

Creating a Graduate Language-Practice Entrepreneur from a Transformative Curriculum Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study posits that entrepreneurship education, when integrated with effective language practice, can empower youth and foster economic growth in South Africa. It challenges the view that university graduates in language practice are primarily oriented towards employment rather than entrepreneurial engagement that support economic growth. The high unemployment rate in South Africa is discussed and underscores the urgent need to reform higher education programmes to integrate entrepreneurial skills as viable alternatives for economic survival. Grounded in bricolage theory – which advocates using locally available resources to address contextual challenges – this qualitative study involved interviews with ten graduate students. This research addressed two primary questions: (1) What are the experiences of language-practice graduates? and (2) How can entrepreneurial skills enhance employment opportunities for these graduates? The findings reveal a shortage of job opportunities for language-practice graduates. Consequently, integrating entrepreneurship into the curriculum is recommended to empower graduates to become job creators rather than job-seekers.

Keywords: Language practice; curriculum; entrepreneurship; education.

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INTRODUCTION

Post 2000, South Africa has seen a growing need to integrate entrepreneurship into education to develop creative, innovative, and problem-solving skills as a counter strategy to reduce unemployment (Ijeoma & Ndedi, 2021). Maka (2023) describes how entrepreneurship education in South Africa has developed over time, transitioning from an optional subject to a more cohesive and thorough part of the educational framework. This transformation has been driven by multiple factors, such as the rising acknowledgement of entrepreneurship's role in economic growth, heightened demand for entrepreneurial competencies from employers, and the necessity to tackle the nation's socio-economic issues (Motaung, 2021).

The current state of South Africa's unemployment rate remains concerning, even for university graduates. Statistics South Africa (2023) reports that the youth unemployment rate – measuring job-seekers aged 15 to 24 – increased to 61% in the fourth quarter of 2022, up from 59.6% in the previous quarter. This trend highlights the urgent need to move beyond traditional forms of employment and empower graduates to pursue entrepreneurship.

Commenting on entrepreneurship, Seikkula-Leino (2011) described it as an educational approach aimed at developing self-directed students who are responsible for their own learning and possess the competencies to thrive in a complex society. Entrepreneurship is further defined as a cognitive process of discovering, evaluating, and exploiting business opportunities through which potential entrepreneurs seek to create value through entrepreneurial and innovative activities (Nguyen & Ahmed, 2023; Nguyen, 2023; Vasilev, 2022). Although entrepreneurship is essential for economic growth, various university curricula have yet to effectively integrate it – particularly in fields such as language practice (Kilasi, 2013). Thus, language-practice graduates frequently struggle to find employment in the formal sector. This underscores the need to amend higher education curricula to foster entrepreneurial skills and bridge the gap in the skills required for scarce jobs.

This study builds on the growing body of research at the intersection of language practice

and entrepreneurship. Ndou (2021) highlights that while entrepreneurship education has traditionally been the focus of business and management disciplines, the evolving technological landscape and increasing societal complexity have made it a critical competency across all educational levels and disciplines. Ratten and Jones (2021) emphasise that entrepreneurial education entails the application, creation, and implementation of creative, forward-thinking, and proactive tactics in an educational setting that should be embedded across curricula.

Therefore, most definitions of entrepreneurship acknowledge the necessity of concurrently studying various subjects to bring about change. This reflects the focus on entrepreneurship education and how well it adapts to changing socio-economic situations in real life. Furthermore, to support lifelong learning, entrepreneurship education incorporates both hard and soft skills. Therefore, soft skills, such as personability, are blended with hard skills, such as technological proficiency or role-specific expertise. One of the biggest challenges graduates face when embarking on their careers is their employability. This indicates that assessing the effect of entrepreneurship education on behaviour requires a more comprehensive and long-term approach (Ratten & Jones, 2021).

A study by the European Masters in Translation in 2009 focused on the translation component in language practice and formulated a framework for translator and translation competencies. The objective of this competency framework was to improve and unify the employability of translation master's degree holders across Europe. The study presented the findings of translation studies that have affected the language services industry, including the lack of employment opportunities for graduates.

This prompted many researchers to consider facilitating the growth of the entrepreneurial potential of future translators through curriculum reform. For instance, Rodríguez de Céspedes (2017) reviewed training and advancements for a master's degree in translation studies at the University of Portsmouth, England, and suggested best practices for boosting employability skills based on needs uncovered during discussions between HEIs and industry stakeholders.

