



# Towards an Equitable Qualification for Learners in Schools of Skills: A Freirean Perspective

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# Introduction

## On Qualifications

- Umalusi is South Africa's Quality Council (QC) for General and Further Education and Training.

NQF Act No. 67 of 2008;  
as amended  
GENFETQA Act 58 of

- **Ensuring the development of qualifications and associated curricula.**

- Accrediting providers to offer such qualifications.

- **Currently**
- Development of the General Education Certificate (GEC).
- To be awarded at the end of Grade 9.
- Equivalent to Year 4 in the Schools of Skills
- Curriculum and assessment model on pilot
- The GEC will address the unique needs of learners in Schools of Skills.

**NQF Level 1  
Qualification**

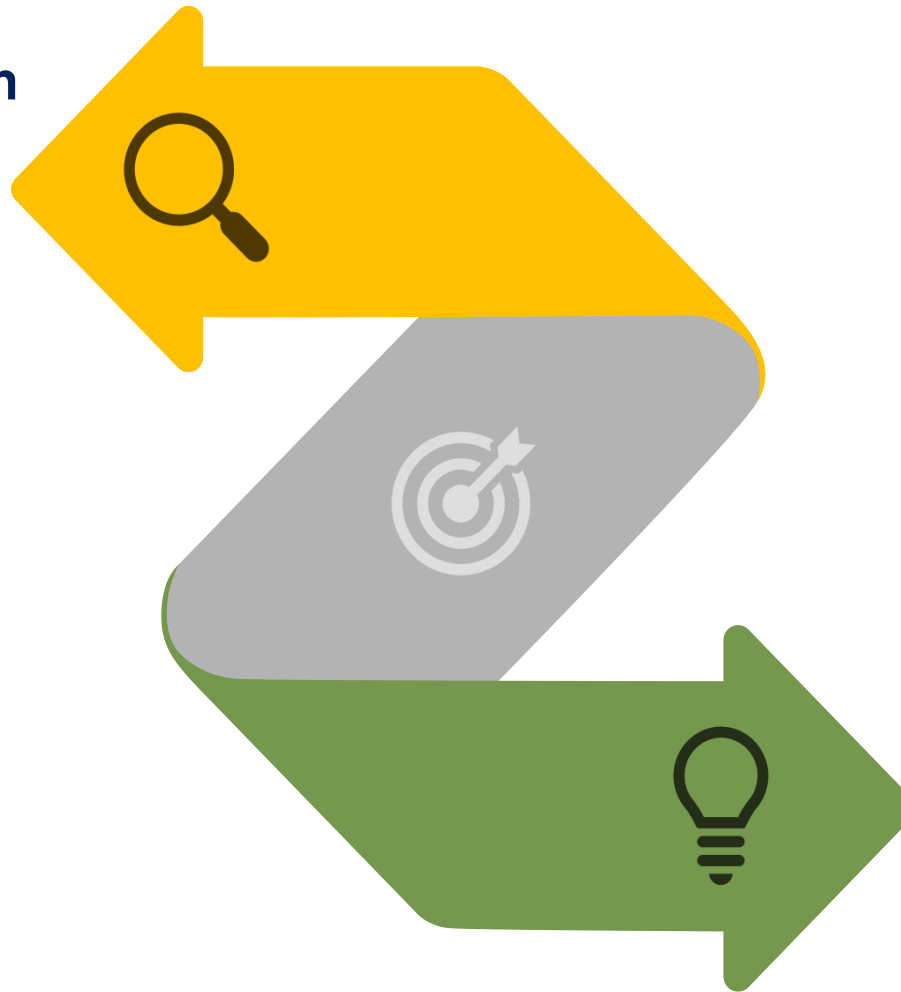
- Issuing certificates to qualifying learners

# Concept clarification

## Inclusive education

Supported by laws like the South African Schools Act, No. 84 of 1996 as amended and White Paper 6 (2001).

Seeks to guarantee that all students, regardless of their skills or impairments, have access to high-quality instruction in normal classroom settings.



## Schools of Skills

A type of special school for learners with mild to moderate intellectual disabilities (MID) who are unable to cope within mainstream schools due to their innate abilities.

Offer what is currently referred to as the Technical Occupation Curriculum (TOC).

