

# Developing an Entrepreneurship Training Framework for Graphic Design Students at the Tshwane University of Technology, South Africa



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## ABSTRACT

Entrepreneurship education has become increasingly important worldwide, including for graduates in South Africa. Like their counterparts in other emerging economies, South African graduates face challenges in starting their businesses. This study focused on Graphic Design graduates at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), who encountered difficulties in establishing their design businesses. The research aimed to develop an entrepreneurship education framework for the Integrated Communication Design (ICD) programme at Tshwane University of Technology. A qualitative method was used along with an interpretivism research philosophy to examine small and micrographic design businesses in Tshwane's central business district. In this article, twelve participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Four main themes were revealed in this article namely, core entrepreneurial skills, curriculum challenges in practical education, challenges faced by graphic design graduates, and strategies for improving business performance. These findings informed the proposed framework for entrepreneurial education for Tshwane University of Technology. The study identified ten key challenges for graphic design graduates, such as a lack of contracts, mentorship, and financial support, difficulties in hiring skilled staff, limited business knowledge, reliance on government contracts, excessive subcontracting, brand recognition issues, cash flow problems, and corruption. The study concluded by emphasising the urgent need for a shift in graphic design education, particularly in South Africa. It is recommended that graphic design educational institutions and the government join hands in finding ways to sponsor these entrepreneurs financially and non-financially to make their transition into the corporate world as smooth as possible.

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## INTRODUCTION

This article delves into a comprehensive study that sought to thoroughly investigate and critically analyse the framework for graphic design entrepreneurship training at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). The impetus for this study stemmed from the increasingly recognised importance of entrepreneurship education in equipping graduates with the requisite skills and mindset for success in the ever-evolving and fiercely competitive graphic design industry.

A pivotal aspect of the study was the observation and recognition of the shifting landscape within higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa. Before the commencement of this research, higher education institutions had embarked on a significant process of revising and realigning their academic offerings to adhere to the standards set by the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF). This initiative was aimed at ensuring that the qualifications conferred by higher education institutions were not only relevant but also aligned with the national educational framework, thereby enhancing the quality and competitiveness of graduates in the job market.<sup>1</sup> As part of this process that is mandated at the national level, Tshwane University of Technology determined that entrepreneurial education is an essential component that must be integrated into the new curriculum.<sup>2</sup>

It is also vital to note that the current study was propelled by the perception among scholars that highlights the challenges graphic design graduates encounter in transitioning from academia to the professional world.<sup>3</sup> Studies indicate that while these graduates possess strong design skills, they often lack the entrepreneurial acumen and business skills necessary to succeed as independent entrepreneurs or within small design firms. Furthermore, for graphic designers to be successful businesspeople, they need to think and behave more like traditional entrepreneurs in "The Rise of the Design Entrepreneur."<sup>4</sup> To assist students in understanding the complete process of bringing a product or service to market, they require an addition to their business education. This need for business education points to a possible need for a review of graphic design curricula in postsecondary education.

This study developed a framework for the education of entrepreneurs within the newly established Integrated Communication Design programme at the Tshwane University of Technology. This framework aims to incorporate entrepreneurial education into the curriculum. Additionally, the study evaluates the status of entrepreneurship education in graphic design or visual communication programmes at selected universities of technology (UoTs) in South Africa.

In this article, design is identified as a "key strategic activity" that adds value to a company by creating new consumer goods.<sup>5</sup> These goods include not only the interaction of the product with customers but also the company's identity, logo, and packaging. Due to the specialised nature of their services, designers often play a crucial role in whether their clients achieve their business goals in today's highly competitive and globalised corporate environment. Designers are valued for their impact on the value chain and the corporate image of an organisation.<sup>6</sup>

Effective graphic design can enhance a business's visibility, leading to increased sales. Graphic design involves creating visually appealing designs that effectively communicate ideas, increase visibility, and enhance credibility, thereby attracting consumers to brands. Increased visibility can create more business opportunities. Consistency in a company's brand appearance, both online and offline, helps build trust and credibility, potentially boosting sales. Design businesses provide employment opportunities for aspiring graphic designers and offer products and services to other businesses, significantly contributing to the overall health of the South African small and medium enterprise (SME) sector.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the growing recognition of these challenges, there is a noticeable gap in the literature that addresses the lack of entrepreneurship education (EE) in the Integrated Communication Design programme at Tshwane University of Technology. In 2012, all higher education institutions in South Africa were in the process of aligning their credentials with the newly established Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework.<sup>8</sup> As part of this national mandate, Tshwane University of Technology

