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Transforming the Transport Sector Through Executive Education: A Case Study of the TETA-Wits International Executive Programme

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Abstract

This research investigates the function of executive education in promoting leadership advancement and sectoral transformation in South Africa's transport industry, using the Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) and Wits Business School (WBS) International Executive Programme (IEP) as a case study. Based on human capital theory, the research employs a qualitative ethnographic methodology, leveraging the experiences of 15 program participants and the author's insider perspective as the accounting officer of TETA and a thought leader in transportation and skills development. Data were gathered through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, and reflective journaling and subsequently analysed thematically. The findings indicate that the IEP augmented participants' strategic management, decision-making, and ethical leadership skills, resulting in enhanced institutional performance, governance practices, and sectoral transformation outcomes. Participants used their acquired knowledge to promote innovation, policy cohesion, and organisational efficiency, illustrating the transformative effects of investing in human capital. Challenges like resistance from the organisation, a lack of resources, and the ability to scale up the impact were identified, indicating that ongoing support and systemic alignment are needed. The research indicates that focused executive education serves as a strategic facilitator of leadership and sectoral transformation, providing guidance for policymakers, industry professionals, and academic institutions aiming to enhance leadership pipelines and attain sustainable development goals in intricate sectors. To achieve a return on investment, ensure value for money, and obtain sustainable outcomes from the IEP programme, the study recommends interventions aimed at developing transformational leaders who foster exceptional leadership and management.

Keywords: Executive Education; Leadership Development; Human Capital Theory; Sector Transformation; Transport Sector; South Africa

1. Introduction

Leadership in South Africa's transport sector is essential for long-term economic growth, fairness, and new ideas. The industry has faced numerous challenges to address, such as limited infrastructure, the need for sustainability, technological innovation, and making sure everyone has equal access and representation. To tackle these issues, the Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) and Wits Business School teamed up to start the International Executive Development Programme (IEDP). The goal of the programme is to equip senior managers with leadership skills in various areas, enhancing their capacity to provide strategic leadership for the growth and development of the transport sector in South Africa, which aims to shape programme design, implementation, and improve results and impact outcomes (Ngcobo, Akinradewo and Mokoena, 2024).

The IEDP is based on earlier leadership programmes like the Leadership Development Programme (LDP), the Emerging Leaders Programme (ELP), and the Senior Leadership Development Programme (SLDP) at Wits Business School. These programmes have shown how important it is to learn by doing, have a mentor, and see how things are done best around the world in order to develop strategic leadership skills. The National Development Plan (NDP 2030) and the Transport Sector Skills Plan (TSSP 2023–2028) for South Africa both stress the need for a capable, ethical, and developmental state. They emphasise employment creation, inclusive growth, and sectoral change. The IEDP supports these goals by trying to speed up the growth of senior managers from historically disadvantaged groups and improve the quality of work in the transport industry (Wits University, 2020; Louw and Ortrun Zuber-Skeritt, 2009).

The Transport Education & Training Authority collaborated with Wits Business School (WBS) to revolutionise South Africa's transport sector. Fifteen senior managers and executives from the industry gathered at WBS for the recent inauguration of a new sector-specific International Executive Development Programme (IEDP), presented by WBS Executive Education. The delegates, representing the rail, aerospace, maritime, road freight, taxi, freight handling, and forwarding and clearing subsectors, were meticulously selected following a stringent evaluation process. Their IEDP will involve a prestigious eight-month educational programme that includes an immersion tour of Spain and Morocco (TETA, 2025; WBS, 2025).

This research investigates the design, execution, and effects of the IEDP, emphasising the correlation between leadership development and enhancements in organisational performance and sector innovation. This research integrates qualitative case study methods with ethnographic and reflective approaches, yielding a comprehensive, insider-informed perspective on leadership development in the transport sector.

