

Mapping the Literature on Entrepreneurial Coaching: A Two-Layer Scientometric Analysis

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Abstract: *Purpose:* Entrepreneurial coaching (EC) has emerged as a recognised support mechanism for venture creation. Yet its intellectual structure, thematic organisation, and conceptual positioning within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem remain insufficiently mapped. *Design/Methodology/Approach:* This study adopts a two-layer scientometric design. Layer 1 examines the internal intellectual structure of EC through 31 peer-reviewed articles retrieved from Web of Science and Scopus (2009–2026). Layer 2 extends the analysis to 74 articles from broader entrepreneurial support literature. Performance analysis and science mapping, including co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence, thematic mapping, and Multiple Correspondence Analysis, were conducted using VOSviewer and Biblioshiny within the Bibliometrix R package. *Findings:* Layer 1 reveals that EC is an emerging but progressively consolidating research domain with interdisciplinary foundations across social cognitive theory, entrepreneurship, and relational support traditions. Coaching and entrepreneurial support constitute the field's motor theme, while entrepreneurial coaching and entrepreneurial self-efficacy form a developing niche. A structural shift is identified from EC as a programmatic incubation tool to EC as a mechanism of entrepreneurial identity and capability development. Layer 2 reveals that EC occupies a conceptually distinct but structurally peripheral position within the ecosystem, forming its own cluster defined by self-efficacy, mentoring, and behaviour though absent from the ecosystem's motor themes. Multiple Correspondence Analysis confirms a fundamental conceptual separation between EC research discourse and the structural ecosystem vocabulary. *Originality/Value:* This study contributes a two-layer scientometric mapping of EC, an analytical architecture that simultaneously maps the field's internal intellectual structure and its positioning within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem, an approach not previously applied to entrepreneurial coaching research. *Theoretical implications.* EC's interdisciplinary embeddedness explains its persistent terminological fragmentation, while the progressive dominance of social cognitive theory signals an emerging phase of conceptual consolidation. *Practical implications:* EC should be understood as a psychologically grounded complement to structural support mechanisms. Its value lying in the relational and behavioural dimensions that incubation and acceleration programmes do not address.

Keywords: Entrepreneurial Coaching; Scientometric Analysis; Bibliometric Mapping; Entrepreneurship Support; Thematic Evolution; Knowledge Development.

1. Introduction

Entrepreneurial coaching (EC) has emerged as a critical support mechanism for venture creation and development, equipping entrepreneurs with the skills, resilience, and decision-making capabilities necessary to navigate the complexities of the entrepreneurial process (Azizi et al., 2023; Kotte et al., 2021). Defined as a customised, reflective, and results-oriented developmental intervention directed toward entrepreneurs across different stages and experience levels (Kotte et al., 2021), EC has attracted growing scholarly attention, particularly since 2018. As entrepreneurial ecosystems became increasingly complex and competitive, demand for structured, individualised support mechanisms has intensified, positioning EC as a strategically relevant yet an insufficiently understood component of the entrepreneurial support landscape (Marras et al., 2024).

Despite this growing interest, significant gaps persist in the literature. EC lacks a unified conceptual definition and is frequently conflated with adjacent support forms including mentoring, business coaching, and consulting, generating terminological fragmentation that hinders cumulative knowledge development (Audet & Couteret, 2012; Kotte et al., 2021). Existing studies tend to address specific aspects of EC, outcomes, populations, or interventions in isolation without providing a comprehensive view of the field's intellectual evolution, thematic organisation, or conceptual positioning relative to other entrepreneurial support mechanisms. To date, no study has systematically applied a scientometric approach to map the knowledge structure of entrepreneurial coaching (EC) across both its internal scholarly literature and the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem in which it is embedded.

To address this gap, this study pursues three research questions:

RQ1: How has the intellectual and thematic structure of entrepreneurial coaching research evolved over time?

RQ2: What are the dominant, emerging, and declining themes in EC literature?

RQ3: What distinguishes EC from other forms of entrepreneurial support, and how does EC establish its conceptual boundaries within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem?

Answering these questions, this study makes three contributions. It provides a comprehensive systematic two-layer scientometric mapping of EC, clarifies the field's thematic trajectories and intellectual foundations, and establishes EC's conceptual boundaries relative to adjacent support mechanisms, thereby supporting both cumulative theory building and evidence-informed practice.

