



south african
cultural observatory



A preliminary Audit/Overview of the Higher Education and Training Programmes for Language Practitioners

Submitted to: Department of Sports, Arts and Culture | **Submitted by:** Nelson Mandela University





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Abbreviations

AAUSC	American Association of University Supervisors, Coordinators and Directors of Foreign Languages Programmes
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
ASEP	Australian Standards for Editing Practice
BPO	Business Process Outsourcing
CASE	Council of Australian Societies of Editors
CAT	Computer Applications Technology
CBE	Council for the Built Environment
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CPD	Continuing professional development
CRL	Cultural, Religious and Linguistic
CSA	Cultural Satellite Account
CUT	Central University of Technology
DPWI	Department of Public Works and Infrastructure
DSAC	Department of Sport, Artis and Culture
DUT	Durban University of Technology
EAC	Editors' Association of Canada
ECML	European Centre for Modern Language
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
ELO	Early Learning Organisation
ELT	English Language Teaching
EOL	Economics of Language
ETHCOM	Ethics Committee
EU	European Union
FIPLV	International Federation of Language Teacher Associations
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GVA	Gross Value Added
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HLT	Human Language Technology
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
IB	International Business
ICT	Information, and Communications Technology
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IO	Input-Output
IPEd	Institute of Professional Editors
ISCO	International Standard Classification of Occupations
KWF	Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino
LACS	Language Associations and Collaborative Support

LL	Linguistic Landscape
LMDSA	Labour Market Dynamics of South Africa
LPC	Legal Practice Council
LPFF	Legal Practitioners Fidelity Fund
LPP	Language Policy and Planning
LSSA	Law Society of South Africa
LTA	Language Teaching Associations
MUT	Mangosuthu University of Technology
MNC	Multinational Corporation
NAPTOSA	National Professional Teachers' Organisation of South Africa
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIDS	National Income Dynamics Study
NLP	Natural Language Processing
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
OQLF	Office québécois de la langue Française
PA	Professional Association
PanSALB	Pan South African Language Board
PDF	Portable Document Format
PRODCO	Professional Development Committee
QLFS	Quarterly Labour Force Survey
RAF	Road Accident Fund
REGCO	Registration Committee
RU	Rhodes University
SA	South Africa
SACE	South African Council for Educators
SACO	South African Cultural Observatory
SADiLaR	South African Centre for Digital Language Resources
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers Union
SALPC	South African Language Practitioners' Council
SAM	Social Accounting Matrix
SAOU	Suid-Afrikaanse Onderwysers Unie
SASL	South African Sign Language
SATI	South African Translators' Institute
SIC	Standard Industrial Classification
SMU	Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University
SNA	System of National Accounts
SPU	Sol Plaatjie University
SU	Stellenbosch University
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology

UCT	University of Cape Town
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UOFS	University of the Free State
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UKZN	University of Kwazulu-Natal
UL	University of Limpopo
UMP	University of Mpumalanga
UP	University of Pretoria
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNIVEN	University of Venda
UniZulu	University of Zululand
Unisa	University of South Africa
USA	United States of America
UWC	University of the Western Cape
VUT	Vaal University of Technology
WIL	Work Integrated Learning
Wits	University of the Witwatersrand
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

Executive summary

This report is the fourth in a series of four interconnected reports. Collectively, these four reports constitute a substantive extension of the original Economics of Language report commissioned by the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO) (Haines & Gouws, 2022), advancing the work from its initial conceptual framing into applied, sector-specific and institutional analysis.

Introduction

PanSALB has been mandated to oversee the implementation of the provisions of the South African Language Practitioners' Council Act of 2014, which includes formally establishing and operating the organization. This necessitates a comprehensive assessment of needs, organizational structure, logistics, costs, and external factors involved in the undertaking. The Act mandates the establishment of the South African Language Practitioners' Council, with the objective of regulating the training, accreditation, and oversight of language practitioners, as well as setting standards for quality in translation and interpretation.

The Council must be operationalized in an efficient and cost-effective manner, requiring the development of a detailed business plan and supporting documentation. It is imperative to identify and define potential revenue streams. Additionally, consideration must be given to how the revised and potentially more business-oriented PanSALB will integrate into the relevant value chains or ecosystem.

Given these challenges, a comprehensive audit of tertiary training programmes for language practitioners is essential to:

- Identify the needs in society and the market-place
- Assess the adequacy of existing programmes in relation to these needs
- Identify alignment with industry needs and multilingual policy objectives
- Highlight geographic, linguistic, and content-related gaps
- Develop recommendations for accreditation and programme expansion
- Determine to what extent the curricula incorporate relevant language ISO Standards

By identifying key gaps and recommending a structured approach to education, accreditation, and professional development, this study will ensure that language practitioners receive training that is recognised, standardised, and aligned with industry demands.