<sup>1</sup> Government of South Africa, "The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework," *Government Gazette*, No. 36003. (Pretoria: Government Printers, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Pfunzo Sidogi and Tumelo Rasedile, "Contesting the Decolonisation Narrative: Towards an Entrepreneurship Based Graphic Design Curricula," *DEFS Contact Details*, 2017, 256.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas Opoku, "Readiness to Enter the Workforce: Perceptions of Graphic Design Students Against Market Demands," 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Denise Anderson, "Graphic Design and Entrepreneurship: The Rise of the Design Entrepreneur," *Creativity and Society* 22 (2014): 1–23.

<sup>5</sup> Gunes, Serkan. "Design entrepreneurship in product design education." *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences* 51 (2012).

<sup>6</sup> Sidogi and Rasedile, "Contesting the Decolonisation Narrative: Towards an Entrepreneurship Based Graphic Design Curricula"; Rasedile Tumelo, "A Framework for Graphic Design Entrepreneurship Training at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)" (Tshwane University of Technology, 2023).

<sup>7</sup> Tumelo, "A Framework for Graphic Design Entrepreneurship Training at the Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)." ."

<sup>8</sup> South Africa. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. *Government Gazette*, No. 36003. Jan 2020: 2-34 Government Printers. Pretoria, (2013).

recognised the need to integrate entrepreneurship education into its new curricula. The integrated communication design programme has replaced the previous graphic design programme.

This article is motivated by the need to bridge a gap in the literature by proposing a framework that integrates entrepreneurship education into the Integrated Communication Design programme at Tshwane University of Technology. This article aims to equip graphic design graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to navigate the challenges of the industry and thrive as entrepreneurs or professionals in small design businesses. Therefore, the researcher developed specific primary questions that sought answers that would clarify the ongoing crisis:

- a) What core entrepreneurial skills are lacking among graphic design graduates?
- b) How can practical education in graphic design programmes be improved to provide students with real-life experiences and industry insights?
- c) What are the main challenges facing graphic design graduates when starting and managing their businesses?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Entrepreneurship Education

It is essential to mention that South Africa, like many other developing countries in Africa, faces high unemployment rates among both adults and young graduates. This problem is largely due to the lack of entrepreneurship education that adequately prepares students for future careers.<sup>9</sup> The challenges stemming from South Africa's previous government have left the region with entrepreneurs who are often ill-equipped to start new businesses. A supportive network, including mentorship, is crucial for their success.<sup>10</sup>

Several scholars conducted a literature review on the components of an entrepreneurial university, highlighting six essential factors for developing entrepreneurial students: entrepreneurship education, research and development, innovation, company incubators, and stakeholder engagement.<sup>11</sup> In the arts, there is an increasing demand for universities to create curricula that foster business acumen and entrepreneurial skills rather than just theoretical knowledge. Clear communication skills, both verbal and written, are also crucial for business success.

### Design Education

Numerous studies have been conducted in South Africa on graphic design, design education, and professional practice, which traditionally focus on technical skills, equipping students with the knowledge needed for success in areas such as advertising design, web design, and typography.<sup>12</sup> This view was supported by several scholars who affirm that freelancing in graphic design education is encouraged as it allows students to explore career options, earn money, and fill gaps in their education. Internships also help bridge the gap between higher education and the commercial world.<sup>13</sup> Scholars have agreed that students should start freelancing before graduation to gain a deeper understanding of graphic design and expand their professional networks.<sup>14</sup> However, while these scholars discuss important aspects of graphic design, they rarely address entrepreneurial education, especially within the South African context. This research on the need for entrepreneurial education is a noticeable gap in the literature. This article aims to address that gap by recognising the growing need to incorporate entrepreneurial education into graphic design programmes, preparing graduates better for the professional realities in South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> Sakhiseni Joseph Yende and George Mugovhani, "Employability Challenges Facing Vocal Art Graduates in South Africa: A Case Study of Tshwane University of Technology," *Muziki* 18, no. 1 (2021): 110–26.