2. Literature Review

This review applies the Theory-Context-Characteristics-Methodology (TCCM) framework (Paul & Menzies, 2023) to structure existing EC scholarship, enabling systematic identification of what is established and where critical gaps persist.

Theory: The theoretical foundations of EC are inherently interdisciplinary, reflecting its roots across psychology, education, and management rather than constituting a standalone discipline (Kotte et al., 2021). Within psychology, self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) and social cognitive theory constitute the most consistently deployed frameworks, with empirical studies demonstrating that coaching interventions strengthen entrepreneurial self-belief through mastery experiences, vicarious learning, and social persuasion (L. M. Molema & Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo, 2024a; Ndlovu et al., 2025). Human capital theory and experiential learning approaches conceptualise coaching as a mechanism for developing entrepreneurial competencies and knowledge transfer (Marvel et al., 2025; Mohamed & Zouaoui, 2022). Relationship-based perspectives further emphasise that effective EC extends beyond skill development to encompass emotional support, identity navigation, and deeper relational dynamics (Marras et al., 2024). Despite this theoretical richness, integration across traditions remains limited with most studies adopting single-theory frameworks rather than integrative models capable of capturing EC's multidimensional nature.

Context: EC research addresses diverse entrepreneurial populations and organisational settings. Novice and nascent entrepreneurs constitute the most studied population, with coaching shown to facilitate skill acquisition and learning during the critical early stages of venture creation (Audet & Couteret, 2012; Fitouri & Zouaoui, 2021). Women entrepreneurs represent a growing focus, with studies demonstrating coaching's effectiveness in addressing gender-specific confidence barriers and self-efficacy deficits (L. M. Molema & Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo, 2024a). Post-failure entrepreneurs constitute a particularly vulnerable context where coaching supports psychological recovery and renewed entrepreneurial action (Anis et al., 2018). Organisationally, business incubators and SMEs are the most prevalent settings, with coaching increasingly positioned as a structured component of incubation and acceleration programmes (Azizi et al., 2023; Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo & Msimango-Galawe, 2023). Geographically, research remains concentrated in Western and North African contexts, with comparative cross-cultural studies notably absent.

Characteristics: EC is distinguished by its multifunctional role, simultaneously serving developmental, instrumental, and psychosocial functions (Marras et al., 2024). Kotte et al. (2021) propose a two-dimensional framework differentiating the process dimension, encompassing goal setting, reflective questioning, and feedback provision, from the content dimension addressing specific entrepreneurial challenges. Critical success factors identified across studies include coach entrepreneurial experience, entrepreneur openness to change, effective coach-coachee matching, and integration with complementary support services.

Methodology: EC scholarship employs diverse approaches including quantitative surveys with structural equation modelling, qualitative case studies, systematic literature reviews, and psychometric scale development (Marras et al., 2024; Azizi et al., 2023). Scientometric and bibliometric methods have emerged as valuable tools for mapping a field's intellectual structure (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic and Čater, 2015), though their systematic application to EC specifically remains nascent, a gap this study directly addresses.

Collectively, the TCCM analysis reveals a field characterised by theoretical diversity and contextual breadth, yet lacking a comprehensive structural mapping of its knowledge architecture and conceptual boundaries within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem, which the dual gap this study is designed to fill.

3. Methodology

Following established bibliometric research guidelines (Donthu et al., 2021), this study adopts a two-layer scientometric approach combining performance analysis and science mapping techniques. Performance analysis evaluates the productivity and scholarly influence of the field through publication trends and citation patterns, while science mapping explores the intellectual and conceptual structure of EC research through co-occurrence and thematic mapping analyses (Zupic & Čater, 2015). Layer 1 examines the internal intellectual structure of EC to answer RQ1 and RQ2, while Layer 2 positions EC within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem to address RQ3. To avoid conceptual dilution while still examining the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem, the extended retrieval strategy associated with RQ3 was not integrated into the main scientometric corpus. Instead, it was used as a comparative conceptual layer to identify adjacent support mechanisms and evaluate the positioning of entrepreneurial coaching relative to mentoring, incubation, acceleration, and entrepreneurial support systems.