Furthermore, comparable measures were suggested by Galán-Mañas et al. (2020) at the University of Barcelona, where the goal of the curriculum in language practice is to emancipate students into finding alternatives such as entrepreneurship, which creates employment opportunities for themselves and others. Another study on language practice was conducted by Aguirre Fernández Bravo and Guindal Pintado (2020), who focused on higher education and interpreting students' entrepreneurial skills by introducing a toolkit based on the Blue Ocean Strategy marketing theory. This strategy offers users a framework for creating an uncontested market space (Alam & Islam, 2017). In addition, Kim (2005) defines blue oceans as completely new and uncharted markets and opportunities characterised by innovative value creation, novel customer bases, and minimal competition. Demand is generated, leading to swift and lucrative growth, rendering competition insignificant, with no established rules of engagement, presenting a broad and profound market space that remains uncharted, where a blue ocean signifies extensive, deep, and powerful opportunities for profitable growth and limitless gains (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005). The authors' hands-on research illustrates how this methodology helps students carve out their own distinct market niche and realise that they can satisfy consumer needs while remaining profitable and maintaining decent working conditions. However, this study did not focus on language practice but on higher education in general.

While prior studies have contributed significantly to the fields of language practice and entrepreneurship, this study offers a distinct perspective by emphasising the integration of entrepreneurship within language-practice courses to enhance graduate competency. Unlike existing research that treats the two domains separately, this study positions their combination as a strategic response to the employment challenges faced by graduates at a University of Technology (UoT).

A further contribution lies in its call for curriculum transformation – specifically, the integration of entrepreneurial skills into language-practice programmes at a UoT. Additionally, this study applies bricolage as a theoretical lens, which has never been applied to language practice. However, it can equip students who use creative forms to address their

unemployment challenges. The central argument is that entrepreneurship education, when combined with strong language practice, can empower the youth and foster economic growth in South Africa.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: BRICOLAGE

In this study, bricolage was used to suggest ways in which language practice in a UoT can address the challenges faced by graduates. Bricolage is a theory that have not been used to interrogate entrepreneurial skills and language-practice curriculum, which allows the engagement in a new space to enhance teaching and learning within a UoT. In terms of origin, bricolage theory is associated with Claude Lévi-Strauss's work. Claude Lévi-Strauss proposed the idea of bricolage in *The Savage Mind* (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). Rather than devising a special solution, it is described as a pre-industrial way of operation in which artisans make or use whatever is available to them.

This approach calls for creativity in solving pressing issues, such as unemployment. Thus, as used in this paper, it reconfigures students and lecturers' minds towards finding the best ways to survive through what they already have in hand – that is, language practice. With this in mind as argued by Bernardi and Pedrini (2020), bricolage when applied to the business world, entrepreneurs are shown to be resource-scarce and to adjust their methods of operation to new environments, like Bricoleurs “the process that propels the discovery of innovations in the form of new services from existing resources is the bricolage hypothesis, which permits the combination of resources and the creation of systems for new purposes” (Duymedjian & Rüling, 2010, p. 142).

This discovery entails entrepreneurial skills, which should form part of the language-practice curriculum to empower students to be self-sufficient and create jobs. Because this article is based on the bricolage idea, the curriculum should position students or graduates to take advantage of the possibilities and talents they already possess to overcome obstacles. Through language practice, graduates can ignite entrepreneurial talent for survival by drawing on their language-practice experiences.

In short, this theory was selected to couch the paper because it encourages graduates to use their imaginations, available local resources,

skills, and opportunities in their environment to navigate the corporate world and environmental prospects within language practice to generate jobs for themselves and others. The methodology used in this study is described in the following section.

METHODOLOGY

The paradigm used in this study was transformative. As Mertens (2012) argues, the transformative paradigm allows people to create opportunities and conditions in which individuals can position themselves for positive change. The transformative paradigm allows researchers to enter the field with the intention of empowering people towards positive change while observing values such as emancipation, social justice, and democracy.

