





# Exploring the impact of Entrepreneurship Education Module on Employment of Graduates: A case study of a selected South African University

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## ABSTRACT

The paper reports on the impact of the Entrepreneurship Education module on the employment of graduates of a selected South African university. Despite the module's theoretical value, it has been noticed from 2022-2024 convocation records that some graduates struggle to access employment in job markets. An interpretivist research design was adopted. The case study research design was also employed. A qualitative research approach was used. After all necessary ethical measures were undertaken, semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with six purposefully sampled unemployed graduates of the 2022-2024 academic years. It emerged that content knowledge and digital skills gaps in the curriculum offered and acquired by them in their pre-service teacher education programme, especially in areas such as design thinking, impact on their graduate attributes. It surfaced that there is a lack of entrepreneurial centers to support real-world applications. These limitations hinder graduates' ability to start and sustain entrepreneurial ventures. It is recommended that the Entrepreneurship Education module content be revisited and reviewed to empower students with the necessary knowledge, practical entrepreneurial and digital skills. It is also recommended that establishing incubation centers could mitigate the lack of entrepreneurial skills. It is further recommended that strengthening university-industry partnerships through subjecting the students to work-integrated learning is critical to better prepare them to sustain themselves while they are unemployed.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship education, graduate attributes, graduate unemployment, experiential learning, mentorship, design thinking, incubation centers.

## INTRODUCTION

Structured programs aimed at developing the information, abilities, and attitudes necessary for entrepreneurial competence are included in the category of entrepreneurship education.<sup>1</sup> Integrating

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<sup>1</sup> Donald F. Kuratko, "The Emergence of Entrepreneurship Education: Development, Trends, and Challenges," *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice* 29, no. 5 (2005): 577–97.

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entrepreneurship education into academic curricula is essential for developing an entrepreneurial attitude and skills, since it promotes an entrepreneurial culture and improves the skills of prospective future entrepreneurs. According to Awaysheh and Bonfiglio, practical experiences like creating company plans and internships are crucial for giving students real-world skills and an awareness of the difficulties faced by entrepreneurs.<sup>2</sup> To develop a broad skill set essential for entrepreneurial success, Kuratko promotes an interdisciplinary approach to entrepreneurship education.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast, several studies have identified one of the most significant elements that may support entrepreneurial activity in South Africa as being the teaching and learning of entrepreneurship in higher education.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, entrepreneurship education and classroom instruction are crucial for helping students develop their entrepreneurial abilities. According to Alvarez-Risco, et al., entrepreneurial abilities significantly increase a person's likelihood of owning or running a business.<sup>5</sup> According to Kanayo, introducing the teaching and learning of entrepreneurial skills in universities is a likely solution for entrepreneurs.<sup>6</sup>

Research shows that successful entrepreneurship programs can improve graduates' employability by encouraging entrepreneurial attitudes, abilities, and behaviours.<sup>7</sup> These courses frequently incorporate real-world business difficulties, coaching, and hands-on training.<sup>8</sup> However, implementation is hampered by issues such as a lack of corporate engagement, a shortage of competent instructors, and limited money.<sup>9</sup> To combat unemployment and poverty, it is suggested by Widjaja et al., that entrepreneurial education should be included in all higher education institutions' curriculum to inspire students while they are still in their academic journey.<sup>10</sup>

At a South African university, the Entrepreneurship Education module is offered to Bachelor of Education Senior Phase and Further Education and Training (BEd SP & FET) final-year students in the last semester of their fourth year of study. However, many graduates struggle to apply their entrepreneurial skills in real-world scenarios, leading to high unemployment rates. From the convocation and graduation records, compared with the responses of the 2022—2024 cohort of some graduates, statistically, it was noted that there is an alarming number of graduates who are still unemployed and have not started a business to help them sustain themselves in their lives. From informal conversations with unemployed graduates who were accessible to us, it surfaced that they do not run a business to sustain themselves, even though they have studied and passed the Entrepreneurship Education module during their study time as students at a selected university. The discovery that students are unemployed and not running a business to keep up with their lives triggered the quest to explore the impact of the Entrepreneurship Education module on graduates' employment. Indeed, Statistics in South Africa, 2024 indicated and confirmed that unemployment has increased from 31.90% to 32.10%. This picture seems to suggest that the affected graduates may suffer from depression and hatred for spending such a long time of their life in the schooling system till completion of tertiary education, only to find out they are unfortunately not absorbed in the job market. Some of these unemployed graduates could find

<sup>2</sup> Amrou Awaysheh and Drew Bonfiglio, "Leveraging Experiential Learning to Incorporate Social Entrepreneurship in MBA Programs: A Case Study," *The International Journal of Management Education* 15, no. 2 (July 2017): 332–49, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2017.04.001>.