2. Problem Statement

The South African government has invested a significant amount of money from national fiscals in improving skills in South Africa's transport sector; there is still a big gap between technical skills and the ability to lead strategically. Although public sector managers have exhibited significant advancements in technical skills, some still lack the leadership necessary for strategic policy development and transformational capacity that yields substantive change (Habiyaemye, Thobela and Saba, 2025). The rising levels of corruption, maladministration, and ethical deficiencies in the sector

undermine the government's fiscal investment in people and skills development. Skills development devoid of enhanced ethical compliance and effective governance equates to fiscal dumping, yielding no returns on the invested efforts (Mlambo, Simangele and Mpanza, 2023).

This dilemma has also affected the transport sector. Consequently, leadership development programs are essential to address technical and performance weaknesses, as well as to provide public service managers with the skills necessary for strategic proficiency and methodical transformation within the transportation sector. Consequently, TETA collaborated with Wits University (Wits) to establish an International Executive Programme aimed at fostering transformative leadership and enhancing institutional capacity within the transport industry (Ahuchogu, Sanyaolu, & Adele, 2024; Research for Community Access Partnership, 2024).

3. Rationale for the Study

The TETA–WBS partnership exemplifies the collaboration between academia and industry to enhance executive leadership and facilitate sectoral transformation, offering significant insights into repositioning executive education as a catalyst for systemic change rather than a mere short-term training intervention. This study is significant in three ways: it contributes to policy discussions on aligning leadership development with national frameworks such as the NDP 2030, NSDP, and ERRP; it informs sectoral transformation by elucidating the impact of leadership capacity on equity, innovation, and governance within the transport ecosystem; and it enriches academic literature on executive education and leadership development in emerging economies, offering insights for creating leadership programmes that address the needs of their intended beneficiaries (Wits University, 2025; Bohari et al., 2024; Auriacombe and Meyer, 2020).

4. Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study was to analyse the impact of executive education on leadership development and sectoral transformation in South Africa's transport sector, using the TETA–Wits International Executive Programme (IEP) as a case study.

1. Examine the function of executive education in augmenting leadership capabilities, strategic management proficiency, and governance within the transportation industry.
2. Evaluate the design, implementation, and outcomes of the TETA–Wits International Executive Programme in relation to sector transformation goals.
3. Evaluate the degree to which the IEP corresponds with national skills and transformation policies, including the NDP 2030, NSDP, and ERRP.
4. Suggest ways to make future executive education programs in South Africa's transportation sector more effective at creating long-lasting leadership and systemic change.

5. Research Questions

To achieve the above objectives, the study has addressed the following key questions:

1. How does executive education contribute to leadership development and strategic management within South Africa's transport sector?

2. In what ways does the TETA–Wits International Executive Programme support sectoral transformation and leadership renewal?
3. Whether the IEP aligned with national policy frameworks and transformation imperatives?
4. What lessons can be drawn from the TETA–WBS partnership to improve the leadership and skills development interventions?

6. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

6.1. Theoretical Framework: Human Capital Theory

This study is based on Human Capital Theory. This theory says that investing in people through education, training, and professional development makes them more productive, creative, and able to help the economy grow. In this context, education serves as both a social benefit and an economic investment, yielding measurable returns for individuals and institutions alike. (Sairmaly, 2023; Wuttaphan, 2020)

Human Capital Theory provides a compelling rationale for leadership development initiatives such as the TETA–Wits International Executive Programme (IEP) within the transport industry. The theory asserts that as managers and executives cultivate advanced competencies in leadership, strategic management, and governance, they enhance their capacity to make informed, innovative, and ethical decisions. These skills, in turn, help institutions run more smoothly, services run more smoothly, and the whole sector change for the better (Oltular, 2025; Mayer, 2024). From this perspective, executive education serves as a strategic instrument for enhancing sector competitiveness and transforming the economy and society. It relates to South Africa's development goals, which are spelt out in the National Development Plan (NDP 2030) and the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP). Both plans say that investing in people is important for growth, fairness, and long-term success (Mthembu and Nhamo, 2022).

