

# CALL FOR ABSTRACTS

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## Special Issue: Educational Research for Social Change (September 2026)

### *Reclaiming Vocational Learning: Africanisation, Critical Pedagogy, and Epistemic Justice in the Global South*

#### ABSTRACT

This special issue seeks to reposition Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) as a critical site of epistemic and pedagogical struggle in postcolonial and Global South contexts. Existing reforms often privilege academisation and employability, reinforcing colonial, neoliberal, and technicist assumptions (Gjelstad, 2025; Sabela & Masuku, 2020). In response, we call for a shift from compliance to conscientisation and from instrumentalism to humanising praxis. Drawing on Freirean pedagogy (Majola et al., 2025), African philosophies such as *Ubuntu* (Ngubane & Makua, 2021), and Indigenous decolonial traditions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018), this issue centres epistemic justice, student agency, and multilingualism as foundational to rethinking vocational education. Contributions may explore alternative knowledge systems, counter-hegemonic pedagogies, and dialogical learning spaces that repoliticise vocational learning. Ultimately, we aim to surface bottom-up practices that resist the global trend of depoliticised academisation and reclaim TVET as a space for social transformation, democratic participation, and epistemic freedom.

#### INTRODUCTION AND RATIONALE

Vocational education remains one of the most marginalised and philosophically overlooked areas of postcolonial educational research. In South Africa and the wider Global South, TVET is typically viewed in narrow economic terms as a pathway to employment rather than as a space for critical knowledge creation or pedagogical innovation (Vally & Motala, 2022). Policy frameworks often prioritise curriculum alignment, lecturer professionalisation, and institutional benchmarking, yet these reforms do little to tackle the historical and epistemic violence embedded in vocational systems (Ngcwangu, 2015). As Gjelstad (2025) observes in the Nordic context, academisation tends to detach vocational education from its social roots, a process that is mirrored and intensified in postcolonial settings where colonial models continue to dominate.

Efforts to professionalise and formalise vocational pathways often reproduce epistemic hierarchies that make African, Indigenous, and working-class knowledge systems invisible. While

academisation is sometimes seen as a way to enable upward mobility, it can actually erase alternative epistemologies and practices rooted in local culture and context (Kaiser, 2021; Sabela & Masuku, 2020). In the South African context, these trends highlight a more profound crisis of meaning in vocational learning: whose knowledge is valued, in what language, and for what purpose? Building on Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2018) concept of epistemological decolonisation, this special issue positions TVET as a battleground for epistemic resistance and reimagination, rejecting the notion that vocational education must remain subordinate to either industrial capitalism or academic formalism.

We build on the work of Freirean and Africanist scholars who argue that vocational education can and should be reclaimed as a space for humanisation, dialogue, and critical consciousness. Majola et al. (2025) demonstrate how dialogical, student-led processes in South African TVET colleges can enable learners to challenge narrow, technicist perspectives and instead express aspirations grounded in justice and dignity. These insights align with Zinn and Rodgers' (2012) call for humanising pedagogies that go beyond rhetorical inclusion to facilitate genuine transformation. Furthermore, Ubuntu pedagogy (Ngubane & Makua, 2021) presents a deeply relational and community-based model for education that disrupts the individualistic and depoliticised logic of current vocational systems.

This special issue invites contributors to explore how vocational learning can be reimaged through decolonial, Africanised, and socially grounded approaches. We welcome empirical and theoretical work that challenges the dominance of Eurocentric curriculum frameworks, incorporates Indigenous languages and knowledges, and highlights the political agency of students and communities. Articles may critically engage with issues of multilingualism, lecturer formation, ecological justice, and the comparative experiences of Global South contexts navigating the tension between market-driven imperatives and emancipatory educational goals (Porres, 2017; Gonon & Bonoli, 2025). In doing so, this issue aims to promote a counter-hegemonic vision of vocational education as a democratic, critical, and socially responsive practice.

## **THEMES AND KEY QUESTIONS**

We invite articles that critically engage with, but are not limited to, the following questions:

### ***1. Academisation and Transformation***

- How does the academisation of TVET shape or restrict its transformative, epistemic, and political aims?
- In what ways do credentialism and standardisation reinforce or challenge colonial and neoliberal hierarchies within vocational education systems?
- Can vocational education maintain its practical focus while also serving as a space for critical knowledge creation and political awareness?

## **2. Decolonial Pedagogies and Africanisation**

- How can Africanisation and Indigenous knowledges be meaningfully embedded in vocational pedagogy beyond symbolic gestures?
- What does *Ubuntu*-informed or community-grounded vocational pedagogy look like in practice?
- How can vocational curricula be redesigned to reflect African philosophies, place-based knowledges, and cultural epistemologies?

## **3. Language and Epistemic Justice**

- How do multilingualism and translanguaging practices challenge linguistic and epistemic hierarchies in vocational classrooms?
- What role does language play in affirming or denying student identity, belonging, and epistemic access in TVET institutions?

## **4. Agency, Activism, and Futures of TVET**

- What role can student voice, activism, or dialogical inquiry play in shaping vocational learning as a site of democratic participation?
- How can vocational education be reimagined as a space of ecological, gender, and social justice, not merely employability?
- What does decolonial lecturer formation look like in post-school education across diverse Global South contexts?
- How do comparative Global South experiences illuminate tensions between market-driven logics and humanising models of vocational education?

## **POTENTIAL AUTHORS AND SUBMISSIONS**

We invite a wide range of contributions that embody the interdisciplinary, critical, and transformative goals of this special issue. Submissions can include empirical research, especially those based on qualitative, ethnographic, or participatory methods that highlight lived experiences and context-specific insights. We also welcome theoretical and conceptual papers that critically examine frameworks such as decoloniality, Africanisation, Freirean pedagogy, or epistemic justice. Additionally, we encourage case studies and reflective practitioner accounts that record innovative practices, community-based learning projects, or challenges encountered when reimagining vocational education. Co-authored contributions by students, educators, and community partners are particularly encouraged, as they reflect the collaborative and dialogical spirit at the heart of this issue.

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES:

Manuscripts should be between 6000 - 8000 words and follow the Educational Research for Social Change formatting and submission guidelines, which can be found at <https://ersc.mandela.ac.za/s>. Submissions may include theoretical essays, empirical research articles in the qualitative tradition case studies, and reflective pieces

## TIMELINE

- Abstracts (300 words max) and a short bio (100 words) are due by: 31 January 2026
- Notifications of acceptance: Early March 2026
- Full article submissions: 30 April 2026
- Peer review and revisions: May – August 2026
- Publication: September 2026 (ERSC – Special issue)

## GUEST EDITORS

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## SUBMISSION AND QUERIES

Please send your abstract and queries to: [Ezekiel.Majola@mandela.ac.za](mailto:Ezekiel.Majola@mandela.ac.za) or [anthony.sibiya@wits.ac.za](mailto:anthony.sibiya@wits.ac.za)

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