3.1 Search Protocol

Both layers were retrieved from Web of Science (TS field) and Scopus (title, abstract, and keywords) in May 2026 with no date restriction, allowing full longitudinal coverage of the field. Only peer-reviewed journal articles in English were retained, with subject categories restricted to business, management, entrepreneurship, psychology, and social sciences. The full screening procedure followed PRISMA guidelines (Page et al., 2021) and is summarised in Table 1 (complete search strings are provided in Appendix N°1).

For Layer 1, the search targeted explicit EC terminology intersected with an entrepreneurial population anchor, yielding 76 records (WoS = 36; Scopus = 40). After removing 21 duplicates and applying document type, language, and subject category filters, the final corpus comprised 31 articles. For Layer 2, the search string extended to adjacent support mechanisms, including entrepreneurial mentoring, business incubation, startup acceleration, and venture support — intersected with a coaching anchor, yielding 163 records (WoS = 72; Scopus = 91). After removing 36 duplicates and applying equivalent criteria, the layer 2 corpus comprised 74 articles.

Table 1: PRISMA based Two-Layer Search Strategy and Corpus Construction

Section	Layer 1 (RQ1–RQ2)	Outcome	Layer 2 (RQ3)	Outcome
Identification	WoS (TS field) + Scopus (Title/Abstract/Keywords). EC-specific terminology (Appendix N°1: Detailed Search string). Date of search: May 2026 Time span: Not restricted	76 records (WoS=36; Scopus=40)	WoS (TS field) + Scopus (Title/Abstract/Keywords). Extended entrepreneurial support terminology intersected with coaching anchor (Appendix N°1: Detailed Search string). Date of search: May 2026 Time span: Not restricted	163 records (WoS=72; Scopus=91)
Screening	Peer-reviewed articles, English only, relevant subject categories, duplicates removed (n=21)	31 articles	Peer-reviewed articles, English only, relevant subject categories, duplicates removed (n=36)	74 articles
Included	Articles explicitly addressing EC within entrepreneurial contexts	31 articles	Articles positioning EC within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem	74 articles

3.2 Analytical Methods

All analyses were conducted using Biblioshiny within the Bibliometrix R package (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017) and VOSviewer (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). For Layer 1, performance analysis addresses RQ1 through descriptive bibliometrics tracking publication trends and citation patterns. Co-citation analysis of authors, conducted in VOSviewer, reveals the theoretical traditions underpinning EC by identifying clusters of systematically co-cited scholars. Keyword co-occurrence analysis and thematic mapping, conducted in Biblioshiny, address RQ2 by

classifying conceptual clusters according to centrality, reflecting external connectivity, and density, reflecting internal cohesion, producing a four-quadrant strategic map distinguishing motor, niche, basic, and emerging or declining themes (Callon et al., 1983). Thematic evolution is applied across two-time windows (2009–2020 and 2021–2026) to capture structural shifts in EC scholarship. For Layer 2, keyword co-occurrence analysis is applied in VOSviewer using author keywords and in Biblioshiny for broader ecosystem coverage. Thematic mapping following the same framework determines EC's strategic position relative to adjacent support mechanisms. Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) additionally provides multivariate confirmation of EC's conceptual distance from ecosystem structures (Aria & Cuccurullo, 2017).

Two limitations are acknowledged: a linguistic bias toward English-language publications, and the unavailability of complete cited-reference metadata in the merged dataset, which precluded document-level co-citation analysis (a dataset overview is provided in Appendix N°2).

4. Findings and Results

4.1 Layer 1: Intellectual and Thematic Structure of EC Research

4.1.1 Descriptive Overview and Production Trajectory

The Layer 1 corpus comprises 31 peer-reviewed articles published across 27 distinct sources between 2009 and 2026 (Figure 1). The near parity between document count and source count indicates a highly dispersed publication landscape with no dominant outlet, a structural feature characteristic of fields not yet coalesced around a core disciplinary venue. The 75 contributing authors, with a mean co-authorship rate of 2.65 per document and an international co-authorship rate of 29.03%, reflect a predominantly collaborative field producing nearly a third of its output through cross-national partnerships. The 151 unique author keywords across 31 articles signals strong terminological heterogeneity and the absence of a stabilised conceptual vocabulary, a structural feature that (Kotte et al., 2021) identify as one of EC's defining developmental characteristics. An average citation rate of 14.48 per document over a mean document age of 4.87 years confirms that EC scholarship is attaining meaningful scholarly visibility relative to its field size.



