



Enhancing Employability and Workplace Readiness through the International Career Coaching Programme (ICCP) in South African TVET Colleges

Rachel Tholakele Khoza¹, Akanimo Odon², Nellie Kangwa³, Tinashe Mutero⁴

¹University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg Business School, South Africa

²Envirofly Consulting Group, United Kingdom

³Flexylearn International, Republic of Zambia

⁴University of Johannesburg, Johannesburg Business School, South Africa

Abstract

South Africa's TVET sector faces persistent challenges in preparing graduates with transferable skills for a volatile labour market. The International Career Coaching Programme (ICCP), developed through international collaboration and accredited by the UK CPD Certification Service, was designed to address this gap by embedding career coaching within vocational education. This study examines participant's perceived outcomes of the ICCP in terms of employability, workplace readiness, and professional development among TVET students and lecturers. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining pre- and post-programme questionnaires with thematic analysis of open-ended responses. Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS. Findings indicate broadly positive self-reported improvements in communication, problem-solving, teamwork, and workplace readiness, with entrepreneurial confidence emerging as a particularly salient perceived outcome. The programme's CPD-accredited international framing contributed to participant's perceived global career awareness and professional legitimacy. Differential completion rates between students and lecturers are treated as analytically significant, reflecting structural inequalities in programme access rather than motivational deficiency. The study contributes to debates on career coaching in vocational education and argues that the ICCP provides a model for integrating structured coaching into TVET curricula, provided that implementation is accompanied by structural investment in digital access, workload accommodation, and institutional support.

Keywords: TVET; employability; career coaching; workplace readiness; skills development; South Africa; CPD.

1. Introduction

South Africa's TVET sector occupies a formally strategic position in national responses to unemployment, yet the gap between its policy mandate and its structural realities has proven difficult to close. With youth unemployment consistently above 50 per cent and the formal economy unable to absorb available labour at the scale required, the question of how vocational institutions prepare graduates for labour market entry carries social urgency beyond its educational dimensions [1,2]. TVET colleges are expected to produce technically capable, employment-ready graduates while simultaneously developing entrepreneurial capacity, digital fluency, and the transferable competencies that contemporary workplaces demand. The empirical record suggests they frequently fall short on all counts, not because of institutional failure alone but because of systemic under resourcing, curriculum misalignment, and a persistent mismatch between what colleges teach and what employers require [3,4]. Career coaching has attracted increasing attention as one intervention capable of bridging this gap. Unlike generic employability skills training, structured coaching is oriented towards developing goal clarity, professional self-efficacy, and the adaptability to navigate career transitions in contexts of uncertainty [5,6]. Evidence from higher education contexts suggests that coaching programmes can contribute meaningfully to students' employability competence development, particularly when they are sustained over time and incorporate reflection and goal-directed action [8,5]. Evidence from TVET specific contexts is considerably thinner, particularly in the African setting, where career guidance services remain underdeveloped and the structural barriers to graduate employment extend well beyond individual competence gaps [9,10,8].



The ICCP, developed through international collaboration and accredited by the UK CPD Certification Service, represents a structured attempt to integrate professional career coaching into the TVET environment. Delivered across multiple South African TVET colleges, the programme targets both students and lecturers, aiming to develop employability competencies, entrepreneurial orientation, and workplace readiness while simultaneously building lecturer coaching capacity. Its international accreditation framework is a deliberate design feature, intended to confer professional legitimacy on participant credentials and to orient participants towards global as well as domestic career possibilities. This article examines participant's perceived outcomes of the ICCP across the pre- and post-programme period, drawing on mixed-methods survey data from 160 pre-programme and 68 post-programme respondents. It does not make causal claims about programme effectiveness; the data are self-reported and cross-sectional, and are treated accordingly. The study's contribution is threefold, (1) it provides empirically grounded evidence on participant perceptions of career coaching in a South African TVET context, (2) it examines the role of international CPD accreditation in shaping participant-perceived professional legitimacy and career aspiration and, (3) it treats differential programme completion as a structural finding rather than a measurement inconvenience. The research questions are: (1) How did ICCP participants perceive the programme's contribution to their employability, workplace readiness, and professional development? (2) What role did the programme's international accreditation framing play in shaping participant perceptions of career possibility? (3) What do patterns of participation and completion reveal about the structural conditions for career coaching delivery in South African TVET colleges?. By answering the research questions, the study aims to examine participant's perceived outcomes of the ICCP in terms of employability, workplace readiness, and professional development among TVET students and lecturers. The next section will cover literature review.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1. Theoretical Framework