<sup>10</sup> Sidogi and Rasedile, "Contesting the Decolonisation Narrative: Towards an Entrepreneurship Based Graphic Design Curricula."

<sup>11</sup> Anthea Patricia Amadi-Echendu et al., "Entrepreneurial Education in a Tertiary Context: A Perspective of the University of South Africa," *International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning* 17, no. 4 (2016): 21–35; Slavica Singer, José Ernesto Amorós, and Daniel Moska Arreola, *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2011 Global Report* (London Business School, 2015).

<sup>12</sup> Piers Carey, "From the Outside in: A Place for Indigenous Graphic Traditions in Contemporary South African Graphic Design," *Design Issues* 27, no. 1 (2011): 55–62; Ben Hannam, *A Graphic Design Student's Guide to Freelance: Practice Makes Perfect* (John Wiley & Sons, 2012).

<sup>13</sup> Hannam, *A Graphic Design Student's Guide to Freelance: Practice Makes Perfect*.

<sup>14</sup> Carey, "From the Outside in: A Place for Indigenous Graphic Traditions in Contemporary South African Graphic Design"; Hannam, *A Graphic Design Student's Guide to Freelance: Practice Makes Perfect*.

## METHODOLOGY

The research conducted in this article employed an interpretive research philosophy, which sought to understand the subjective experiences and meanings that individuals attribute to their experiences.<sup>15</sup> This philosophy was complemented by a qualitative research design, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of micro and small graphic design businesses in the City of Tshwane's central business district. This study focused on a population of 122 micro and small graphic design businesses operating within the City of Tshwane's central business district, identified using a Google search. From this population, a sample was selected using non-probability purposive sampling, which was deemed appropriate given the philosophy of interpretivism research and the qualitative design of the study.<sup>16</sup> Purposive sampling allowed the researchers to specifically target participants who could provide relevant and valuable insights based on their judgment. The inclusion criteria for the sample required participants to be business owners of micro and small graphic design organisations, with perspectives on entrepreneurship training and the challenges of starting, running, and growing a business. Additionally, the businesses had to be registered entities under South African law, have been in operation for at least one year, and be located within the City of Tshwane's central business district. Of those who met these criteria, 12 participants agreed to participate in the study, and were subsequently interviewed to explore the entrepreneurial landscape within the graphic design industry.

The data collected from the participants were subjected to thematic analysis using ATLAS.ti 7 software. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within data, and helped this study generate three key themes: core entrepreneurial skills, practical education curriculum, and challenges faced by graphic design graduates.<sup>17</sup> These themes provided valuable insights into the needs and experiences of graphic design businesses and graduates, informing the development of a proposed framework for entrepreneurial education at Tshwane University of Technology. This framework aims to address the identified gaps and challenges, offering a structured approach to improving entrepreneurial skills and education field of graphic design. To maintain the quality of the data in this study, the researcher employed a triangulation approach. This method was crucial for validating and cross-examining the data, effectively eliminating potential criticism and debate about bias, singular perspectives, and subjective observational research.

Lastly, in this study, participants were told about the nature and goal of this research and provided with letters of consent. The study participants signed an informed consent form, attesting to the fact that their privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality would be respected. Lastly, everyone who participated did so willingly.

## PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

### Introductory remarks

This section provides an overview of entrepreneurial and graphic design education in South Africa, with a specific focus on the offerings at the Tshwane University of Technology. The discussion highlights the importance of entrepreneurship in the graphic design field and the role of education in preparing students for successful careers in this industry. Students in the Graphic Design programme at the Tshwane University of Technology lacked entrepreneurial training, with only the Professional Practice course addressing professional conduct in the workplace, which accounted for just 10% of the diploma's total credit allocation. This course, however, is now being discontinued, leaving students without specific entrepreneurial preparation. The study findings reveal common themes that emerged from the three research questions: core entrepreneurial skills, practical education curriculum, and challenges faced by graphic design graduates. Scholarly literary writings supplemented these findings.

### Core entrepreneurial skills

Participants in the study expressed a belief that business management should be integrated into graphic design courses, as many designers lack essential business skills. They suggested that such integration

<sup>15</sup> M. Saunders, P. Lewis, and A. Thornhill, *Research Methods for Business Students*, 7th ed. (Edinburgh Gate Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2016); G Parkinson and R Drislane, "Qualitative Research," *Online Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Parkinson, G., and R. Drislane. "Qualitative research." *Online dictionary of the social sciences* (2011).