Figure 1: Descriptive Bibliometric Indicators of the Layer 1 Corpus (Source: Biblioshiny)

The annual scientific production (Figure 2) reveals a trajectory of prolonged latency followed by progressive acceleration, a pattern consistent with the pre-paradigmatic growth phase identified in scientometric lifecycle models (Donthu et al., 2021).

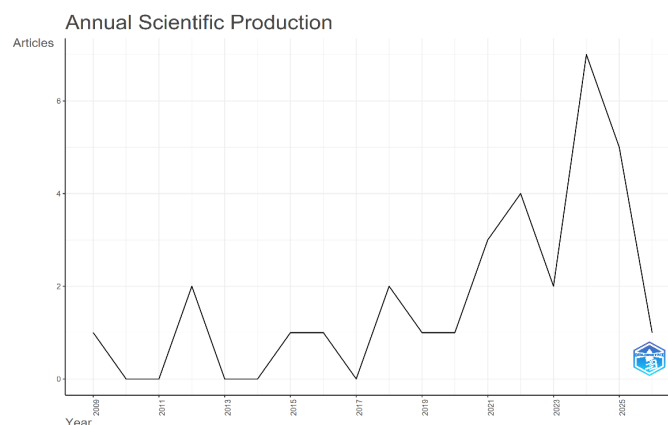


Figure 2: The Annual Scientific Production (Source: Biblioshiny)

Output remained sporadic between 2009 and 2017, a period in which EC lacked both definitional consensus and a critical mass of scholars, constraining cumulative development. The inflection point after 2018, culminating in a peak of seven articles in 2024, signals that the field has crossed the threshold from emergence into structured growth, driven by increasing theoretical specialisation around self-efficacy and a growing recognition of coaching as distinct from mentoring and consulting. This acceleration confirms that EC

is not a peripheral sub-topic absorbed within broader entrepreneurship research, but an increasingly autonomous scholarly domain building its own intellectual corpus.

4.1.2 Intellectual Foundations

The most globally cited documents (Appendix N°3) reveal the foundational architecture of EC scholarship. Kutzhanova et al. (2009, 95 citations) grounded EC in competency-based development theory, establishing individual skill acquisition as a primary mechanism of coaching impact. Mansoori (2019, 74 citations) extended EC's conceptual scope toward technology-intensive venture contexts, while Audet and Couteret (2012, 67 citations) provided the field's most widely cited empirical framework of EC features and success factors. Kotte et al. (2021, 27 citations) proposed the most structurally influential theoretical contribution, a two-dimensional process-content framework that currently anchors definitional debates. The temporal distribution of these papers, spanning 2009 to 2024, confirms that EC's intellectual architecture remains actively under construction.

Co-citation analysis (Appendix N°4) identifies three distinct intellectual clusters through which EC derives its theoretical resources. The first, anchored by Bandura (1977), reflects EC's deep roots in social cognitive theory and self-efficacy, the most consistently deployed theoretical framework across EC empirical studies (L. M. Molema & Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo, 2024a; Ndlovu et al., 2025). The second groups entrepreneurship scholars including Kuratko, Marvel, Audretsch, and Mansoori, confirm EC's substantial grounding in entrepreneurship theory around venture learning and performance (Marvel et al., 2025). The third, centred on St-Jean, captures mentoring and relational support traditions, underscoring the theoretical proximity of EC to adjacent mechanisms that has historically complicated boundary-drawing efforts (Audet & Couteret, 2012; Marras et al., 2024). This tripartite intellectual structure confirms EC as an inherently interdisciplinary construct embedded simultaneously in psychological, entrepreneurial, and relational traditions. This interdisciplinarity explains both EC's richness and its persistent fragmentation: a field drawing simultaneously on three distinct theoretical traditions will naturally resist terminological unification until one tradition achieves sufficient dominance to anchor the others, a process that the trend topic analysis suggests is now underway through the progressive ascendancy of social cognitive theory.