Purpose of the Report

This research report conducted an initial evaluation of higher education programmes available for language practitioners in South Africa.

This exercise required the cooperation of DSAC and PanSALB officials, Institutions of Higher Learning, LP Students and any partnering agency in the location of relevant material, which may not be otherwise accessible.

Objectives:

The key objectives of this report are:

- **Assessment of Educational Needs**
 - Refine the educational needs of language practitioners based on prior survey results
 - Analyse the offerings of SAQA-accredited higher education institutions and their alignment with the identified needs
 - Conduct a gap analysis of training and accreditation.
- **Evaluation of Existing Training Programmes**
 - Identify and catalogue tertiary education programmes for language practitioners.
 - Assess the adequacy of current offerings in terms of curriculum, specialisation, and practical skills training
 - Evaluate whether training programmes meet industry demands and align with multilingual policy objectives
 - Analyse the extent of geographic accessibility to training programmes across South Africa.

The need for this report

Despite the importance of language services in a multilingual country like South Africa, there no clear framework ensuring that tertiary education programmes equip language practitioners with the necessary skills.

Many practitioners enter the industry with qualifications that may not be recognised, standardised, or aligned with industry demands, leading to inconsistencies in professional standards and employability.

This study follows from prior research on language practitioners' knowledge and capacities and will provide a structured review of tertiary education and training. By understanding how well current training meets the demands of the language economy, this report will provide a roadmap for strengthening education pathways and enhancing professional development opportunities.

The report:

- Examines existing tertiary education programmes to determine their scope, accessibility, and effectiveness in the light of the identified needs
- Evaluates the alignment between training curricula and industry needs
- Identifies gaps in the geographic distribution of programmes, language focus, and certification pathways
- Makes recommendations on accreditation, expansion, and standardisation to ensure a coherent and industry-aligned training landscape.

By addressing these concerns, this study inform policy development and provides a structured approach to improving education and training for language practitioners.

Key Findings of the Report

This report, the fourth in a series of interconnected research outputs, marks a significant transition in the Economics of Language (EOL) research trajectory. While previous reports established the conceptual framing and mapped the macro-economic scale of South Africa's language sector, Report 4 provides an applied, institutional analysis focused on the higher education and training landscape. Collectively, these reports constitute a substantive extension of the original work commissioned by the South African Cultural Observatory (SACO), moving from system-level scoping to the granular evaluation of the human and professional capacity required to activate South Africa's linguistic potential.

The Policy and Legislative Mandate

South Africa's language economy is anchored in a progressive 1996 Constitution that recognizes 12 official languages, including South African Sign Language (SASL), and mandates "parity of esteem" for all.

This constitutional foundation is supported by the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) Act of 1995 and the Use of Official Languages Act of 2012, which together establish the statutory basis for multilingual governance.

A central pillar of this framework is the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) Act of 2014. This Act represents a strategic institutional innovation, tasking the SALPC with the professional regulation, accreditation, and oversight of language practitioners. This report is necessitated by the requirement to operationalise the Council, which demands a comprehensive audit of tertiary training to ensure that practitioners are trained to recognized, standardized levels that align with global benchmarks and domestic industry demands.

The Crisis of Fragmentation and Administrative Invisibility

Despite a robust legislative environment, the language sector suffers from structural fragmentation and "administrative invisibility". Earlier EOL reports identified that while the language economy produces approximately R10,3 billion in Gross Value Added (GVA) and employs roughly 66 000 people, it remains disorganized, with duplicated efforts and a lack of unified professional coordination.

This fragmentation has resulted in a significant "alignment gap" between university curricula and the practical requirements of the modern workplace. Many practitioners enter the industry with qualifications that lack formal professional recognition or the specific technical skills required for the digital language economy. Furthermore, the lack of a consolidated, practitioner-focused dataset makes it difficult for policymakers to track employment outcomes or identify regional and linguistic shortages.

The Purpose and Scope of the Audit

The primary purpose of this report is to conduct an initial evaluation of higher education programmes available to language practitioners in South Africa. To move beyond anecdotal evidence, this study assesses the offerings of SAQA-accredited institutions and evaluates their alignment with societal needs and multilingual policy objectives.