Offer a 4-year programme aimed at learners with an aptitude for skills training and who love doing practical work.

# Inclusive Education in South Africa

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Traditionally based on exclusion, with learners placed in special schools or classes.

Research and social change led to a shift towards inclusion in education.

## KEY POLICIES & COMMITMENTS

White Paper 6 (2001): Government commitment to inclusive education, reducing reliance on special schools.

Ensures equal participation for all learners, regardless of their difficulties.

The goal was to adapt mainstream schools to meet a broader range of needs.

Screening, Identification, Assessment and Support (SIAS) Policy (Department of Basic Education, 2014).

## CHALLENGES & SPECIAL SCHOOLS' ROLE

Some learners with severe disabilities still require specialised support.


Special schools provide tailored services, therapies, and assistive technology.

Intellectual disability emerged within inclusive education.

Learners experiencing moderate cognitive barriers to learning are accommodated in Schools of Skills.

# Schools of Skills Learner Profile

AGE RANGE	LEARNING BARRIERS	LANGUAGE CHALLENGES	ADDITIONAL CONDITIONS
13–19 years (admitted at 13, turning 14).	Mild to moderate intellectual disabilities, and difficulties with reading, writing, and comprehension.	Learners may struggle if their home language differs from the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT).	Dyslexia, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), autism, and other psychosocial difficulties.

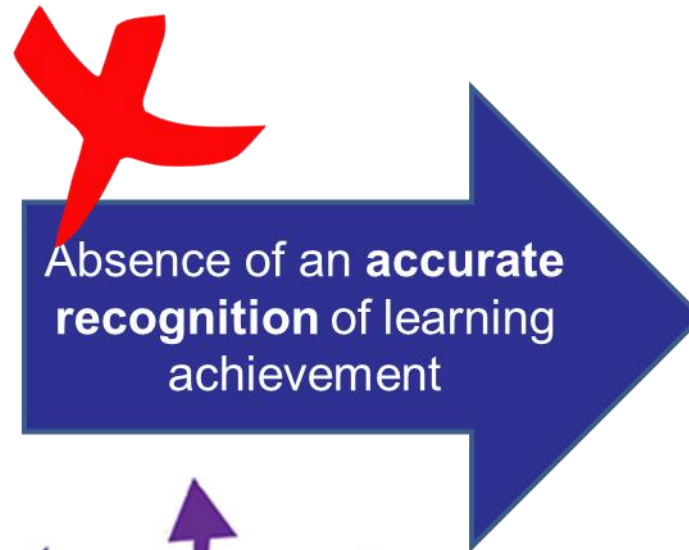


# Subjects offered in Schools of Skills

- ❖ Agricultural studies
- ❖ Arts and Crafts
- ❖ Early Childhood Development
- ❖ Electrical Technology: Electrical
- ❖ Mechanical Technology: Motor Mechanics
- ❖ Mechanical Technology: Spray Painting and Body Works
- ❖ Mechanical Technology: Welding
- ❖ Mechanical Technology: Sheet Metal Work
- ❖ Civil Technology: Woodworking and Timber
- ❖ Civil Technology: Plumbing
- ❖ Civil Technology: Bricklaying and Plastering
- ❖ Personal Care: Hairdressing
- ❖ Personal Care: Beauty and Nail Technology
- ❖ Personal Care: Ancillary Health Care
- ❖ Consumer Studies: Food Production
- ❖ Consumer Studies: Sewing
- ❖ Hospitality Studies
- ❖ Wholesale and Retail Studies
- ❖ Service Technology: Upholstery
- ❖ Service Technology: Maintenance
- ❖ Office Administration

ICT offered as a compulsory enrichment subject to all Year 1-4 learners  
Four fundamental subjects (Mathematics, English, Natural sciences and Life orientation)