4.1.3 Thematic Structure and Evolution

The overall thematic map (Figure 3) reveals four thematically distinct positions. The motor theme cluster, grouping *coaching* and *entrepreneurial support*, exhibits high internal coherence and strong external connectivity, confirming that EC scholarship is principally organised around coaching as a functional support mechanism (Ben Salem & Lakhal, 2018; Marras et al., 2024). The niche theme cluster positions *entrepreneurial coaching* and *entrepreneurial self-efficacy* above average density but below average centrality, revealing the progressive convergence of EC scholarship on Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory as its primary explanatory mechanism, particularly in accounting for how coaching translates into enhanced entrepreneurial confidence and action (Crompton et al. 2012; Molema et al., 2024). *Entrepreneurship* occupies the basic themes quadrant, high centrality, low density, functioning as a foundational contextual backdrop without constituting a theoretically integrated partner construct. *Entrepreneurial learning* remains in the emerging or declining themes quadrant, identifying a persistent conceptual gap that Marvel et al. (2025) and Fitouri and Zouaoui (2021) have begun to address but which has not yet achieved sufficient critical mass.

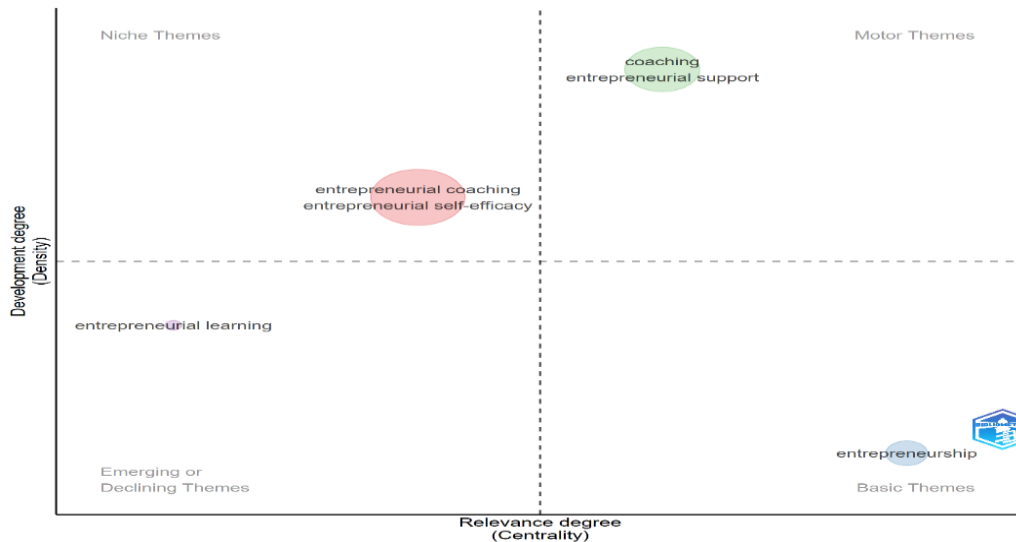


Figure 3: EC Thematic Map (Source: Biblioshiny)

The comparative thematic maps (Figure 4) reveal a meaningful structural reconfiguration. During 2009–2020, *coaching* paired with *incubator* constituted the motor theme, reflecting a dominant preoccupation with EC as a programmatic tool within structured organisational environments. By 2021–2026, *coaching* pairs with *entrepreneurship* as the motor theme, signalling a conceptual transition from EC as an institutional instrument to EC as an intrinsic component of entrepreneurial identity and capability development. Simultaneously, *entrepreneurial coaching*, *entrepreneurial self-efficacy*, and *women entrepreneurs* consolidate into a clearly defined developing theme, reflecting the field's growing attention to psychological depth and demographic specificity in coaching interventions (Cronje et al., 2025; L. Molema et al., 2024). Trend topic analysis further confirms that *entrepreneurial self-efficacy* and *innovation* are the most recently activated and still-growing terms in the corpus, identifying the field's current research frontier.



