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# Transformational Leadership as A Predictor of Employability Skills Acquisition in TVET Institutions in Southwest Region Cameroon

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**ABSTRACT:** This study examined the influence of Transformational leadership practices on the development of employability abilities among students in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. Specifically, the study assessed the effects of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration on students' employability skills. A mixed-methods approach based on a concurrent triangulation design was employed. Quantitative data were collected from 505 students by structured questionnaires using cluster sampling, whereas qualitative data were obtained from interviews with 30 purposively selected teachers and administrators. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple linear regression, whereas qualitative data were analysed thematically. The findings showed that although transformational leadership practices were implemented at generally low levels, all four dimensions had statistically significant positive effects on employability skills. Intellectual stimulation emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by inspirational motivation, individualised consideration, and idealised influence. Qualitative findings additionally emphasised the value of ethical role modelling, learner support, innovation in training, and industry collaboration regarding enhancing employability outcomes. The study determines that strengthening transformational leadership practices remains essential for improving the quality and relevance of TVET. The study contributes empirical evidence on the role of transformational leadership in improving TVET effectiveness and provides practical recommendations for strengthening graduate employability through leadership development, curriculum innovation, learner support, and enhanced industry collaboration

**KEYWORDS:** transformational leadership, TVET, employability skills, vocational education, Cameroon

## INTRODUCTION

The twenty-first century labour market is characterised by rapid technological advancement, globalisation, digital transformation, and evolving workplace expectations, all of which have fundamentally reshaped the competencies required for sustainable employment. Employers increasingly seek graduates who possess not only occupation-specific technical competencies but also a broad range of employability skills such as critical thinking, communication, teamwork, adaptability, creativity, problem-solving, digital literacy, ethical responsibility, leadership, and lifelong learning (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2022; UNESCO, 2023). Consequently, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions are under increasing pressure to produce graduates who are capable of responding effectively to the changing demands of industry while contributing to national economic growth and sustainable development.

Across the globe, governments have increasingly recognised TVET as a strategic mechanism for developing human capital, reducing youth unemployment, fostering entrepreneurship, and promoting industrialisation (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2022). In Africa, where youth unemployment and underemployment remain significant developmental challenges, strengthening TVET has become central to national development agendas and the implementation of the African Union's Agenda 2063. The agenda emphasises the development of relevant technical competencies and employability skills that enhance young people's transition from school to productive employment (African Union Commission, 2021). Nevertheless, despite considerable investments in expanding access to TVET education across many African countries, concerns persist regarding the mismatch between graduates' competencies and labour market expectations (Afeti, 2018; Oketch, 2020).

Cameroon has equally identified TVET as a cornerstone for achieving its national development aspirations outlined in the National Development Strategy 2020–2030 (SND30), which seeks to accelerate industrialisation, improve productivity, and reduce unemployment through skills development. Over the past decade, the government has undertaken several reforms aimed at modernising TVET curricula, improving infrastructure, strengthening partnerships with industry, and enhancing competency-based training (Republic of Cameroon, 2020). Despite these reforms, employers continue to report that many TVET graduates demonstrate adequate technical knowledge but insufficient employability skills required for effective workplace performance. Skills such as communication, teamwork, innovation, adaptability, initiative, leadership, professionalism, and problem-solving remain relatively underdeveloped among many graduates entering the labour market (Nji & Ndzi, 2022; Ndzi & Tambo, 2021).

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Employability skills refer to the transferable knowledge, attitudes, behaviours, and personal attributes that enable individuals to obtain, maintain, and progress in employment while adapting to changing occupational environments (Yorke, 2006). Unlike technical competencies, employability skills transcend occupational boundaries and facilitate effective interaction within diverse workplace contexts. These skills include interpersonal communication, collaboration, leadership, digital competence, emotional intelligence, self-management, resilience, entrepreneurial thinking, innovation, ethical decision-making, and continuous learning (Robles, 2012). Contemporary employers increasingly value these generic competencies because they complement technical expertise and enhance organisational productivity, employee adaptability, and career sustainability.

The acquisition of employability skills within TVET institutions depends on numerous institutional factors, including curriculum relevance, instructional approaches, industry collaboration, institutional culture, resource availability, and leadership practices. Among these factors, leadership has emerged as a particularly significant determinant of educational quality and student outcomes. Effective institutional leadership influences organisational vision, staff motivation, innovation, instructional quality, stakeholder collaboration, and institutional responsiveness to labour market demands (Leithwood et al., 2020). Educational leaders establish the organisational climate within which teaching, learning, curriculum implementation, and professional development occur, thereby indirectly shaping students' acquisition of employability competencies.

One leadership approach that has attracted considerable scholarly attention is transformational leadership. Originally conceptualised by Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass (1985), transformational leadership focuses on inspiring followers to transcend personal interests for collective organisational goals through shared vision, intellectual stimulation, individualised consideration, and inspirational motivation. Unlike transactional leadership, which emphasises supervision, compliance, and reward-based exchanges, transformational leadership seeks to develop people's capacity, creativity, commitment, and intrinsic motivation. Within educational institutions, transformational leaders foster collaborative learning environments, encourage innovation, empower teachers, strengthen professional learning communities, and cultivate organisational cultures that support continuous improvement and student-centred learning (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

In the context of TVET institutions, transformational leadership may play an instrumental role in promoting employability skills acquisition by encouraging curriculum innovation, strengthening partnerships with industries, supporting experiential learning, motivating instructors to adopt learner-centred pedagogies, and creating institutional cultures that value creativity, entrepreneurship, teamwork, and problem-solving. Leaders who articulate a compelling institutional vision and actively support professional development are more likely to influence instructors' instructional practices, thereby enhancing students' opportunities to acquire workplace-relevant competencies. Moreover, transformational leaders often facilitate collaboration with employers, enabling institutions to align training programmes with evolving labour market needs and technological advancements.

Empirical studies conducted in various educational contexts have demonstrated positive relationships between transformational leadership and educational effectiveness, teacher commitment, organisational innovation, student engagement, institutional performance, and graduate readiness for employment (Hallinger, 2011; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Within African higher education and TVET contexts, emerging evidence suggests that visionary and participatory leadership enhances curriculum implementation, institutional adaptability, staff motivation, and graduate competence (Ngcamu, 2021; Afeti, 2018). However, relatively few studies have specifically examined whether transformational leadership predicts employability skills acquisition among students enrolled in TVET institutions, particularly within the Cameroonian context. Existing research has predominantly focused on curriculum implementation, infrastructure, financing, or technical competency development while giving comparatively limited attention to leadership as a predictor of graduate employability outcomes.\

The Southwest Region of Cameroon presents a particularly important context for investigating this relationship. The region hosts numerous public and private TVET institutions responsible for preparing skilled personnel in engineering, agriculture, business, information technology, hospitality, and other vocational fields. However, persistent socio-economic challenges, rapid technological changes, and the socio-political crisis affecting the region have significantly disrupted educational delivery, institutional management, industry collaboration, and students' practical training opportunities. These realities have heightened concerns regarding the preparedness of graduates for an increasingly competitive labour market. Consequently, understanding how institutional leadership contributes to employability skills acquisition has become both a practical and policy-relevant concern.

