class aunts	Rural and township schools	Commercial Subjects such as Accounting	Political Sciences, Political Analyst	Rejected at university; low APS points for LLB degree	NATED/Report 191: Financial Accounting	None	Not doing so well in grade 12; being rejected at university; going to college
Ibanathi Age: 24 Live: Humansdorp	Poor/working-class; single parent	Township schools in Humansdorp.	N/A – never reached grade 10	Nothing as he stopped schooling at a young age.	No grade 12; advised by cousin to try college	NC(V): Office Administration	Salon – hairdresser	Discovering that he's HIV+; going to Cape Town
Manelisi Age: 27 Live: Paterson	Poor/working-class; parents divorced; lives with mother; mother farm worker	Rural schools in Fort Beaufort	General Subjects	Nothing specific during high school.	No grade 12; influenced by external social pressure and the need to empower himself	NC(V): Office Administration	Restaurant – waiter; NGO	Discovering that he's gay; raped in JHB; working for NGO; going to college

Appendix 2: Consent Letter for Participants

Title of Study: Factors that influence career choices of Technical Vocational Education and training College students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro?

Principal Investigator: Lucky Maluleke

Primary Responsible Persons: Shervani Pillay and Lesley Powell

Department: Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela University

Tel: 041 504-3526

Cell: 0742950859

E-mail: Lucky.Maluleke@Mandela.ac.za

Background

You are being invited to take part in a research study that looks at what influences the career choices of students in the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) College. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is vital that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve, as well as your expected contribution, and the amount of time required. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If anything is unclear, kindly ask the researcher for clarification.

Purpose of Study

In the South African literature little is known about the reasons why students choose to study at public TVET Colleges. This gap in the literature can be attributed to the country's policy direction on TVET that seems to be biased towards education and training for employability and responsiveness and the universal tendency of limited career guidance provided for TVET students. Most importantly, the shortage of research, especially qualitative research has led to a poor understanding of the students in the sector and how they make their career choices. Against this backdrop, the current study seeks to understand why students choose to study in public TVET Colleges in general, and in the specific courses selected in particular. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to investigate, from the perspective of learners, what influences the career choices of TVET college students in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metro.

Aim of the Study

If you choose to participate in this study, it is good to know that this study aims to capture how the environment in which you live has shaped your career choice, or how your perception of careers has evolved over the years. In this study, you will be asked to participate in a focus group discussion where you will be sharing your views about career choices with other students. You will be asked to join in a group of at least 8 people. The study aims to understand how students in the TVET College make their career choices, and how they are influenced by various environmental dynamics to make such career choices. You will also be asked to participate in an individual interview that will be entirely confidential.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part in this study. If you do choose to take part in this study, you will be asked to sign at the end of this consent form. Kindly note that the interviews will be recorded using a digital audio recorder. You will be asked to sign again, indicating whether you would like to be recorded or not. You are, however, free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason, and your relationship with the researcher will not be affected at all. The intended time and period of your voluntary participation is a minimum of four meetings. Individual interviews will take about 40 minutes to one hour per interview. Focus group discussions will take about 2 hours to 3 hours per session.

Benefits

There will be no direct benefit to you for your participation in this study. However, I (the researcher) hope that the information obtained from this study may be beneficial to participants through their participation in the process and the potential use of the research. Also, I hope that your participation in this study will be a process of developing critical awareness about the role of vocational education in your life and community, as well as how you can help other people make their career choices. I further hope that your participation will contribute to the creation of new knowledge about the topic and will positively contribute to existing literature. Also, data and the final product will be shared with you.

Confidentiality

Every effort will be made by the researcher to preserve your confidentiality including the following:

- Assigning pseudonyms, codes or numbers for participants that will be used on all researcher notes and documents, that is, your name or any information that can lead to your identification will not be revealed to a third party under no circumstance;
- Notes and transcribed notes and any other identifying participant information will be kept in a locked file cabinet at the Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela University;
- Information from this research will be used solely for the purpose of this study and any publications that may result from this study. All participants involved in this study will not be identifiable (they will be disguised);

Institutional Review Board

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or if problems arise which you do not feel you can discuss with the primary investigators/researchers, please feel free to contact my supervisors:

Names: Dr. Lesley Powell and Dr. Shervani Pillay

Email Addresses: Lesley.Powell@Mandela.ac.za and Shervani.Pillay@Mandela.ac.za

Consent

By signing this consent form, I confirm that:

- I have read and understood the information and have had the opportunity to ask questions;
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving a reason and at no cost;
- I understand that I will be given a copy of this consent form;
- I voluntarily agree to take part in this study;
- I understand that data generated through this study will be published in journal articles, thesis.
- Most importantly, in all these publications and written reports, the identities of participants will be protected.

