

The impact of professional education programs on career development

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Tim Cheng

Institute for China Business, The University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate the impact of the professional development programs on individual career development. The objective of this study is to evaluate the alignment of professional programs with the changing business environment in China and their ability to address the market skills gap.

Design/methodology/approach – This study will use the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) case for analysis. This study adopts a mixed research method combining quantitative data from an alumni survey and qualitative interviews. Quantitative data included employment status, salary progression, job title and satisfaction with the program's impact on career development. Qualitative data collection included semi-structured interviews with alumni, faculty and industry partners.

Findings – Quantitative research findings show that over 70% of respondents consider HKUICB professional education programs to be highly beneficial to their career development. Qualitative analysis found that alumni highly recognize the professionalism, forward-looking nature, problem-solving approach and practicality of HKUICB programs.

Originality/value – This study provides a comprehensive insight into how a professional education program can impact alumni career development, especially in China's ever-changing market economy. It also explores the importance of networking and business opportunities in career development, which provides a new perspective on existing literature.

Keywords Professional education programs, Career development, Industry collaboration, Networking and business opportunities

Paper type Research paper

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1. Introduction

In China's evolving labor market, professional education has become increasingly essential for individuals seeking to remain competitive and advance their careers (Khasanova, 2021; Xiang and Zhang, 2021). As rapid economic change and globalization reshape workplace demands, employees must continuously enhance their skills and adopt strategic approaches to career development. However, many individuals in China still rely heavily on past work experiences and informal networks, underscoring the need for more structured, professional education programs tailored to the dynamic market landscape.

This research aims to explore the impact of professional education programs on the career development of individuals seeking to progress in their careers. Using a mixed-methods research approach, this study will examine how program curricula, industry collaborations and networking opportunities play a role in supporting participants' career development. By combining quantitative data collected from participants with insights from qualitative interviews, a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of the program will be achieved.

The anticipated findings of this study are expected to underscore the vital role that professional education plays in enhancing participants' employability, skill sets and overall career progression. This will underscore the imperative need for specialized professional

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education programs that are tailored to meet the evolving demands of the dynamic China market.

1.1 The research addresses the following key questions

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- RQ1. How is the curriculum of the professional program aligned with the current and emerging needs of the participants?
 - RQ2. In what ways do the professional training programs improve the skills of the participants?
 - RQ3. To what extent do the industry partnerships and networking opportunities offered by the professional program facilitate participants' career development?
 - RQ4. How do participants perceive the value of professional development programs in terms of their personal career development?

By exploring these questions, this study aims to highlight the critical role of professional education in career development and provide evidence of how tailored educational interventions, such as those offered by Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB), equip professionals for success in an increasingly competitive business landscape.

2. Literature review

In reviewing the literature, it's clear that there are diverse perspectives on the effectiveness of professional education programs. Scholars have explored aspects such as curriculum design, delivery and the long-term career outcomes for participants. The literature also delves into how programs, like those at HKUICB, align with businesses' strategic goals in China's evolving market. This review aims to consolidate existing knowledge, pinpoint research gaps and connect key elements to the practical experiences of HKUICB alumni in their professional journeys.

2.1 Learning and development in professional education

Professional education refers to a structured and specialized training program designed to equip individuals with the essential knowledge, skills and competencies required to excel in a specific profession. During these programs, learners are introduced to key concepts, principles and techniques relevant to their field of expertise and are taught how to apply these effectively in real-world scenarios (Han *et al.*, 2015). Additionally, professional education aims to foster the development of proper professional practice and behavior. The training is tailored to the specific job requirements and can encompass a range of elements, including behavior training, practical principles related to the role and the confidence necessary to carry out daily tasks. This education can be obtained through formal institutions like schools or colleges or through online platforms (Preston, 2023).

Lifelong learning refers to the continuous, voluntary and self-driven pursuit of knowledge, whether for personal or professional motivations. Its benefits encompass social inclusion, active citizenship, personal growth as well as self-sustainability, competitiveness and employability. Terms such as "continuing education," "professional development" and "lifelong learning" all describe educational and training processes that play a crucial role in the success of organizations (Giordano, 2020; Knust and Hanft, 2009).