<sup>3</sup> Kuratko, "The Emergence of Entrepreneurship Education: Development, Trends, and Challenges."

<sup>4</sup> Ogujiuba Kanayo, "Determinants of Female Entrepreneurship Success in the Agricultural Sector: An Examination of SMEs in South Africa," *International Journal of Economics and Financial Issues* 11, no. 3 (May 10, 2021): 123–33, <https://doi.org/10.32479/ijefi.11274>; Jurie Jansen Van Vuuren and Darelle Groenewald, "A Critical Analysis of the Influence of Start-up Factors in Small Businesses and Entrepreneurial Ventures in SA," *Acta Commercii* 7, no. 1 (2007): 269–80.

<sup>5</sup> Mlodzianowska, eAlvarez-Risco, Rosen García-Ibarra, and Del-Aguila-Arcentales, "Understanding Young Entrepreneurs: Interest in Supporting Business Success," *EKUITAS (Jurnal Ekonomi Dan Keuangan)* 8, no. 2 (2021): 288–303.

<sup>6</sup> Kanayo, "Determinants of Female Entrepreneurship Success in the Agricultural Sector: An Examination of SMEs in South Africa."

<sup>7</sup> Sri Umi Mintarti Widjaja et al., "Identifying Factors Affecting Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention among Indonesian University Students," *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 10, no. 3 (2022): 89–104, <https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2022.100306>.

<sup>8</sup> Widjaja et al., "Identifying Factors Affecting Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention among Indonesian University Students."

<sup>9</sup> Widjaja et al., "Identifying Factors Affecting Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention among Indonesian University Students."

<sup>10</sup> Widjaja et al., "Identifying Factors Affecting Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention among Indonesian University Students."

themselves being victims of drug abusers and crime activists, resulting in being jailed, to mention a few. It is against this backdrop that the researchers embarked on exploring the impact of the Entrepreneurship education module on the employment of graduates of a selected South African university as a means to generate strategies to mitigate the identified phenomenon. The following section discusses the benefits of entrepreneurial skills to students, factors affecting the responsiveness of the Entrepreneurship Education module and the importance of module curriculum reviews.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Benefits of entrepreneurial skills in students

Globally, entrepreneurship education is gaining prominence due to its ability to contribute to the creation of job opportunities and economic growth.<sup>11</sup> This has stimulated its introduction in many universities' curricula.<sup>12</sup> It is argued by some researchers that Entrepreneurship Education in Universities remains a priority worldwide,<sup>13</sup> because of its target at promoting creativity, innovation and self-employment through the development of personal attributes and skills that form the foundation of an entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour.<sup>14</sup> Despite efforts by universities to foster entrepreneurship, graduate unemployment remains a pressing concern in South Africa. A significant challenge is cultivating an entrepreneurial mindset among graduates, particularly those from non-entrepreneurial disciplines who often default to seeking employment rather than creating their own opportunities.

Research on youth employment in Nigeria reveals several socioeconomic impediments connected to population increase, corruption, poor management practice, and poor enabling environment.<sup>15</sup> The realities of graduate unemployment remain underpinned by weaknesses in educational policy frameworks that have narrowly focused on entrepreneurship development in the school curriculum for a long time. Emeh, Nwanguna and Abaroh, mentioned the lack of early introduction of entrepreneurship education as an essential course in academic institutions, which contributed to some challenges limiting students' interest in becoming an entrepreneur or having entrepreneurial intentions.<sup>16</sup> This neglect of entrepreneurship studies in the school curriculum has created a problem of skills mismatch among graduates, whereby there is a disparity between skills learned in schools and the practical skills and experience needed in the labor market. Entrepreneurship education equips students with skills for starting and running businesses, which is crucial in South Africa's high-unemployment context. The lack of emphasis on entrepreneurship education in academic institutions has resulted in graduates being ill-prepared to navigate the demands of the labor market, leading to a skills mismatch that exacerbates unemployment. Integrating entrepreneurship education early in the curriculum can foster a proactive mindset, enabling students to identify opportunities and develop innovative solutions. This approach can also equip graduates with the skills to create their own employment opportunities, rather than relying on traditional job markets.

<sup>11</sup> YanYun Nian et al., "Impact of Land Use Change on Water Resource Allocation in the Middle Reaches of the Heihe River Basin in Northwestern China," *Journal of Arid Land* 6, no. 3 (2014): 273–86.

<sup>12</sup> Mohammadreza Arasti, Nima Garousi Mokhtarzadeh, and Ismail Jafarpanah, "Networking Capability: A Systematic Review of Literature and Future Research Agenda," *Journal of Business & Industrial Marketing* 37, no. 1 (January 3, 2022): 160–79, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JBIM-06-2020-0273>; Rim Badri and Nejib Hachicha, "Entrepreneurship Education and Its Impact on Students' Intention to Start up: A Sample Case Study of Students from Two Tunisian Universities," *The International Journal of Management Education* 17, no. 2 (July 2019): 182–90, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijme.2019.02.004>.