<sup>17</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, "Teaching Thematic Analysis: Overcoming Challenges and Developing Strategies for Effective Learning," *The Psychologist* 26, no. 2 (2013): 120–23.

could improve participants' business acumen, highlighting the importance of administrative activities and customer service delivery. Some participants proposed a predominantly business-focused graphic design course, with technical graphic design elements comprising only a small portion of the curriculum. This desire for a business education focus is supported by the following quotations from some of the participants:

**Participant E:** *“I think institutions need to include the business course. Business courses are a way of preparing students to think out of the box so that when you go to an institution and enrol for a course, you are not necessarily going there to be able to be an employee at the end of the day. You should be able to go there with the mindset that after this, I have a second option.”*

**Participant F:** *“Customers are attracted by a service and then if you don't know how service has got to be run then you'll obviously fail to keep customers.”*

**Participant I:** *“I think there should be a whole module dedicated to business. I remember we did Business Communication. There's art history, art theory, and graphic theory. I think that forms 5% of your design life going forward. It should be 95% business and 5% theory.”*

It is interesting to note that **Participant K** highlighted that three major challenges: ... *“The first challenge, I think, is the financial background. The second challenge, is time management. The third [problem] is just a lack of running a business.”*

Participants suggested that the graphic design course should include content to enhance students' financial literacy. Scholars have also emphasised the importance of understanding concepts such as money management, savings, and investments.<sup>18</sup> Participants advocated for teaching students how to handle money and develop entrepreneurial skills rather than fostering an employee mindset. This desire for a money-handling education focus is supported by the following quotations from some of the participants:

**Participant H:** *“What is money? What really is money? You see, we come from a community where you grow up in an environment where money is always a challenge. We are not taught how to handle money. School does not teach you how to handle money except how to go to get a job and make money.”*

In addition, participants indicated that graphic design courses should not focus only on providing theoretical modules, which may not be applicable in modern times. Therefore, it was suggested that learning is based on real-life experiences that graphic designers face in the business world. This suggestion regarding real-life practicality is confirmed by studies done on graphic design education.<sup>19</sup> This practical content is more likely to bring positive outcomes for graphic design students as they apply their academic knowledge to the real business context in their respective industries. This desire for a practical education focus is supported by the following quote from one of the participants:

**Participant A:** *“I wish they could turn theory modules into real-life experiences instead of a books written four years ago.”*

Furthermore, it was further highlighted that time management is a challenge in running a graphic design business. Incorporation of this time management content into the curriculum would give students time management skills that are instrumental in the business world. Time management skills can help graphic designers to be more effective in their business operations, as time is a valuable resource that needs to be properly managed to timeously meet the deadlines set by clients.

### **Practical Education Curriculum**

This study indicated that industry educational tours could be valuable for graphic design students as they are more likely to learn about their profession and see how graphic design organisations work and conduct

<sup>18</sup> Selma Schiller, “The Acquisition of Essential Characteristics Required for a Contemporary Graphic Design Career” (University of Pretoria, 2013); Sidogi and Rasedile, “Contesting the Decolonisation Narrative: Towards an Entrepreneurship Based Graphic Design Curricula.”

<sup>19</sup> Schiller, “The Acquisition of Essential Characteristics Required for a Contemporary Graphic Design Career.”

their business. Industry tours can dispel misconceptions about the graphic design industry, which could assist graphic designers in knowing well in advance what is required of them and what they can do to prepare themselves for the industry. This desire for educational company tours is supported by the following quotation from a participant:

**Participant E:** *“I wish our lecturers or the institutions where I gained my qualifications would have let us know the operations. For instance, you go to school, you learn about the profession, but you haven’t experienced the actual environment on how things are done. For instance, maybe after you do your first year, they should take us on a road trip to go and see advertising companies for instance, how things work, how the process works, how they look for clients, such things. It gives you an overview of how the business side of the graphic [design] industry works. I think that would be helpful for students as well.”*

Moreover, participants indicated that lectures from business people within the graphic design industry could assist students in learning more about business and entrepreneurialism as they will be able to learn more from individuals currently running businesses. Thus, graphic design courses could cultivate entrepreneurial skills in students and better position the students to enter into the industry well-equipped to meet any challenge they may face. This desire for lectures from business people is supported by the following quote from a participant:

**Participant A:** *“[University courses] need to get business people from magazines, television and graphic design studios and offer them one-to-two-year contracts so that they can be educated about current business experiences. A person with only 20 years of lecturing experience is not in touch with the world. He is teaching what he thinks the world is at.”*

Additionally, it was indicated that graphic design courses should eliminate obsolete theories and move with the times. This elimination of obsolete theories avoids teaching students graphic design modules that will not be applicable in the industry. Also, participants cited that instead of wasting time with obsolete theory, more energy should be focused on things that matter, such as entrepreneurship, financial management, business management and modern graphic design techniques that are currently being used and are sought after by the graphic design industry. This desire for obsolete theory elimination is supported by the following quotations from some of the participants:

**Participant B:** *“Sometimes I feel like going to school wasted my time. Trust me. You spend so much of your time trying to learn something that a human being has done and inside you, every person in this world had a space to do something.”*

**Participant K:** *“You see when I was at school, the things we were taught, we were taught to work for the industry. We were never taught to own our own business. We were never taught this thing of becoming entrepreneurs. You know, there’s one subject that I wish could be sacrificed which is life drawing. I really don’t see the point of it when you are a graphic designer even up to now. I just really don’t see the point. It was back then when we used to do the drawing boards and the storyboards and all those things that used to help us in such instances, but everything is now digitalised. I don’t see a point of a graphic designer at this age still doing life drawing. Instead of doing life drawing I think entrepreneurship must just be stronger in there. People must be taught business. They must be taught financial management, how to manage the business, how to run a business successfully.”*

Participant B expressed frustration, feeling that their education was a waste of time, as much of what they learned could have been achieved through personal exploration. Participant K echoed this sentiment, emphasising that the education system focused on preparing students for employment rather than entrepreneurship.<sup>20</sup> They questioned the relevance of certain subjects, like life drawing, in the digital age of graphic design. Instead, Participant K advocated for a stronger focus on entrepreneurship and

<sup>20</sup> Schiller, “The Acquisition of Essential Characteristics Required for a Contemporary Graphic Design Career”; Sidogi and Rasedile, “Contesting the Decolonisation Narrative: Towards an Entrepreneurship Based Graphic Design Curricula.”

business management in the curriculum, believing these skills are more valuable for success in the industry.

### **Challenges that graphic design graduates face**

The findings indicate that the lack of contracts is one of the challenges that graphic design graduates face. It is tough for newly graduated graphic designers to secure long-term contracts. As a result, income and cash flow are typically inconsistent in the early years of doing business. This desire for knowledge about tendering for contracts is supported by the following quotations from some of the participants:

**Participant D:** *“I think, initially, is the challenge of being able to get the business first of all”*

**Participant G:** *“The one is that first, to start with, there is an issue of cash flow or revenue perspective. As a small business, you get a big opportunity you run with it for the next six months and for the other six months, there’s nothing coming. The first challenge is when there’s no income and you basically get tempted to do things that you are not even supposed to be doing such as ultimately you end up taking opportunities to do printing which might not necessarily be your core business.”*

**Participant L:** *“Another challenge might be that our work is limited in such a way that if you don’t have clients that you could do work for or more work for them it limits you to do work on a minimal [basis].”*

Participants also indicated that a lack of financial support hinders the growth and success of new graphic design businesses. This lack of financial support suggests there are no government programmes or initiatives aimed at supporting businesses. Moreover, the participants also pointed out that when graphic design graduates start their businesses, they often need some capital to buy marketing and advertising equipment and support administrative and operational activities before their businesses can sustain themselves through a reliable customer base. As a result, these businesses cannot support both business operations and the personal needs of the owners, which leads them to an undesirable hand-to-mouth scenario. This need for start-up financing is supported by the following quotations from some of the participants:

**Participant C:** *“I think the biggest, biggest challenge is finance. Most entrepreneurs are on their own. If there was finance, I think it would make life much easier but again I think if you get your basics right and if you have your business model right, I don’t think you need finance. You would need financing, yes, to finance maybe your first three or four jobs but going forward when you are established and people know that you can offer quality service, you know what you are doing and you’ve established good relationships with suppliers and all that.”*