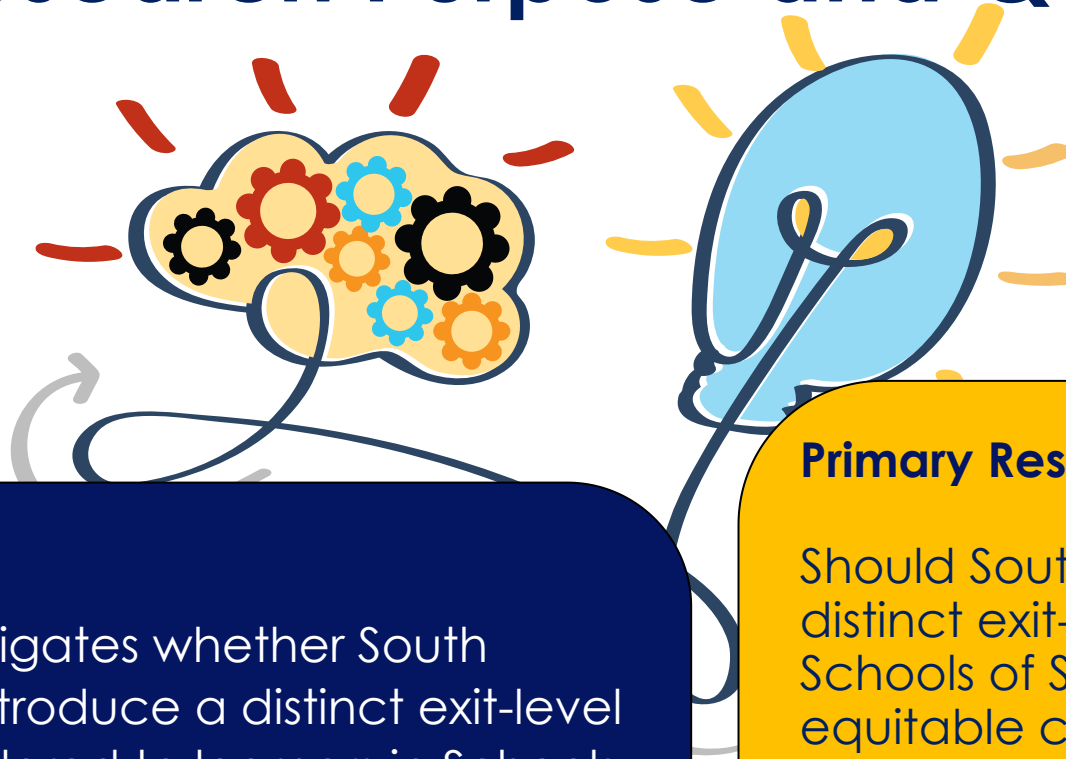
# Problem Statement



**Limited facilitation of access, mobility, and progression within education, training, and career paths**



# Research Purpose and Question



## Purpose

This study investigates whether South Africa should introduce a distinct exit-level qualification tailored to learners in Schools of Skills, ensuring equitable access to meaningful certification aligned with their abilities and career pathways.

## Primary Research Question

Should South Africa implement a distinct exit-level qualification for Schools of Skills learners to ensure equitable certification and alignment with their abilities and career pathways?

## Supporting Research Question

What lessons can South Africa learn from international models of certification for learners with special needs?

# Methodology

For this study, **qualitative secondary data analysis** was conducted using Umalusi's study investigating the possible provision of the General Education Certificate to learners in Schools of Skills as a data source.

## The main study adopted:

- ❖ Mixed-methods research approach
  - ❖ Online survey
  - ❖ Semi-structured interviews
  - ❖ School observation

Furthermore, **desktop research** to identify best practices from international models was conducted in this study.



# Theoretical Framework: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970)

## Education as a Tool for Social Transformation

Education should drive deep social change, combating discrimination, exclusion, poverty, and inequity.

Inspired by a pedagogy of hope, promoting transformative learning.



## Critique of the "Banking Model" of Education

Traditional education sees students as passive recipients of knowledge ("banking concept").

This reinforces oppression rather than critical thinking and transformation.

Instead, education should be problem-solving.

# Theoretical Framework: Paulo Freire's Critical Pedagogy (Freire, 1970) cont.

## Critical Consciousness

Awareness of oppression and questioning existing power structures.

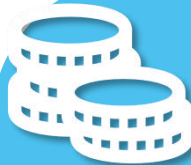
Teaching is inherently political; neutrality is an illusion.



## Education as a Path to Liberation

Critical pedagogy empowers marginalised communities and oppressed students.

Learning should free individuals from exploitation and challenge societal norms.