<sup>13</sup> Donna M. De Carolis and Barrie E. Litzky, "Unleashing the Potential of University Entrepreneurship Education," *New England Journal of Entrepreneurship* 22, no. 1 (September 18, 2019): 58–66, <https://doi.org/10.1108/NEJE-04-2019-0022>.

<sup>14</sup> Elaine C Rideout and Denis O Gray, "Does Entrepreneurship Education Really Work? A Review and Methodological Critique of the Empirical Literature on the Effects of University-based Entrepreneurship Education," *Journal of Small Business Management* 51, no. 3 (2013): 329–51.

<sup>15</sup> Oluyomi Pitan and Segun O Adedeji, "Skills Mismatch Among University Graduates in the Nigeria Labor Market," *US-China Education Review* 1 (January 1, 2012): 90–98; Ike E Emeh, E O Nwanguna, and J J Abaroh, "Engaging Youth Unemployment in Nigeria with Youth Development and Empowerment Programmes: The Lagos State in Focus," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Contemporary Research in Business* 4, no. 5 (2012): 1125–41.

<sup>16</sup> Emeh, Nwanguna, and Abaroh, "Engaging Youth Unemployment in Nigeria with Youth Development and Empowerment Programmes: The Lagos State in Focus."

The results have shown that Entrepreneurship Education may improve students' entrepreneurial skills, mindset, and career ambitions.<sup>17</sup> Experiential methodologies have proved to be particularly effective in the entrepreneurship domain. Entrepreneurship education is one of the most important ways of improving the youth's skill set in South Africa. Rashid concluded that an initiative towards entrepreneurship education and training goes a long way in imparting skills to youth.<sup>18</sup> University learning can shape the mindset and attitude of youth toward considering entrepreneurship as a career option.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Ajani argued that despite entrepreneurship support programs made available to youth and communities, graduates rarely consider entrepreneurship a career or show interest in becoming entrepreneurs.<sup>20</sup>

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in shaping students' entrepreneurial skills and mindset is well-documented, yet its impact on career choices remains inconsistent. While experiential learning methodologies have shown promise, the translation of entrepreneurial intentions into actual career paths requires further exploration. In the South African context, where youth unemployment is a pressing concern, entrepreneurship education can play a pivotal role in empowering young people with the skills and confidence to create their own opportunities. However, the disconnect between entrepreneurship education and graduates' career aspirations suggests a need for more targeted and effective program design. By understanding the nuances of this relationship, educators and policymakers can develop more impactful interventions to foster entrepreneurial mindsets and career choices among South African youth.

### Factors affecting the responsiveness of entrepreneurship education

Various studies have been conducted on digital literacy as the ability to understand and apply knowledge in various media, with a focus on critical thinking skills and not just proficiency in information and communication technology.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that mastery of digital literacy is one of measures of success in the education and economic sector to sort out issues or challenges prohibiting the realisation of the set goals.<sup>22</sup> Digital literacy can improve graduates' employability by empowering them to succeed in business in the digital economy.<sup>23</sup> In addition, several studies note that many opportunities for entrepreneurial activity are stimulated through digitalization.<sup>24</sup> Digital literacy can improve graduates' employability by empowering them to succeed in business in the digital economy.<sup>25</sup> In addition, several studies note that many opportunities for entrepreneurial activity are stimulated through digitalization.<sup>26</sup> The significance of digital literacy in today's economy cannot be overstated, as it equips graduates with the critical thinking skills necessary to navigate and thrive in digital environments. By leveraging digital literacy, graduates can unlock new opportunities for entrepreneurial activity, driven by the increasing digitalization of business and commerce. Ultimately, digital literacy is a key determinant of employability and entrepreneurial success in the modern economy.

<sup>17</sup> Jun Cui, "The Influence of Entrepreneurial Education and Psychological Capital on Entrepreneurial Behavior Among College Students," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (November 17, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.755479>.

<sup>18</sup> Lubna Rashid, "Entrepreneurship Education and Sustainable Development Goals: A Literature Review and a Closer Look at Fragile States and Technology-Enabled Approaches," *Sustainability* 11, no. 19 (September 27, 2019): 5343, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su11195343>.

<sup>19</sup> Cagla Ozen et al., "Exploring Entrepreneurship in the Academic Environment," *Technology in Society* 72 (February 2023): 102168, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2022.102168>.

<sup>20</sup> Oluwatoyin Ayodele Ajani, "Entrepreneurship Education in South Africa's Higher Education Institutions: In Pursuit of Promoting Self-Reliance in Students," *International Journal of Management, Knowledge and Learning* 13 (March 23, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.53615/2232-5697.13.29-41>.