**Participant E:** *“The challenges are for, well with start-ups, mainly it’s when you start because you don’t have any backing financially. That’s the first thing. You do not have a financial backing to go out there and market yourself to people so that they can know the services you offer.”*

**Participant I:** *“I think that’s the biggest challenge, finance. We operate on a hand-to-mouth basis which we know doesn’t work but we continue to do it.”*

In addition, the participants also pointed out that employing the right people is a challenge for many graphic design entrepreneurs. Cutting costs leads to subcontracting the work to people who do not have the appropriate skills and experience to do the job. Besides, working with unprofessional people can lead to delays in project delivery performance, which may also include many reworks that diminish business profitability. This consequential cost-cutting is supported by the following quote from one of the participants:

**Participant C:** *“I think the biggest, biggest challenge that I came across in my 12 years as an entrepreneur. I think it’s employing the right people that has been the biggest challenge. One of the challenges in terms of employing the right people, I have always employed the wrong people”*

*and the reason has always been you cut costs and employ people who don't know what they are doing."*

Moreover, lack of mentorship was identified as one of the challenges that graphic design graduates face when they enter the industry. This need for mentorship suggests that graphic design courses may not provide mentorship opportunities. As a result, the development and growth of these graphic designers have stagnated. This desire for mentorship is supported by the following quote from one of the participants:

**Participant A:** *"Lack of contracts, lack of mentorship, lack of financial support and coaching. Those were hard-core because you need bigger/older people to open certain doors for you."*

It was indicated that lack of business acumen is a challenge among graphic designers as the current academic settings do not promote the development of business knowledge. In light of this, graphic design graduates seeking to start up their businesses will find it hard as they may not have formal business training. This lack of business acumen may also become an obstacle when applying for a loan due to the inability to present the required business and financial documentation.

## DISCUSSION

This study explored the challenges facing by graphic design graduates in South Africa as they enter the industry, focusing on aspects such as contract availability, financial support, mentoring, hiring practices, and business acumen. The findings reveal significant gaps and issues that confirm and extend the existing literature, shedding light on critical areas that impact the professional success of graduates.

The findings corroborate several points raised in the literature review. Firstly, the challenge of limited contracts resonates with existing literature that discusses the instability of freelancing in creative professions.<sup>21</sup> The study underscores the precarious nature of income streams for new graphic designers, highlighting the need for stable client relationships and ongoing work opportunities. Participants frequently resorted to taking unrelated jobs to sustain their businesses, illustrating the inconsistent cash flow that plagues many new entrepreneurs. This issue underscores the importance of reliable financial planning and resource management, which are often underemphasised in graphic design education.

Secondly, the study's identification of financial barriers aligns with existing literature that emphasises the crucial role of financial support in entrepreneurial ventures.<sup>22</sup> Participants' struggles with securing initial capital and managing cash flow underscore the gap between available resources and the financial needs of emerging designers, suggesting the need for targeted financial assistance programmes.

Thirdly, the lack of mentorship identified in the study supports Salem's argument regarding the importance of mentorship in entrepreneurial success.<sup>23</sup> Participants expressed a clear desire for guidance from experienced professionals to navigate industry challenges and opportunities, pointing to a deficiency in current educational offerings that could be addressed through mentorship initiatives.

Although the study confirms many existing challenges, it also brings to light new insights. For instance, the study's focus on hiring practices reveals a significant issue with subcontracting and its impact on project outcomes. This finding adds depth to discussions on workforce management within creative industries, suggesting a need for better training in project coordination and team building among graduates. Moreover, the study's emphasis on the lack of business acumen challenges assumptions about the adequacy of current curricula in preparing students for entrepreneurial ventures. The call in this article to integrate employability skills gains urgency as participants highlight gaps in financial literacy, marketing knowledge, and strategic planning abilities among graduates.

This study contributes to the field of graphic design education by providing a nuanced understanding of the challenges facing graduates in South Africa. Evidently, by interpreting these findings in light of existing literature and research questions, the article confirms the need for holistic educational approaches that integrate technical skills with entrepreneurial competencies. Moving forward, addressing

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<sup>21</sup> Hannam, *A Graphic Design Student's Guide to Freelance: Practice Makes Perfect*.