Despite increasing recognition of transformational leadership in educational management literature, there remains limited empirical evidence regarding its predictive influence on students' employability skills acquisition within TVET institutions in Cameroon. This knowledge gap constrains policymakers, institutional administrators, and educational planners from developing evidence-based leadership interventions that can strengthen graduate employability. Furthermore, the interaction between leadership practices and employability outcomes remains insufficiently explored within developing-country TVET systems characterised by resource constraints, institutional reforms, and rapidly changing labour market expectations.

Against this background, the present study investigates transformational leadership as a predictor of employability skills acquisition among students in TVET institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. Specifically, the study seeks to establish whether transformational leadership practices within TVET institutions significantly influence students' development of essential employability competencies required for successful labour market participation. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on educational leadership, TVET quality improvement, and workforce development while providing practical recommendations for institutional leaders, policymakers, curriculum developers, and other stakeholders committed to enhancing graduate employability in Cameroon.

**Background to the Study**

Employability skills constitute one of the most important outcomes of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), as they determine the extent to which graduates can secure work, perform effectively, adapt to changing workplace demands, and contribute productively to economic and social development. Beyond technical competence, TVET graduates are expected to demonstrate communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, professionalism, digital competence, and entrepreneurial initiative. These competencies are particularly important

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in contemporary labour markets, where employers increasingly require graduates who can apply practical knowledge, collaborate with others, respond to technological change, and continue learning throughout their careers.

Within this context, TVET is widely recognised as a major pathway for developing employability skills among young people and supporting school-to-work transition, productivity, and socio-economic inclusion. Globally, TVET systems are under growing pressure to respond to technological change, demographic expansion, and persistent mismatches between education and labour-market demands. Consequently, the effectiveness of TVET is no longer assessed solely by enrolment or certification rates, but by the extent to which it enables learners to acquire practical, transferable, and adaptive skills required for meaningful employment.

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is increasingly recognised as a critical pathway for equipping young people with the skills required for employment, productivity, and socio-economic inclusion in rapidly evolving economies. Globally, TVET systems face pressure to respond to technological change, demographic expansion, and persistent mismatches between education and labour market demands. As a result, TVET effectiveness is now judged not only by enrolment or certification rates but also by its ability to develop practical, transferable, and adaptive employability skills.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, these challenges are particularly pronounced. Many TVET systems face weak institutional linkages with industry, limited workplace exposure, and insufficient pedagogical innovation. As a result, graduates often struggle to transition successfully into employment despite possessing technical qualifications. These challenges highlight the need for TVET systems to focus more deliberately on developing employability skills, including communication, teamwork, critical thinking, adaptability, and professional behaviour.

Cameroon reflects similar trends. National policy frameworks, including the National Development Strategy (2020–2030), emphasise the role of TVET in promoting employment, economic transformation, and youth empowerment. However, evidence suggests persistent gaps in aligning vocational training with labour market needs and in ensuring that graduates acquire the competencies required for meaningful work. These gaps point to broader institutional challenges affecting the quality and relevance of TVET outcomes.

Within this context, leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of TVET institutions. Transformational leadership, which emphasises vision, motivation, innovation, and individual support, is widely associated with improved educational outcomes. In vocational education settings, such leadership is particularly important because employability skills develop not only through technical instruction but also through learning environments that encourage problem-solving, ethical conduct, collaboration, and continuous improvement.

Despite the recognised importance of leadership, limited empirical research in Cameroon has examined how specific dimensions of transformational leadership influence students' employability skills in TVET institutions. This study addresses this gap by investigating the effects of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration on students' employability skills in the Southwest Region of Cameroon.

**Transformational Leadership in Education**

Transformational leadership is a leadership orientation concerned with purposeful change in people and institutions. Originating from Burns (1978) and later expanded by Bass and Avolio, it emphasises the leader's capacity to inspire followers, build commitment, stimulate innovation, and support the development of individual potential beyond routine performance expectations. In education, transformational leadership is relevant because schools and training institutions require leaders who can create a shared vision, promote collaboration, strengthen professional commitment, and guide change in response to evolving learning and labour-market demands (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021; Kareem et al., 2023; Heenan et al., 2023).

The theory is commonly explained through four interrelated dimensions. Idealised influence describes the leader's ability to model integrity, professionalism, and ethical conduct, thereby generating trust and respect. Inspirational motivation involves articulating an attractive vision, communicating optimism, and encouraging commitment to meaningful goals. Intellectual stimulation refers to encouraging inquiry, creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Individualised consideration involves attention to the unique needs, aspirations, and developmental potential of learners and staff through mentoring, listening, and support (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). Together, these dimensions show that transformational leadership is not only an administrative style but also a developmental process that shapes institutional culture, teaching practice, and learner growth.

Recent educational leadership studies continue to show that transformational leadership is associated with teacher commitment, school culture, organisational learning, motivation, and sustainable teaching performance (Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Kareem et al., 2023; Heenan et al., 2023; Caharian & Cabanlit, 2024). These outcomes are important for TVET because the quality of vocational learning depends not only on equipment and curriculum, but also on whether leaders and teachers create learning environments that encourage initiative, discipline, innovation, and continuous improvement. In this study, transformational leadership is therefore understood as a leadership practice that inspires motivation, models professional values, encourages intellectual growth, and supports individual development in ways that strengthen students' acquisition of employability skills.

**Understanding the Concept and Importance of Employability Skills in TVET**

Employability skills are a broad range of technical, cognitive, social, and personal competencies that enable individuals to secure employment, perform effectively, adapt to changing job demands, and advance in their careers. In TVET, employability skills extend beyond occupational competence, as graduates are expected not only to master practical tasks but also to communicate effectively, solve problems, work in teams, manage time, demonstrate integrity, use relevant technologies, adapt to workplace change, and show initiative in employment or entrepreneurship. The International Labour Organisation identifies core employability skills as particularly important for young people, as many first-time jobseekers lack workplace experience and must rely on transferable skills to compete in the labour market (ILO, 2024).

Contemporary TVET policy literature emphasises employability because vocational systems in many low- and middle-income countries continue to face skills mismatches, weak industry linkages, limited workplace exposure, unsupported teachers, and insufficient responsiveness to changing labour market needs (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). These challenges indicate that employability skills must be

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deliberately cultivated through curriculum design, practical training, work-based learning, career guidance, digital and green skills development, entrepreneurship education, and collaboration with employers. For TVET students, employability is therefore not a single skill, but a multidimensional outcome shaped by the interaction among technical training, institutional support, learner motivation, and exposure to real workplace expectations.

In the context of this study, employability skills include practical occupational competence, communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, professionalism, emotional self-management, digital competence, confidence, time management, and readiness for industry-based learning. These skills are particularly important in Cameroon's Southwest Region because TVET institutions are expected to contribute to youth employment, entrepreneurship, and local economic development. A review of employability skills is therefore essential because it clarifies the outcome that transformational leadership is expected to influence.

