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Professional Development of Lecturers at South African TVET Colleges through Coaching and Mentoring

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Abstract

This study examines the role of coaching and mentoring as professional development interventions aimed at enhancing lecturer competencies within South African Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. Drawing on a systematic literature review, the paper synthesises recent empirical and theoretical contributions to identify how these interventions support the development of pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competencies. The findings indicate that while coaching and mentoring remain underutilised in the South African TVET sector, they present significant potential to address persistent skills gaps and align educator competencies with labour market needs. The study proposes a conceptual model grounded in General Systems Theory, outlining how coaching and mentoring, supported by institutional structures, contribute to sustained competency development. The model emphasises the importance of structured, context-specific approaches to lecturer support. The paper concludes by recommending the formal integration of coaching and mentoring frameworks into institutional policy to enhance the quality and relevance of TVET education.

Keywords: TVET, lecturer development, coaching, mentoring, professional competencies, South Africa

Introduction

South African TVET colleges face significant challenges, with half of all lecturers underqualified (Mgijima, 2014) and a mere 8% possessing the necessary qualifications (Booyens, 2009). They also recruit lecturers from the industry who lack pedagogical skills and academics without industrial experience (Arfo, 2015; Blom, 2016; Mokone, 2011), with both approaches negatively impacting their teaching abilities. TVET colleges teach technology and science-related courses. They facilitate the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding, and knowledge of occupations in various sectors of economic and social life (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 1999, as cited in Blom, 2016). In South Africa, they provide diverse qualifications, including the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) (an alternative vocational learning route for Grades 10 to 12), National Technical Education (NATED) programs, and occupational qualifications tailored to meet workplace needs and incorporate Work-Based Learning (WBL) schemes (Hofmeyr & Vally, 2022). As a result, TVET lecturers should ideally be multifaceted professionals with dual qualifications, in trade and professional teaching, (Mesuwini et al., 2021; Schmidt, 2019) to match the TVET teaching context. Blom (2016) further raised

concerns about a lack of motivation for TVET lecturers to update their skills due to general dissatisfaction with service conditions. Mgijima (2014) noted that TVET lecturers do not aspire to upskill, as it is optional for them to possess teaching qualifications. Hence, some critics point to a lack of academic and professional qualifications for TVET lecturers (Hofmeyr & Vally, 2022; van der Bijl & Oosthuizen, 2019) as causative of poor educational outcomes. Thus, van der Bijl & Oosthuizen (2019) opined that many of the TVET teaching population require an academic, teaching, or workplace qualification.

To remedy the situation, authorities and institutions have often relied on interventionist strategies such as tutorials, opportunities for professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Jita & Ndlalane, 2009) short courses, workshops, enrolment for formal studies and encouraging underqualified staff to upgrade their qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Deacon, 2010; Mokone, 2011). However, despite implementing these interventions, student performance has not improved (Ramrathan, 2017), raising questions about the efficacy and efficiency of traditional lecturer support strategies. Therefore, a need arises to expand and revolutionise the professional educator development framework by embracing coaching and mentoring (Ndlovu et al., 2024). These are seen as 'reform-oriented type activities' (Quick et al., 2009) that are more likely to provide opportunities for active learning than traditional external workshops or courses (Nel & Luneta, 2017; Quick et al., 2009).

Several reasons justify these endeavours. Firstly, coaching and mentoring research is a relatively recent phenomenon in the South African education arena (Hofmeyr & Vally, 2022), having begun to gain traction in the education sector in South Africa between 2003 and 2008 (Makhurane, 2017). Therefore, their benefits have not yet been proven. Secondly, the skills-needs gap among TVET lecturers requires innovative strategies beyond traditional methods, which have had minimal impact on educational proficiency. Thirdly, the Education and Training Development Practices Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA ETDP, 2020) in South Africa agree that mentoring and coaching can contribute to improved quality in the education sector if integrated into the mainstream portfolio of lecturer development strategies. Thus, this study reinforces this policy position. Fourthly, coaching and mentoring have proven to be credible skills development strategies in other fields; hence, exploring their transferability into the South African TVET sector, which faces skills development challenges, is necessary. Lastly, this study proposes a framework consolidating key priority areas in coaching and mentoring.