Participant Signature 1: _____ **Date** _____

I agree that the interviews in which I will be taking part will be recorded using an audio recorder. Please do not sign if you do not wish to be recorded.

Participant Signature 2: _____ **Date:** _____

I, the primary investigator, am satisfied that we have given adequate information to the participant and that the participant is fully aware of the demands of this research process.

Student/Researcher _____ **Date:** _____

We, the supervisors, are satisfied that this form provides adequate information to the participants, and that participants will be well-informed about the aim of the study, as well as their role in it.

Supervisor Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Supervisor Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Appendix 3: Invitation Letter to Participate

Mr. L. Maluleke
Faculty of Education
Nelson Mandela University
Tel: 0415043526
Date: 06 February 2018

Port Elizabeth TVET College
Private Bag x6040
Port Elizabeth
6000

Dear Participant

Invitation to participate in a research study

I hope that this letter finds you well. I acknowledge that we have never met, but I would like to meet you soon. My name is Lucky Maluleke. I am a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education, at the Nelson Mandela University, South Campus in Summerstrand, Port Elizabeth. My research interest is centred on technical and vocational education and training colleges, particularly as it relates to students' career choices in these institutions.

I would like to invite you to take part in a research study whose aim is to look at what influences student career choices. The study seeks to explore your experience of making a career choice, and what contextual factors impacted on your preference.

In the first phase of the study, you will be required to participate in a focus group discussion. In the second phase of the study, you may be asked to participate in an individual interview. I must, however, indicate that your participation is entirely voluntary. I also promise that your identity will be protected and not revealed to a third party. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be required to sign a consent letter which indicates that I (the researcher), have provided enough information about the research project, that you fully understand that your identity will be protected, that you understand that your participation is voluntary and that you can withdraw at any time. Furthermore, the time that will take to complete this participation fully is a maximum of 10 hours, which will be spread over 3 days of group discussions, and 1 day of individual interview.

I hope to meet with you soon.

Kind regards
Lucky Maluleke
Faculty of Education
Nelson Mandela University

Appendix 4: Letter to College Principal



• PO Box 77000 • Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
• Port Elizabeth • 6031 • South Africa • www.nmmu.ac.za

Mr. L. Maluleke (Primary Investigator)
Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela
University, Summerstrand South Campus
Tel: (041) 504 3526
06 February 2018

The Principal
Port Elizabeth TVET College
Private Bag x6040
Port Elizabeth
6000

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PORT ELIZABETH TVET COLLEGE

Dear Mr. Matiso

My name is Lucky Maluleke. I am a doctoral student at the Faculty of Education, Nelson Mandela University in Port Elizabeth. I hereby request permission to conduct research in your college. The research I wish to conduct seeks to capture the views of students at the Port Elizabeth Technical and Vocational Education and Training College (PE-TVET College) on career choices.

I am hereby seeking your permission to approach 16 students in the Port Elizabeth TVET College who will form part of focus group discussions where various parts of the research topic will be discussed. Participants will also be asked to participate in confidential individual interviews.