The importance of employability skills in TVET lies in their contribution to school-to-work transition, productivity, lifelong learning, and social inclusion. Current global evidence shows that many TVET systems in low- and middle-income countries struggle to align training with labour market needs, even as effective TVET is increasingly needed to support young people amid technological, demographic, and climate-related changes (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2023). The ILO further emphasises that core employability skills are particularly important for young people because first-time jobseekers often lack work experience and must rely on transferable skills to compete for employment opportunities (ILO, 2024). For this reason, employability skills are central to the quality and relevance of TVET, especially in contexts where graduates must be prepared not only for wage employment, but also for entrepreneurship, self-employment, and continuous adaptation to changing work demands.

**Importance of Transformational Leadership for Employability Skills Acquisition**

The relationship between transformational leadership and the acquisition of employability skills can be understood by examining how leadership shapes learning conditions within TVET institutions. Employability skills are not acquired through technical instruction alone; they develop when students are exposed to ethical role models, motivating goals, problem-based learning, supportive feedback, mentorship, and meaningful links with industry. Transformational leadership provides a useful framework for explaining these conditions because it connects institutional vision, teacher behaviour, learner motivation, curriculum innovation, and student support.

In TVET, idealised influence can strengthen employability by modelling integrity, responsibility, discipline, and professional conduct. Inspirational motivation can improve career readiness by helping students connect training with future work, set goals, and persist despite challenges. Intellectual stimulation can develop problem-solving, creativity, adaptability, and critical thinking by encouraging learners to address real workplace problems rather than memorise procedures. Individualised consideration can support employability by providing mentorship, career guidance, inclusive support, and feedback that help students build confidence and competence. The present study therefore treats transformational leadership as the independent variable and the acquisition of employability skills as the dependent variable, while recognising that the relationship is shaped by curriculum quality, practical exposure, teacher capacity, school-industry collaboration, and institutional resources.

The importance of transformational leadership in this relationship lies in its ability to translate institutional goals into concrete learning conditions. UNESCO-UNEVOC's recent TVET leadership work highlights the need for TVET leaders who can manage change, strengthen strategic planning, support innovation, and build partnerships for more sustainable and impactful institutions (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023). Similarly, recent literature reviews on transformational leadership in education show that leadership can shape educational outcomes by influencing motivation, culture, teacher practice, and institutional improvement (Menon, 2024). In TVET, these leadership functions are especially important because employability skills require coordinated action across curriculum delivery, practical training, mentorship, learner support, and industry engagement.

**Transformational Leadership Practices and Employability Skills in TVET**

***Concept of Idealised Influence***

Idealised influence refers to the capacity of leaders to act as respected role models who demonstrate integrity, consistency, accountability, and commitment to shared values. In TVET, this dimension is directly connected to employability because students learn workplace conduct not only from formal lessons but also from observing how teachers, administrators, and industry mentors behave. When institutional leaders model punctuality, ethical decision-making, respect for work standards, and professional responsibility, they help students internalise behaviours that employers expect. Idealised influence therefore contributes to employability by strengthening professional identity, discipline, trust, and responsible conduct among learners.

***Concept of Inspirational Motivation***

Inspirational motivation refers to leaders' ability to communicate a compelling vision, foster optimism, and help learners attach meaning to their training. In TVET, this dimension supports employability by helping students see vocational education as a pathway to decent work, entrepreneurship, and social contribution. When teachers and school leaders set challenging but achievable goals, celebrate progress, invite successful professionals, and connect classroom tasks to career possibilities, students are more likely to persist, build confidence, and develop a stronger orientation toward employment. Inspirational motivation, therefore, strengthens employability through goal setting, persistence, self-belief, and career aspiration.

***Concept of Intellectual Stimulation***

Intellectual stimulation refers to a leader's ability to encourage inquiry, creativity, critical thinking, and the questioning of routine assumptions. In TVET, it is especially important because contemporary workplaces require graduates who can analyse problems, adapt to new technologies, work collaboratively, and generate practical solutions. Leaders who promote intellectual stimulation encourage teachers to use case studies, simulations, workplace projects, reflective tasks, and innovation-based learning rather than relying only on routine instruction. This dimension is therefore strongly linked to employability skills such as problem-solving, adaptability, creativity, digital readiness, and lifelong learning.

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***Concept of Individualised Consideration***

Individualised consideration refers to the leader's attention to the specific needs, aspirations, and developmental potential of each learner or staff member. In TVET, this dimension supports employability by ensuring that students receive guidance that reflects their strengths, challenges, career goals, and learning needs. Mentorship, coaching, feedback, career counselling, peer support, and inclusive teaching help learners develop confidence and translate training into workplace competence. Individualised consideration is therefore closely related to employability outcomes such as self-management, confidence, communication, resilience, and readiness for professional growth.

## EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Empirical evidence shows that employability outcomes in TVET are strongly influenced by curriculum relevance, industry collaboration, institutional leadership, and the extent to which training reflects workplace expectations. The World Bank, ILO and UNESCO (2023) report that many TVET systems in low- and middle-income countries continue to face weak alignment with labour-market needs, limited workplace exposure, and inadequate teacher and institutional support. UNESCO (2024) similarly emphasises demand-driven curricula, stakeholder participation, and stronger links between training providers and employers. These findings support the view that employability skills are shaped not only by students' personal effort, but also by institutional decisions and leadership practices that determine how teaching, mentoring, practical exposure, and industry engagement are organised.

Studies on transformational leadership in education provide evidence that leadership affects the institutional conditions through which employability skills may be developed. Kareem et al. (2023), in a study of 1,173 teachers in India, found that transformational leadership significantly influenced teachers' commitment to the institution, students' development, and their own development. Heenan et al. (2023) and Caharian and Cabanlit (2024) also show that transformational leadership is linked to staff motivation, school culture, teacher commitment, and organisational improvement. Although these studies were not conducted specifically in Cameroonian TVET institutions, they indicate that transformational leadership can strengthen teacher behaviour and learning environments, which are important pathways for developing students' employability skills.

TVET-specific studies further confirm the importance of leadership and institutional responsiveness. Ab Halim and Abdul Gani (2024), in a systematic review of studies published between 2019 and 2024, found that strategic leadership and effective management are essential for aligning TVET curricula with industry needs and improving graduate employability. In a South African TVET study, Kana and Letaba (2024) reported that curriculum transformation, industry partnerships, and lecturer involvement are necessary to prepare graduates for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution workplace. Omar and Kamaruzaman (2024) also found that industry collaboration in TVET improves programme relevance by supporting curriculum alignment, workplace exposure, internships, soft skills development, and job placement services. These studies collectively show that employability skills are strengthened when TVET leadership connects curriculum delivery with labour-market realities.

Recent studies also suggest that specific dimensions of transformational leadership are relevant to TVET improvement. Dianawati et al. (2025), in a systematic review of leadership styles and innovation in TVET, found that transformational leadership was especially effective in supporting vision alignment, empowerment, creativity, technological integration, and collaborative practice. Mohd Khalid and Noor (2025) similarly identified transformational, distributed, and innovative leadership as important leadership approaches for TVET institutions facing change management, disruptive technology, and stakeholder collaboration challenges. These findings are important for the present study because intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation, idealised influence, and individualised consideration are not abstract leadership traits; they are practical mechanisms through which TVET institutions may promote innovation, motivation, professionalism, and learner support.