# Findings: Recognition of Achievement

## Types of Reports

Some schools issue two types of report cards – an academic report and a technical/skills report, both designed by the schools.

## Lack of National Certification

No official qualification from the national office is provided; progress reports are issued as feedback.

## School-Based Certificates

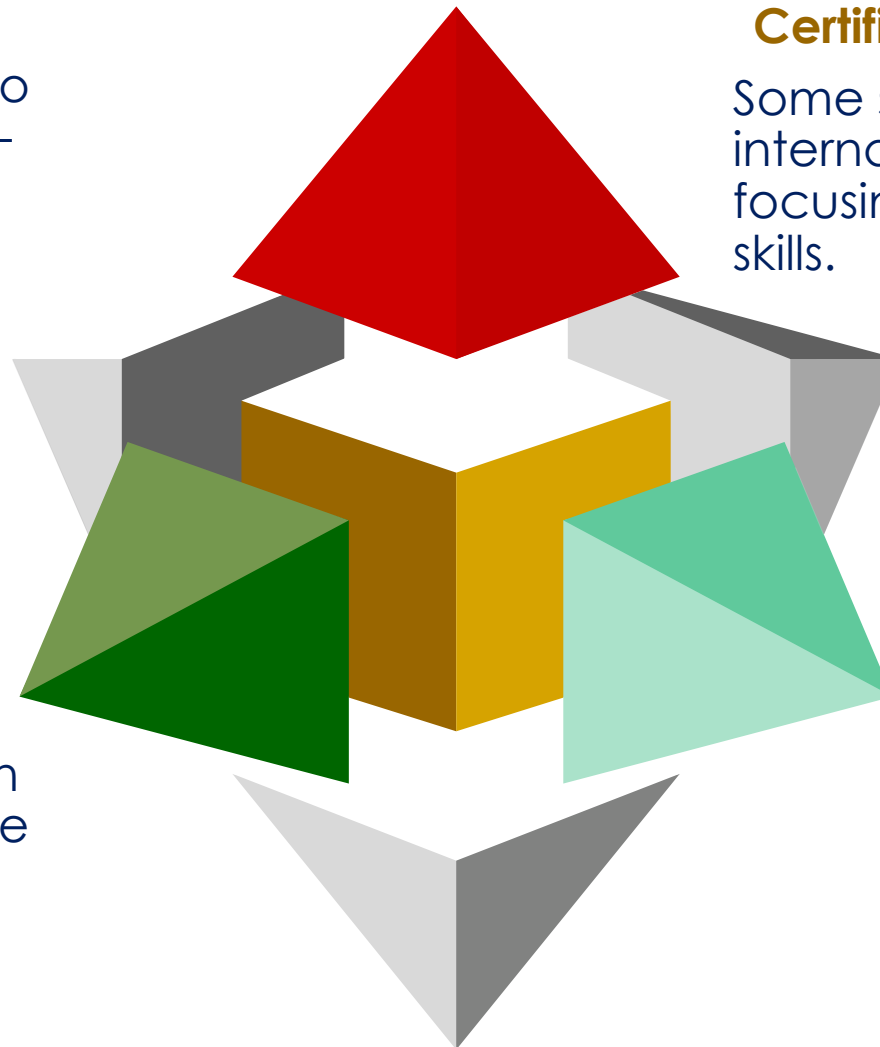
Some schools provide internal certificates focusing on technical skills.

## Challenges

No standardised recognition system across Schools of Skills.

Lack of national certification demotivates learners and parents.

Employers do not recognise school-based certificates, limiting job opportunities.



# Findings: International Practices

## Canada

Provinces set their own policies.

Students with special needs can follow individualised programs and earn a Certificate of Completion.

## Ireland

The Junior Certificate School Programme (JCSP) helps 12–16-year-olds struggling with mainstream education.

JCSP students receive Individualised Student Profiles highlighting their achievements.