Coaching and Mentoring: Core Professional Development Interventions for TVET Lecturers

The persistent challenges within TVET colleges highlight the need for professional development approaches that effectively address gaps in pedagogy, social interaction, resilience, and professional conduct (Matu & Rothwell, 2024). Coaching and mentoring have emerged as structured interventions that provide targeted support to lecturers, enhancing their teaching effectiveness (Boldra et al., 2008; Gul et al., 2019; Hastings & Kane, 2018). Coaching follows a goal-driven model, improving individual performance through feedback and reflection (Klarin, 2015; Ladegard & Gjerde, 2014; McLaughlin & Cox, 2015; Mmaditla & Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo, 2022). Mentoring, in contrast, is collegial and informal, facilitating knowledge transfer between experienced and less-experienced lecturers (Guthrie & Meriwether, 2018; Hafsteinsdóttir, 2023; Redford & Clarke, 2022). While distinct, these approaches overlap in practice, forming a continuum of professional development (Bureau & Lawhead, 2018; Hakro & Mathew, 2020; van Nieuwerburgh, 2018). Despite their benefits, South African TVET colleges underutilise coaching and mentoring, relying instead on workshops and short courses with limited long-term impact (Hlatjwako et al., 2022). These conventional methods often lack follow-up support and fail to address day-to-day teaching challenges (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Deacon, 2010; Mokone, 2011; Ono & Ferreira, 2010). In contrast, coaching and mentoring provide sustained, personalised support, making them more effective.

By integrating coaching and mentoring, TVET lecturers can receive continuous, context-specific support, improving teaching quality and student outcomes. Internationally, countries like Australia, Malaysia, and Nigeria have successfully used coaching models to align lecturer skills with industry expectations (Delgado et al., 2021; Peiser, 2020). Standardising these interventions within South African TVET colleges could enhance professional development.

Theoretical Foundations of Coaching and Mentoring in the TVET Sector

Coaching and mentoring in TVET education are grounded in well-established theories of learning and development. These frameworks explain how lecturers acquire competencies and the role of structured, sustained interventions in their professional growth. Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) suggests that individuals learn by observing others, receiving feedback, and modelling best practices. TVET lecturers refine their pedagogical skills in a coaching and mentoring context by observing experienced educators, engaging in reflective discussions, and applying feedback. This process enhances self-efficacy, encouraging lecturers to experiment with new teaching strategies in a supportive environment. Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964) emphasises the value

of investing in knowledge and skills to enhance productivity. Within TVET, coaching and mentoring are critical investments that align lecturers' technical and pedagogical competencies with industry needs. By strengthening the skills of educators, institutions can improve student learning outcomes and workforce readiness. Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1981) posits that learning occurs through experience, reflection, and adaptation. Coaching and mentoring in TVET provide opportunities for hands-on learning, where lecturers test new instructional strategies, receive feedback, and refine their techniques through guided reflection. This continuous practical engagement and mentorship cycle ensures educators develop technical proficiency and effective teaching methodologies. Together, these theories highlight the interactive, investment-driven, and experiential nature of coaching and mentoring in TVET. By integrating these approaches, institutions can foster sustainable professional development, equipping lecturers with the necessary skills to adapt to evolving educational and industry demands.

Method

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) to explore the role of coaching and mentoring in the professional development of lecturers in the TVET sector. The review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 framework Page et al. (2021)which ensures methodological rigour, transparency, and replicability in identifying, selecting, and analysing relevant literature. Systematic reviews are characterised by their adherence to predefined protocols that address specific research questions, incorporating explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, structured search strategies, and standardised data extraction procedures (Ahn & Kang, 2018; Kang, 2015).