Despite this growing evidence, an important gap remains. Much of the literature examines transformational leadership in general education, teacher commitment, curriculum alignment, or industry collaboration, while fewer studies test how the four specific dimensions of transformational leadership predict students' employability skills in TVET. The gap is even more pronounced in Cameroon, where limited empirical work has examined leadership processes within TVET institutions in relation to students' acquisition of employability skills. This study therefore contributes context-specific evidence from the Southwest Region of Cameroon by examining the effects of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration on students' employability skills.

## THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

***Transformational Leadership Theory***

This study is anchored in Transformational Leadership Theory, first articulated by Burns (1978) and later developed by Bass (1985) and Bass and Avolio (1994). The theory explains leadership as a process through which leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation, morality, commitment, and performance. It is appropriate for this study because employability skills in TVET require more than technical instruction; they require leadership practices that inspire learners, model professional values, encourage problem-solving, and support individual development.

The four dimensions of the theory correspond directly with the study variables. Idealised influence explains how ethical role modelling can build professionalism and responsible conduct among TVET students. Inspirational motivation explains how vision, encouragement, and goal setting can strengthen confidence, persistence, and career aspiration. Intellectual stimulation explains how inquiry, creativity, and problem-solving can develop adaptability and innovation for the workplace. Individualised consideration explains how mentoring, feedback, and learner support can help students overcome barriers and develop personal competence. These theoretical links make transformational leadership a suitable framework for analysing the acquisition of employability skills in TVET.

The theory also helps explain why leadership practice may influence student outcomes indirectly through institutional culture, teacher behaviour, curriculum delivery, and learner support. In TVET institutions, transformational leadership can create the conditions for practical learning, school-

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industry collaboration, inclusive support systems, and innovation-oriented pedagogy. For this reason, the theory provides a coherent basis for testing whether transformational leadership practices significantly affect students' employability skills in the Southwest Region of Cameroon.

The reviewed literature shows that transformational leadership and employability skills are conceptually connected, empirically relevant, and theoretically grounded. It also reveals the need for context-specific evidence on how leadership practices shape employability skills in Cameroonian TVET institutions.

**Statement of the problem**

Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is expected to equip learners with the employability skills needed for a successful transition from school to work and for meaningful participation in economic and social life. Beyond technical competence, TVET graduates are expected to demonstrate communication, teamwork, problem-solving, critical thinking, adaptability, professionalism, and entrepreneurial skills.

However, many TVET systems, particularly in low- and middle-income countries, do not fully achieve these outcomes. Global reports by the World Bank, International Labour Organisation (ILO), and UNESCO indicate persistent skills mismatches, limited workplace exposure, and weak alignment between training and labour market demands (World Bank et al., 2023). In Sub-Saharan Africa, studies further show that graduates often lack critical employability competencies despite completing vocational programmes, due to weak industry linkages and insufficient practical training (AfDB & ILO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024). In Cameroon, similar concerns have been highlighted. National policy documents, such as the National Development Strategy (2020–2030), acknowledge the need to enhance the relevance and quality of vocational training. Labour market reports also indicate continued youth underemployment and skills gaps, suggesting that many graduates are not adequately prepared for employment (ILO, 2024; UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2024). These findings point to persistent challenges in aligning TVET provision with labour market expectations and reinforce the need to strengthen graduates' employability skills.

Although leadership has been identified as a key factor influencing educational effectiveness, although transformational leadership has been widely examined in general educational settings, limited empirical evidence exists on how its specific dimensions influence employability skills acquisition in TVET institutions, particularly within the Cameroonian context. Existing studies have primarily focused on teacher commitment, school effectiveness, organisational culture, and curriculum implementation, with less attention given to employability outcomes among vocational learners. This gap limits understanding of leadership as a mechanism for improving labour-market readiness and graduate employability. The present study addresses this gap by examining the extent to which idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration influence students' acquisition of employability skills in TVET institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon.

**Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study was to examine the influence of transformational leadership on students' acquisition of employability skills in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. Specifically, the study sought to:

1.Examine the effect of idealised influence on students' employability skills.

2. Assess the effect of inspirational motivation on students' employability skills.

3. Determine the effect of intellectual stimulation on students' employability skills.

4. Investigate the effect of individualised consideration on students' employability skills.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a mixed-methods research approach based on a concurrent triangulation design. This design enabled the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data within the same phase of the study, allowing for comparison and integration of findings. The quantitative component provided measurable evidence of the relationship between transformational leadership practices and students' employability skills, while the qualitative component offered in-depth insights into leadership practices, curriculum implementation, learner support, and institutional challenges within TVET settings. The study was conducted in the Southwest Region of Cameroon, a context where Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) plays a critical role in youth skills development and employment preparation.

The population comprised students, teachers, and administrators in selected TVET institutions. Students formed the main population for the quantitative component, while teachers and administrators were included in the qualitative phase due to their direct involvement in leadership practices, teaching, and institutional management. A combination of sampling techniques was employed. Cluster sampling was used to select 505 students from the selected institutions, ensuring representation across different programmes and levels of study. For the qualitative strand, purposive sampling was used to select 30 teachers and administrators based on their experience and relevance to the study. This combination enhanced both the representativeness and the depth of the data.

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide. The questionnaire was administered to students to capture their perceptions of the four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration—and their acquisition of employability skills. The interview guide was used to obtain detailed perspectives from teachers and administrators on leadership practices, student development, instructional strategies, mentorship, and industry collaboration. The validity of the instruments was ensured through careful alignment with the study objectives, literature, and conceptual framework. The instruments were also pilot tested to improve clarity, relevance, and suitability for respondents. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients, which indicated satisfactory internal consistency across all variables. The coefficients ranged from .784 to .890, with an overall reliability of .851, exceeding the recommended threshold of .70 and confirming the instrument's consistency. Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to summarise the data. Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between transformational leadership dimensions and employability skills, while multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the extent to which the four leadership dimensions predicted students' acquisition of employability skills. The level of statistical significance was set at $p < .05$. Qualitative data obtained from interviews were analysed thematically, with responses carefully reviewed, coded, and grouped into key themes.

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The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the role of transformational leadership in shaping employability outcomes.

Ethical standards were maintained throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and the data collected were used solely for academic purposes. Respondents were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

## RESULTS

This section presents the study's findings based on quantitative data collected from 505 students and qualitative data from interviews with 30 teachers and administrators. The results are organised according to the study objectives, followed by correlation and regression analyses, and finally, qualitative findings.