<sup>22</sup> Amadi-Echendu et al., "Entrepreneurial Education in a Tertiary Context: A Perspective of the University of South Africa"; Singer, Amorós, and Arreola, *Global Entrepreneurship Monitor: 2011 Global Report*.

<sup>23</sup> Schiller, "The Acquisition of Essential Characteristics Required for a Contemporary Graphic Design Career."



these challenges can pave the way for a more resilient and competitive graphic design workforce capable of driving innovation and economic growth in South Africa's creative industries.

### **SIGNIFICANCE AND IMPLICATIONS**

The findings underscore the need for an entrepreneurship training framework tailored to Graphic Design students at Tshwane University of Technology. Addressing challenges such as, securing contracts, accessing financial support, mentoring, and business acumen through educational reforms will better prepare graduates for competitive careers. Integrating practical modules in financial management, marketing, and networking can bridge academic learning with industry demands, fostering innovation and self-sufficiency among students. Strengthening partnerships among the universities, government, and industry can create supportive ecosystems that promote entrepreneurial success, boosting economic growth and resilience in South Africa's creative sectors. This initiative equips graduates to navigate and lead in today's marketplace, contributing significantly to socio-economic development.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

To address the identified challenges, it is recommended that Tshwane University of Technology and other institutions offering graphic design courses revise their curricula to include modules focused on entrepreneurship. These modules should cover essential aspects such as business planning, financial management, marketing, and customer service. Additionally, mentorship programmes should be established to provide students with guidance and support from experienced professionals in the field.

Moreover, students should be required to undertake mandatory industrial internships for one semester, either in their third or final year. This approach ensures they gain practical working experience and build a network with employers in the graphic design sector before graduation. Some universities have implemented this strategy for students enrolled in art courses, and the results have been consistently encouraging. Many students secure employment with the companies where they interned, while others gain the practical experience necessary to start their businesses after completing their studies. Through integrating these internships into the curriculum, educational institutions can better prepare graduates for success in the industry and empower them to thrive as entrepreneurs.

Also, it is recommended that graphic design educational institutions and the government join hands in finding ways to sponsor these entrepreneurs financially and non-financially to make their transition into the corporate world as smooth as possible. This financial support for start-ups may help reduce unemployment within the country and spike economic development, which is much needed at a community level and in South Africa.

### **Proposed Entrepreneurial Framework**

The following entrepreneurial education was developed on the basis of the findings of this article. Figure: 1 shows that at the classroom level, the focus is on equipping graphic design students with essential entrepreneurial skills such as business management, financial literacy, and time management, which are crucial for running their own businesses. The industry level emphasises practical education, including industrial tours, lectures from industry professionals, and updating the curriculum to align with real-world business needs. This helps students apply theoretical knowledge in practical business contexts. The individual level of entrepreneurial education targets personal development, encouraging students to engage in networking, continuous improvement, and forming partnerships, which are key to improving business performance. These three levels, core entrepreneurial skills, practical education, and personal development, are essential to prepare graphic design graduates to thrive as entrepreneurs.

