

Implanting Lifelong Learning in the Alignment of the PSET Sector with Critical Skills and Industry Needs

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Abstract

Lifelong learning is central to developing a workforce capable of adapting to rapid technological, economic, and social change. This presentation argues that the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) sector in South Africa must place lifelong learning at its core if it is to address persistent skills shortages and align effectively with the updated national Critical Skills List. Degrees, diplomas, and microcredentials each offer distinct but complementary pathways that support skills acquisition across the individual's lifespan – from young graduates entering the labour market to mid-career professionals seeking to reskill or upskill. Microcredentials, in particular, provide a fast, targeted, and flexible mechanism for addressing immediate skills gaps in high-demand sectors such as ICT, renewable energy, and advanced manufacturing. However, systemic barriers such as lack of standardisation and formal recognition limit their potential impact. Drawing on South African and international case studies, the presentation demonstrates that integrating microcredentials within a coherent qualifications framework enhances the responsiveness and relevance of the PSET sector. It recommends policy reforms to standardise and formally recognise microcredentials, strengthen industry–education–government partnerships, and entrench lifelong learning as a guiding principle for curriculum design. By doing so, South Africa and Africa as a whole can foster a more agile, inclusive, and future-fit workforce.

Index Terms

Lifelong learning, Degrees, Diplomas, Microcredentialing, PSET sector, Critical Skills list, CHE