

The Importance of Competence in Shaping an Academically Excellent Culture: TVET Educators' Exclusive Views

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Abstract - This study aims to collect preliminary data on the importance of competency in shaping an academically excellent culture among TVET educators. This research uses qualitative methods, gathering data through Semi-Structured Interviews with three TVET educators who have between ten and twenty-five years of experience in the field. The collected data was analysed thematically to highlight the significance of competency in developing an academically excellent culture within TVET institutions. The findings reveal that TVET educators view competency as a key factor in shaping an academically excellent culture, which in turn influences the overall academic environment. The competencies involved include technical skills, pedagogy, and personnel development. While several factors were taken into account to ensure the quality of the study, it is limited by the small number of participants who contributed their perspectives on building a culture of excellence among TVET educators. This research is crucial to informing the government's formulation of effective strategies to sustain the National Policy TVET 2030. It is expected that this study will help in addressing the need for highly competent professionals in TVET institutions, encompassing technical, pedagogical, and personnel competencies, to foster an academically excellent culture.

Keywords: *Academic excellence culture, TVET educator, Competency, Technical skills, pedagogy skills, Personnel Skills*

1. Introduction

Historically, skills and knowledge have been persistent challenges for individuals and societies in fostering economic development. Matching skills with jobs is a priority to ensure that the human capital developed is fully utilised. Mohd Zaidi et al. (2025) conducted a meta-analysis examining the significant absence of a consolidated, standardized competency framework for TVET instructors, especially in Malaysia. Most educators lack formal pedagogical training, especially those who are fresh graduates or from technical backgrounds. There is also no national pre-service training centre for TVET educators. Muhd Khaizer Omar et al. (2020) highlight that TVET educators often lack critical competencies, particularly practical industry experience, teaching skills, and current knowledge. This results in theoretical, less engaging delivery of training and low student outcomes. Emotional and spiritual competencies (ESC) are also often overlooked.

Thus, education and training systems, including Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), help equip the current and future workforce with the skills required for a variety of occupations, including entrepreneurship. However, in practice, most countries face significant challenges in ensuring that their human capital development agendas are delivered as planned. Thus, the Importance of Competence in shaping an Academically Excellent Culture is very beneficial for future TVET educators. Competency TVET institutions can also utilise the diverse qualities of TVET educators to guide their clients in formulating their own competencies, fostering an excellent culture in the future. The objectives of this study are to:

- a) To explore the issue of competency in shaping an Academically Excellent Culture
- b) To explore the importance of competency in shaping an Academically Excellent Culture

To ensure that national TVET empowerment is recognised, various efforts have been implemented, particularly to increase the country's productivity and competitiveness. To strengthen TVET implementation, issues and challenges have been identified from several previous studies focusing on quality, governance, financing, branding, and industry. Rushda et al. (2023) mention in their study that well-trained and competent TVET educators are essential for economic development. Educators who maintain high academic standards ensure that students acquire the skills and knowledge to contribute effectively across industries, thereby driving economic growth and innovation.

The National TVET Policy 2030 will be implemented through 5 strategic thrusts and supported by 23 implementation strategies such as governance, comprehensive & synergize, world-class quality & educational pathways, efficient & productive industrial cooperation, sustainable TVET financing and TVET options for main career. All of the policies relate to Malaysia's vision to become a high-income, knowledge-driven economy, which requires a skilled workforce. An academically excellent culture supports the continuous development of curricula that respond to technological advancements and industry trends (ISEAS, 2025). Additionally, Graduates with high-level skills are better prepared to meet the dynamic demands of the labour market (RSIS International, 2022). TVET has often been perceived as a secondary educational pathway. However, when educators maintain high academic standards, they help change this perception. A rigorous academic environment can attract more students to pursue TVET as a prestigious and viable career pathway (Zakaria, 2023).

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Qualitative data pertaining to human behaviour can be observed through descriptive, oral, or written expressions (Jasmi, 2012). The researcher meticulously documented each dialogue with the informed consent of the participants, which was subsequently transcribed into a textual format for data analysis and future reference. Throughout the interview process, the researchers also took notes. Furthermore, the researchers conducted a comparative analysis of the notes relative to the transcripts to assess the consistency between the information obtained through oral interviews and that recorded in the transcripts. Using NVivo, the researchers established dependability by creating an audit trail and an exhaustive record of the data collection methodology.