<sup>21</sup> WaiMun Chan, YiYing Chai, and AsmaAlhusna Abang Abdullah, "The Use of Information and Communication Technology among Undergraduate Students in Dental Training," *Journal of Education and Ethics in Dentistry* 6, no. 1 (2016): 27, [https://doi.org/10.4103/jeed.jeed\\_22\\_15](https://doi.org/10.4103/jeed.jeed_22_15).

<sup>22</sup> Justita Dura and Ditya Wardana, "The Sustainability Role of Women Entrepreneurs through the Digital Financial Literacy Movement," *Population and Economics* 8, no. 3 (October 30, 2024): 108–29, <https://doi.org/10.3897/popecon.8.e116923>.

<sup>23</sup> Chan, Chai, and Abang Abdullah, "The Use of Information and Communication Technology among Undergraduate Students in Dental Training."

<sup>24</sup> Rr Ponco Dewi Karyaningsih et al., "Does Entrepreneurial Knowledge Influence Vocational Students' Intention? Lessons from Indonesia," *Entrepreneurial Business and Economics Review* 8, no. 4 (2020): 138–55, <https://doi.org/10.15678/EBER.2020.080408>.

<sup>25</sup> Radovan Vrana, "Digital Literacy as a Boost Factor in Employability of Students," 2016, 169–78, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52162-6\\_17](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-52162-6_17).

<sup>26</sup> Karyaningsih et al., "Does Entrepreneurial Knowledge Influence Vocational Students' Intention? Lessons from Indonesia."

Financial literacy refers to knowledge or education related to money, assets, bank accounts, investments, credit, insurance, taxes, and how to use this financial information when making individual financial plans effectively.<sup>27</sup> Financial management is one element that can influence a person's level of readiness to enter the world of entrepreneurship.<sup>28</sup> Financial literacy helps individuals understand how to manage their finances well. Several previous studies found that financial literacy influences individual financial behavior, and as a person's financial literacy increases, their ability to manage finances effectively also increases.<sup>29</sup> The importance of financial literacy in entrepreneurship cannot be overstated, as it enables individuals to make informed decisions about resource allocation, risk management, and investment. By understanding financial concepts and principles, entrepreneurs can better navigate the financial aspects of starting and running a business. Effective financial management is critical to entrepreneurial success, and financial literacy plays a key role in achieving this. Moreover, financially literate entrepreneurs are more likely to achieve their business goals and sustain their ventures over time.

### Importance of module curriculum reviews

Apart from that, the urgency of curriculum development is useful for assisting students and teachers in carrying out the education and teaching process. The more a country develops, the more knowledge it has to assist students and teachers in carrying out the education and teaching process. As a country develops, the knowledge it teaches must also be developed and perfected continuously. Therefore, the development of the education and teaching process starts from curriculum development.<sup>30</sup> The imperative for continuous curriculum development is underscored by the evolving needs of students and teachers in an ever-changing educational landscape. As nations progress, their curricula must adapt to incorporate new knowledge, technologies, and pedagogies that enhance the learning experience. By prioritizing curriculum development, educators can ensure that students are equipped with the skills and competencies necessary to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

Hattarina et al., in their paper, explain that one of the main characteristics of the independent curriculum in overcoming learning loss that is occurring is called project-based learning.<sup>31</sup> Learning is deeper and more meaningful when students are involved in creating their own knowledge, according to the constructivist learning theory, which is the foundation of project-based learning.<sup>32</sup> Project-based learning, which is planned in the independent curriculum, has a positive impact, namely being able to improve students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. According to Hattarina et al. since students are taught to utilize technology to find information, solve issues, and communicate, they will be able to apply the critical thinking, creative thinking, teamwork, and communication skills they develop while working on projects.<sup>33</sup> The effectiveness of project-based learning in fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills is well-documented, and its integration into the independent curriculum is a strategic move to mitigate learning loss. By engaging in project-based learning, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning, applying theoretical concepts to real-world problems and developing essential skills for the 21st century. The constructivist learning theory underlying project-based learning emphasizes the importance of student-centered approaches, allowing learners to construct their own knowledge and understanding. As students work on projects, they develop not only critical thinking and problem-solving skills but also collaboration and communication skills, which are vital for success in today's interconnected world.

A curriculum that is relevant to industry needs reflects these changes. This involves updating the content of study programs, a more contextual learning approach, and more skills-oriented teaching

<sup>27</sup> Annamaria Lusardi and Olivia S Mitchell, "The Economic Importance of Financial Literacy: Theory and Evidence," *American Economic Journal: Journal of Economic Literature* 52, no. 1 (2014): 5–44.