## Germany

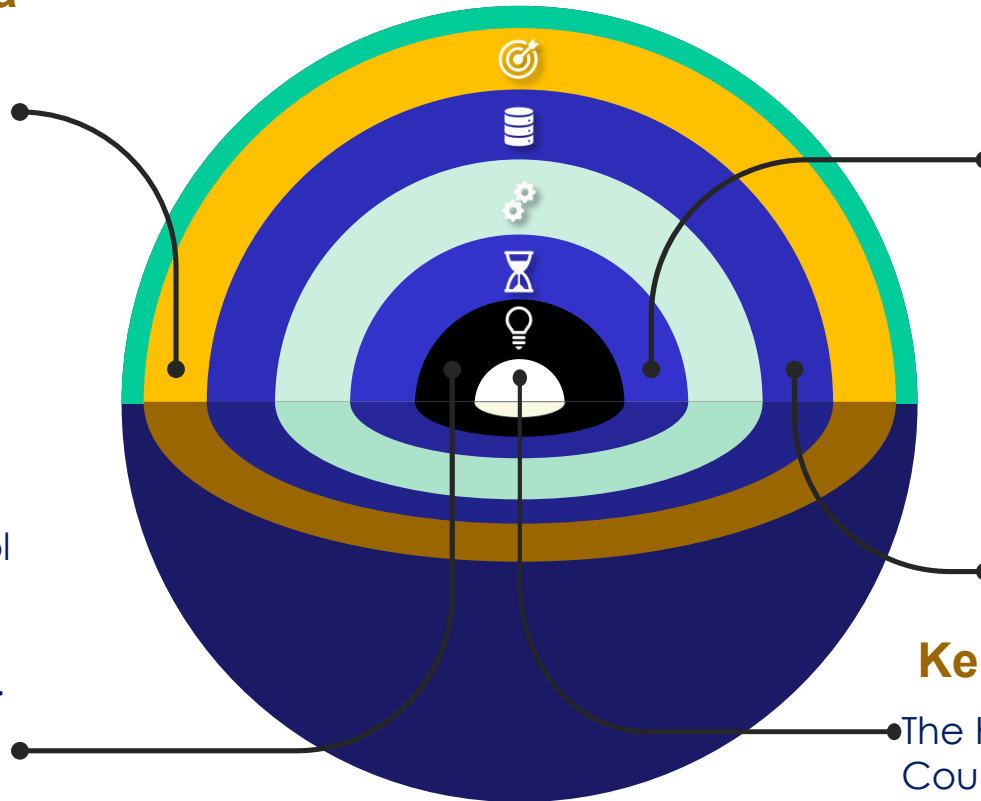
Offers individualised education programs or adapted curricula. Students can achieve vocational or academic qualifications through alternative pathways.

## Japan

Special needs schools grant certificates equivalent to regular schools, recognised by employers to facilitate workforce integration.

## Kenya

The Kenya National Examinations Council (KNEC) provides a Learner Exit Profile (LEP), documenting skills, values, and non-formal learning activities for students leaving any stage of the education system.



# Discussion: A Freirean Perspective

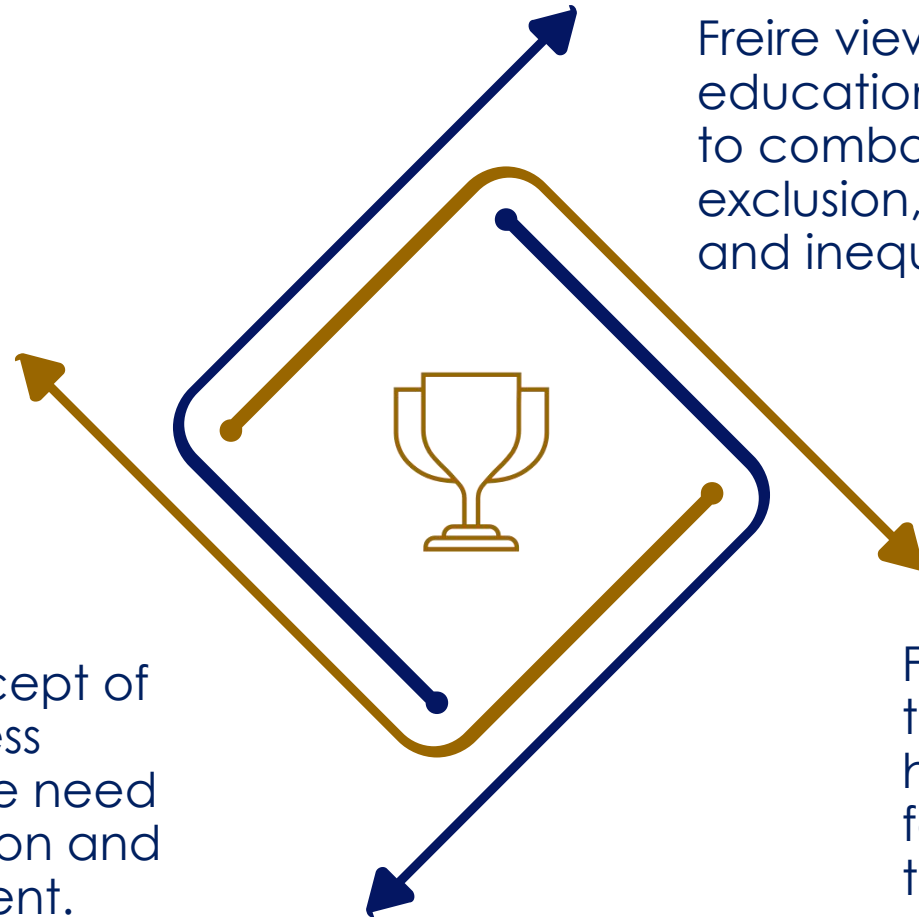
## Education, Inclusion, and Social Justice