### Descriptive Statistics

**Table 1: Appraisal of the Use of Idealised Influence on Students**

| Test items | Agree | Disagree | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The TVET program includes training on ethical leadership and high moral standards. | 309 (61.2%) | 196 (38.8%) | 2.59 | 0.488 |
| Through case studies and discussions, I learned how to act as a positive role model in my future profession. | 331 (65.5%) | 174 (34.5%) | 2.64 | 0.476 |
| My instructors demonstrate ethical behaviour and commitment that I want to emulate. | 228 (45.1%) | 277 (54.9%) | 2.25 | 0.498 |
| Group projects in my program encourage teamwork and ethical decision-making. | 197 (39.0%) | 308 (61.0%) | 2.11 | 0.488 |
| I have studied leadership theories, including transformational leadership, in my academic pursuits. | 155 (30.7%) | 350 (69.3%) | 2.01 | 0.462 |
| Reflection activities help me evaluate how well I practice ethical and influential leadership. | 159 (31.5%) | 346 (68.5%) | 1.69 | 0.465 |
| The program provides opportunities for me to receive feedback on my leadership skills. | 210 (41.6%) | 295 (58.4%) | 2.28 | 0.493 |
| Industry leaders who act as role models visit or mentor us in the program. | 223 (44.2%) | 282 (55.8%) | 2.36 | 0.497 |
| Internships or practical experiences connect me with leaders who demonstrate ethical leadership. | 200 (39.6%) | 305 (60.4%) | 1.60 | 0.490 |
| **Multiple response set and overall mean** | **2163** | **2887** | **2.09** | **0.482** |

The descriptive results indicated that idealised influence was practised at a low level in the sampled TVET institutions. Only 42.8% of the respondents agreed that their programmes promoted ethical leadership and role modelling, while 57.2% disagreed. The overall mean score of 2.09 (SD = 0.482) was below the benchmark of 3.0, indicating weak integration of idealised influence practices. Students reported some exposure to ethical leadership concepts and case-based discussions; however, fewer indicated that instructors consistently demonstrated professional behaviour, provided leadership feedback, or facilitated interaction with industry roleI models. This suggests that ethical role modelling and professional conduct were not strongly institutionalised.

**Table 2: Appraisal of the Use of Inspirational Motivation on Students**

| Test items | Agree | Disagree | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The program clearly communicates a vision of success that motivates me in my studies. | 140 (27.7%) | 365 (72.3%) | 1.72 | 0.448 |
| I am encouraged to set and work toward meaningful professional goals. | 154 (30.5%) | 351 (69.5%) | 1.70 | 0.461 |
| Teachers and leaders communicate with optimism and enthusiasm about our future careers. | 168 (33.3%) | 337 (66.7%) | 1.67 | 0.472 |
| Small achievements in my training are celebrated, which motivates me to keep improving. | 186 (36.8%) | 319 (63.2%) | 1.63 | 0.483 |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The program sets challenging but achievable standards that push me to do my best. | 210 (41.6%) | 295 (58.4%) | 1.58 | 0.493 |
| I am motivated to think critically, innovate, and collaborate through assessments and projects. | 225 (44.6%) | 280 (55.4%) | 1.55 | 0.498 |
| I understand how my vocational training can make a positive impact on society. | 225 (44.6%) | 280 (55.4%) | 1.55 | 0.498 |
| Team projects and group activities help me develop collaboration and teamwork skills. | 214 (42.4%) | 291 (57.6%) | 1.58 | 0.495 |
| Inspirational stories or guest lectures from successful professionals encourage me to excel. | 223 (44.2%) | 282 (55.8%) | 1.56 | 0.497 |
| Visual and emotional elements, such as videos and symbols, inspire me to stay engaged in the program. | 213 (42.2%) | 292 (57.8%) | 1.58 | 0.494 |
| **Multiple response set and overall mean** | **1958 (38.8%)** | **3092 (61.2%)** | **1.61** | **0.48** |

The findings showed that inspirational motivation was the least practised dimension of transformational leadership. Only 38.8% of the respondents agreed that their programmes motivated them through vision, goal setting, and encouragement, while 61.2% disagreed. The overall mean score was 1.61 (SD = 0.484), which indicates a low level of motivational practices. The results suggest that students were not consistently encouraged to set professional goals, celebrate achievements, or develop a powerful sense of purpose regarding their training. This reflects weak motivational structures within the TVET programmes.

**Table 3: Appraisal of the Use of Intellectual Stimulation on Students**

| Test items | Agree | Disagree | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The program encourages me to investigate real-world industry problems and propose solutions. | 216 (42.8%) | 289 (57.2%) | 2.42 | 0.495 |
| I am given complex problem-solving tasks that reflect actual workplace challenges. | 221 (43.8%) | 284 (56.2%) | 2.46 | 0.497 |
| Collaborative projects help me exchange ideas and develop innovative solutions with my peers. | 226 (44.8%) | 279 (55.2%) | 2.45 | 0.498 |
| Reflection activities enable me to assess my learning and identify areas for improvement. | 225 (44.6%) | 280 (55.4%) | 2.47 | 0.498 |
| I receive constructive feedback from teachers and classmates that helps me grow intellectually. | 226 (44.8%) | 279 (55.2%) | 2.46 | 0.498 |
| The use of technology, such as simulations and virtual labs, enhances my understanding of practical skills. | 218 (43.2%) | 287 (56.8%) | 2.44 | 0.496 |
| The program encourages me to be curious and continuously learn to adapt to my profession. | 245 (48.5%) | 260 (51.5%) | 2.49 | 0.500 |
| I am comfortable experimenting with innovative ideas and learning from my mistakes during training. | 213 (42.2%) | 292 (57.8%) | 2.41 | 0.494 |
| Case studies and industry scenarios help me think critically about real workplace problems. | 218 (43.2%) | 287 (56.8%) | 2.43 | 0.496 |
| I have opportunities to lead initiatives or projects that allow me to apply creative and critical thinking skills. | 218 (43.2%) | 287 (56.8%) | 2.44 | 0.496 |
| **Multiple response set and overall mean** | **2226 (44.1%)** | **2824 (55.9%)** | **2.45** | **0.497** |

The findings revealed that intellectual stimulation was also practised at a low level, although it recorded higher values compared to other leadership dimensions. Overall, 44.1% of the respondents agreed that their programmes encouraged critical thinking, problem-solving, and innovation, while 55.9% disagreed. The mean score was 2.45 (SD = 0.497), which was below the expected benchmark. Students reported limited opportunities to engage in real-world problem-solving, collaborative innovation, and workplace simulations. However, some exposure to inquiry-based learning and continuous learning practices was observed, suggesting that intellectual stimulation was present but not strongly implemented.

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**Table 4: Appraisal of the Use of Individualised Consideration on Students**

| Test items | Agree | Disagree | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The program offers personalized learning plans that align with my strengths and career goals. | 229 (45.3%) | 276 (54.7%) | 2.47 | 0.498 |
| Teachers listen carefully to my challenges and provide helpful, constructive feedback. | 216 (42.8%) | 289 (57.2%) | 2.43 | 0.495 |
| I feel supported by my instructors and mentors during my training. | 197 (39.0%) | 308 (61.0%) | 2.11 | 0.488 |
| Opportunities for mentorship and coaching are available to help me grow academically and professionally. | 212 (42.0%) | 293 (58.0%) | 2.44 | 0.494 |
| Peer mentoring is encouraged, allowing senior students to support and guide juniors. | 231 (45.7%) | 274 (54.3%) | 2.47 | 0.499 |
| The learning environment is inclusive and accommodates students from diverse backgrounds. | 263 (52.1%) | 242 (47.9%) | 2.52 | 0.500 |
| Resources are provided to support students with different learning needs or disabilities. | 260 (51.5%) | 245 (48.5%) | 2.51 | 0.500 |
| I am encouraged to reflect on my learning experiences to identify areas for improvement. | 249 (49.3%) | 256 (50.7%) | 2.48 | 0.500 |
| The program encourages me to take responsibility for my personal and professional development. | 261 (51.7%) | 244 (48.3%) | 2.50 | 0.500 |
| Leadership development activities help me build skills such as empathy, communication, and decision-making. | 254 (50.3%) | 251 (49.7%) | 2.49 | 1.501 |
| **Multiple response set and overall mean** | **2118 (41.9%)** | **2932 (58.1%)** | **2.44** | **0.597** |

The results showed that individualised consideration was also practised at a low level. Only 41.9% of the respondents agreed that they received personalised support, mentorship, or individual guidance, while 58.1% disagreed. The overall mean score was 2.44 (SD = 0.597). Although some students acknowledged inclusive learning environments and support for diverse learners, many reported limited access to mentorship, personalised feedback, and tailored learning support. This indicates weaknesses in learner-centred support systems within the institutions.