<sup>28</sup> Lusardi and Mitchell, "The Economic Importance of Financial Literacy: Theory and Evidence."

<sup>29</sup> Kok Fei Chong et al., "The Effects of Financial Literacy, Self-Efficacy and Self-Coping on Financial Behavior of Emerging Adults," *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business* 8, no. 3 (2021): 905–15.

<sup>30</sup> Fadriati Khoirurrijal et al., "Hamdani, and Suprapno," *Pengembangann Kurikulum Merdeka*, 2022.

<sup>31</sup> Shofia Hattarina et al., "Implementasi Kurikulum Medeka Belajar Di Lembaga Pendidikan," in *Seminar Nasional Sosial Sains, Pendidikan, Humaniora (SENASSDRA)*, vol. 1, 2022, 181–92.

<sup>32</sup> Hattarina et al., "Implementasi Kurikulum Medeka Belajar Di Lembaga Pendidikan."

<sup>33</sup> Hattarina et al., "Implementasi Kurikulum Medeka Belajar Di Lembaga Pendidikan."

methods. This means that the curriculum must produce graduates with a deep understanding of fundamental concepts and practical skills that can be applied effectively in the work environment.<sup>34</sup> Various studies have been conducted on curriculum development as an essential educational effort. In the past, curricula were often based on a more traditional approach, focusing on imparting specific knowledge and skills to students. However, in the modern era, especially with technological developments and changes in society's needs, there are new approaches to curriculum development that are more dynamic and relevant.<sup>35</sup>

Higher education has a vital role in preparing individuals to enter the job market. In the era of globalization, the relevance and impactful of higher education curricula to industry needs is critical in preparation and production of graduates able to sustain the demands of the world. A curriculum that meets the demands of today's industrial world will help students develop relevant skills, increase their competitiveness, and contribute to economic growth. In addition, higher education institutions respond to the multifaceted societal challenges of our times by training students in innovative and complex skills to prepare a well-equipped workforce. The alignment of higher education curricula with industry needs is crucial for producing graduates who are job-ready and can contribute to the workforce effectively. By integrating industry-relevant skills and knowledge into curricula, higher education institutions can enhance the employability and career prospects of their graduates.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

To guide this research and to facilitate meaningful learning from experiences, cognitive constructivist learning theory integrates constructivist and cognitive methodologies.<sup>36</sup> This theory aids students in gaining and developing the information and abilities required for success, especially in entrepreneurship. As facilitators, teachers develop methods that let students create information instead of passively absorbing it.<sup>37</sup> The dynamic nature of the learning process necessitates ongoing assessment and adjustment to students' evolving attitudes and ways of thinking.<sup>38</sup>

According to constructivism, students can develop their knowledge through active learning and understand concepts in their own ways.<sup>39</sup> The ultimate objective is to help students become more entrepreneurial to contribute significantly to society and the economy. This strategy supports the study's goal of preparing college students to launch and run profitable enterprises.

## METHODOLOGY

In this research, an interpretive research paradigm was adopted. Interpretivism is a research paradigm that has a strong relationship with qualitative research as its focus in the interpretations that people attach to their lived experiences.<sup>40</sup> Interpretivism is beneficial for this study as the focus is on 2022-2024 graduates who enrolled in the Entrepreneurship Education module at a South African university.

A case study research design was used. A case study research design helps researchers to generate an in-depth, multi-layered account of a complex issue in its real-life context, where it happens.<sup>41</sup> In this research, it should be noted that it was a case study of the 2022-2024 cohort of unemployed graduates who declared that they do not own or manage a business to sustain their lives. A qualitative research approach was adopted to explore the participants' understanding and lived experiences of the world. A qualitative research approach enables the researchers to focus on people's experiences and

<sup>34</sup> Anthony P Carnevale, Nicole Smith, and Jeff Strohl, *Help Wanted: Projections of Job and Education Requirements through 2018* (Lumina Foundation, 2010).

<sup>35</sup> Judith Harris, Punya Mishra, and Matthew Koehler, "Teachers' Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge and Learning Activity Types: Curriculum-Based Technology Integration Reframed," *Journal of Research on Technology in Education* 41, no. 4 (2009): 393–416.

<sup>36</sup> S.N. Sailin and N.A. Mahmor, "Cognitive Constructivist Learning Theory: A Case Study," *Journal of Education and Learning*, 2018.

<sup>37</sup> X. Li and Y. Guo, "Constructivist Learning Theory and Its Application in Education," *International Journal of Modern Education and Computer Science*, 2015.

<sup>38</sup> J. Stewart, "Cognitivist Teaching Strategies in South African Education," *South African Journal of Education*, 2021.

<sup>39</sup> R. Sulistyowati, "Constructivism in Education: Building Knowledge through Active Learning," *Journal of Educational Research and Practice* 2019 (2019).