This study used case studies of situation analysis, which attempted to analyse a situation against specific or multiple events (García-Montoya & Mahoney, 2023). In this case, the Central UoT, Free State, was used as a case study in the discussion on language practice, entrepreneurship, and re-curriculisation. Case-study research is a widely used approach in qualitative studies. The advantages of case-study research include its ability to investigate complex social phenomena and handle dense data (Glette & Wiig, 2022).

The research design for this study was qualitative, which enabled better answers to be obtained to complex questions or those that were not fully formed (Hamilton & Finley, 2019). Qualitative research explores, describes, and understands concepts (Hays & McKibben, 2021).

This study responds to two research questions: (1) What are the experiences of language-practice graduates? and (2) How can entrepreneurial skills enhance employment opportunities for these graduates? Purposive sampling was used to select the students who were in their senior level in the whole language practice, as they would have a better understanding of the course, having gone through the entire programme. The senior-level group (postgraduate) had ten students enrolled for the qualification of language practice at the UoT.

We noticed that while the study speaks of graduates, the participants of the study are students who have graduated with a diploma in

language practice and are now pursuing advanced studies in the field. Thus, using current students who are also graduates enabled a deeper understanding of the programmes in language practice to be gained and highlighted how students can be assisted before they exit the UoT. The thematic approach suggested by Clarke and Braun (2017) was used to analyse the data. The approach has six stages, in which the data is analysed to generate themes, as follows:

- Familiarising oneself with the data.
- Generate initial codes.
- Search for themes.
- Review themes.
- Define and name themes.
- Produce the report.

These steps resulted in themes that emerged because the data responded to the research questions. To ensure data credibility, member-checking was used to verify or assess the trustworthiness of the qualitative results. Member-checking is a process in which data transcripts are presented to some or all participants for their feedback (Varpio et al., 2017). The following section presents the findings with respect to the research questions.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The first section of the findings focused on the first research question, which sought to solicit the experiences of language graduates in the job market.

Graduate Students' Experiences in Language Practice

This section reports the findings related to the first question: What are the experiences of language-practice graduates? The first is the lack of job opportunities.

Lack of job opportunities

Students noted that the current language-practice curriculum does not promote adequate job opportunities, thus negatively affecting their lives. This problem is not only unique to language practices but also to many qualifications, where students are developed as workers instead of job creators. The following section elaborates on this point.

In an interview with Student 1:

“Due to lack of job opportunities, many of us find ourselves resorting to the education department for PGCE because we fear that we can't [find a] job with the language practice”.

Similarly, Student 7 responded that:

“The challenge with us is language-practice graduates is right after we have graduated we struggled to find jobs because there are not many jobs for language practitioners in you know spaces and most of the time we are all looking for jobs in government and you'll see they're government posts that are advertised are two or three posts for different languages and sometimes those languages we have not done them for instance is even or this is rude so we struggled them to find jobs”.

The responses of these participants clearly show that students who graduate with language practice fail to get jobs that relate to language-practice qualifications, which requires a new approach to the curriculum design. Given the participants' gloomy picture of the lack of opportunities for language-practice qualification, it is important that curriculum planners take note of the challenges graduates face upon graduation, which could be mitigated by integrating entrepreneurial skills within language-practice courses. This is in line with bricolage theory, which buttresses the need to address students' challenges of unemployment by engaging in entrepreneurial skills to enhance their survival.

Considering the findings from the students, language practice should consider students plight after completion so that the field of language practice does not face demise due to students shunning the programme. The following section discusses graduates' limited experience. The following section notes another challenge faced by students in language practice: limited practical experience.

Limited practical experience

The research made it clear that the current language-practice curriculum deprives students of much-needed practical experience, which would enable them to enter the job market with the required skills, including entrepreneurial skills. Without practical knowledge, graduates are disadvantaged in the job market, which ignites negative attitudes towards the subject.

To illustrate this point, Student 5 responded as follows:

“My experiences of language practice graduate are that many of us, we do not have experience on the field of work and hence we find it hard to blend out in the real world of work”.

Additionally, Student 9 noted that:

“My lack of experience in language practice has made it difficult for me to find a job. Whenever I apply, they demand practical experience which unfortunate was very limited for me during my years of study. So, when applying for a job, I always start at a disadvantaged position”.