**Table 5: Appraisal of Students' Acquisition of Employability Skills**

| Test items | Agree | Disagree | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The TVET program helps me develop practical skills needed for employment. | 284 (56.2%) | 221 (43.8%) | 2.51 | 1.490 |
| I feel confident in my communication skills because of the training I received. | 252 (49.9%) | 253 (50.1%) | 2.44 | 1.501 |
| I am taught how to manage my emotions and stress in a professional environment. | 253 (50.1%) | 252 (49.9%) | 2.46 | 1.501 |
| Integrity and professionalism are emphasized throughout my training. | 259 (51.3%) | 246 (48.7%) | 2.49 | 1.501 |
| I have opportunities in my curriculum to gain practical skills related to my future job. | 275 (54.5%) | 230 (45.5%) | 2.53 | 1.496 |
| My TVET program prepares me to work effectively in a team in a professional environment. | 255 (50.5%) | 250 (49.5%) | 2.49 | 1.501 |
| I have access to internships or practical experiences with companies during my training. | 224 (44.4%) | 281 (55.6%) | 2.38 | 1.492 |
| My TVET program helps me develop time-management and organizational skills. | 232 (45.9%) | 273 (54.1%) | 2.32 | 1.497 |
| I am taught to use relevant technological tools for my field during my studies. | 234 (46.3%) | 271 (53.7%) | 2.48 | 1.497 |

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| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| My training includes activities that build my confidence and public speaking skills. | 230 (45.5%) | 275 (54.5%) | 2.43 | 1.496 |
| The skills I acquire in my TVET program increase my chances of finding a job after graduation. | 257 (50.9%) | 248 (49.1%) | 2.49 | 1.501 |
| **Multiple response set and overall mean** | **2755 (49.6%)** | **2800 (50.4%)** | **2.46** | **1.498** |

The results further showed that students' employability skills were developed at a moderate level. Overall, 49.6% of the respondents agreed that their programmes enhanced employability skills, while 50.4% disagreed. The mean score of 2.46 (SD = 1.498) was below the benchmark of 3.0. Students reported relatively stronger development in practical and job-related skills, as well as professionalism. However, areas such as communication, confidence, teamwork, technological skills, time management, and access to internships were less developed. This suggests that TVET programmes did not fully prepare students across key employability domains.

**Inferential Statistics**

**Table 6: Spearman Correlations Between Transformational Leadership Dimensions and Employability Skills**

| Variable | Statistic | Idealised influence | Inspirational motivation | Intellectual stimulation | Individualised consideration | Employability skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Idealised influence | r | 1 | .194** | .142** | .032 | .406** |
| Inspirational motivation | r | .194** | 1 | .460** | .274** | .537** |
| Intellectual stimulation | r | .142** | .460** | 1 | .476** | .589** |
| Individualised consideration | r | .032 | .274** | .476** | 1 | .502** |
| **N** | — | **505** | **505** | **505** | **505** | **505** |

***Note.*** **Spearman's rho correlations are reported. ** p < .01, two-tailed.**

Spearman's rho correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships between transformational leadership dimensions and students' employability skills. The results indicated significant positive relationships between all four leadership dimensions and employability skills. Idealised influence was significantly related to employability skills ($r = .406$, $p < .001$). Inspirational motivation also showed a significant relationship ($r = .537$, $p < .001$). Intellectual stimulation recorded the strongest relationship ($r = .589$, $p < .001$), while individualised consideration also showed a significant positive relationship ($r = .502$, $p < .001$). These results indicate that improvements in transformational leadership practices are associated with improvements in students' employability skills.

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine the extent to which the four dimensions of transformational leadership predicted students' employability skills. The model was statistically significant, $F = 73.352$, $p < .001$, with an R value of .698 and an R-square value of .448. This indicates that transformational leadership explained 44.8% of the variance in students' employability skills. All four leadership dimensions had statistically significant positive effects on employability skills. Intellectual stimulation was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .587$), followed by inspirational motivation ($\beta = .498$), individualised consideration ($\beta = .487$), and idealised influence ($\beta = .381$). These findings imply that students' employability skills improve when institutions strengthen innovation, critical thinking, motivation, mentorship, ethical role modelling, and learner support.

**Qualitative findings**

**Table 7: Themes from Qualitative Interviews**

| Theme | Frequency, n (%) | Illustrative quotations |
|---|---|---|
| Ethical role modelling and professional conduct | 27 (90.0%) | "Students learn better when teachers model discipline, integrity, and commitment in their daily practice." "Professional conduct is easier for learners to adopt when school leaders and instructors practise what they expect from students." "When leaders are punctual and fair, students begin to see those behaviours as part of employability." |
| Limited inspirational motivation and career vision | 25 (83.3%) | "Many students are not consistently encouraged to set career goals or to see the larger purpose of their training." "Recognition systems for student effort and achievement are still limited in most programmes." "Students become more serious when teachers connect lessons to real career opportunities." |
| Problem-solving and innovation in training | 26 (86.7%) | "TVET should expose students to real workplace problems instead of focusing mainly on routine classroom exercises." "Employers need graduates who can think critically and adapt, not only follow instructions." "Innovation improves when students are allowed to test ideas, make mistakes, and solve practical problems." |
| Mentorship and individual learner support | 24 (80.0%) | "Students' progress more when teachers listen to their difficulties and guide them individually." "Mentoring is important, but overcrowded classes reduce the |

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| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | attention each learner receives." "Career guidance helps students understand their strengths and prepare better for work." |
| Employability skills gap | 28 (93.3%) | "Graduates often leave with technical basics, but they still lack confidence, communication, and teamwork skills." "The labour market expects initiative and professionalism, yet many students are not sufficiently prepared in these areas." "Employability requires more than practical skills; students also need confidence, teamwork, and workplace attitude." |
| Industry exposure and collaboration | 23 (76.7%) | "Partnerships with industry would make leadership training more practical and relevant." "Internships and workplace mentoring remain too limited for many students." "When employers participate in training, students understand workplace expectations more clearly." |

***Note.*** Frequencies indicate the number and percentage of the 30 interview participants whose responses were coded under each theme. Themes were not mutually exclusive because a single participant could contribute statements to more than one theme; therefore, percentages exceed 100 when summed across themes.