<sup>40</sup> M., Saunders, P., Lewis, and A. Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students*, 8th ed. (Pearson, 2019).

<sup>41</sup> Priya Oza, "Digital Humanities—An Introduction," Mumbai: University of Mumbai, 2020, <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/343774514>.

perceptions of the realities they grapple with.<sup>42</sup> For instance, in this research, the participants were grappling with unemployment, though they had graduated and had nothing like a business being owned by them as a means to sustain themselves. The data from six purposefully selected graduates of the 2022-2024 academic years was collected through semi-structured interviews conducted face-to-face with them. The semi-structured approach helps the researchers to understand the preferences, feelings, attitudes, knowledge, and views of a few people. In this research, it should be noted that semi-structured interviews were adopted on the basis that they enable researchers to obtain the relevant data for meaningful research findings of studies.<sup>43</sup> The six selected graduates of 2022-2024 academic years were found to be relevant for the phenomenon being explored. It should be noted that they were unemployed at the time of the data collection stage. The sample size consisted of three female and three male graduates of a selected South African university.

Ethical considerations, such as soliciting participants' permission to voluntarily participate in this research, were observed. Additionally, it should be noted that they were assured of confidentiality and anonymity as a means to avoid their identities and responses from being easily identifiable to the readers. For example, to avoid using their real names, Graduate No. 1 to Graduate No. 6 were used to represent their names. By extension, it implies that each participant got a unique identification number, and all data remained anonymised. It should be noted that the collected data from the participants was analysed by means of a thematic approach.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The following findings had emerged after analysing the collected data using thematic approach. To present clear and meaningful findings, themes were constructed after re-reading, sorting and grouping of similar responses during data analysis.

### Theme 1: Skills Development for Entrepreneurship

Six participants, who constituted the total number of purposefully selected graduates as the sample size for this research, reported being taught how to write a business plan, but expressed concerns about the financial literacy-related topics, like the financial statement component. The researchers sought to understand what topics were covered and their satisfaction with the module in question. Specifically, they mentioned not being taken through the details of preparing different types of financial statements. For example, Graduate No. 1 answered as follows, "*We were taught how to write a business plan, but the financial part is where we struggle. We don't have confidence in preparing financial statements.*" This suggests that the module may not have provided sufficient depth and practical training in financial planning, a critical aspect of entrepreneurship.

In terms of marketing function, participants reported that they were taught various marketing skills, such as branding and social media marketing. However, they felt that digital marketing skills, such as website development and content creation, were not adequately covered. Graduate No. 3 replied, "*We were taught marketing skills like branding and social media marketing, but digital marketing skills like making a website and content creation were supposed to be part of this chapter.*" This indicates that the module may not have comprehensively covered digital marketing skills, which are essential for modern entrepreneurship.

Participants expressed a desire for more practical activities, such as entrepreneurship days, to apply what they had learned in lectures. Graduate No. 2 indicated, "*I was hoping to have activities like entrepreneurship days where we could present our business ideas and practice what we learned during lectures.*" The above assertion seems to suggest that the module may have been too theoretical and that participants crave hands-on experience to develop their entrepreneurial skills. In simpler terms, it can be concluded that the module does not include and allows the work-integrated learning (WIL)

<sup>42</sup> Theophilus Azungah, "Qualitative Research: Deductive and Inductive Approaches to Data Analysis," *Qualitative Research Journal* 18, no. 4 (November 15, 2018): 383–400, <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-D-18-00035>.

<sup>43</sup> Omolola A Adeoye-Olatunde and Nicole L Olenik, "Research and Scholarly Methods: Semi-structured Interviews," *Journal of the American College of Clinical Pharmacy* 4, no. 10 (2021): 1358–67.

component, which would familiarise and capacitate the students better with all relevant aspects needed to start and manage a business venture.

### **Theme 2: Digital Literacy for Business**

The participants reported that the Entrepreneurship Education module did not cover digital literacy for business, with one noting, Graduate No 4 divulged, *"The module didn't cover digital literacy for business, it wasn't even mentioned in the course outline."* It appears that a lack of coverage left participants feeling unprepared to leverage digital tools and platforms for business purposes. Another participant, Graduate No. 5, echoed this sentiment: *"We didn't learn anything about digital marketing, e-commerce, or online business management."* Participants expressed a desire for more comprehensive training in digital literacy to enhance their entrepreneurial skills, with one emphasizing, for example, Graduate No. 6 answered, *"We need to learn about digital literacy to succeed in business."* The absence of digital literacy training in the module was seen as a significant gap in the participants' education, highlighting the need for revised curricula that incorporate digital literacy for business. By including digital literacy, entrepreneurship education can better equip graduates for the modern business landscape. Overall, the participants' feedback underscores the importance of integrating digital literacy into entrepreneurship education to prepare students for the demands of the digital economy.