Figure 4: The comparative thematic maps (2009-2020 & 2021-2026) (Source: Biblioshiny)

4.2 Layer 2: EC's Conceptual Position within the Entrepreneurial Support Ecosystem

4.2.1 Conceptual Structure and Cluster Differentiation

The keyword co-occurrence network for Layer 2 (Appendix N°5) resolves into four structurally distinct clusters across 74 articles. The first, anchored by *entrepreneurship*, *start-up*, and *university*, represents the institutional dimension of the ecosystem. The second, grouping *accelerator*, *entrepreneurial ecosystems*, and *impact*, captures innovation-oriented infrastructure. The third, comprising *entrepreneurial support*, *entrepreneurial learning*, *women entrepreneurs*, and *novice entrepreneurs*, reflects the relational and developmental support tradition. *Entrepreneurial coaching* constitutes a distinct fourth cluster, co-occurring primarily with *self-efficacy*, *mentoring*, *behaviour*, and *SMEs*, a psychologically grounded configuration that clearly differentiates EC from

the institutional vocabulary dominating the remaining clusters (Kotte et al., 2021; Marras et al., 2024). The presence of *mentoring* within EC's cluster reveals the definitional proximity that has historically complicated boundary-drawing within the ecosystem (Audet & Couteret, 2012). Inter-cluster connections confirm EC's engagement with adjacent research traditions without dissolving its structural separateness, indicating that EC has established a recognisable conceptual identity while remaining insufficiently integrated with the structural mainstream of entrepreneurial support research.

4.2.2 Strategic Positioning within the Ecosystem

The Layer 2 thematic map (Figure 5) positions *innovation*, *business incubation*, *performance*, *networks*, *coaching*, and *self-efficacy* in the motor themes quadrant, establishing these as the most developed and centrally connected themes in the ecosystem literature and confirming that structured support mechanisms, particularly incubation, constitute the theoretical mainstream of entrepreneurial support scholarship (Bruneel et al., 2012). In direct contrast, *entrepreneurial coaching*, *entrepreneurial self-efficacy*, *startup accelerator*, and *entrepreneurial competencies* appear collectively in the emerging or declining themes quadrant, characterised by both low centrality and low density.

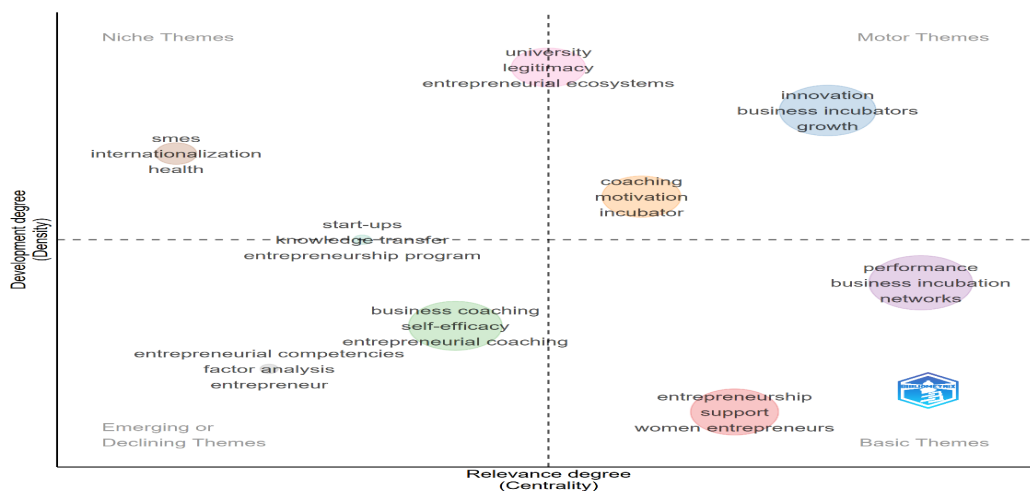


Figure 5: Thematic Evolution Layer 2 (Source: Biblioshiny)

This positioning indicates that EC has not yet achieved the conceptual development or network integration required to function as a core mechanism in ecosystem-level discourse. The divergence between EC's niche status within its own internal corpus, where it demonstrates above-average internal coherence, and its marginal ecosystem position constitutes the central empirical answer to RQ3: EC is conceptually self-contained but structurally peripheral within the broader entrepreneurial support ecosystem.

4.2.3 Temporal and Intellectual Evidence

Words' frequency over time analysis (Appendix N°6) reveals a lexical asymmetry that has direct theoretical implications. *Entrepreneurship* (17 occurrences by 2026), *innovation* (14), and *business coaching* (11) have accumulated sustained referential presence since the early 2010s, establishing their status as the ecosystem's primary conceptual currency. *Entrepreneurial coaching*, by contrast, records only 5 occurrences, the lowest of all tracked terms, with first appearances emerging only from 2018. This is not merely a difference in frequency: it indicates that EC has not yet been absorbed into the shared vocabulary through which the entrepreneurial support ecosystem defines itself and its boundaries. A construct must be named before it can be theorised, and EC's late and limited lexical presence confirms that the process of boundary recognition, the first step toward institutional legitimacy, remains incomplete (Azizi et al., 2023; Ben Salem & Lakhal, 2018).