Therefore, the TETA–WBS partnership is more than just an educational partnership; it is a way to turn people into institutional capability. The programme helps build a knowledge-driven, innovative, and globally competitive transport sector in South Africa that is in line with the country's transformation agenda by giving leaders high-level management and strategic skills.

7. Literature Review

7.1 IEDP Programme Overview

The International Executive Development Program (IEDP) is the premier executive education program offered by Wits Business School (WBS). Through its international network of global business schools and strategic partner organisations, WBS delivers the ultimate experiential learning experience. WBS and top international schools have been delivering this Programme for the past 50 years. The IEDP develops business leaders who drive change, generate opportunity, and provide innovative solutions to global business issues, particularly those that impact the Global African Diaspora and the changing global landscape. The course is aimed at executives who would like to update their knowledge in the changing business landscapes and leverage the network of various institutions and companies at their resident university

(WBS) and three prestigious international institutions (Wits University, 2025).

7.2 Human Capital Development and Economic Transformation

Human capital has been recognised as crucial for enhancing a nation's competitiveness and advancing its economy and society. Education and training augment individuals' productive ability, consequently enhancing institutional and economic performance. Investment in human capital is crucial for sustainable economic transformation, especially in emerging nations where skill deficiencies hinder production. The National Development Plan (NDP 2030) for South Africa asserts that growth and transformation necessitate quality education, skill development, and leadership capabilities. The National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) asserts the necessity of enhancing leadership and managerial competencies in critical economic sectors, such as transportation, to ensure policy coherence and effective implementation. The nation must cultivate a foundation of adept and progressive leaders to implement enduring and inclusive reforms (Ullah et al., 2022; Tan, 2014; Chattopadhyay, 2012).

7.3 Executive Education and Leadership Capacity Building

Executive education is a type of adult learning that helps professionals and leaders get better at managing and making strategic decisions. It focuses on making better decisions, being an ethical leader, and being able to see the big picture, all of which are important for working in complex organisations. Mintzberg (2004) contends that executive education must surpass traditional classroom instruction by integrating reflective practice, experiential learning, and contextual problem-solving (Schanck, Tallgauer & Startz, 2025; McIntosh, Antes & DuBois, 2020). Institutions like Harvard Business School, INSEAD, and Oxford's Saïd Business School have shown that executive education can change the way leaders think and act by making them more open-minded and responsive (Antonacopoulou, 2010). Partnerships between universities and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) in South Africa, such as the one between TETA and Wits Business School, show how to adapt global best practices to fit local needs while also meeting national needs for change (Susan Elaine Murphy & Johnson, 2011).

7.4 Leadership and Sectoral Transformation

Most people agree that leadership is the key to changing institutions. Transformational leadership helps organisations align their vision, culture, and performance with the goals of social change. In areas like transportation, good leadership is necessary to bring together technology, infrastructure growth, and changes to policy. South Africa's efforts to change are often slowed down by weak leadership pipelines, not enough planning for succession, and not enough strategic capacity at the top levels of management. Leadership development is not only a managerial necessity but also a moral and strategic imperative — it is essential to ensure that transformation goes beyond compliance and becomes part of the culture of the organisation. In the transportation industry, change also means fixing past unfairness in representation, ownership, and access to job opportunities. Executive education programs that combine leadership, governance, and transformational awareness are therefore especially important for making sure that sectoral reform fits with the larger national goals of fairness and inclusion (Sharma & Adeoye, 2024; Meirinhos et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2011).

7.5 The Role of Partnerships in Leadership Development

Collaborative partnerships between industry and academia are increasingly acknowledged as essential for the development of leadership capacity. The Triple Helix Model posits that innovation and the development of human capital flourish when government, academia, and industry engage in synergistic interactions. The TETA–Wits International Executive Programme (IEP) exemplifies this approach by fostering a collaborative learning environment that integrates academic scholarship, industry experience, and policy context. These kinds of partnerships make sure that leadership training is based on real-world problems and not just theory. The IEP's use of applied research, case studies, and international benchmarking helps participants understand leadership in a way that is relevant to South Africa's changing transportation landscape. Human Capital Theory says that targeted education and training create cumulative benefits across systems and institutions. This approach is in line with that theory (Zakaria et al., 2023; Yang, 2022; Willgerodt et al., 2020).