A robust theoretical framework for this study draws on Human Capital Theory and Career Construction Theory to explain how structured career coaching interventions can strengthen employability and workplace readiness among students in South African TVET colleges. Human Capital Theory suggests that investment in knowledge, skills, and competencies enhances individual productivity and labour market competitiveness, positioning the ICCP as a mechanism for developing transferable skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, and entrepreneurial capacity [11]. Complementing this perspective, Career Construction Theory emphasises career adaptability, self-awareness, and proactive career planning as essential capabilities for navigating dynamic and uncertain labour markets [11]. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive lens for understanding the ICCP as an intervention that not only builds employability skills but also promotes career identity development and long-term professional readiness in an increasingly complex employment environment [12].

2.2. Employability and Workplace Readiness in TVET

Graduate employability in the South African TVET context is shaped by intersecting structural conditions: curriculum-industry misalignment, credential undervaluation relative to university qualifications, weak work-integrated learning infrastructure, and the socio-economic circumstances of the student population [3,13]. Research consistently identifies a gap between the competencies TVET graduates possess on completion and those that employers require, a gap that is simultaneously a curriculum problem, a pedagogy problem, and a structural labour market problem [4,14]. Soft skills, defined broadly as communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and adaptability, feature prominently in employer accounts of what TVET graduates lack, a finding with direct implications for programme design [15,16].

The concept of workplace readiness extends the employability frame: it refers to the combination of practical competence, professional orientation, and psychosocial preparedness that enables graduates to function effectively from the point of labour market entry [16,17]. Research on workplace readiness among South African TVET students identifies career self-efficacy, career exploration, and self-perceived employability as significant predictors, suggesting that affective and psychological dimensions of preparation matter alongside technical skill development [16]. Programmes that address these



dimensions alongside hard skills may contribute to a more durable form of graduate readiness than those focused exclusively on technical competencies.

2.3. Career Coaching and Career Guidance in Vocational Education

Career coaching in educational contexts is characterised by a facilitative, goal-oriented process aimed at developing self-clarity, career goal clarity, and the confidence to act on professional aspirations [6,5]. According to [6] career resources model identifies self-clarity and career-goal clarity as foundational prerequisites for career optimism and career security, outcomes with direct relevance to TVET graduates navigating constrained opportunity structures. [5], in a multi-institutional study of career coaching in higher education in the Netherlands and Belgium, found that autonomy-supportive coaching was positively associated with employability competence development, with trial-and-error encouragement and reflective practice as key facilitative mechanisms.

In the African TVET context specifically, career guidance and counselling services are poorly developed, and the majority of graduates navigate career decision-making without structured institutional support [8,9]. According to [9] and [10] have documented the career barriers facing marginalised South African youth and the significance of contextually grounded interventions in supporting career adaptability among disadvantaged populations. [18] identifies self-knowledge and career exploration as foundational to sound career decision-making across international contexts, a framework that aligns with the ICCP's coaching design. The scarcity of structured career coaching provision in South African TVET colleges positions the ICCP as a rare institutional attempt to address this gap at scale.

2.4. CPD Accreditation, International Frameworks, and Professional Legitimacy

Professional accreditation in continuing professional development (CPD) serves multiple functions in vocational education: it provides quality assurance signals to participants, employers, and institutional partners; it confers credential recognition that individual college certificates may not command; and it positions programme participants within professional networks and discourses that extend beyond the national context [18,19]. For TVET participants in a context where vocational credentials are frequently undervalued relative to university qualifications, international CPD accreditation carries a specific legitimising function: it reframes the participant's learning within a credentialed professional identity that is recognised beyond the domestic South African system.

The aspiration to international career exposure and global professional participation is documented among TVET students in sub-Saharan African contexts as simultaneously rational, given domestic opportunity constraints, and aspirationally significant, in expanding the range of professional futures participants are willing to contemplate [10,20]. Programmes that explicitly engage this aspiration, by exposing participants to international professional standards, accredited credentials, and global network possibilities, may contribute to what has been described as a 'cosmopolitan capability': the professional orientation and confidence to engage with global as well as local career environments. Whether this translates into concrete mobility or international employment is a question beyond the reach of the present data; but the aspiration activation itself is analytically significant as an employability-relevant outcome.