The qualitative evidence adds depth to the statistical findings by showing that employability development in the sampled TVET institutions is shaped by both leadership behaviour and institutional learning conditions. Participants' accounts suggest that students do not acquire employability skills through technical instruction alone; rather, they develop such skills when teachers and administrators model professional conduct, communicate a clear career vision, create opportunities for problem-solving, and provide guidance that responds to learners' individual needs. The emphasis on ethical role modelling shows that leadership is experienced by students through daily practices such as punctuality, fairness, discipline, and consistency. Similarly, the themes on motivation and learner support indicate that students require encouragement, recognition, mentoring, and career guidance to connect vocational training with future employment. The problem-solving and industry-collaboration themes further suggest that employability is weakened when learning remains classroom-bound and insufficiently connected to workplace realities. Overall, the qualitative findings explain why transformational leadership matters in TVET: it creates the institutional climate through which practical competence, confidence, teamwork, initiative, professionalism, and work readiness can be strengthened.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study show that transformational leadership practices are generally implemented only weakly in the sampled TVET institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon, yet all four dimensions—idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration—significantly predict students' acquisition of employability skills. This finding is theoretically important because it confirms the central claim of Transformational Leadership Theory that leaders influence followers not only through formal authority, but through motivation, value formation, intellectual development, and individual support (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). It also supports the argument that leadership in education shapes institutional culture, teacher behaviour, learner engagement, and educational outcomes (Kareem et al., 2023; Heenan et al., 2023; Alzoraiki et al., 2023; Caharian & Cabanlit, 2024). In the context of TVET, this relationship is especially important because employability skills are not developed through technical instruction alone; they are strengthened through learning environments that promote discipline, innovation, confidence, collaboration, workplace exposure, and personal development (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024; ILO, 2024). Thus, the results suggest that transformational leadership is not simply an administrative practice but a developmental process through which TVET institutions can improve the quality and labour-market relevance of training.

The low level of idealised influence observed in the study suggests that ethical role modelling, professional conduct, and leadership feedback are not yet well institutionalised in many of the sampled TVET programmes. This is concerning because idealised influence is regarded as one of the foundations of transformational leadership, since leaders who demonstrate integrity, accountability, commitment, and professionalism are more likely to build trust and encourage followers to internalise shared values (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). The significant positive effect of idealised influence on employability skills therefore confirms that students' readiness for work is strengthened when teachers, administrators, and institutional leaders model the ethical and professional behaviours expected in the workplace.

This finding agrees with Kareem et al. (2023), who found that transformational leadership contributes to teacher commitment and student development, and with Heenan et al. (2023), who linked transformational leadership to school culture and organisational improvement. It is also consistent with UNESCO (2024), which emphasises that TVET quality depends not only on curriculum content but also on the institutional conditions that support practical competence, values, and workplace readiness. The qualitative findings of this study further support this interpretation, as teachers and administrators stressed that students learn discipline, integrity, and responsibility when these values are demonstrated consistently by school leaders and teachers. Therefore, the weak practice of idealised influence suggests a gap in the moral and professional socialisation of TVET students, while its significant predictive effect confirms its importance for developing employability attributes such as professionalism, accountability, discipline, and responsible conduct.

The findings on inspirational motivation indicate that this was the weakest-practised dimension of transformational leadership, suggesting that many students do not receive sufficient encouragement, goal-setting support, recognition, or exposure to a compelling vision of career success. This result reflects a major institutional weakness because inspirational motivation is central to transformational leadership theory, in which leaders are expected to communicate optimism, create a shared purpose, and inspire followers to commit to meaningful goals (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). In TVET institutions, inspirational motivation is particularly relevant because many learners need to understand how their training connects to employment, entrepreneurship, personal advancement, and social contribution. The significant positive effect of inspirational

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motivation on employability skills therefore suggests that when students are encouraged to set professional goals, believe in their abilities, and see vocational training as a pathway to meaningful work, they are more likely to develop confidence, persistence, and career orientation.

This finding agrees with Alzoraiki et al. (2023), Kareem et al. (2023), and Caharian and Cabanlit (2024), who reported that transformational leadership is associated with motivation, commitment, and a positive institutional climate. It also supports UNESCO-UNEVOC's (2023) position that TVET leaders must provide strategic direction, manage change, and build institutions that are responsive to learners and labour-market needs. The qualitative evidence from this study, which revealed weak institutional motivation structures and limited recognition systems, helps explain why students' motivational experiences were low. This implies that TVET institutions need stronger systems for communicating vision, recognising student effort, linking training to career opportunities, and building learner confidence if employability outcomes are to improve.

The finding that intellectual stimulation emerged as the strongest predictor of employability skills is particularly important for TVET. Although the descriptive results showed that intellectual stimulation was still practised below the expected level, its strong predictive effect indicates that students' employability improves significantly when they are encouraged to think critically, solve real-world problems, experiment with ideas, use technology, and engage in innovation-oriented learning. This finding strongly aligns with Transformational Leadership Theory, which views intellectual stimulation as the process by which leaders encourage followers to question assumptions, explore novel solutions, and develop creativity and problem-solving capacity (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). In contemporary TVET, these competencies are essential because employers increasingly require graduates who can adapt to technological change, analyse workplace problems, collaborate with others, and apply knowledge in practical contexts (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024; ILO, 2024).

The result also agrees with Ab Halim and Abdul Gani (2024), who found that strategic leadership and effective management are important for aligning TVET curricula with industry needs, and with Kana and Letaba (2024), who emphasised curriculum transformation, lecturer involvement, and industry partnerships as necessary for preparing graduates for Fourth Industrial Revolution workplace demands. Similarly, Omar and Kamaruzaman (2024) showed that industry collaboration strengthens programme relevance through curriculum alignment, internships, soft skills development, and workplace exposure. The qualitative findings of the present study reinforce this argument, as participants stressed that TVET should move beyond routine classroom exercises and expose students to real workplace problems. This suggests that intellectual stimulation is a key pathway through which TVET institutions can develop employability skills such as creativity, adaptability, critical thinking, teamwork, digital readiness, and lifelong learning.

The results for individualised consideration indicate that personalised guidance, mentorship, learner support, and career counselling are not yet well embedded in the sampled institutions. Although some students acknowledged inclusive learning environments and support for diverse learners, many still reported limited access to mentoring, personalised feedback, and individual guidance. This finding is significant because individualised consideration is a core element of transformational leadership, involving attention to the unique needs, abilities, aspirations, and developmental potential of each follower (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). In TVET, this dimension is especially relevant because students often differ in academic preparation, practical ability, socio-economic background, career interest, confidence, and exposure to the world of work. The significant positive effect of individualised consideration on employability skills therefore suggests that students become more employable when institutions provide mentoring, coaching, feedback, inclusive support, and career guidance.

This finding agrees with TVET literature emphasising the importance of learner support systems, workplace mentoring, inclusive teaching, and career services in improving graduate employability (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024; Omar & Kamaruzaman, 2024). It also supports the position of Ab Halim and Abdul Gani (2024), who argue that effective TVET leadership must align institutional management with student development and labour-market needs. The qualitative findings further strengthen this interpretation, as participants noted that students' progress better when teachers listen to their difficulties and guide them individually, although overcrowded classrooms and limited resources constrain such support. This means that individualised consideration is not merely a supportive leadership behaviour; it is a practical employability mechanism that helps students build confidence, resilience, communication ability, self-management, and readiness for professional growth.