7.6 Gaps in the Literature

While many studies emphasise the significance of leadership and executive education, there is a lack of empirical research examining their direct correlation with sectoral transformation in South Africa's transport sector. Most studies concentrate on either skills deficits or general leadership training, with scant focus on the effects of structured executive programmes on strategic governance, innovation, and transformation outcomes. This gap highlights the importance of analysing the TETA–Wits International Executive Programme as a case study to comprehend how executive education can be utilised to reconcile the disparity between leadership competence and systemic transformation in a complex, policy-driven sector (Masa Sylvester Motadi, 2024; Osuzoka, 2024).

8. Research Methodology

8.1 Research Design

This study uses a qualitative ethnographic research design to examine the interrelationship among executive education, leadership development, and sectoral transformation in South Africa's transport sector. Ethnography is particularly suitable for this study as it enables a thorough, contextually nuanced analysis of organisational practices, leadership behaviours, and sectoral dynamics from an insider's perspective (Black et al., 2021; Albudaiwi, 2018; Schurink, 2003). The research is located in the South African transportation industry, specifically on the Transport Education and Training Authority (TETA) and its collaboration with Wits Business School to conduct the International Executive Program (IEP). This environment offers a comprehensive framework for analysing the impact of executive education programs on leadership capacity, governance practices, and outcomes of sectoral transformation. The author, who is both a participant-observer and an accounting officer, has firsthand experience with TETA's strategic planning, program implementation, and monitoring processes. This gives them a unique perspective on both the operational and transformational aspects of leadership development (TETA, 2022; Bless, Tsotsotso & Gebremichael, 2017).

8.2 Data Collection Techniques

To ensure triangulation and a full understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, data were collected using a variety of qualitative techniques. As the primary source of information documenting leadership interactions, decision-making

procedures, and the real-world application of skills learnt through the International Executive Programme (IEP), participant observation involved the author's direct involvement in TETA operations, programme oversight, and policy implementation (Vivek, Nanthagopan and Piriyaarshan, 2023; Busetto, Wick & Gumbinger, 2020). To find out how the program impacted their capacity to lead, make strategic choices, and effect change in their field, 15 participants were interviewed in-depth using a semi-structured format. They were prompted to reflect carefully on their experiences, difficulties, and work outcomes by open-ended questions. To contextualise participant experiences and assess programme design and results, document analysis included looking through organisational records, programme reports, policy documents, and training materials (Wakelin, McAra-Couper & Fleming, 2024). To record ideas, observations, and insights while collaborating with participants and conducting programme activities, the author also maintained well-organised field notes and reflexive journals. This further improved the process of gathering data (Dahal, 2025; Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2017).

8.3 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, allowing patterns, concepts, and relationships to emerge from both experiential and documentary sources (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis focused on three central themes: (1) Leadership Capacity Development, which assessed how the IEP enhances strategic, managerial, and ethical competencies; (2) Organisational and Sectoral Transformation, examining how improved leadership translates into better governance, innovation, and sectoral performance; and (3) Human Capital Outcomes, evaluating the broader impact of executive education on institutional capability and sectoral competitiveness. The author's insider knowledge, which combined lived experience and documentary evidence to create a comprehensive, contextually grounded understanding of the transformative potential of the IEP, made it simpler to engage in iterative interpretation while suspending bias to enhance impartiality (Ahmed et al., 2025; Walsh et al., 2019).

8.4 Ethical Considerations

Ethical reflexivity is essential to this study because the author serves as both a researcher and a participant-observer. A number of steps have been taken, such as keeping the author's positionality transparent, protecting the privacy and anonymity of programme participants when appropriate, and critically analysing any potential biases resulting from insider involvement. Efforts have been made to reduce these biases by triangulating with documentary sources and field observations (Alordiah, 2025; Jadallah, 2024).