Although the term "continuing education" can have various interpretations, one comprehensive and relevant definition from Liveright and Haygood's 1969 version states that it is "a process in which individuals who are no longer engaged in full-time schooling undertake sequential and organized activities with the explicit intention of acquiring new information, expanding knowledge, developing skills and shaping attitudes, either for

personal growth or to address personal or community issues” (Carr *et al.*, 2020; Encyclopedia, 2023; Taranto and Buchanan, 2020; Thongmak, 2021).

Curriculum relevance and pedagogical approaches are essential in designing educational programs that meet real-world needs and enhance learning outcomes. In post-graduate studies, it is critical to have up-to-date and relevant curricula tailored to students’ specific requirements.

Curriculum relevance integrates key elements with practical application, aligning skills with industry demands. Pedagogical approaches focus on interactive and experiential learning methods like case studies and group discussions to engage students effectively (Morales-Doyle, 2018).

The active learning theory (3-3-3 model) at ICB emphasizes student participation in the learning process. This model suggests that active engagement and interaction with peers can deepen practical knowledge for application in professional settings (Morales-Doyle, 2018).

2.2 Career development

Career development involves selecting a career, honing skills and advancing along a chosen path. It is a lifelong journey of learning and decision-making to attain the desired job, skills and lifestyle. Understanding the factors and hurdles influencing one’s career progression is vital (Gartner, 2023).

Self-awareness, exploration and informed decision-making are central to career development. It requires navigating through different job options that resonate with one’s personality, skills and interests (Akkermans *et al.*, 2021; Han *et al.*, 2015). Through active career development, individuals identify strengths and weaknesses, work on skill improvement, explore diverse roles and industries and seek opportunities for growth and potential transitions to align with a more suitable professional trajectory.

To comprehend the drivers of career mobility, factors like education, training, experience, networking and mentorship must be explored. The role of professional education in facilitating transitions to elevated roles or diverse industries is also crucial to consider. Investigating these elements provides insights into the mechanisms enabling career progression (Calinaud *et al.*, 2021; Green, 2024; Randel *et al.*, 2021).

Educational outcomes and impact measurement involve evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs in achieving their goals and generating meaningful results for learners, institutions and society. This assessment considers indicators like academic achievement, skills development and personal growth, focusing on the practical application of knowledge and skills (Murnane and Ganimian, 2014; Nachbauer and Kyriakides, 2020).

Impact measurement assesses the broader and long-term effects of educational interventions on societal progress, economic development and social mobility. By evaluating outcomes and impact, researchers and policymakers can enhance educational programs, allocate resources efficiently and make informed decisions to shape educational policies and practices for improved learning outcomes and increased societal impact (Angrist *et al.*, 2020; Caspersen *et al.*, 2017; Murnane and Ganimian, 2014; Nachbauer and Kyriakides, 2020).

Career services, mentorship programs and counseling are vital components of professional education studies that support students in their career development and success. Career services encompass resources like job placement assistance, resume building, networking events and internship opportunities, preparing students for the workforce (Dey and Cruzvergara, 2014; Kronholz, 2015; Lalande *et al.*, 2006; Mackay *et al.*, 2015). Mentorship programs pair students with industry professionals to provide guidance and insights for personal and professional growth (Bjursell and Florin Sadbom, 2018).

2.3 Industry collaboration and networking

Networking and industry partnerships play crucial roles in post-graduate studies by fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing and professional advancement (Kruss, 2006).

In the context of professional education, particularly within the China market, industry collaboration and networking assume a pivotal role. Collaborations with industry facilitate the updating of educational institutions on the latest industry trends, technologies and practices, thereby ensuring the continued relevance and practical application of the curriculum for students. Furthermore, networking with industry professionals provides students with valuable opportunities for internships, mentorships and potential job placements upon graduation.

Networking involves building connections within one's field to exchange ideas and seek guidance, while industry partnerships between educational institutions and businesses provide practical exposure and research opportunities. These collaborations offer students insights into industry practices, enhancing their employability and preparing them for successful careers (Kruss, 2006; Moller *et al.*, 2005).