I have provided you with a copy of the research proposal which includes copies of the measure and consent and assent forms to be used in the research process, as well as a copy of the approval letters which I received from the Nelson Mandela University Research Ethics Committee (Human). I have also provided you with the standard application form from the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Upon completion of the study, I undertake to provide the PE-TVET College with a bound copy of the full research report; and I will also share with the college other research outputs, for example published work on this research project. If you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on:

Tel: 041504 3526

Email: Lucky.Maluleke@Mandela.ac.za

Alternatively, you can contact my supervisors, Dr. L. Powell and Dr. S. Pillay on:

Lesley.Powell@Mandela.ac.za and Shervani.Pillay@Mandela.ac.za

Thank you for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Lucky Maluleke (Mr)
Faculty of Education
Nelson Mandela University

Appendix 5: Ethical Clearance

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

PO Box 7200, Nelson Mandela University, Port Elizabeth, 6001, South Africa 043824 2428

Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee (Human)
Tel: +27 (0)41 504 2235
charmain.cilliers@mandela.ac.za

Ref: [H17-EDU-ERE-027 / Approval]

14 February 2018

Dr L Powell
Faculty of Education
South Campus

Dear Dr Powell

**FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE CAREER CHOICES OF TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGE STUDENTS IN THE NELSON MANDELA BAY METRO**

PRP: Dr L Powell
PI: Mr L Maluleke

Your above-entitled application served at the Research Ethics Committee (Human) for approval.

The ethics clearance reference number is H17-EDU-ERE-027 and is valid for three years. Please inform the REC-H, via your faculty representative, if any changes (particularly in the methodology) occur during this time. An annual affirmation to the effect that the protocols in use are still those for which approval was granted, will be required from you. You will be reminded timeously of this responsibility, and will receive the necessary documentation well in advance of any deadline.

We wish you well with the project.

Yours sincerely



Prof C Cilliers
Chairperson: Research Ethics Committee (Human)

Co: Department of Research Capacity Development
Faculty Officer: Education

Appendix 6: Letter of Permission



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



Mr L. Maluleke
Primary Investigator
Faculty of Education
Nelson Mandela University
Summerstrand South Campus
6 March 2018

RE: REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT PORT ELIZABETH TVET COLLEGE

Dear Mr L. Maluleke

Thank you for the interest shown in using Port Elizabeth TVET College as the focus of your research towards career choices.

Permission is hereby granted for you to conduct this research. We would like to request that you forward us your schedule so that Campus Managers can be informed when you will be visiting Campuses. This will ensure that protocol is observed.

A further request is that the Deputy Principal receives a copy of your dissertation when it is complete.

We wish you well with the research and looking forward to the results thereof.


Mrs Jessie Figa
Deputy Principal: Academic

Port Elizabeth Technical Vocational Education and Training College (TVET)

Central Administration - Tel: 041 608 6000, Fax: 041 582 2017 • Dower Campus - Tel: 041 609 6200, Fax: 041 481 7111
Iqhayiya Campus - Tel: 041 509 6450, Fax: 041 452 1048 • Russell Road Campus - Tel: 041 509 6300, Fax: 041 592 2281
Victoria Campus - Tel: 041 509 6150, Fax: 041 374 5321
Private Bag X8040, Port Elizabeth 6000 • Email: info@pec.edu.za • www.pecollege.edu.za

YOUR FUTURE STARTS NOW

NELSON MANDELA
UNIVERSITY

**PERMISSION TO SUBMIT A TREATISE/DISSERTATION/THESIS FOR
EXAMINATION**

NAME: LUCKY MALULEKE

STUDENT NUMBER: 215357663 candidate for
the

DEGREE: PHD in the

FACULTY: EDUCATION SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT: DEPARTMENT OF POST
GRADUATE STUDIES

has today submitted his/her treatise/dissertation/thesis for examination.

1. Has this treatise/dissertation/thesis been submitted with your knowledge and support?

YES	X	NO
-----	---	----

(Please tick the appropriate response clearly)

2. Submission Recommendation:

A. Permission Granted for submission for examination	
B. Permission Granted for submission for examination with reservations	X
C. Submission against advice of Supervisor	

(Please tick only the applicable response clearly)

3. Did the candidate's research involve animal experimentation or human subjects as defined in the Nelson Mandela University Policy on Ethics in Research?

YES X NO

(Please tick the appropriate response clearly)

If YES, has clearance been obtained from the relevant Ethics Committee?

YES X NO

(Please tick the appropriate response clearly) If YES, kindly provide ethics clearance reference number)

Name of supervisor: DR L. POWELL

Signature: _____

Date: 7/12/21

Dr Powell is out of town and requested that I (Prof Pillay) complete this form

Name of Co-supervisor: PROF K.S. PILLAY

Signature: K.S Pillay

Date: 7/12/21