The researchers undertook multiple readings of the interview transcripts. The transcription process and preliminary readings were imperative for familiarising oneself with the interview transcripts, and initial insights were documented during the transcription phase. The subsequent phase involved coding, theme formulation, and review. The data were subjected to both open and axial coding methodologies. The open coding phase initially yielded a multitude of codes, in which informant-centric terminology (Gioia et al., 2013) was preserved to authentically represent participants' lived experiences. In instances of overlapping codes, those were amalgamated, while codes lacking adequate support were eliminated.

Instrument design for semi-structured interviews involves creating a set of flexible guidelines that balance consistency and adaptability during data collection. The design typically includes open-ended questions and prompts, giving interviewers the freedom to explore topics in depth while ensuring that key areas of interest are covered. This approach enables the researcher to gain insights from participants' perspectives while maintaining a balance between structure and flexibility. According to Creswell (2014), the semi-structured format allows for the exploration of complex issues, as it encourages natural conversation flow while still addressing specific research objectives (Creswell, 2014).

Table 1 *Respondent Informant*

Informant code	Position	Experience in TVET	expertise
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M1	Director	45 years	TVET
M2	Senior lecturer	30 years	Education in TVET
M3	Senior lecturer	42 years	Electrical, IT, and Consultation in TVET

Using only three respondents in a semi-structured interview can be advantageous in qualitative research, particularly when the aim is to gather in-depth insights from a smaller sample. According to Morse (2000), small sample sizes are often employed in qualitative studies to facilitate a deeper understanding of individual perspectives, thereby ensuring that the data are rich and detailed. Limiting the number of respondents helps researchers manage the data more effectively and focus on capturing nuanced, context-specific information (Morse 2000), as well as determining the sample size in qualitative research. This approach is beneficial when time or resources are limited, as it enables a more manageable and focused analysis of each interview. However, researchers must acknowledge the limitations regarding the generalizability of the findings when using such a small sample size.

3. STUDY FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the thematic analysis show that each TVET educator graduate has an opinion based on their experience in the TVET sector. The results of the analysis on the importance and issues in shaping an Academically Excellent Culture are evident. The summary of every respondent is below:

The conversation addresses the competencies required of TVET lecturers, emphasising the importance of knowledge, psychomotor skills, and attitudes, and how these competencies are essential for producing quality graduates. The professor explains that lecturers must stay up to date with industry trends and new technologies. There is also a focus on the need for pedagogical skills and real-world teaching experience, with a strong emphasis on lifelong learning and continuous professional development. The professor further highlights challenges, such as the lack of pedagogical training for TVET lecturers, which affects teaching quality. The conversation also addresses the gap in academic culture and the need for research and internationalisation in TVET institutions to produce well-rounded graduates. The dialogue concludes with a call for greater communication, networking, and professional development for lecturers to ensure they can provide the best education to their students.

The competency of TVET educators is among the problems that can be seen. TVET educators must be competent in terms of technical skills, teaching skills and management skills. They must be qualified to teach and recognised as professionals. They must be capable of troubleshooting and fixing problems as practised in industry. But we have strong doubts about this....(M1)

There is a competency problem related to the skills of TVET educators. Okay, when we talk about TVET educators, they should be hands-on, have industry experience, pedagogy experience, it cannot be static. Experience TVET educators is a must... but most of them are not. Not all, but most of them, only know and teach what is in the book...TVET educators must learn new trend..... (M1)

TVET educators must have real task and real working environment to produce good TVET students. If lecturer didn't have this exposure?? How to train student? (M1)

Teaching method also important among TVET lecturer especially andragogy maybe.... UTHM is the one of MTUN which is have education in TVET. Only UTHM have education in TVET compared to other MTUN. So,

there engineering background which is directly teach the student with industry experience.....two week until three week there have been work as lecturer for teaching is not enough.....this is the weakness....this kind of lecturer not being exposed and experienced in pedagogy skills because to teaching in TVET obviously different with academic..... (M1)

Technical, pedagogy and personel skills , all of this is important in TVET education....(M1)