Professional networks and social capital are vital in post-graduate studies for career growth and personal development (Heidari *et al.*, 2023). Building and nurturing these networks is key for students, providing industry insights, access to opportunities and credibility. Active engagement, attending events and utilizing digital platforms are essential for developing these connections.

Industry-academia cooperation fosters partnerships between academic institutions and businesses, facilitating knowledge exchange and innovation. This collaboration enriches academic research with practical insights and exposes professional education students to real-world industry dynamics and challenges (Garousi *et al.*, 2016; Wohlin *et al.*, 2011). By engaging with industry partners, students bridge theory and practice, rendering their research more relevant while offering industry access to cutting-edge research and fresh academic perspectives, fostering innovation and competitiveness. Moreover, such collaborations often yield internship opportunities, joint research endeavors and industry-backed scholarships, equipping students with valuable practical skills and enhancing their employability (Sanno *et al.*, 2019; Wohlin *et al.*, 2011).

3. Research design and methodology

This chapter examines the research design and methodology used in this study. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative data to analyze the impact of the professional development program on the career outcomes of HKUICB graduates as a case study.

3.1 Research design

The research design incorporates key elements to investigate the impact of professional education programs on career outcomes. This study aims to explore how these programs influence career trajectories by drawing on established theories.

Furthermore, a thorough review of related studies will be conducted to identify gaps in existing research and emphasize the significance of this study in contributing new knowledge to the field of vocational education programs. The mixed-methods convergent parallel design approach will offer a comprehensive understanding of the program's effects on career development, integrating both quantitative and qualitative perspectives. The mixed-methods convergent parallel design approach (Figure 1) adopted in this study will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact on career development and outcomes, considering both quantitative and qualitative dimensions (Coe *et al.*, 2021)

3.2 Data collection

The data collection process for qualitative data will involve conducting semi-structured interviews with alumni, faculty and industry partners to gather insights into the program's impact. Purposive sampling will be used to ensure that diverse perspectives are represented.

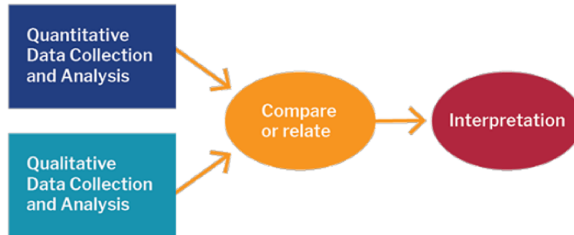
**BASIC MIXED METHODS
RESEARCH DESIGNS****Convergent Parallel Design**

Figure 1. Convergent parallel design [Tim \(2024\)](#)

In-depth narratives will be captured through face-to-face video interviews with alumni, providing a deeper understanding of their experiences ([Coe et al., 2021](#)).

For quantitative data, surveys will be administered to a stratified random sample of alumni to gather information on employment status, salary progression, job roles and satisfaction with the program's influence on career development. These surveys will be conducted online to ensure accessibility, enabling a comprehensive analysis across different alumni groups ([Coe et al., 2021](#)).

3.3 Data analysis

The qualitative analysis utilized thematic analysis to examine interview transcripts, aiming to identify recurring themes and patterns. This process provided valuable insights into the program's impact on career development. The analysis followed five steps: familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, identifying themes across the dataset, refining the themes and reporting the findings in a clear and structured manner.

The quantitative analysis included a statistical examination of survey data. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize sample characteristics and key variables, while correlation analysis explored relationships between program participation and career outcomes. Additionally, regression models were employed to assess the predictive power of program participation on career indicators. These analyses provided empirical evidence of the program's impact on alumni career development.

The study enhanced the validity of its findings through triangulation of data sources and methods, integrating quantitative and qualitative data for cross-validation. A pilot test of the survey and interview protocol was conducted with a small group to refine the questions and ensure data reliability, thereby strengthening both the validity and reliability of the research.

Ethical considerations were a central focus, with measures taken to safeguard participant rights and confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained, and data anonymity was ensured, adhering to ethical guidelines to uphold research integrity and participant well-being. The study aimed to analyze the impact of the professional education program on career outcomes for ICB alumni by utilizing quantitative and qualitative data, theoretical frameworks and a comprehensive literature review. The research design facilitated a robust exploration of the program's effects, ensuring validity and reliability through triangulation while maintaining high ethical standards.

4. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of the study, derived from data collected and analyzed according to the previously outlined research design. The study included both quantitative and

qualitative methods. Notably, the actual sample sizes exceeded the original plan, with quantitative data ranging from 100 to 161 samples and qualitative data from 5 to 11 interviews. Further details are provided as below (Table 1).

4.1 Participation background

According to data (Table 2), there were 161 valid responses to the online survey, of which 40.4% were male and 59.6% were female. The number of female participants exceeded the number of male participants.

Regarding the job level distribution among participants, “Founders” constituted the largest proportion at 32.9%, indicating a significant presence of company founders and high-level entrepreneurial roles. “Vice President/General Manager” roles followed closely at 28.0%, suggesting a substantial representation of middle to upper management executives. In contrast, the “Manager/Senior Manager” and “Director” categories had lower percentages at 19.3 and 10.6%, respectively, indicating a smaller presence of middle management participants. “Department Head” and “Other” categories had the lowest percentages at 5.3% each, reinforcing the dominance of middle to upper management and founder roles among respondents.

Lastly, the age groups of 31–40 years and 41–50 years had the highest percentage of people, 43.5 and 50.9%, respectively, with a total percentage of 94.4%. This showed that the respondents for this survey were mainly concentrated in the 31+ age group. The number of respondents in the 18–25 and over 60 age groups was zero, suggesting that these two age groups did not participate in the survey.

4.2 Perception of the participants on the effectiveness of the professional program

The quantitative research involved a sample size of 161 participants and included a comprehensive set of 12 questions (Table 3). Due to the extensive nature of the data, it was recommended to focus on analyzing the mean scores for each question, as this allowed for the identification of key themes.

The analysis of the survey data revealed several key findings, emphasizing the strengths and areas for improvement in the professional education programs offered by the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB).

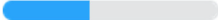
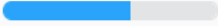



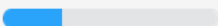
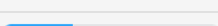


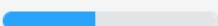


The survey highlighted several strengths of the programmes (Tim, 2024). One of the most notable findings was the high recommendation rate, with 89% of respondents (Q11) indicating they would recommend HKUICB’s professional education programs to others. This demonstrated strong overall satisfaction and confidence in the value of the programs. The curriculum also received high marks, with 78% of participants (Q1) agreeing that it matched the current and emerging needs of the China business environment. Similarly, 75% of respondents (Q6) found the curriculum effectively incorporated real-life business scenarios, underscoring the relevance and practicality of the courses. Career development support was another significant strength, with 82% of respondents (Q12) rating the programs as effective in supporting their career advancement. This aligned with the 73% (Q4) who assessed the programs as valuable for personal career development. Additionally, the teaching methods

Table 1. The research methodology planning for both quantitative and qualitative research

Research Methodology	Quantitative (online survey)	Qualitative (online interview)
Original plan	100 samples	5 interviews
Actual results	161 samples	11 interviews

Source(s): Tim (2024)

Table 2. Quantitative research on participation background

Options	Subtotal	Ratio
Gender		
Male	65	 40.4%
Female	96	 59.6%
Alumni Occupation		
Manager/Senior Manager	31	 19.3%
Director	17	 10.6%
Department Head	8	 5.0%
Deputy General Manager/General Manager	45	 28.0%
Founder	53	 32.9%
Others	7	 4.4%
Age Distribution		
26~30 years old	3	 1.9%
31~40 years old	70	 43.5%
41~50 years old	82	 50.9%
51~60 years old	6	 3.7%
Total	161	

Source(s): Tim (2024)

were highly rated, with 77% of participants (Q7) agreeing that they enhanced the learning experience. Furthermore, 75% of respondents (Q5) believed the programs effectively responded to the changing needs of the China business environment, reinforcing the programs' alignment with industry demands.