2.5. Lecturer Professional Development and Coaching Capacity in TVET

TVET lecturer professional development is a documented weak point in the South African sector. [21] and [22] have documented the effects of professional competence deficiencies on lecturer confidence, self-efficacy, and institutional effectiveness, identifying inadequate training and development as a primary structural driver. Programmes that develop coaching capacity among lecturers carry implications beyond individual professional development: lecturers who acquire coaching skills and apply them in their institutional contexts function as multipliers, extending programme benefit to students and colleagues who did not participate directly [23]. This multiplier logic is central to the ICCP's institutional design, which targets lecturers alongside students in the expectation that lecturer development will generate downstream institutional benefit.



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The study employs a cross-sectional mixed-methods design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of participant experiences. Quantitative data obtained from Likert-scale items in pre- and post-programme instruments are analysed descriptively using frequencies, means, standard deviations, and distributional comparisons, while qualitative responses from open-ended items are examined through thematic analysis using inductive coding procedures [24,25]. The two data streams are treated as complementary, where quantitative findings establish patterns and trends, and qualitative insights provide depth, context, and meaning. Given the exploratory nature of the study, no inferential statistical analyses are conducted, as the focus is on interpretation and participant perceptions rather than causal relationships or validated labour market outcomes.

3.2 Participants

Pre-programme data were collected from 160 participants across three TVET colleges: Majuba (n = 122; 76.3%), Vhembe (n = 30; 18.8%), and Central Johannesburg College (n = 5; 3.1%). The sample comprised 127 students (79.4%) and 33 lecturers (20.6%). The age distribution was weighted towards 25 to 34 years (43.9%), with substantial representation in the 18 to 24 bracket (33.1%). Most participants were affiliated with Business Studies programmes (65.6%), with the NCV and NATED levels near-equally represented. Post-programme data were returned by 68 participants (41 students; 27 lecturers), representing 42.5 per cent of the pre-programme cohort. Lecturer completion was approximately 81.8 per cent of the pre-programme lecturer group; student completion was approximately 32.3 per cent. This differential is treated analytically as a structural feature of the programme's interaction with participants' different institutional and socio-economic circumstances, and conditions all post-programme findings reported below.

Table 1 provides a summary profiles.

Variable	Category	Pre-programme (N=160)	Post-programme (N=)
Role	Student	127 (79.4%)	41 (60.3%)
	Lecturer	33 (20.6%)	27 (39.7%)
College	Majuba	122 (76.3%)	34 (50.7%)
	Vhembe	30 (18.8%)	23 (34.3%)
	CJC / Other	8 (5.0%)	11 (16.2%)
Programme Level	NCV	75 (46.9%)	21 (30.9%)
	NATED	78 (48.8%)	41 (60.3%)
Field	Business Studies	105 (65.6%)	55 (84.6%)
	Engineering / Other	55 (34.4%)	13 (19.1%)

Source: Authors own compilation

3.3. Instruments and Analytic Procedure

The pre-programme instrument addressed participant demographics, self-assessed confidence across five employability competency domains on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Not Confident; 5 = Very Confident), and open-ended items on career goals, motivations, and expected programme benefits. The post-programme instrument addressed overall programme experience, content relevance, satisfaction with delivery, self-reported improvement across the same five domains (1 = No improvement; 5 =



Significant improvement), and open-ended items on career aspiration change, skills application, entrepreneurial orientation, institutional value, and challenges. Qualitative responses were coded inductively, with thematic categories reviewed through the conceptual lenses described in the literature review.

3.4 Limitations

The study is subject to four substantive constraints. First, all data are self-reported; perceived improvement cannot be equated with verified skill development or labour market outcome. Second, the substantial attrition between pre- and post-programme samples introduces completion bias: findings from the post-programme instrument represent participants who completed the programme and are not representative of the full initial cohort. Third, the unmatched design of the pre- and post-programme samples precludes direct individual-level comparison. Fourth, the open-ended framing of some items, particularly on institutional benefits, may have primed responses using programme language. These limitations are acknowledged throughout and condition the scope of all claims made.