Integrity, authority, and professionalism is must when you are a TVET lecturer. To be an excellent TVET lecturer, you must give back to communities, transfer knowledge to societies for example you are a culinary lecturer, give your culinary knowledge to society, communities, a good and authoritative TVET lecturer is giving back their knowledge to society.....authoritative TVET lecturer is contribution to society....and is a part of your criteria of promotion journey to be associate prof or Professor... all of this thing is by design, strategize your vision and mission to be an excellent TVET lecturer....Don't wait for university, you have to set your own path to excellence...its individually..... (M1)

When we talk about integrity, it's a first not just talking to money, but work results. Making paper, teaching, but there have some lecturer, teach unteachable...disappointed...if there have a lecturer behave like that...its all bout integrity...publication, performance mark's and others...this need to have some integrity....don't start the bad culture, once you start, it becomes normalize. Don't be like that...that's integrity, we are Muslim. We can work smart do not step on other's..... (M1)

Professional is relate with integrity, responsibility also visibility to other platform.....TVET lecturer have to be brave...the academically excellent culture is life long learning....Competency must be have in Shaping an Academically Excellent Culture.....(M1)

The conversation covers competence, which consists of three key components: knowledge, referring to understanding theory and core expertise in a specific field; motor skills, encompassing the practical and technical abilities required for effective teaching; and interpersonal skills, including communication, relationship-building, and emotional intelligence. All three components are essential for delivering effective teaching and learning. The impact of competence on teaching performance is significant. TVET instructors are required to meet the competency standards set by the MQA. If any of the components of competence are missing, it can negatively affect teaching performance. Instructors who lack the necessary competence may be unqualified to teach, or even if they do teach, they may not meet the expected standards. Higher education demands more than just meeting the minimum curriculum requirements; it requires a deeper knowledge base and a well-rounded set of competencies to ensure high-quality education.

Every TVET lecturer needs to have competency, if we talk about competency, it comes with three element, skills, knowledge and attitude.....so, for example Culinary course, Culinary lecturer must be good in cooking..... A culinary lecturer must be good at cooking. He has knowledge and skills, but if he doesn't have an attitude and not professional, he is incompetent. A good TVET lecturer must be have this three element when to become a good TVET lecturer..... Knowledge is for their main expertise, Skills also for their main expertise, positive attitude also for their main expertise.....(M2).

Competence not only in your technical skills but also competence in pedagogy skills, in teaching and learning.....TVET lecturer also must competence in other related competency because in Public university, all TVET lecturer must competence to achieve (M2)

He must involve, he must have all three aspects of knowledge related to the field, scale related to the field and also a positive attitude. So that's why an educator or individual level really needs staff, ultimately this competition is in many fields, not just technical fields, for example my field is in-laws. So I also need competition in terms of teaching path and logic because I am in education, I must have competition in coaching and learning

as well. But apart from the technical field, our field, technology, education we also need to master other comparisons because as an industry leader our job is not just teaching, our job includes covering the 7Ps of teaching, research, renovation, management, and others I'm going to. So we have a lot of scope of work that we need to cover.... (M2)

To excel in our field of work, competency is one of the needs, is one of the needs but someone who is competency is not necessarily successful, he is excellent because excellence depends on many factors, one of which is competition For example, someone who is naturally competitive, he is indeed good at speaking in whether he is skilled in being professional while teaching but he is not excellent in this work. Why might it be because the level of satisfaction is between low. Maybe his commitment is too high, his burden is too much, he has too many unrelated burdens in his teaching field, maybe he is involved in management causing him not to excel in teaching so maybe his commitment to his family, his family has problems, his child is sick so Due to too many factors that influence the defilement of a staff, so we cannot say that someone who compares must be excellent in academia, no But what is certain is that competition is one of the factors that influence excellence or academic excellence culture. (M2)

.....to identify a competent person in that field or not, we see that he has performance, in that sense the 7Ps are set. If he has the 7P's to be excellent, to achieve every KPI, that means he is excellent, right? If he claims, we claim it's equally brilliant but when we look at the 7P, it's not achieved so how can we say it's brilliant. So to excel, we have to be measurable, we can measure it. Otherwise, he will be very much standard. That's right. Requirement A, he is excellent, so he achieved all 7Ps. Lecturer B is also said to be excellent but he did not achieve 7P. So??.....(M2)