In accordance with these guidelines, this review synthesised peer-reviewed studies published in English between 2010 and 2024, focusing on coaching and mentoring practices relevant to TVET lecturer development. The PRISMA protocol guided each stage of the review process, including identification, screening, eligibility determination, and final inclusion. A comprehensive PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the selection process, ensuring the review's integrity and alignment with established evidence-based research standards (Ndlovu et al., 2025; Page et al., 2021)

Search Strategy

A structured search was conducted across Scopus, Google Scholar, and Web of Science, using Boolean search terms:

"Lecturer" AND ("Coach" OR "Mentor") AND ("TVET" OR "Vocational Training").

Additional relevant studies were identified by screening the reference list of included articles to enhance comprehensiveness.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

This sets out the parameters used to guide the article selection process.

1. Inclusion Criteria: Studies were included if they:

Focused on coaching or mentoring in TVET lecturer development.

Were peer-reviewed and published in English.

Examined lecturer competencies, professional development, or institutional support.

2. Exclusion Criteria: Studies were excluded if they:

Did not specifically focus on TVET.

Were conference papers, book chapters, theses, or grey literature.

Lacked methodological rigour.

Study Selection and Data Extraction

The search yielded 89 studies, of which 20 duplicates were removed, leaving 69 studies for screening. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 50 studies were excluded, resulting in 19 studies for full-text analysis. The final sample included:

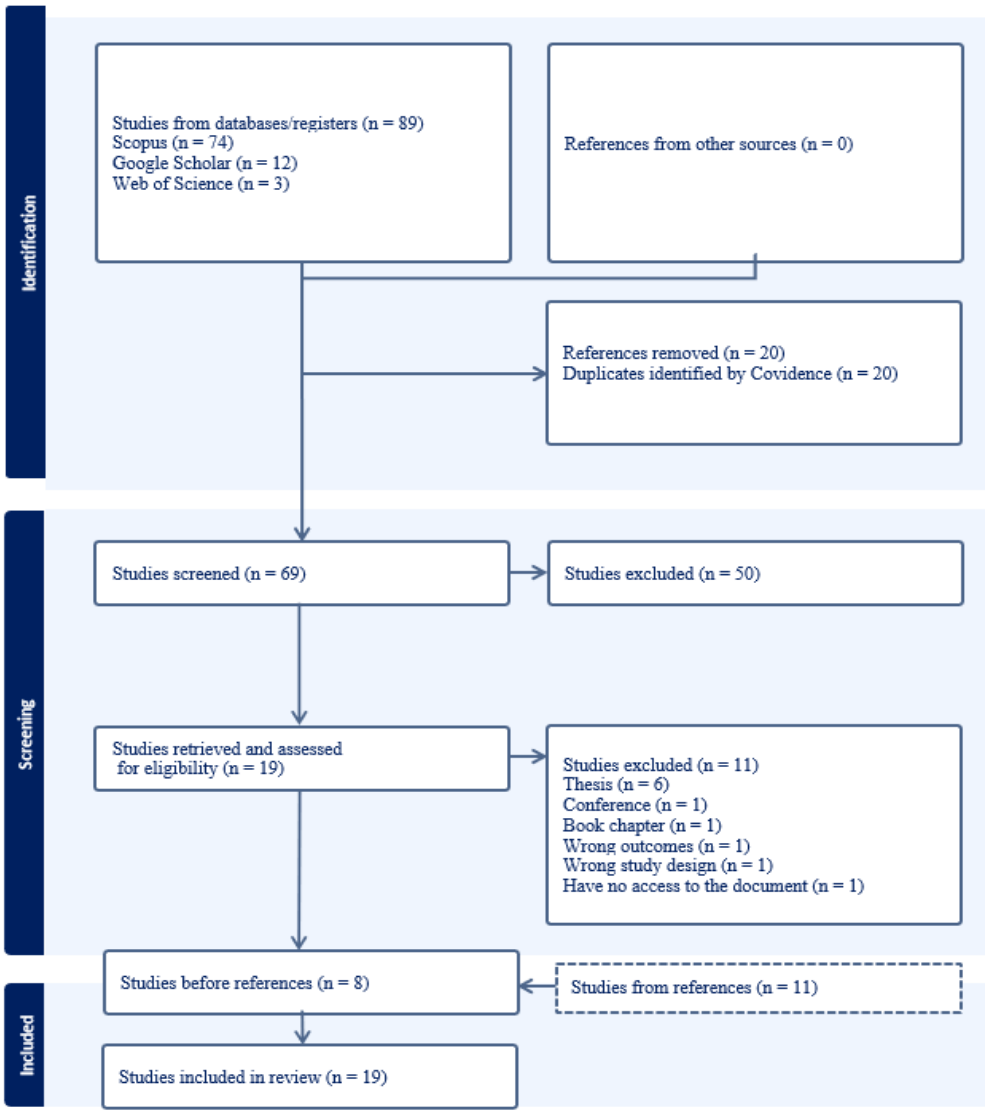
- 8 quantitative studies
- 5 qualitative studies
- 4 literature reviews
- 1 document analysis
- 1 mixed-methods study