4. Results

4.1 Baseline Competency Confidence and Career Orientation

Pre-programme Likert responses indicated high overall confidence, with notable variation across domains. Teamwork and collaboration returned the highest mean ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 0.53$), followed by workplace readiness ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.74$), communication skills ($M = 4.54$, $SD = 0.65$), and problem-solving ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.68$). Entrepreneurial skills was the exception: lower mean ($M = 4.17$), wider standard deviation ($SD = 0.93$), and modal and median values of 4 rather than 5. Table 2 presents the full profile. Perceived job market readiness was similarly high overall ($M = 4.44$, $SD = 0.83$), though approximately one in three respondents rated themselves at level 4 rather than the highest level, indicating that confident but not fully settled self-assessment was common.

Table 2. Provides a baseline self-assessed competency confidence (pre-programme; scale 1–5).

Table 2: Baseline Competence full profile				
Competency Domain	Valid (n)	Mean	Median	SD
Communication skills	142	4.54	5.0	0.65
Problem-solving skills	140	4.45	5.0	0.68
Teamwork and collaboration	151	4.74	5.0	0.53
Entrepreneurial skills	135	4.17	4.0	0.93
Workplace readiness	142	4.58	5.0	0.74

Source: Authors own compilation

Pre-programme open-ended responses revealed differentiated aspirational orientations across the two participant groups. Student career goals centred on labour market entry, further qualification, and entrepreneurial aspiration, with a recurrent motif of international career exposure: multiple students described aspirations to work overseas or access globally recognised credentials. Lecturer goals were oriented around pedagogical leadership, curriculum innovation, and institutional contribution. These divergent orientations at baseline are analytically significant: they establish that students and lecturers entered the programme with structurally different frames of reference, a differentiation that shapes how post-programme perceptions should be read.

4.2 Post-Programme Experience and Self-Reported Skill Development

Post-programme ratings were strongly positive. Overall experience had a mean of 4.53 ($SD = 0.70$), with 64.7 per cent at the highest level and no respondent below 3. Content relevance to career goals returned a mean of 4.49 ($SD = 0.74$). Satisfaction with trainers and coaches was highest ($M = 4.59$, SD



= 0.74), with accessibility also highly rated ($M = 4.47$, $SD = 0.80$). Programme materials were comparatively lower ($M = 4.29$ to 4.31), suggesting a relative gap in resource quality relative to human delivery quality. Self-reported improvement across competency domains was broadly high, as shown in Table 3. Communication skills returned the highest improvement mean ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 0.63$), with problem-solving ($M = 4.49$), workplace readiness ($M = 4.40$), entrepreneurial skills ($M = 4.35$), and teamwork ($M = 4.32$) following. Across all domains, no respondent reported no improvement; minimum reported improvement was level 2 for teamwork and level 3 for all others.

Table 3 below presents self-reported competency improvement following ICCP participation (post-programme; scale 1–5).

Table 3: Post-program competency				
Competency Domain	Valid (n)	Mean	SD	% at 4 or 5
Communication skills	67	4.58	0.63	92.5
Problem-solving skills	68	4.49	0.68	89.7
Teamwork and collaboration	68	4.32	0.84	82.4
Entrepreneurial skills	68	4.35	0.82	84.0
Workplace readiness	68	4.40	0.76	83.8

Source: Authors own compilation

The entrepreneurial skills domain warrants attention: the post-programme improvement mean ($M = 4.35$) exceeded the pre-programme confidence baseline for the same domain ($M = 4.17$), and the standard deviation narrowed (from 0.93 to 0.82). This pattern suggests that participants who reported lower confidence at baseline described comparatively larger perceived gains in this domain. The pre- and post-programme samples are not matched, and the shift may partly reflect selection; what can be said is that entrepreneurial confidence was the domain where the distributional contrast between baseline and post-programme self-assessment was most pronounced.

4.3 Employability, Workplace Readiness, and Global Career Orientation

Qualitative post-programme responses on employability and workplace readiness centred on three patterns: perceived gains in professional communication and self-presentation; an enhanced capacity to engage with formal workplace norms; and a perceived broadening of career horizon from local to international. Students described the programme as having addressed a gap between their college learning and workplace competency expectations, a gap consistent with documented curriculum-industry misalignment in the South African TVET sector [3,4]. Multiple participants described reorienting their job search frame to include global possibilities, with accounts of advising fellow students not to limit themselves to the South African market.