Taken together, the findings demonstrate that transformational leadership is a critical but underutilised resource for improving employability skills in TVET institutions. The descriptive results show that all four leadership dimensions are practised at low levels, while students' employability skills are only moderately developed. This pattern reflects broader concerns in the TVET literature, where weak industry linkages, limited workplace exposure, inadequate practical training, and skills mismatch have been identified as recurring barriers to graduate employability, particularly in low- and middle-income countries (World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; AfDB & ILO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024; ILO, 2024). However, the correlation and regression results indicate that transformational leadership explains a substantial proportion of the variance in students' employability skills, confirming that leadership practices meaningfully influence student outcomes.

This supports Menon's (2024) argument that transformational leadership shapes educational outcomes through motivation, culture, teacher practice, and institutional improvement. It also agrees with Dianawati et al. (2025), who found that transformational leadership supports vision alignment, empowerment, creativity, technological integration, and collaboration in TVET, and with Mohd Khalid and Noor (2025), who identified transformational, distributed, and innovative leadership as important for TVET institutions facing disruptive technology and stakeholder collaboration challenges. Therefore, the findings suggest that improving employability in TVET requires more than curriculum reform alone; it requires leadership that can connect curriculum delivery, practical training, teacher support, learner motivation, mentorship, innovation, and industry collaboration.

The study also contributes to the literature by providing context-specific evidence from Cameroon, where empirical research on transformational leadership and employability skills in TVET remains limited. Much of the existing literature has examined transformational leadership in general education, teacher commitment, school culture, curriculum alignment, or industry collaboration (Kareem et al., 2023; Heenan et al., 2023; Caharian & Cabanlit, 2024; Ab Halim & Abdul Gani, 2024).

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However, fewer studies have tested how the four specific dimensions of transformational leadership predict students' employability skills in TVET institutions, particularly in the Cameroonian context. By showing that idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration each have significant positive effects on employability skills, this study extends Transformational Leadership Theory into the field of TVET and demonstrates its relevance for understanding how leadership affects students' preparation for work. The findings also show that intellectual stimulation is especially important in this context, suggesting that TVET institutions may achieve stronger employability outcomes when leadership encourages problem-solving, creativity, inquiry, technology use, and real-world application of skills. This is consistent with contemporary TVET policy and the empirical literature, which increasingly emphasise innovation, adaptability, work-based learning, and school-industry collaboration as essential for preparing graduates for changing labour market demands (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023; World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024; Kana & Letaba, 2024).

Overall, the discussion shows that transformational leadership provides a strong theoretical and practical framework for improving employability skills in TVET institutions. The findings confirm that students' employability is shaped not only by what is taught, but also by how institutions are led, how teachers motivate and support learners, how students are exposed to real workplace problems, and how ethical and professional values are modelled within the training environment. This supports the theoretical position that transformational leadership elevates followers' motivation, commitment, morality, and performance (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994). It also supports empirical and policy literature showing that effective TVET requires leadership that promotes curriculum relevance, learner support, innovation, industry engagement, and responsiveness to labour-market needs (UNESCO-UNEVOC, 2023; World Bank, ILO & UNESCO, 2023; UNESCO, 2024; Omar & Kamaruzaman, 2024). Consequently, strengthening transformational leadership in TVET institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon should be understood as both an educational and labour-market priority. If TVET leaders and teachers model professional values, communicate inspiring goals, promote problem-solving and innovation, and provide individualised support, students are more likely to acquire the practical, social, cognitive, and adaptive skills required for employment, entrepreneurship, and lifelong career development.

***Contribution to knowledge***

Theoretically, this study contributes to Transformational Leadership Theory by extending its application to employability skills development within vocational education settings. The findings demonstrate that transformational leadership influences not only educational processes and institutional effectiveness but also students' preparedness for employment. The significant effects of idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration suggest that leadership practices serve as important mechanisms through which employability competencies are developed. The prominence of intellectual stimulation further indicates that innovation-oriented learning environments are particularly important for preparing students to respond to contemporary labour-market demands.

Furthermore, the findings have important implications for educational leaders, policymakers, and TVET practitioners. Leadership development should be recognised as a central component of TVET improvement initiatives. Efforts to strengthen employability outcomes should extend beyond curriculum reform to include investments in transformational leadership development, mentorship systems, learner support structures, innovation-oriented teaching practices, and school-industry partnerships. Educational authorities should therefore prioritise leadership training programmes that enhance institutional capacity to support student development, innovation, and workplace readiness.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- TVET administrators and teachers should strengthen ethical leadership and professional role modelling by consistently demonstrating integrity, discipline, accountability, and workplace standards, and by integrating structured leadership and ethics education into training programmes to enhance students' professional behaviour.
- School leaders and programme coordinators should improve motivational practices by clearly communicating career-oriented goals, encouraging students to set professional targets, recognising achievement, and creating a supportive learning environment that builds confidence and persistence.
- Curriculum developers and instructors should prioritise problem-based learning, workplace simulations, case studies, and innovation-driven teaching approaches to enhance students' critical thinking, creativity, adaptability, and real-world problem-solving skills.
- TVET institutions should strengthen mentorship and learner support systems by providing personalised guidance, career counselling, coaching, and feedback, while also promoting inclusive teaching practices that address the diverse needs and aspirations of students.
- Institutions should expand opportunities for practical training and industry exposure by strengthening partnerships with employers, increasing access to internships, and integrating workplace learning into the curriculum to improve students' readiness for employment.
- Education authorities should invest in leadership development programmes for TVET administrators and teachers to build capacity in transformational leadership, particularly in innovation, student motivation, mentorship, and institutional improvement.
- Further research should be conducted across different regions and types of TVET institutions to deepen understanding of how leadership practices influence employability outcomes and to provide broader evidence for policy and practice.

## CONCLUSION

The study examined the influence of transformational leadership on students' acquisition of employability skills in TVET institutions in the Southwest Region of Cameroon. The findings revealed that although the four dimensions of transformational leadership—idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration—were practised at low levels, each dimension had a statistically significant positive effect on students' employability skills. Intellectual stimulation emerged as the strongest predictor, indicating that innovation, problem-solving, and critical thinking are particularly important for enhancing employability outcomes.

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The findings further showed that students' employability skills were only moderately developed, with notable gaps in communication, teamwork, confidence, and workplace exposure.

The study concludes that transformational leadership represents a critical yet underutilised resource for strengthening employability outcomes in TVET institutions. Although transformational leadership practices were implemented at low levels within the sampled institutions, all four leadership dimensions significantly enhanced students' employability skills. Intellectual stimulation emerged as the strongest predictor, highlighting the importance of critical thinking, innovation, problem-solving, and adaptability in contemporary vocational education. Strengthening transformational leadership in TVET institutions should therefore be viewed not only as an educational strategy but also as a workforce-development intervention capable of enhancing youth employability, supporting economic development, and improving the long-term relevance of vocational education in Cameroon.

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