The responses above clearly outline the concerns raised by students regarding the uncertainty of an employer's expectations of the need for practical work as a requirement for employment, which the current curriculum does not provide. This is further worsened by Bayerlein's (2015) observation that most curriculum packages appear to develop technical skills in isolation and outside the contextual setting of a real-world environment. and more so without entrepreneurial skills, which enable graduate students to cope with current economic demands that require a different set of skills, such as the ability to create jobs.

These findings illustrate the need for curriculum change through what Rodríguez de Céspedes (2017) calls reviewed training and advancement to boost graduates' employability skills based on industry needs. Considering the foregoing, this paper discusses the recurriculisation of language is necessary, urgent, and in the right direction, with the intent of increasing practical experience for language-practice graduates. Apart from this point, the dated and unchanging curriculum remains the trajectory of language practices, which is discussed further below.

Outdated curriculum packages

The curriculum field generally faces challenges in its packages, which do not change in accordance with technological and human requirements. The language-practice curriculum is no exception, as it is confronted with modules that are outdated for a longer period, which, unfortunately, leads to students acquiring irrelevant content for the industry, rendering them unemployable. During the discussion, students remarked on the use of dated study material that was not in line with

current developments in the world, such as technology.

Student 4 remarked as follows:

“Our course is not like other courses that have a lot of technology that is used. Our prescribed books do not have for example in video, where we can be taught about new editing features and apps that are out there now. This really affects us in job market”.

To elaborate this trajectory, Student 7 noted that:

“We live in a world where social media has taken over, but our study guides do not even cover how we can use social media to advance our skills or reach online audience with what we are learning. For example, translation of words through the apps”.

The above responses from graduate students highlight a concern regarding the study material, which lacks the technological aspect of the modern 21st century, where technology is highly embraced and is a necessity for effective learning. Sen and Gayen (2021) stated that technology integration is the proper and effective use of computer-centred teaching and learning activities in the curriculum. This helps students acquire, organise, demonstrate, and communicate information more effectively.

These findings prove the need for the integration of technology into the practical language curriculum to ensure that students can use new technological skills in rendering language services and, in the process, create jobs for themselves and others. Considering the negative experiences outlined by the interviewed students, in the following section, mitigating factors that can position graduates towards employability are discussed – that is, integrating and embracing entrepreneurial skills within language-practice programmes.

Enhancing Opportunities for Language Graduate Through Entrepreneurial Skills

The current job market is thwarted, thus creating a need to create entrepreneurial skills to address the trajectories and ambivalence facing language-practice programmes in South Africa. The first point to discuss is the view that entrepreneurship has the impetus to extend the job market.

Entrepreneurial skills enable expanded job market

During the interviews, there was consensus that language curriculum packages should move towards ensuring that students are empowered to create jobs instead of being job-seekers. Essentially, the students indicated that entrepreneurial skills would assist in increasing job availability in the future.

Student 3 expressed that:

“Incorporating entrepreneurial skills into language-practice courses will assist us to understand our job and not only understand our job in work spaces studies, to see how can we make money from what we are learning in class through all of the modules that we are doing because for example if you are looking at our modules like VIDEO end media studies we can be able to even look into things like opening a company on videography and taking pictures”.

Similarly, Student 6 stated that:

“Integrating entrepreneurship is important in this day and age. I think my life would have been better if the curriculum was intentional about making me a businessperson as opposed to a worker. I am prepared to go back to school and do modules which can help me build entrepreneurship within me and in the process. I would be able to help others”.

The student responses highlighted the importance of entrepreneurship as one of the few alternatives to address job scarcity in South Africa. The foregoing can be successful when curriculum packages are deliberate to ensure that students are well equipped through degree programmes, such as language practice, by being intentional about acquiring entrepreneurial skills. In this regard, this study concurs with Ratten and Jones (2021), who explain that entrepreneurial education entails the application, creation, and implementation of creative, forward-thinking, and proactive tactics in educational settings.

It is apparent that increased understanding and awareness of entrepreneurial competencies and behaviours through curriculum embedment of entrepreneurial learning in a discipline-specific context should complement the course and assist students in expanding job creation in the language-practice course. The possibility of the foregoing is premised on the recirculation of current programmes at the Central UoT to

promote entrepreneurial skills among all students. This can be done in all undergraduate modules to provide students with the skills to create jobs.