The international accreditation dimension of the programme appeared to contribute to this reorientation. Several participants described the UK CPD Certification Service accreditation as having conferred a form of professional legitimacy that distinguished their participation from ordinary college activity. One participant described the certificate as evidence that their training met an internationally recognised standard, while another described using the accreditation to position themselves in job applications beyond South Africa. These accounts suggest that the programme's international framing contributed to participant-perceived credential value and global career orientation, consistent with the aspirational function of international accreditation described in the literature.

4.4 Perceived Entrepreneurial Confidence and Orientation

Entrepreneurial orientation was among the most generative themes in the post-programme qualitative data. Two patterns were present. The first, which might be called perceived confidence activation, involved accounts of a shift in participants' willingness to contemplate entrepreneurial activity:



descriptions of no longer feeling that entrepreneurship was inaccessible, of becoming aware of available funding ecosystems, and of beginning to take initial steps, including forming teams, conducting sector research, and applying for grants. The second pattern involved accounts of concrete initial activity: participants described having started a small business or side venture during or immediately following the programme. Both patterns should be read carefully. The data support claims about perceived entrepreneurial orientation and reported initial steps, not about verified venture creation or sustained entrepreneurial activity. In the South African context, structural barriers to entrepreneurship, including limited access to finance, weak business support infrastructure, and constrained market access, are well documented and are not resolved by a coaching intervention alone [9,16]. The significance of the entrepreneurial confidence finding lies in the perceived orientation shift: participants reported a changed sense of possibility rather than a guaranteed business outcome, which is a meaningful intermediate outcome in itself.

4.5 Career Coaching Outcome Pathway in the ICCP

Figure 1 presents a synthesising model of the perceived outcome pathway in the ICCP, organising the empirical findings from Sections 4.2 to 4.4. The model foregrounds the differentiated nature of outcomes across student and lecturer groups and notes the participation-conditional character of the pathway: structural barriers shape who reaches each stage of the outcome sequence. Figure 1. Below present the participant`s perceived career coaching outcome pathway in the ICCP (based on pre- and post-programme survey data).

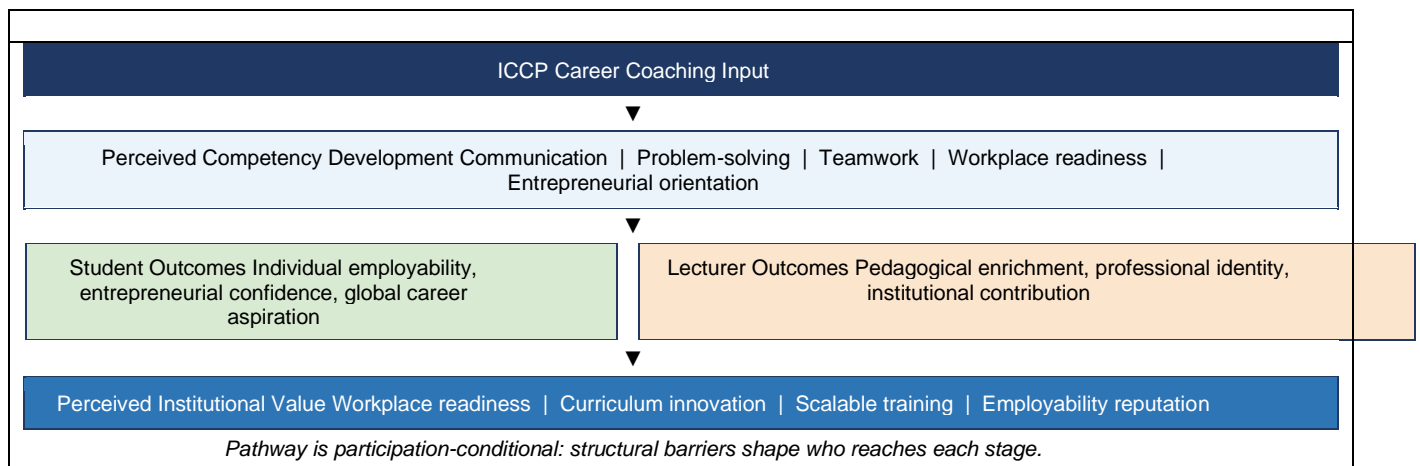


Fig. 1. ICCP Career Coaching Pathway
Source: Authors own compilation

4.6 Differential Patterns: Students and Lecturers

As documented in the companion articles in this series, students and lecturers engaged with the programme from structurally different positions and attributed different forms of value to their participation. Students oriented perceived benefit around personal employability, entrepreneurial aspiration, and global career possibility. Lecturers framed benefit through professional identity, pedagogical enrichment, and institutional contribution, with multiple accounts of sharing programme learning with students and colleagues.