Education is inherently political; it must be challenged and also challenge existing structures.

Freire views education as a tool to combat exclusion, poverty, and inequity.

Freire's concept of consciousness highlights the need for recognition and empowerment.

Freire emphasises the pedagogy of hope as a driving force for transformation.



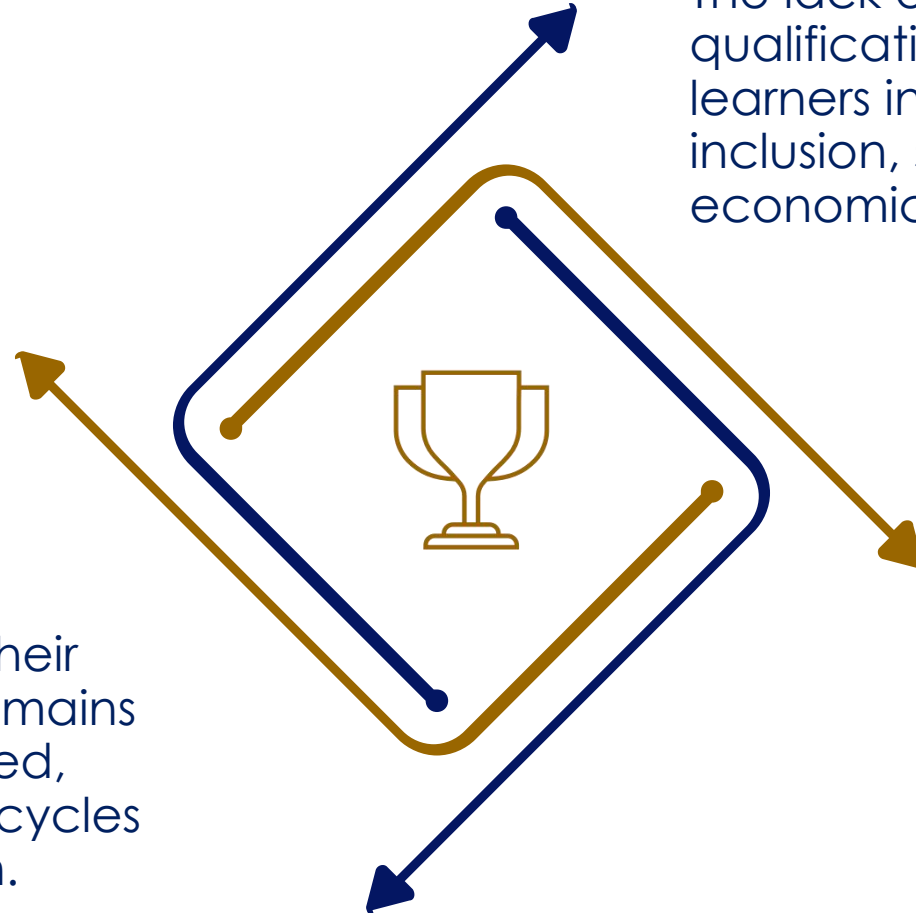
# Discussion: A Freirean Perspective

## Challenges in the Current Education System

Traditional education is a passive transfer of knowledge.