Despite these strengths, the survey also revealed areas for improvement. Networking opportunities and industry partnerships appeared to be a weaker aspect of the programs. Only 63% of respondents (Q3) felt that these opportunities significantly contributed to career development, which was the lowest score across all survey items. Although satisfaction with networking opportunities scored slightly higher at 72% (Q9), this still indicated room for improvement in leveraging such connections for alumni. Another area requiring attention was the programs' ability to help participants adapt to the changing business environment, with 69% of respondents (Q8) rating this aspect positively. While this score was not particularly low, it suggested that further enhancements in equipping participants to navigate an evolving business landscape could have been beneficial. Additionally, the programs' effectiveness in enhancing participants' skills scored 71% (Q2), indicating potential gaps in fully meeting participants' professional development needs.

Overall, the survey results presented a largely positive assessment of HKUICB's professional education programs, especially in terms of their relevance, curriculum design, teaching methods and career development support. The high recommendation rate (Q11) and overall effectiveness

Table 3. Participants' perception on the effectiveness of professional program

No.	Questions	Mean score
Q1	Does the curriculum of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) match the current and emerging needs of the China business environment?	78%
Q2	The professional education programs of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) enhance the skills of the participants?	71%
Q3	To what extent do the industry partnerships and networking opportunities offered by the University of Hong Kong Institute of China Business (HKUICB) contribute to the career development of alumni?	63%
Q4	How do participants assess the value of the professional education programs of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) for their personal career development?	73%
Q5	To what extent does the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) understand and respond to the changing needs of the Chinese business environment?	75%
Q6	To what extent does the curriculum of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) incorporate real-life business scenarios?	75%
Q7	How effective are the teaching methods used in the professional education programs of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) in enhancing the learning experience of the participants?	77%
Q8	To what extent do the professional education programs of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) help participants adapt to the changing business environment?	69%
Q9	How satisfied are HKU Institute for China Business (HKUICB) alumni with the networking and industry cooperation opportunities provided?	72%
Q10	How relevant are the professional education programs of the University of Hong Kong Institute of China Business (HKUICB) to the current and emerging needs of the China business environment?	73%
Q11	How likely is the participant to recommend the professional education programs of the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) to others?	89%
Q12	Overall, how would you rate the effectiveness of the professional education programs at the University of Hong Kong Institute for China Business (HKUICB) in supporting the career development of the participants?	82%

Source(s): [Tim \(2024\)](#)

(Q12) highlighted the programs' strengths. However, the lower scores in networking opportunities (Q3 and Q9), skill enhancement (Q2) and adaptability to a changing business environment (Q8) pointed to areas where improvements could have been made. Addressing these aspects would have enabled HKUICB to further strengthen its offerings and better serve the needs of its participants, solidifying its impact in the China business education sector.

4.3 Qualitative analysis

In this section, the qualitative interview content was analyzed using a thematic approach. This method of analysis emphasized the identification and alignment of key messages within the data. By using this approach, the qualitative findings could be effectively organized and synthesized to reveal meaningful themes and patterns within the interview data.

4.3.1 Participant background. The participants in this qualitative research study consisted of 11 interviewees with an almost balanced gender distribution. Most of the participants were experienced professionals, mainly in middle to senior management positions, with the majority aged between 31 and 50. This reflects a group of respondents with significant professional and managerial experience.

4.4 Perception of professional program effectiveness by participants

Based on the data from the 11 existing interviews, the use of a thematic approach was paramount to ensure that the qualitative data was fully analyzed by [Figure 2 \(Tim, 2024\)](#). This

approach allowed for a systematic review of the data and helped to identify and explore recurring themes and patterns. In addition, the inclusion of interpretative research in the analysis process could provide a structured framework for organizing and interpreting the data, further enhancing the clarity and rigor of the analysis. By implementing these strategies, robust and insightful analyses of qualitative data could be achieved.

4.4.1 Interview data. The thematic analysis involved not only conducting in-depth interviews with participants but also capturing and analyzing their key messages to assign appropriate codes. The findings revealed three main themes: participants' perceptions of professional education programs, the value of business opportunities and networking and career advancement (Tim, 2024).

4.4.1.1 Participants' perceptions of professional education programs. One of the key findings highlighted participants' reflections on the impact of professional education programs on their learning and thinking processes. Many participants noted how these programs challenged their preconceived notions and enhanced their understanding of complex business concepts. For instance, one participant shared:

I once raised a question in class: My business has only receivables and no payables. I thought this was a good business model, but in class this view was rejected. Mr. Sham pointed out that such a business could not grow bigger, and once it expanded its projects, cash flow problems could arise at any time, which would be very fatal.