These studies originated from Africa (8), Asia (8), and other regions (3), with five articles published in the *Journal of Technical Education and Training*.

Data Analysis

A qualitative content analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008) was employed to synthesise themes emerging from the selected studies. The PRISMA flow diagram (Figure 1) illustrates the study selection process.

Figure 1: PRISMA



Findings

To identify the proposed model constructs, we followed the approach taken by (Bozer & Jones, 2018). We focused on identifying the theoretical constructs extant in the broader literature and inductively identified the frequently operationalised theoretical constructs in the extracted literature. In this undertaking, we noted

(Olojuolawe & Adelowo, 2022) observations of embedded inconsistencies around attempts to develop competency frameworks in education. In line with this view, we synthesised literature, conscious of the diverse opinions that can emerge.

Table 1: Findings from the systematic literature review

Theme	Findings from the reviewed studies
Input: Coaching and Mentoring as Professional Development Interventions	Coaching and mentoring are widely recognised as effective capacity-building strategies for TVET lecturers (Nhlumayo & Shandu, 2023; Njenga, 2022; Prummer et al., 2024)(Nhlumayo & Shandu, 2023; Njenga, 2022; Pitsoe & Maila, 2012). While structured mentoring enhances technical, pedagogical, and professional competencies, implementation remains inconsistent across institutions (Njenga, 2023; Prummer et al., 2024). Coaching has been underutilised in South African TVET colleges despite its success in improving instructional delivery and student engagement in Malaysia and Nigeria (Delgado et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2022).
Process: Institutional and Organisational Support	The success of coaching and mentoring relies on institutional commitment, structured CPD policies, and resource availability (Hafiz Salleh et al., 2022; Ismail et al., 2018). In South Africa, TVET institutions lack formal mentorship frameworks, resulting in fragmented, informal CPD practices (Ana et al., 2020; Ithnain & Saidin, 2021). In contrast, structured coaching and mentoring models in Asia have led to higher lecturer retention, engagement, and competency development (Hamisu et al., 2017; Siregar et al., 2022). Policy inconsistencies, financial constraints, and high workloads continue to hinder effective CPD in TVET settings (Husband, 2015; Usman et al., 2023). Despite these barriers, research confirms that well-structured professional development models enhance lecturer competencies and align TVET education with industry needs (Amran et al., 2020; Jafar et al., 2020).
Output: Lecturer Competency Development	Coaching and mentoring contribute to developing pedagogical, social, personality, and professional competencies critical for effective TVET instruction (Amran et al., 2020; Ana et al., 2020; Hamisu et al., 2017). Pedagogical competencies such as lesson planning, instructional design, and curriculum adaptation are frequently addressed in CPD programmes, while continuous professional development remains underexplored (Ithnain & Saidin, 2021; Siregar et al., 2022). Studies show that social and personality competencies, including resilience, adaptability, and communication skills, receive less structured support despite their role in enhancing classroom engagement (AbdulRab, 2023; Melki & Bouzid, 2021). Professional competencies, including technical expertise and industry alignment, are widely recognised as essential in TVET education but remain underdeveloped in many South African institutions (Ismail et al., 2018; Khan et al., 2022).