### **Theme 3: Access to Funding and Resources**

Participants reported that the module taught them about different funding options, such as loans, grants, crowdfunding, and venture capital. They also learned about government agencies like the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA). However, despite having this knowledge, participants struggled to access these funding opportunities due to several challenges. One major issue was the requirement for collateral, which many participants lacked. Another challenge was the limited credit scores of many participants, which made it difficult for them to secure loans. Participants also mentioned a lack of coaching and guidance on navigating the funding process. Participants pointed out that the NYDA and SEDA policies were restrictive, as they only funded already operational businesses. In addition to funding challenges, participants reported lacking access to other resources, such as mentorship, networking opportunities, and business incubators.

The participants' responses suggest that while the module provided them with knowledge about funding options, it did not equip them with the practical skills and resources needed to access funding. Challenges, such as a lack of collateral, limited credit scores, and restrictive policies, highlight the need for more comprehensive support systems. The lack of access to resources like mentorship, networking opportunities, and business incubators further exacerbates the challenges participants face. These resources are essential for entrepreneurs to gain valuable insights, build relationships, and develop their businesses.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Skills Development for Entrepreneurship**

According to the results, participants learned basic entrepreneurial skills, including creating company strategies and doing simple branding and social media marketing. Participants, however, voiced concerns with the shallowness of financial management education, especially with regard to creating and analyzing various financial statement formats. Many were unconfident in their ability to manage the financial aspects that are essential to company operations. Participants also emphasized how theoretical the curriculum was and how few opportunities there were for hands-on learning, such as entrepreneurship days or mock company scenarios.

The absence of hands-on activities implies that students were not sufficiently exposed to real-world business obstacles, which hindered the growth of their entrepreneurial skills. Kuratko highlighted that multidisciplinary knowledge, and real-world experiences must be included in effective

entrepreneurship education programs.<sup>44</sup> In a similar vein, experiential learning is essential to provide students with employable entrepreneurial skills.<sup>45</sup> As a result, practical projects, case studies, and real-world simulations must be incorporated into the curriculum to elevate university entrepreneurship education beyond theory.

### Digital Literacy for Business

Another critical gap identified was the lack of digital literacy training. Participants indicated that digital marketing, website creation, e-commerce management, and other digital business skills were absent from the entrepreneurship module. Digital competence is fundamental to starting and sustaining a business in the current digital era. Without these skills, graduates are at a disadvantage when leveraging online markets or digital platforms for business growth.

According to Wang et al. and Wardana et al., graduates' employability and entrepreneurial potential are significantly increased by digital literacy.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, digital literacy is a necessary ability for contemporary entrepreneurs, according to Karyaningsih, et al., who contends that digitizing business creates new entrepreneurial prospects.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, digital business capabilities must be incorporated into entrepreneurship education to guarantee that graduates are prepared to prosper in a quickly changing environment.

### Access to Funding and Resources

Despite learning about funding options, including grants, loans, crowdsourcing, and venture capital, the participants faced real-world obstacles while attempting to get this money. Poor credit histories, the inability to fulfil collateral requirements, and tight criteria imposed by organizations such as the SEDA and the NYDA, which only provide funding to enterprises that are already operating, were among the difficulties. In addition, participants bemoaned the lack of access to incubators and mentorship programs that may help them with their entrepreneurial ventures.

This result indicates a discrepancy between theoretical understanding and real-world implementation. To make the move from ideation to company start-up simpler, entrepreneurship education must go beyond the classroom by forging solid alliances with financing organizations, mentorship programs, and business incubators. Widjaja et al., affirm the importance of embedding real-world support systems within entrepreneurship programs, while Gibb also emphasizes the need for entrepreneurial universities to act as hubs linking students to real economic ecosystems.<sup>48</sup>

### Curriculum Timing and Content Gaps

The scheduling of the entrepreneurship module, which was only included in the last year of study, became a cross-cutting problem. Students' chances to cultivate entrepreneurial mindsets and hone their talents over time were hampered by this delayed exposure. Additionally, participants identified areas of lacking material, such as design thinking, innovation tactics, and thorough digital skill development.

According to Ahmad et al. early exposure to entrepreneurship education fosters entrepreneurial ambitions more successfully and resolves the skills gap frequently seen between academic training and industrial demands.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, Rideout and Gray stress that earlier initiation of entrepreneurship

<sup>44</sup> Kuratko, "The Emergence of Entrepreneurship Education: Development, Trends, and Challenges."

<sup>45</sup> Jonathan M Scott, Andy Penaluna, and John L Thompson, "A Critical Perspective on Learning Outcomes and the Effectiveness of Experiential Approaches in Entrepreneurship Education: Do We Innovate or Implement?," *Education+ Training* 58, no.1(2016):82–93.