This quote illustrates how participants gained valuable insights that reshaped their perspectives on business operations and sustainability.

4.4.1.2 The value of business opportunities and networking. Another key finding emphasized the importance of networking and collaboration within the professional education program. Participants frequently mentioned how interactions with classmates and instructors provided them with practical solutions and opportunities to improve their projects. One of the participants reflected on his view of professional education programs.

One of the biggest benefits was the help of my fellow students. My project is actually my company's project, and it's been enjoying the dividends of your comments, professor's guidance, and the input of my classmates. I often share these experiences with my students, and they say, 'Then you should treat us to dinner!' I am also very happy to be able to handle these issues so properly.

This statement highlights the role of peer-to-peer learning and professional networks in fostering knowledge exchange and mutual support.

4.4.1.3 Career development. The analysis also revealed that the program significantly contributed to participants' career advancement by equipping them with the skills to address complex organizational challenges. Participants noted how the knowledge gained enabled them to handle intricate issues with greater confidence and precision. One of the key findings was related to participants' perceptions on professional education programs.

When it comes to shareholdings and options, in the past, these issues were always a headache, and if they were not handled properly, they would lead to a lot of problems in the future. Now I can see the problems with the Equity Design structure of some companies, and it is true that they will soon have problems.

This illustrates how the program helped participants identify and resolve strategic issues, thereby enhancing their professional capabilities.

4.4.1.4 Summary. The interview data provided valuable insights into participants' experiences with the professional education program. The findings focused on learning and thinking processes, networking and career growth, which were essential to the thematic analysis and contributed to the development of the thematic relationship chart (Figure 2). By presenting the findings alongside direct quotations, the analysis highlights the depth and relevance of participants' contributions to understanding the impact of the program.

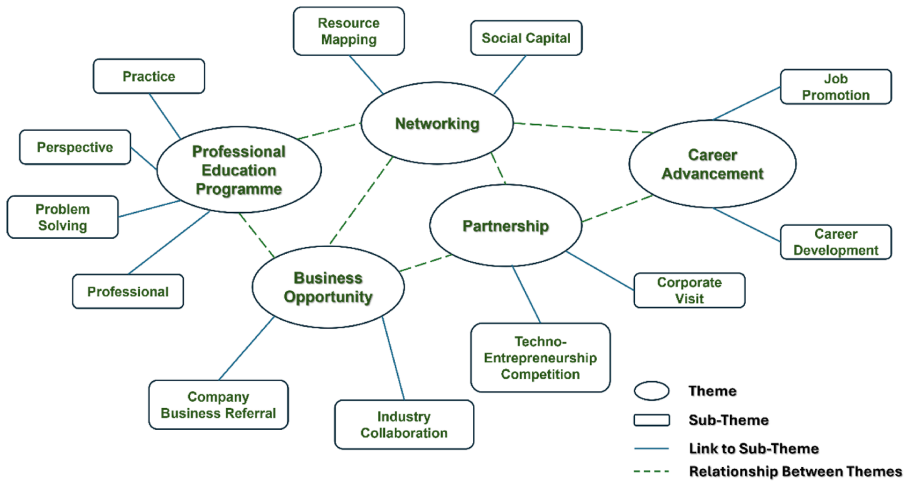


Figure 2. Thematic analysis relationship chart regarding the professional education program Tim (2024)

4.5 Reporting

Through thematic analysis, we identified keywords highlighting how professional education programs supported alumni career development. Participants expressed strong alignment with HKUICB programs, emphasizing their professionalism, perspectives, problem-solving approach and practicality. They acknowledged the high program quality and valued the networking opportunities provided by HKUICB for resource identification and social capital building.

The supportive HKUICB atmosphere differed from the business market, fostering close relationships among participants through shared alumni status. Participants expressed interest in collaboration and business opportunities offered by HKUICB, seeking to learn from best practices and access diverse business resources for career advancement.

Participants noted that HKUICB programs enhanced their mindset and job search approach, enabling them to leverage knowledge and academic frameworks effectively. The programs equipped them with skills to excel and compete in management roles. Overall, the participants praised HKUICB programs for providing essential tools and personal competencies for career success.