Source: Authors' Findings

The findings indicate that coaching and mentoring interventions influence TVET lecturer competency development, yet institutional barriers limit their effectiveness. While pedagogical and professional skills are well-supported, personality and social competencies remain underdeveloped. Additionally, policy inconsistencies and lack of structured support hinder the long-term impact of mentoring and coaching. These challenges highlight the need for a structured conceptual model integrating coaching and mentoring into institutional policies to ensure sustainable professional development. Based on General Systems Theory (GST), the proposed conceptual framework provides a structured approach to align coaching and mentoring with competency development, institutional support, and policy integration.

The proposed conceptual model for TVET lecturer professional development

The systematic literature review's synthesis follows the General Systems Theory (GST) by (Bertalanffy, 1969) with inputs, processes, and outputs. Thus, forms of professional development for TVET lecturers (input) should result in desirable competencies (output) facilitated by an enabling environment (processes). Similarly, (Sibanda & Iwu, 2023) applied the GST concept to propose a model for improving academic performance.

Input (independent variable)

The study by (Nhlumayo & Shandu, 2023) highlights the critical role of mentoring and coaching in supporting novice lecturers in TVET. (Njenga, 2022) also alludes to the importance of mentorship in TVET, though it is poorly implemented and limited to the basics in the study's sample. Thus, improved TVET lecturer competencies are more likely if mentoring and coaching are structured and implemented effectively. For example, a study exploring structured mentoring revealed that individual mentoring is more important than group and expert-based key performance area mentoring (Prummer et al., 2024)

Process (Mediator variable)

Considering the poor implementation of mentorship in TVET (Njenga, 2022), institutional support, structured mentoring or coaching programmes, and the quality of interactions between mentor-mentee and coach-coachee are projected to enhance the value of mentoring and coaching (AbdulRab, 2023). Some studies have reported a positive relationship between professional development and TVET lecturer competencies (Ithnain & Saidin, 2021; Khan et al., 2022) and, more specifically, mentoring (Hafiz Salleh et al., 2022; Komaro et al., 2022; Melki & Bouzid, 2021).

Output (independent variable)

(Usman et al., 2023) decried the lack of competencies expected among TVET lecturers. Several studies suggested the competencies expected among TVET lecturers. Various studies (Amran et al., 2020; Hamisu et al., 2017; Ismail et al., 2018; Jafar et al., 2020; Pitsoe & Maila, 2012) adopting different methodologies (literature review, qualitative, quantitative and document analysis) have identified the following TVET lecturer competencies:

(i) Pedagogical (application competency, pedagogical content knowledge, teaching, learning, and training, TVET curriculum delivery, TVET curriculum evaluation, TVET curriculum planning and development, workshop and laboratory management),

(ii) Personal (mental and physical, motive, personal attributes, personal traits and professionalism, the self),

(iii) Social (faculty leadership, industrial planning and project supervision, technical or professional services, organisational competency, the environment)

(iv) Professional (content knowledge, skills, technical, and innovation, technical, technical and research innovation, management, academic advisory, thinking competency)

In the studies by (Ana et al., 2020) and (Siregar et al., 2022), these competencies emerged as significant: pedagogical, social, personality and professional. However, a study by (Husband, 2015) from a European sample put less emphasis on professional development, vocational skills training, meeting special educational needs, and classroom management techniques. The proposed model is presented in Figure 2.