4.2.4 Multivariate Confirmation of Conceptual Boundaries

The Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Figure 6) provides the most analytically precise answer to RQ3. The first factorial dimension accounts for 50.36% of total variance, achieving a statistically robust separation between two conceptual spaces. The red cluster encompasses the entire EC and coaching research discourse, grouping *entrepreneurial coaching*, *business coaching*, *self-efficacy*, *motivation*, *performance*, *entrepreneurship*, and *business incubation*. The blue cluster, positioned distinctly to the right, groups the structural ecosystem

vocabulary exclusively: *business incubators, networks, firms, support, and impact*. This separation, more than half the total explained variance on a single axis, reveals a fundamental conceptual divide: EC belongs to the discourse of coaching outcomes, psychological mechanisms, and individual-level capability development, while ecosystem structures belong to the discourse of networks, institutional performance, and impact assessment. EC has established a recognisable conceptual identity, but one defined by its distinctiveness from rather than its integration with the structural mainstream of entrepreneurial support research (Kotte et al., 2021; Marras et al., 2024).

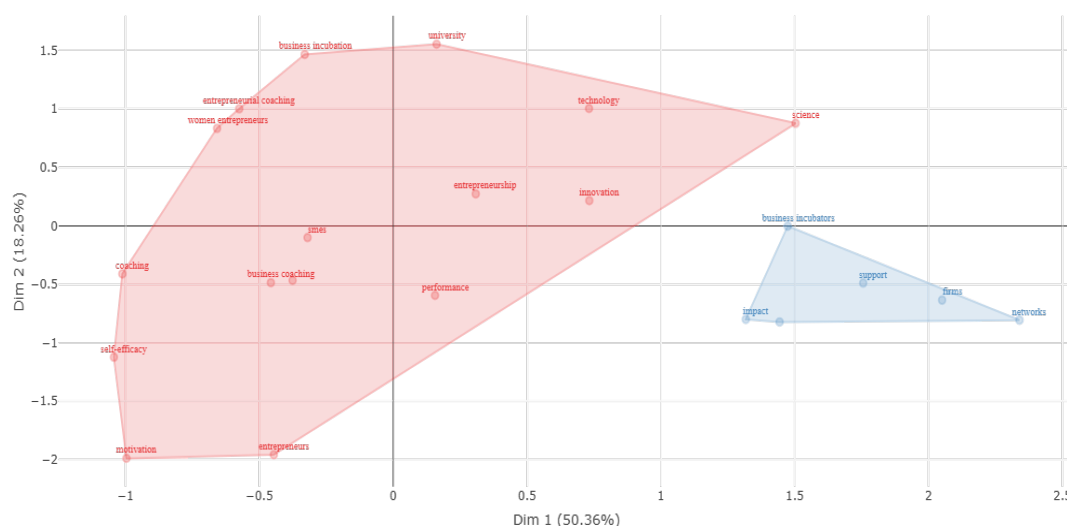


Figure 6: Multiple Correspondence Analysis (Source : Biblioshiny)

5. Discussion

The findings collectively position entrepreneurial coaching as a field in productive tension: internally consolidated yet externally marginalised, conceptually distinct but terminologically unstable. This tension constitutes both the field's defining characteristic and its most pressing scholarly challenge.

With respect to RQ1, the bibliometric evidence confirms that EC has transitioned from an implicit peripheral concept toward an increasingly explicit and autonomous research domain. The post-2018 acceleration in annual production, combined with an interdisciplinary intellectual heritage spanning social cognitive theory, entrepreneurship, and relational support traditions, is consistent with the expansion phase of emerging interdisciplinary fields. This trajectory aligns with Marras et al.'s (2024) characterisation of EC as a maturing but definitionally contested field. Yet, the persistence of 151 unique author keywords across only 31 articles demonstrates that fragmentation is not merely conceptual but structurally embedded in the field's citation and keyword architecture, extending Kotte et al.'s (2021) observation that definitional ambiguity constitutes a structural barrier to cumulative knowledge building. Until the field consolidates shared conceptual vocabulary, cross-study comparison and theory accumulation will remain fundamentally constrained.