Yes, I always hear, especially from the aspect of integrity, people's have problems in terms of, for example, corruption, not going to class, not marking assignments, then everyone gets an A after studying. This shows that we don't do the assessment correctly. We want to do the assessment correctly. We do the teaching process correctly. So these are all issues related to the integrity of professionalism and also authority.....(M2)

Prof Madya M3 presented a comprehensive overview of the competency requirements for academic staff in technical and vocational education (TVET), focusing on three core pillars essential for academic excellence: knowledge, skills, and attitude. Knowledge refers to technical expertise and industry-relevant understanding, while skills involve practical application and pedagogical abilities. Attitude encompasses the professional mindset and a positive approach to teaching and learning. In addition, the technical competency requirements include industry-specific knowledge, practical experience, occupational orientation aligned with current market demands, computer literacy, relevant technical skills, and problem-solving capabilities for production environments. The team also highlighted the importance of maintaining high professional standards and integrity across all academic activities, emphasizing that integrity is a non-negotiable element. Key professional elements discussed included integrity in academic and administrative work, professionalism in interactions with students and industry partners, ethical conduct in research and publication, and a commitment to continuous professional development. However, the discussion revealed significant gaps between industry expectations and academic preparation, particularly in TVET. The identified challenges included the ineffectiveness of a one-size-fits-all approach to diverse institutional needs, variation in competency requirements across educational levels (diploma, degree, and PhD), and the need for specialised competency frameworks for different academic roles.

We first need to define what is meant by competence in terms of knowledge, competence in terms of experience, Xperia of knowledge in teaching and learning if we say MTUN, Malaysia Technical University Networking now calls MTQ Malaysia Technical University comparative competence that is meant in the context of MTUN is that it includes three compounding components, one component in terms of knowledge, compounding term of that, so if asked to agree we want the signal to need to have potential. ... (M3)

yes to be a lecturer in the TVET field, lecturer must have skills of teaching and learning at the

university.... there should be competent in 3 skills, knowledge, technical and personnel. Through this, it can be applied all the knowledge in terms of theoretical practical that can be delivered effectively....(M3)

.....to ensure that we truly understand our roles and responsibilities as lecturers, even more so if we refer to professional terms, when we are professionals there are guidelines that we need to refer to ensure that our responsibilities are based on government criteria or characteristics that are specified. in our list of duties indeed the scope or scope of duties that we have to follow, there are actions so in terms of professionalism and to achieve good or successful professionalism we need to follow courses or training that are said to have a good standard level of competence from professionalism. so professionalism refers to potential. In terms of integrity it will happen long your duty or long the process of teaching and learning meaning we do not have the ability to act as lecturers. If we look at the terminology of competence itself, our ability to be responsible in the academic context of excellence, this component is indeed very, very important, to ensure the quality of energy at a very good level based on an excellent culture....M3)

In the end, especially the field of knowledge in technical is very crucial. if we don't have a background in the technical field, we won't be able to master it well because it's not a field. There are some that are only based on theoretical knowledge but when it comes to TVET, it has to be balanced, theoretical and practical. Lecturers who know a lot of theory and have good experience but they have a bad personality, it's also difficult to excel. The balancing of this 3 skills are required.....(M3)

The Importance of Competency in Shaping an Academically Excellent Culture to sustaining a culture of excellence within educational institutions with knowledge in fields, Pedagogical Abilities and Practical Application, Professional, Integrity, and Authority, Aligning TVET Education with Market Needs.

3.1. Knowledge: The foundation for excellence in TVET Education

Knowledge, particularly in terms of technical expertise and industry-relevant understanding, is crucial for TVET lecturers to foster a culture of excellence. TVET Lecturers must retain not only academic knowledge but also practical industry experience, enabling them to teach students effectively and provide real-world applications (Khan et al., 2023; Lee et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2023; Altbach & Knight, 2023). A culture of excellence is exist upon educators who are well-versed in the latest trends, technologies, and practices within their respective fields. TVET educators need to stay advanced with industry trends and innovations, such as AI, automation, and green technologies, to ensure that the curriculum remains relevant and that students are prepared for the workforce (Zhang & Li, 2023; Liu & Karpinski, 2023; Moore & Green, 2023; Saxena & Zhou, 2023). The continuous development of their technical knowledge helps fill the gap between what is taught in the classroom and what is expected in the real world (Edwards et al., 2023; Saxena & Zhou, 2023). If educators are not equipped with the most current knowledge, the quality of education suffers, and students may graduate without the skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing job market (Yu & Li, 2023; Mayer et al., 2024).