The participants utilized both quantitative and qualitative methods to express their study experiences. This mixed approach offered insights into participant intentions and a multifaceted view of the alumni community. Contrasting these methods in the next chapter aimed to improve HKUICB's professional education programs for a competitive edge.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study highlighted the significant role of the professional education program at HKUICB in supporting alumni career development. Over 70% of the participants recognized the program as highly beneficial for their professional growth, underscoring its widespread positive reception. By integrating quantitative and qualitative analyses, the results revealed that alumni placed a high value on the program's offerings, which addressed their evolving career needs and aspirations. The research findings emphasized the importance of aligning program content with industry practices and utilizing diverse resources to enhance career advancement opportunities. This insight underlines how professional education

programs can go beyond traditional postgraduate education by focusing on work-based and results-oriented learning approaches. Such a framework not only facilitates skills development but also fosters social networking and access to business opportunities, positioning graduates to elevate their professional standing in competitive job markets.

The professional education programs are well-aligned with the current and emerging needs of participants, particularly in the evolving China business environment. The curriculum, highly rated by participants, is designed to integrate real-life business scenarios, ensuring its relevance and practicality. With 78% of respondents agreeing that the curriculum addresses the needs of the China market, the program equips participants with essential problem-solving skills and offers effective teaching methods, such as case studies and interactive learning. Qualitative insights further highlight how the program reshapes participants' understanding of complex business challenges, making it a valuable asset for their professional development.

While participants acknowledged the program's strengths in skill enhancement and career development, they also noted that industry partnerships and networking opportunities, though moderately effective, could be improved. Although 63% of respondents felt these opportunities facilitated their career development, participants expressed a desire for more structured and impactful networking initiatives. Despite this, the program's overall value was rated highly, with 82% of participants affirming its effectiveness in supporting their career growth and 89% recommending it to others. The combination of a relevant curriculum, practical applications and career-focused learning makes the program a significant contributor to participants' personal and professional success.

The practical implications of this study are substantial. The findings provide actionable insights for program administrators, allowing them to identify areas for improvement and enhance the overall learning experience. By tailoring the curriculum to meet the demands of the dynamic business environment, the program can better prepare alumni for career success. Furthermore, this research offers valuable guidance to professionals in the field, highlighting best practices such as the integration of industry partnerships and the promotion of experiential learning opportunities. These recommendations can help professionals and educators enrich alumni exposure and enable them to achieve greater success in their roles.

In addition to its practical implications, the study contributes to educational policy development by offering evidence-based recommendations for promoting quality education and supporting student outcomes. The research underscores the importance of aligning educational policies with industry trends, which can inform decision-making processes for policymakers. By identifying effective strategies and areas for improvement, this study provides a foundation for developing policies that enhance program quality and foster student success in a rapidly changing professional landscape.

The findings also have significant implications for fostering industry engagement. By identifying best practices and areas for optimization, the research offers insights that can help industry stakeholders stay competitive and drive innovation. These insights are particularly relevant for adapting to shifting market demands and ensuring that professional education programs remain aligned with the needs of the industry. The integration of industry perspectives into program development enhances the quality of education while simultaneously supporting the operational goals of businesses.

6. Conclusion

The research explored the impact of a professional education program on participants' career development through a mixed-methods approach. The quantitative data measured the program's effectiveness in areas such as curriculum, alumni network and career development. The qualitative data offered in-depth insights into alumni experiences and provided suggestions for improvement.

The study uncovered that the program effectively facilitated knowledge transfer and experience sharing, contributing to participants' professional development. However,

participants expressed a strong desire for more networking and business opportunities. This suggests that professional education programs should not only focus on knowledge and skills but also actively facilitate connections and opportunities for participants. Therefore, coordinating resources to create a platform for networking and business opportunities is a crucial trend for enriching professional education programs.

This study was limited by the time constraints, resource scarcity and the small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research could address these limitations by expanding the sample size and conducting a more in-depth analysis.

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Appendix

The supplementary material for this article can be found online.

Corresponding author

Tim Cheng can be contacted at: sltcheng@hku.hk