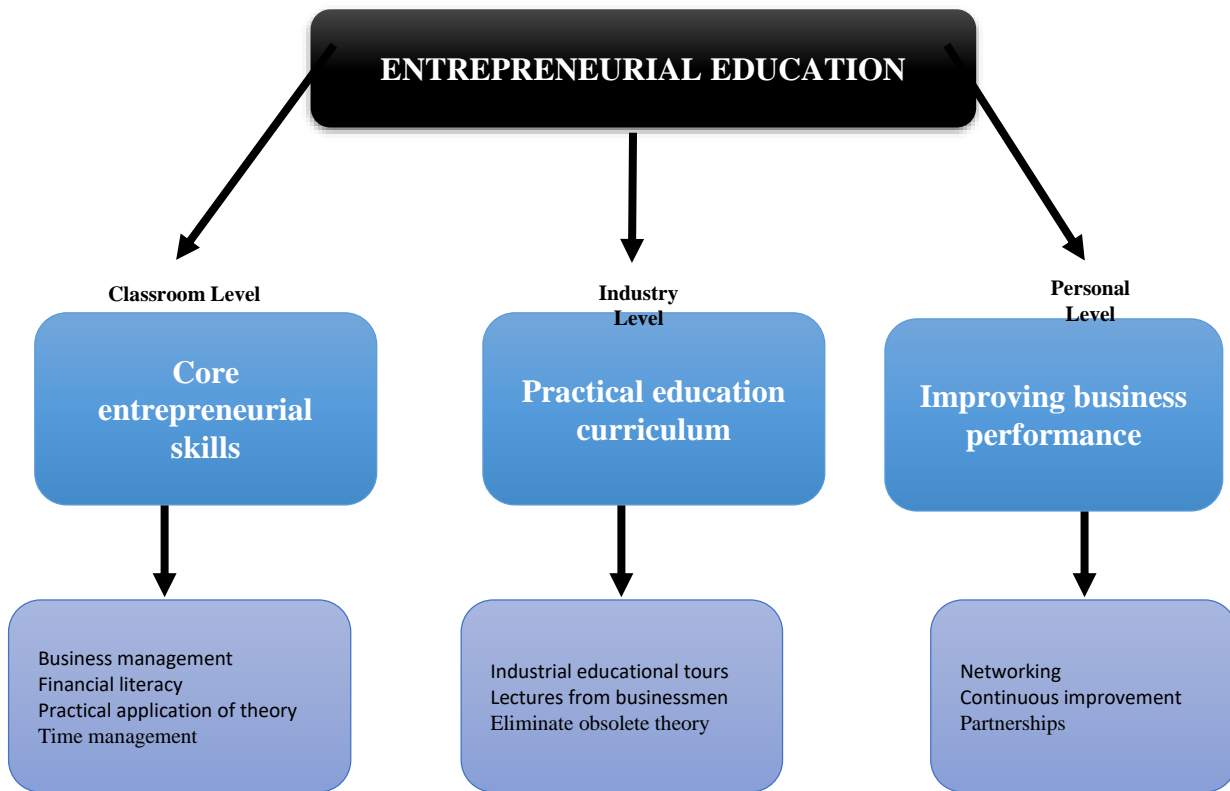


Fig.1. Proposed Entrepreneurial Framework

The proposed framework for entrepreneurial education at Tshwane University of Technology is comprehensive, addressing the classroom, industry, and individual levels. It is evident that by focusing on essential entrepreneurial skills, practical education, and personal development, this framework ensures that graphic design students are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the business world. The integration of classroom knowledge with industry practices and the emphasis on personal growth through networking and continuous improvement are key to fostering successful entrepreneurship among graduates. This holistic approach is vital for preparing students to not only start but also sustain and grow their businesses.

**CONCLUSION**

This study has highlighted the pressing need for a paradigm shift in graphic design education, particularly in South Africa. The insights gained from the participants have revealed a gap between the current curriculum and the demands of the industry. The traditional focus on technical skills, while essential, is insufficient in preparing graduates for the complexities of entrepreneurship in graphic design.

One of the key findings is the overwhelming consensus among participants on the need for more business-oriented education. The lack of contracts, financial support, and mentorship are significant challenges that hinder the growth and success of graphic design businesses. Participants also stressed the importance of financial literacy and the ability to manage and sustain a business over time. The discontinuation of the Professional Practice course, which previously provided some exposure to entrepreneurial concepts, underscores the need for a more comprehensive approach to entrepreneurship education. Graphic design programmes must evolve to include modules specifically tailored to entrepreneurship, covering topics such as business planning, financial management, and marketing.

Moving forward, educational institutions offering graphic design courses must adapt their curricula to better align with the needs of the industry. By incorporating entrepreneurial education, schools can empower graduates with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive as entrepreneurs in the graphic design field. This new insight underscores the importance of reimagining graphic design education to foster a new generation of entrepreneurial graphic designers in South Africa.

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Tumelo Rasedile is a seasoned graphic design lecturer with over 15 years of experience at the Tshwane University of Technology in the Faculty of Arts and Design, where he also serves as the Entrepreneurship and Work Integrated Learning Coordinator. He is committed to imparting design principles, fostering creativity, and encouraging critical thinking among his students. His teaching philosophy emphasises a hands-on, collaborative learning environment that inspires students to explore innovative solutions and remains attuned to industry trends and advancements in technology. Tumelo has presented numerous papers at both local and international conferences, showcasing his dedication to advancing design education and practice. Through his role as coordinator, he bridges the gap between academia and industry, ensuring that students gain practical experience and entrepreneurial skills essential for their future careers.