8.5 Limitations of the Methodology

The ethnographic method may be subjective and have limited generalisability, despite providing deep, contextual insights. The results may not be statistically generalisable to all leadership development programmes and represent the author's personal experience, which is supported by documentary evidence. Nonetheless, the method offers profound contextual knowledge and lessons that can be applied to sectoral transformation projects and executive education in comparable settings (Amuomo & Odoyo, 2020).

9. Findings

The analysis of data from 15 participants enrolled in the TETA–Wits International Executive Programme (IEP), combined with the

author's insider observations as Accounting Officer of TETA, revealed several critical insights regarding the programme's contribution to leadership development and sectoral transformation in South Africa's transport sector. Findings are presented according to three main themes: leadership capacity development, institutional and sectoral transformation, and human capital outcomes (Bastable et al., 2023; Abdallah & Kaabi, 2024; Venter, du Plessis & Stander, 2024).

9.1 Leadership Capacity Development

Participants consistently stated that the IEP greatly improved their strategic management and leadership skills, emphasising improved decision-making and problem-solving skills because exposure to case studies, scenario planning, and strategic simulations allowed them to approach complex sectoral challenges with greater confidence and critical thinking; ethical and transformational leadership skills, as many highlighted that the program reinforced the importance of integrity, transparency, and According to the author's observations made during program sessions and organisational settings, participants used these skills in practical settings, which resulted in better stakeholder engagement, more structured decision-making, and improved strategic planning procedures for TETA and its partner organisations (Othman Saiful Azlan et al., 2024; Beauty Zindi & Sibanda, 2022).

9.2 Institutional and Sectoral Transformation

As participants reported applying new knowledge and skills to governance improvement through the introduction of more transparent reporting systems, ethical leadership practices, and structured decision-making processes; fostering innovation in programme delivery by implementing initiatives aimed at improving training accessibility, industry partnerships, and sector-wide efficiency; and improving policy responsiveness, with leaders better equipped to translate national and sectoral policies into actionable organisational strategies supporting broader transformation goals, the study found that strengthened leadership capacity had a direct influence on institutional and sectoral transformation. According to the author's ethnographic observations, these shifts impacted organisational culture by encouraging cooperative problem-solving and cross-functional communication, both of which are essential for systemic change in the transportation industry (Bian and Wang, 2024; Grobler & Grobler, 2024).

9.3 Human Capital Outcomes

In line with Human Capital Theory, the study shows that the IEP functions as a strategic investment in leadership talent, with benefits that extend beyond the individual participants. These benefits include increased organisational capability as trained leaders use their newfound skills to improve operational efficiency, programme management, and service delivery; sector-wide impact through improved training delivery, stronger industry partnerships, and more strategic alignment across transport in By demonstrating the practical use of leadership abilities in operational and strategic decision-making throughout TETA and the transportation industry as a whole, the author's insider knowledge supported these findings (Bai, 2024; Geerts, 2024).

9.4 Challenges Identified

Despite these positive outcomes, the study identified challenges in translating leadership development into systemic change, including resistance to change, as certain organisational units exhibited inertia or hesitance in adopting new leadership practices; resource constraints, as participants' innovative approaches were

occasionally hindered by insufficient funding and personnel; and the scalability of impact, since while individual leadership capacity improved, the expansion of these benefits to broader institutional or sectoral levels requires ongoing mentorship and systemic support.. ubbart, 2023; Damawan & Azizah, 2020).

10. Conclusion

The results highlight how executive education can spur sectoral change and leadership when it is thoughtfully planned and contextualised. The TETA–Wits IEP shows that investing in human capital improves governance, organisational performance, and leadership effectiveness in quantifiable ways. This supports the Human Capital Theory, which holds that capacity and productivity are increased through education and training. Such investment results in both individual and institutional change in the transportation sector, cultivating a leadership cadre that is more flexible, creative, and morally orientated. The study also emphasises how useful insider-led ethnographic methods are for gathering complex information about the effects of programmes, such as systemic influence, behavioural shift, and practical application. A thorough grasp of how executive education supports sector transformation in practice is provided by the author's personal experiences combined with participant narratives.