With respect to RQ2, the progressive convergence of EC scholarship on self-efficacy reflects a broader pattern in coaching research, where social cognitive theory consistently provides the most tractable framework for measuring coaching outcomes (Bozer & Jones, 2018). Our findings confirm that Bandura's (1977) framework has migrated from executive coaching into entrepreneurial coaching contexts with growing dominance, providing theoretical coherence but also risking a narrowing of explanatory ambition toward psychological outcomes at the expense of systemic and relational dimensions. The persistent marginalisation of entrepreneurial learning within the emerging or declining themes quadrant is particularly notable: coaching is fundamentally a developmental intervention, yet its learning theory foundations within EC remain underdeveloped, a gap that Marvel et al. (2025) and Fitouri and Zouaoui (2021) have begun to address but which represents the field's most urgent theoretical deficit.

With respect to RQ3, the cross-layer comparison yields the study's central theoretical contribution. EC demonstrates above-average internal coherence within its own literature yet occupies the emerging or declining themes quadrant within the ecosystem map, a structural decoupling between scholarly self-definition and institutional recognition. EC knows what it is; the ecosystem does not yet know what to do with it. This finding

suggests that EC has not yet achieved the institutional legitimacy required to drive its adoption as a mainstream support mechanism alongside incubation and acceleration. For researchers, boundary-spanning work connecting EC frameworks to ecosystem-level support structures represents the most urgent theoretical frontier. For practitioners and policymakers, EC should be understood as a psychologically grounded complement to structural mechanisms. Its value lying precisely in the relational and behavioural dimensions that incubation and acceleration programmes do not address (Audet and Couteret, 2012; Crompton et al., 2012). Deliberately integrating EC into incubation programmes, rather than positioning it as an alternative, represents the most productive path toward closing the gap the MCA identifies.

6. Conclusion

This study provides a systematic two-layer scientometric mapping of entrepreneurial coaching, addressing its intellectual evolution, thematic organisation, and ecosystem positioning. Three principal contributions emerge. First, EC is confirmed as an emerging but accelerating research domain, grounded in interdisciplinary foundations across social cognitive theory, entrepreneurship, and relational support traditions, with momentum concentrated post-2018. Second, thematic analysis reveals a structurally evolving field in which coaching and entrepreneurial support constitute the motor theme, while entrepreneurial coaching and entrepreneurial self-efficacy form a developing niche of growing internal coherence, signalling progressive conceptual specialisation. Third, cross-layer analysis establishes that EC occupies a distinct yet peripheral position within the entrepreneurial support ecosystem, characterised by psychological and relational constructs that differentiate it from the structural mainstream of incubation and acceleration research.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. Restriction to English-language publications introduces a linguistic bias, potentially under-representing non-Anglophone EC scholarship. The unavailability of complete cited-reference metadata in the merged dataset precluded document-level co-citation analysis. The Layer 1 corpus of 31 articles also constrains the statistical robustness of certain bibliometric indicators.

Three future research directions emerge: longitudinal studies examining whether coaching effects persist across the entrepreneurial lifecycle, cross-cultural investigations assessing the transferability of entrepreneurial coaching models beyond predominantly Western contexts, and process-oriented research exploring the micro-level mechanisms through which coaching interactions generate entrepreneurial self-efficacy, learning, and capability development. More broadly, this study positions entrepreneurial coaching at a scholarly inflection point, where its conceptual identity is increasingly established but its institutional consolidation within the entrepreneurial support ecosystem remains incomplete. The navigational map provided by this study offers a foundation for future scholarship to strengthen theoretical linkages, broaden geographical and contextual coverage, and deepen understanding of developmental processes that may ultimately establish entrepreneurial coaching as a theoretically mature and institutionally recognised domain within entrepreneurship research.

Data Availability

We have shared the data

Ethics Declaration

This study follows ethical standards and academic integrity, with no IRB approval needed due to the absence of human or animal subjects.

AI Declaration

AI tools like ChatGPT, SciSpace, STORM, and Paperpal supported editing only; research design, analysis, and conclusions were entirely conducted and validated by the authors.

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