3.2. Pedagogical abilities and practical Application

Skills, both pedagogical and practical, are essential in creating a dynamic and effective learning environment, which is a key characteristic of a culture of excellence. Pedagogical skills enable educators to engage students and employ teaching methods that foster active learning and skill development. The ability to apply practical knowledge in the classroom ensures that students are not only prepared theoretically but also equipped with the practical tools necessary for their careers (Gentry & Daugherty, 2023; Hodge et al., 2023; Doran et al., 2024; Brown et al., 2023). As pointed out in the interviews, practical application is a hallmark of TVET education, and the lack of exposure to real-world scenarios can diminish the effectiveness of teaching. Educators with industry experience are better equipped to connect theory and practice, providing students with a deeper understanding of how their learning can be applied in the field (Roberts & Tynan, 2024; Spence & Martin, 2024; Weber & De Jong, 2023). The development of pedagogical expertise enables educators to tailor their teaching methods to meet students' diverse needs and learning styles, thereby fostering a culture of excellence in TVET institutions (Miller & Jukes, 2024; Bannister et al., 2023; Wang, 2024). For the TVET institution, it's important to ensure the continued supply of competent employees who have been trained at institutions that comply with

established quality standards and criteria.

3.3. Professionalism, Integrity and Authority

The attitude of TVET educators plays a significant role in merging a culture of excellence. A professional mindset and positive approach to teaching are essential in creating an environment that encourages student success and promotes continuous improvement (Miller & Jukes, 2024; Doran et al., 2023; Harris & Simons, 2024; Bannister et al., 2023). TVET lecturers must demonstrate a commitment to lifelong learning and personal growth, continually updating their skills, knowledge, and teaching methodologies to remain current and effective. This attitude towards professional development is integral to maintaining the standards required for high-quality teaching (Moore & Green, 2024; Spence & Martin, 2024; Aytac & Pinar, 2024; Zubair et al., 2023). Integrity in teaching is also critical to achieving a culture of excellence. Integrity in both academic and administrative work is non-negotiable, as it ensures that educators serve as role models for their students (Mayer et al., 2023; Zubair et al., 2023; Zhang & Li, 2023; Bannister et al., 2024). A commitment to ethical conduct and professionalism in all aspects of teaching fosters trust and respect between lecturers and students, enhancing the learning environment. Furthermore, an educator's ability to model positive attitudes such as empathy, communication, and collaboration encourages students to develop these values as well (Hodge et al., 2023; Miller & Jukes, 2024; Gentry & Daugherty, 2023).

3.4. Addressing Industry-Academia gaps: Challenges in aligning TVET education with market needs

The interviews also highlighted significant gaps between industry expectations and academic preparation in TVET institutions, a challenge that impacts the establishment of a culture of excellence. The current one-size-fits-all approach in curriculum design fails to address the diverse needs of institutions and industries, and the lack of industry collaboration often leads to discrepancies between the skills graduates possess and the skills required by employers (Van der Meer et al., 2023; Rodriguez & Weiss, 2024; Glen et al., 2023; Groves et al., 2023). As highlighted by Prof M1, Prof. Madya M2 and Professor M3, institutions must develop specialised competency frameworks tailored to specific academic roles and industry requirements to bridge these gaps and improve the alignment between education and market demands (Grajales et al., 2024; Makram et al., 2023; Zubair et al., 2023). Moreover, as technological advancements continue to shape industries, there is an increasing need for TVET educators to be involved in industry collaboration and to gain real-world exposure to emerging technologies (Glen et al., 2023; Saxena & Zhou, 2023; Serban et al., 2024; Yu & Li, 2024). By engaging in continuous networking and collaboration with industry experts, TVET lecturers can gain insights into industry trends and integrate these into their teaching, ensuring that the curriculum stays relevant and produces competent graduates who meet industry standards (Saxena & Zhou, 2023; Serban et al., 2024; Zhang & Li, 2023; McCulloch & Williams, 2023).