The IEDP shows that leadership development that is planned out strategically can create transformational leaders who can bring about change in their organisations and sectors. Ethnographic observations and reflexive analysis underscore the program's efficacy in cultivating ethical, adaptive, and innovative leadership behaviours. By combining formal learning, mentoring, and working together online, the program matches personal growth with national policy goals. This helps South Africa's transport sector grow its workforce, encourage new ideas, and make things fairer. To keep and grow this influence, structured alumni involvement, long-term evaluation, and inclusive recruitment are all necessary. This will make sure that the IEDP keeps making leaders who change both organisations and the sector as a whole.

The IEP eliminates the conventional gap between education and practice by fusing academic theory with real-world industry insights. It gives managers a transformative mindset in addition to managerial skills, one that synchronises leadership excellence with the national imperatives of inclusiveness, economic recovery, and institutional renewal. This alignment emphasises how executive education plays a strategic role in developing a cadre of accountable and responsive leaders capable of sustaining long-term sectoral growth. The TETA–Wits partnership's collaborative nature also shows how cross-sector collaboration can be used to address challenges related to transformation and leadership. Through this collaboration, industry, and academia work together to develop a pipeline of leaders who are both locally rooted and globally aware, able to strike a balance between the strategic vision required to reposition South Africa's transport sector and operational realities.

In the end, executive education's transformation of the transport industry involves institutional and systemic change in addition to the improvement of individual skills. As a result, the IEP strategically supports the larger transformation agenda by encouraging moral leadership, innovation, and governance in the industry. To ensure that leadership development continues to be a pillar of South Africa's transport modernisation and competitiveness, future research should further analyse how

executive education interventions translate into quantifiable organisational performance and policy influence.

11. Recommendations

Based on the study's results, it is suggested that alumni networks be formalised to make it easier for people to keep mentoring and working together and that long-term impact evaluations be done to keep track of participants' career progress and contributions to their fields. The study further suggests that WBS and TETA's IEP program should include global and local curriculum elements blended with South African case studies and best practices, and program outcomes should be aligned with policy milestones like NDP 2030 and TSSP objectives. The study finally recommends that blended and digital learning methods be used to make the IEP programme more accessible to a wider audience to attract participation from the multiplicity across the transport or education sector. In return, WBS would realise the financial benefit of partnering with TETA and enrolling in the IEP program, as funding would come from various sources. By focusing on the recommendations listed below, WBS and TETA can enhance the IEP programme's impact by ensuring a return on investment, value for money, and sustainable outcomes that build transformational leaders who promote exceptional leadership and managerial capabilities in the transport sector, ultimately contributing to the country's growth and development:

- Institutionalise Executive Education in Sector Strategy: Executive education should be incorporated into sectoral development frameworks as a strategic pillar by the Department of Transportation, through TETA and its industry partners. Sustained investment in leadership development will guarantee that transformation initiatives continue beyond compliance and develop into an innovative and accountable culture.
- Enhance academic-industry partnerships: The TETA-Wits collaboration's success shows the importance of jointly created programs that blend academic rigour with real-world industry insights. A larger ecosystem for leadership excellence across transportation sub-sectors might be created by extending these collaborations to other academic institutions, research centres, and regional stakeholders.
- Promote Monitoring and Impact Evaluation: To measure the long-term effectiveness of executive education, TETA and its partners should develop a robust monitoring and evaluation (M&E) framework. This framework should assess not only knowledge acquisition but also behavioural change, organisational performance, and contribution to transformation outcomes.
- Foster a Culture of Ethical and Adaptive Leadership: As the transport sector evolves, leaders must embody ethical, transparent, and adaptive leadership practices. Continuous leadership reflection, mentorship, and professional peer-learning platforms should be institutionalised to reinforce ethical governance and responsiveness to change.

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