4.7 Implementation Challenges and the Attrition Finding

Post-programme open-ended responses identified a consistent cluster of implementation barriers: workload and time pressure, digital connectivity constraints, platform navigation difficulties (particularly regarding LinkedIn), and variable mentorship quality. These findings are documented in detail in Article 2 of this series. For the purposes of the present analysis, the critical finding is the differential completion rate: approximately 81.8 per cent of pre-programme lecturers completed the post-programme evaluation, compared with approximately 32.3 per cent of students. This differential is not incidental; it



reflects the structural incompatibility between the programme's demands and the time, resource, and digital access circumstances of TVET students under South African conditions. The post-programme findings described above should therefore be understood as representing the experience of programme completers: disproportionately lecturers, and among students, those for whom structural barriers were insufficiently severe to prevent completion. [25] have documented the multidimensional causes of student attrition in South African TVET colleges; the attrition pattern in the ICCP data is consistent with those causes and should be read structurally rather than individually.

5. Discussion

The findings suggest that the ICCP positively influenced employability, workplace readiness, and career development among programme completers by strengthening competencies frequently identified in TVET literature as important for graduate preparedness, including professional communication, career adaptability, self-efficacy, and career aspirations. Entrepreneurial confidence emerged as a particularly important outcome, indicating improved perceptions of participants' ability to identify opportunities and pursue diverse career pathways. The programme's mentored coaching structure appears to have supported this development by enhancing confidence, facilitating career goal formation, and encouraging entrepreneurial thinking beyond immediate employment outcomes. International CPD accreditation also emerged as a significant programme component, with participants perceiving accredited certification as enhancing the legitimacy and credibility of their qualifications while strengthening their professional identity and confidence regarding broader career opportunities. However, high levels of participant attrition highlighted structural challenges such as limited digital access, workload pressures, and competing responsibilities, suggesting that programme effectiveness may be influenced by contextual factors beyond the intervention itself. These findings indicate that while the ICCP demonstrates potential as a scalable career development intervention within TVET education, stronger institutional support, resource provision, and inclusive implementation strategies are necessary to improve participation and sustained engagement.

6. Recommendations for Policy and Institutional Practice

The findings of this study suggest several implications for policy and institutional practice within the South African TVET sector. First, career coaching interventions such as the ICCP should be integrated more systematically into TVET curricula rather than implemented as stand-alone extracurricular initiatives. Embedding structured coaching within existing academic programmes may improve accessibility, participation, and long-term sustainability. Second, institutions should strengthen digital support systems to address barriers related to connectivity, platform access, and digital literacy. The high level of student attrition observed in this study indicates that unequal access to technological resources continues to shape participation outcomes within coaching and professional development programmes. Third, workload-sensitive programme design is necessary, particularly for students balancing academic, financial, and personal responsibilities. Flexible scheduling, blended learning approaches, and extended completion timelines may improve programme retention and participation equity. Fourth, TVET colleges should invest in lecturer coaching capacity development, as lecturers who acquire coaching and mentoring competencies may serve as institutional multipliers by extending employability support to wider student populations. Finally, future programme implementation should incorporate longitudinal graduate tracking systems to evaluate long-term employability outcomes, entrepreneurial activity, and workplace integration beyond self-reported participant perceptions. Such evidence would strengthen the empirical basis for scaling career coaching interventions across the TVET sector.

7. Conclusion

This study examined participants' perceived outcomes of the ICCP within South African TVET colleges, focusing on employability, workplace readiness, entrepreneurial confidence, and the role of international CPD accreditation in shaping professional identity and career aspirations. The findings revealed positive self-reported development across key competency areas among programme completers, with entrepreneurial confidence demonstrating the most substantial improvement. The accreditation component further contributed to perceptions of enhanced professional legitimacy and increased



confidence regarding broader career opportunities. The study contributes to the TVET employability and career coaching literature by providing evidence of participant experiences within an internationally accredited intervention in the South African context and by highlighting that programme completion patterns may reflect structural and contextual barriers rather than individual limitations. Future research should adopt longitudinal approaches to assess the sustainability of programme outcomes and explore barriers experienced by non-completers to strengthen understanding of long-term impacts and support more equitable participation in similar initiatives.

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