<sup>46</sup> Jie Wang, Chang Liu, and Zhijian Cai, "Digital Literacy and Subjective Happiness of Low-Income Groups: Evidence from Rural China," *Frontiers in Psychology* 13 (2022): 1045187; Miko Andi Wardana et al., "The Analysis of Organizational Justice, Competence and Work Motivation to Improve The Performance," *Jurnal Informatika Ekonomi Bisnis*, June 30, 2023, 421–27, <https://doi.org/10.37034/infeb.v5i2.589>.

<sup>47</sup> Karyaningsih et al., "Does Entrepreneurial Knowledge Influence Vocational Students' Intention? Lessons from Indonesia."

<sup>48</sup> Widjaja et al., "Identifying Factors Affecting Entrepreneurship Education and Entrepreneurial Intention among Indonesian University Students"; Allan Gibb, "Towards the Entrepreneurial University: Entrepreneurship Education as a Lever for Chance," *Policy Paper* 3 (2005).

<sup>49</sup> Said Ahmad et al., "The Role of Education in Fostering Entrepreneurial Spirit in the Young Generation," *Journal of Contemporary Administration and Management (ADMAN)* 1, no. 2 (August 13, 2023): 93–100, <https://doi.org/10.61100/adman.v1i2.28>.

education leads to more significant entrepreneurial career outcomes.<sup>50</sup> As a result, it is advised that academic institutions incorporate entrepreneurship instruction into their curricula from the very beginning, across all faculties, and update the material often to take into account changes in the market and technology.

### **Discussion Summary**

According to this survey, the Entrepreneurship Education module covered the fundamentals but fell short in digital literacy, real-world applicability, and practical financial abilities. Due to inadequate mentorship assistance, restricted access to funds, and a lack of experiential learning, graduates found it difficult to shift into entrepreneurship. Its late debut in the final year further diminished the module's usefulness. Universities must prioritize experiential and digital learning, fortify their relationships with industry, incorporate entrepreneurship education sooner, and change their curricula often to enhance results. Closing these disparities is essential to improving the employability of graduates and lowering young unemployment in South Africa.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Universities should include more experiential learning opportunities, such as entrepreneurship days, business simulations, live projects, and real-world business plan contests, to increase the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education. Through these exercises, students would gain confidence in their entrepreneurial skills and be able to put their academic knowledge to use in practical situations. To educate students for the needs of the digital economy, digital literacy, which includes digital marketing, e-commerce, website building, and online company management skills, must be incorporated into the entrepreneurship curriculum.

Universities need to improve their relationships with private investors, business incubators, government organizations like NYDA and SEDA, and financial institutions. Students would have more access to start-up support networks, finance, and mentorship as a result of these partnerships. In order to allow for the steady development of skills and mentality over time, entrepreneurship education should be introduced early, ideally from the first or second year of undergraduate study, rather than being restricted to final-year modules.

To make sure that academic programs stay in line with the demands of the market, emerging technologies, and societal issues, it is also essential to conduct regular curriculum evaluations with industry professionals, alumni, and entrepreneurs. Universities should make their courses dynamic and future-focused in order to quickly adjust to the rapidly evolving entrepreneurial environment. Furthermore, it is strongly advised that universities set up fully functional entrepreneurship centers. These facilities would act as gathering places for networking, incubation services, training sessions, financial guidance, and mentoring. Empowering graduates through innovative, practical, and future-ready entrepreneurship education is not only a solution to unemployment but a vital investment in the economic resilience and prosperity of South Africa.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) should be included in the Entrepreneurship Education module for practical industry exposure; advisory boards with industry experts should be established to guide curriculum development; and frequent curriculum reviews should guarantee relevance and fit with industry needs. Including more chances for experiential learning, such as practical projects and entrepreneurship days, will also help students acquire the tools and confidence required to be successful entrepreneurs, so improving their employability and helping to lower young unemployment.

### **CONCLUSION**

This study has assessed the impact of the Entrepreneurship Education module on the employment of graduates of a selected South African university. Though it lacked depth in digital literacy, actual financial skills, and real-world applicability, the Entrepreneurship Education module offered basic information. Due to restricted access to capital, mentoring, and chances for experiential learning,

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<sup>50</sup> Rideout and Gray, "Does Entrepreneurship Education Really Work? A Review and Methodological Critique of the Empirical Literature on the Effects of University-based Entrepreneurship Education."

graduates struggled to enter business. Universities should give experiential and digital learning top priority, enhance industry alliances, start entrepreneurship education earlier, and routinely adapt courses to reflect technical and market developments in order to raise results. Improving graduate employability and lowering young unemployment in South Africa depend on filling in these voids.

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