Curricula should allow students to engage in different entrepreneurship programmes on campus to nurture business skills while studying. In addition, universities should provide different types of support, such as capital, to students who want to start businesses on campus. Rather than outsourcing everything, students can be given the opportunity to start businesses, such as travel agencies, which allow them to communicate with clients and do business simultaneously.

Acquire new skills

Incorporating entrepreneurial skills into the language-practice curriculum has the potential to instil new skills in graduates. It was noted in the challenges section that graduates lack skills that are critical in the job market; hence, there is a need to ensure that the recurriculisation of the language-practice modules is intentional about entrepreneurship. Through various interviews, it was clear that new skills are essential for survival in a squashed job market. The direction of the economy points to the fact that only those with new skills can survive, which presents a critical wake-up call for universities to redesign curriculum packages to instil entrepreneurial skills.

Student 2 noted that:

“Through entrepreneurship skills I would be able to start my own empires or companies so that we can cater for the needs of private sectors with regards to interpretation and translation purposes. Secondly, we can group ourselves into a consortium which can bring change to the unemployment challenge. Through a consortium, we can learn and share various skills which can make us compatible with ever changing workplace which is forever marked with the demand of new skills”.

In support of the foregoing, Student 5 noted that:

“Entrepreneurship will enable me to acquire new skills to survive job market scarcity among many other things”.

Considering how students perceive the benefits of entrepreneurship in terms of acquiring new skills, there is an empirical need for

entrepreneurship that enables them to develop a new set of skills compatible with the job market and its requirements.

This study shows that the skills that can be cultivated through entrepreneurship include creative thinking, problem solving, negotiating, communicating, and leadership, which are critical for promoting and enhancing new skills as graduates interact with the corporate world. Consequently, this is in line with bricolage theorisation, which helps to foster students' capacity to produce economic, cultural, or social value, which would benefit both them and society.

Entrepreneurial skills expand the knowledge base for curriculum development

Another point that emerged from the participants was that the introduction of entrepreneurship would allow knowledge expansion in other areas not covered by the current curriculum. Areas that involve business management and aspects needed to start a business. This knowledge will be fed back to curriculum practices by creating models to make relevant language practices a job-creating mechanism.

Student 3 expressed that:

“Entrepreneurships are also going to teach us how to deal with running a business and finance, so meaning our knowledge is going to expand on other things like economy and money. This type of knowledge was not availed to us during our studies hence we struggle”.

In addition, Student 1 explained that:

“When we do entrepreneurship, we are going to learn about business, management, financial literacy and even how to look for funding to start our businesses like NYDA, so we are also going to learn about other course work, not just language practice and media studies”.

The students' answers above point to the possibility of opportunities that would come with entrepreneurship beyond just business, but also to aspects that need to be considered for a business to succeed. This is based on the observation by Secundo et al. (2021) that entrepreneurship offers individuals essential business skills, such as creativity, innovation, risk-taking, and the ability to plan and manage projects to achieve objectives. Entrepreneurship can provide more than the skills required to run

a business and enhance the South African economy. These attributes are inevitable strategies for reducing unemployment and redundant graduates.

In summary, the possibilities for creating jobs lie in curriculum reformations, which should be deliberate and intentional regarding entrepreneurship inclusion. Through this, the curriculum is bricolised by ensuring that available strategies are used to address life challenges, such as unemployment. Further, curriculum reformations should begin in primary schools up to universities, where the government, business community, and curriculum planners become deliberate and intentional about the student they wish to produce, which in this case is one with the ability to create employment rather than being employed.

Unfortunately, the current curriculum from primary school to university in many African countries teaches people to be job-seekers instead of job creators. This study submits that CUT as a UoT, should research models which have worked in countries like Japan, China, and US where unemployment is significantly reduced owing to entrepreneurial skills embedded in the curriculum.

CONCLUSION

This article outlines the challenges faced by language-practice students, particularly the persistent lack of job opportunities in the formal sector. In response, it advocates for the integration of entrepreneurship into existing language practice and media studies curricula as a strategic alternative. This argument is grounded in Claude Lévi-Strauss's concept of bricolage, introduced in *The Savage Mind* (Lévi-Strauss, 1966), which emphasises innovation through the creative recombination of existing resources. Embedding entrepreneurial skills within the curriculum may offer a practical solution to address the employment challenges experienced by language-practice graduates.

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