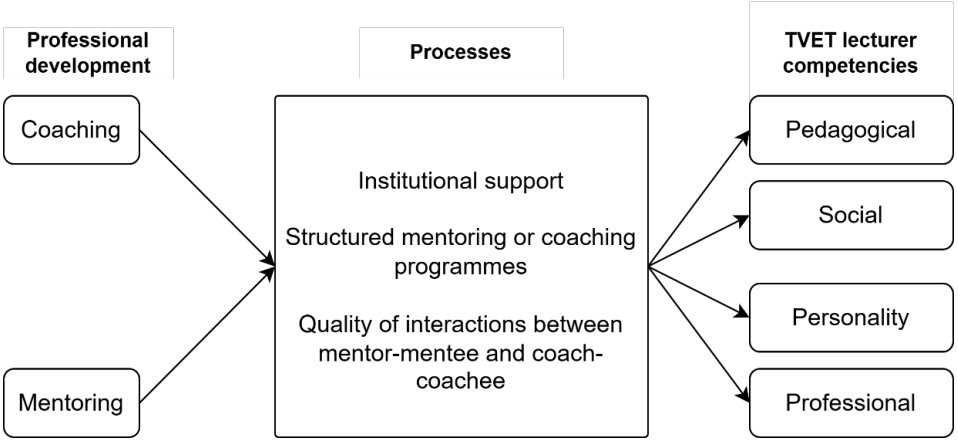


Figure 2: A proposed model for TVET lecturer professional development

The relevance of modelling coaching and mentoring interventions, as outlined in Figure 1, emanates from the contextual and human capability challenges in the South African TVET sector, as discussed in the literature review. The model underscores that lecturers gain subject matter expertise through learning from coaches and mentors and develop the psych to adapt to a dynamic and contested learning environment. In the process, they also gain better problem-solving, stress management, and critical thinking, which engenders adaptability and resilience linked to their profession. Thus, access to coaching improves the ability to be self-directed, self-managed, self-monitor, and self-modify to suit the teaching environment (Rutgers & Reddy, 2013), enhancing their confidence in their profession. This developmental aspect is key, considering that TVET lecturers are not seen as professionals in South Africa.

Discussion- Conclusions

The findings of this study highlight that coaching and mentoring play a pivotal role in the professional development of lecturers in South African TVET colleges. These interventions significantly enhance pedagogical and professional competencies, particularly lesson planning, instructional strategies, and industry alignment. However, there remains a limited emphasis on continuous professional development, particularly in addressing evolving industry needs. Notably, coaching is structured and goal-driven, while mentoring provides long-term peer support and blended models, and the combination of both approaches yields the best outcomes. However, developing structured coaching frameworks in South African TVET colleges remains under-explored, largely due to policy inconsistencies and resource constraints.

While technical and institutional competencies benefit significantly from coaching and mentoring, developing social and personality competencies, such as resilience, adaptability, and teamwork, remains insufficiently addressed. These skills are critical for lecturer effectiveness but receive little formal attention in training programmes. While mentoring supports confidence-building and interpersonal skills, there is limited empirical research on its long-term impact. The findings suggest greater integration of soft skills training within coaching and mentoring frameworks.

Institutional challenges, including heavy workloads, lack of formal mentorship policies, and inconsistent implementation, further limit the effectiveness of coaching and mentoring. In contrast, countries such as Malaysia and Nigeria have demonstrated the benefits of structured coaching models in improving lecture engagement and retention. South African TVET colleges, however, face fragmented and inconsistent professional development due to a lack of standardised coaching and mentoring frameworks.

TVET institutions should prioritise formalising coaching and mentoring within TVET lecturer development policies. Structured and standardised frameworks are essential to ensure consistency and maximise impact. While current practices enhance technical and instructional skills, neglecting personality development and institutional barriers weakens long-term outcomes. Professional development programs must integrate structured training, such as resilience and teamwork, into coaching and mentoring programs. Aligning professional development strategies with international best practices, expanding training to include social and personality competencies, and ensuring institutional support for structured mentorship will strengthen the impact of coaching and mentoring in South African TVET colleges.

For coaching and mentoring to be sustainable, TVET institutions must institutionalise mentorship frameworks, embed soft skills training, and adopt structured policies aligned with international models. Addressing workload constraints and resource limitations through digital coaching platforms and peer mentoring networks can offer scalable and accessible professional development opportunities. A shift towards formalised, well-supported coaching and mentoring strategies will ultimately lead to higher lecturer competency, improved student outcomes, and a more effective TVET system.

This concludes that South African TVET colleges must adopt a more formalised and structured approach to optimise the impact of coaching and mentoring. While current practices effectively improve technical and institutional competencies, neglecting soft skills development and persistent college barriers undermine long-term results.

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