The absence of certification mirrors this outdated model, restricting learners' opportunities.

Without it, their potential remains unrecognised, reinforcing cycles of exclusion.



The lack of a standardised qualification for Schools of Skills learners in South Africa limits inclusion, social mobility, and economic opportunities.

Grounded in the importance of dialogue and engaging in a reciprocal exchange of ideas and experiences, lessons can be drawn from international practices.



# Discussion: A Freirean Perspective

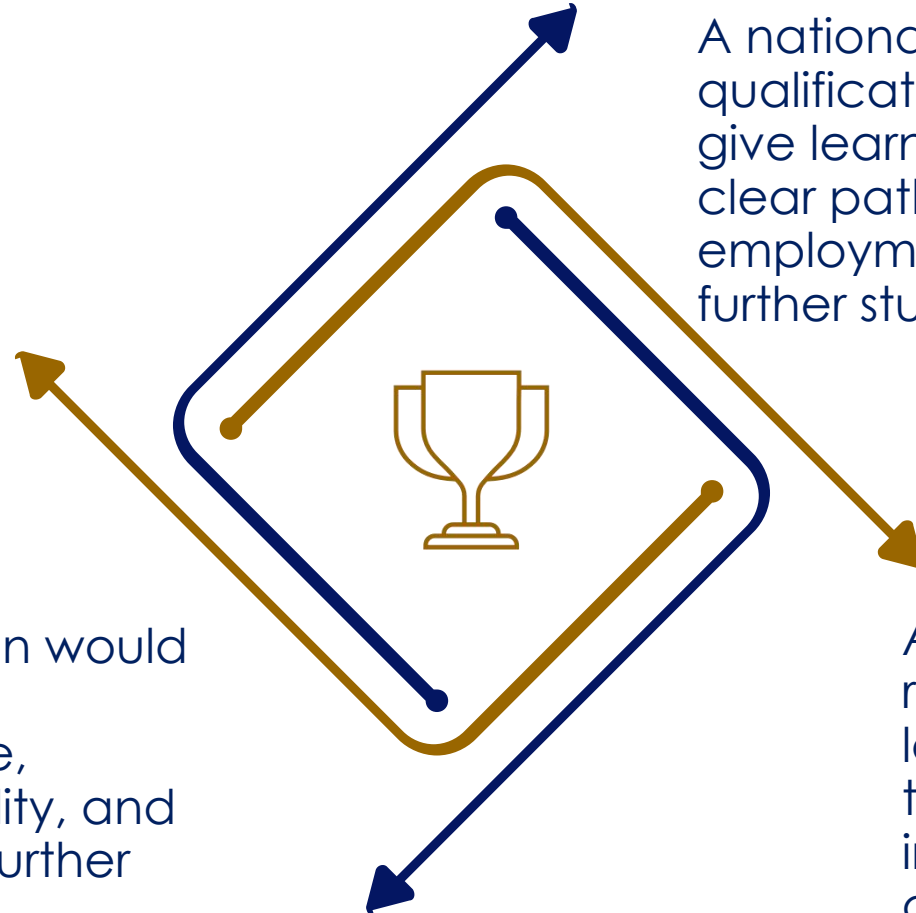
## The Need for a Standardised Qualification

Learners need certification to understand their role in society and the workforce.

A national qualification would give learners a clear path to employment and further study.

A formal qualification would enhance confidence, employability, and access to further education.

A formal recognition of learning aligns with the principles of inclusive education and social justice.





# Conclusion

- ❖ The lack of certification is a form of systemic oppression.
- ❖ Drawing on Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy, the argument for qualification for learners in Schools of Skills in South Africa is both compelling and necessary.
- ❖ Freire's educational philosophy emphasises the transformative power of education to challenge marginalisation and change oppressive structures, making it particularly relevant to the context of Schools of Skills.
- ❖ This position aligns with the broader goals of social justice, empowerment, and educational equity.



# Pedagogy as Hope, Recognition, Empowerment and Liberation