The creation of a culture of excellence within TVET institutions relies on the development of well-rounded educators who possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Educators must not only be technically competent but also continuously engage in professional development and stay aligned with industry needs. Addressing the challenges of industry-academia alignment and ensuring a pedagogical focus will help bridge gaps and foster a dynamic and relevant learning environment for students. A culture of excellence in TVET education is achieved when competence is nurtured across all levels of instruction, fostering an environment of collaboration, professionalism, and ethical practice.

Overall, these findings align with the principles of human capital theory (Becker, 1993; Selane & Odeku, 2024), which posits that investment in education and training enhances employability and productivity. They also echo previous empirical research (Y. Jing et al., 2022; Mendoza et al., 2025), affirming that well-developed technical and vocational skills serve as key drivers for successful labor market integration.

4. CONCLUSION

This study on TVET educator competencies has several limitations that should be considered when

interpreting the findings. First, the study is primarily based on qualitative interviews with a limited number of participants, which may not fully represent the diverse range of experiences and perspectives within the broader TVET educator community. The small sample size may introduce sampling bias, and the findings may not be generalizable to all TVET institutions or educators, particularly in diverse cultural or educational contexts (Zainal et al., 2022). Second, the study focuses primarily on TVET educators in Malaysia, which means that the findings may be more relevant to the specific challenges and educational frameworks within the Malaysian context. The insights may not be directly applicable to other countries or regions with different educational policies, industry needs, and training systems. There is also the potential for cultural bias, as the interviewees' responses may be influenced by local norms and expectations that do not necessarily reflect global TVET trends (Abdullah et al., 2023).

Additionally, the study's reliance on self-reported data from educators introduces the possibility of social desirability bias, where participants may provide answers they believe are expected or socially acceptable, rather than honest reflections of their experiences and challenges. The findings might also be limited by the subjectivity of the interview process, where the researcher's interpretations of the data could influence the analysis and conclusions (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2020).

Finally, the study primarily focuses on the current competency gaps and challenges faced by TVET educators, without examining the impact of these gaps on student outcomes or the long-term effectiveness of TVET programs in depth. Future studies could explore these aspects in more depth. Given the limitations outlined above, future research on TVET educator competencies could expand the scope of the study to include a larger, more diverse sample of educators from different countries, regions, and types of TVET institutions, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and needs faced by TVET educators globally. Such studies could also explore the perspectives of industry partners, students, and policy makers to gain a more holistic view of the competencies required for effective TVET education and how these competencies impact educational quality and graduate employability.

Future research should also investigate the long-term effects of enhanced educator competencies, specifically how these improvements affect student learning outcomes, skill acquisition, and job-market success. Besides, research could focus on the implementation of specialised competency frameworks for different levels of TVET education (e.g., diploma, degree, PhD) to better meet the diverse needs of institutions and industries (Zainal et al., 2022). Given the rapid technological advancements in AI, robotics, and digital transformation, future research could examine how TVET educators can develop the competencies needed to effectively integrate these technologies into their curricula. Understanding how educators can keep pace with technological innovation while maintaining pedagogical quality will be essential for preparing students for the future workforce (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2023; Department of Skills Development Malaysia, 2021). Finally, future studies should explore the role of industry-academia partnerships in enhancing educator competencies, as close collaboration between educational institutions and industry partners is essential for ensuring that TVET educators are equipped with the practical skills and up-to-date knowledge necessary to meet market demands (Lee et al., 2024).

The establishment of a culture of excellence within Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions is contingent upon cultivating well-rounded educators who embody the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Educators are required to possess not only technical proficiency but also to engage in ongoing professional development while remaining attuned to the evolving needs of the industry. Confronting the challenges associated with aligning industry practices and academic frameworks, and ensuring a pedagogical emphasis, will facilitate the bridging of gaps and promote a dynamic, relevant learning environment for students. The realisation of a culture of excellence in TVET education is attained through the nurturing of competence at all instructional levels, thereby fostering an atmosphere characterised by collaboration, professionalism, and ethical conduct.

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