The audit focuses on five key areas of concern:

- **Mechanical and Functional Competence:** Addressing the reported lack of mastery over basic grammar and editing skills even among degree-holders.
- **Digital and AI Literacy:** Evaluating how institutions are integrating Human Language Technology (HLT), machine translation, and AI verification into their curricula.
- **Business and Entrepreneurial Capacity:** Recognizing that a high proportion of practitioners operate as SMMEs or freelancers without formal training in pricing, contracting, or project management.
- **Domain-Specific Specialisation:** Identifying the shortage of practitioners qualified for technical fields such as law, health, and engineering, particularly in indigenous languages.
- **Work-Integrated Learning (WIL):** Assessing the availability of structured internships and mentorship pathways to bridge the transition from education to professional practice.

Educational Trends and Labour Market Dynamics

The report draws on data indicating that while **humanities and language graduates** often face higher levels of short-term unemployment (between 10–15%) compared to STEM graduates, their long-term absorption into the labour market is strong, with employment rates converging toward 90–97% after seven years.

This suggests that language qualifications possess inherent value, but there is a distinct "conversion lag" where graduates require extended periods to translate academic knowledge into employable professional capability.

Moreover, the audit highlights a foundational literacy crisis, noting that approximately 80% of Grade 4 learners in South Africa are unable to read for meaning in any language. This failure at the foundational level creates a "vicious cycle" that impacts the quality of students entering tertiary institutions and, eventually, the professional sector.

Structure and Objectives of Report 4

This report is divided into two primary sections. Section A provides the theoretical review and methodology, positioning the study within the broader EOL policy trajectory. It reviews the challenges facing universities internationally and locally, including the need for a shift from traditional degrees to a model of lifelong learning and digital competence.

Section B delivers the core Needs Assessment and recommendations. It synthesizes insights from an online survey and 44 qualitative interviews with academics, practitioners, and government officials. This section provides a consolidated gap analysis and proposes a recalibrated curriculum architecture built on five pillars: functional mechanics, digital integration, entrepreneurship, interdisciplinary specialisation, and experiential learning.

Chapter 1: Theory Review

This chapter examines the challenges facing universities internationally and in South Africa, specifically regarding the need for more dynamic and inclusive learning programs. It identifies a common divide between language teaching and academic theory, which often diminishes the

professional status of language acquisition. The review argues for a paradigm shift toward lifelong learning and the integration of "soft skills" like intercultural understanding and problem-solving. Furthermore, it stresses that digital competence for both academics and students is essential for navigating the globalized, technology-driven workforce.

Chapter 2: Methodology and Research Methods

This section outlines the mixed-method research approach used to assess the knowledge and capacities of language practitioners. The research design combined policy reviews, desktop research, and field-based qualitative data collection through semi-structured stakeholder interviews and online surveys. The study employed descriptive and thematic analysis, supported by AI tools for data mining, to identify patterns, risks, and opportunities within the language economy. The ultimate goal was to create a credible, evidence-based database system for professional recognition and sectoral coordination.

Chapter 3: Policy Context and Background

This chapter situates the report within South Africa's multilingual constitutional framework, which recognizes 12 official languages and mandates linguistic equality. It discusses the legislative foundations of the sector, focusing on the SALPC Act of 2014 as a strategic instrument for transitioning the profession into a formal statutory regulatory model. The chapter also highlights the foundational role of education policy in shaping long-term professional sustainability and the importance of linguistic redress for indigenous languages. It concludes that an integrated approach to rights, regulation, and infrastructure positions South Africa as a global innovator.

Chapter 4: Key Issues Identified in EOL Reports 1, 2 & 3

This chapter synthesizes the findings of the first three reports, noting that the language economy generates approximately R10.3 billion in GVA but remains disorganized and "administratively invisible". Key challenges identified include sector fragmentation, inconsistent professional standards, and the rapid disruption caused by AI and digital tools. The reports highlight the urgent need for a national practitioner database to provide quality assurance and public trust. They also call for better coordination between academia and the private sector to empower indigenous languages and enhance economic competitiveness.

Chapter 5: Assessment of Educational Needs

This chapter evaluates the alignment between tertiary training and the professional requirements of the industry, identifying a significant "alignment gap". While university programs provide strong theoretical foundations, graduates often lack applied technical competence in digital tools, domain-specific terminology, and business literacy. The analysis reveals a "conversion lag" where language graduates face higher short-term unemployment before eventually achieving stable long-term employment. The chapter concludes that the sector suffers from fragmented accreditation pathways and uneven integration of practical skills, requiring a more coordinated national audit.

Chapter 6: Online Survey Review

This brief section provides an analysis of survey data regarding existing training programs and their alignment with industry requirements and ISO standards. Although there were few

respondents the data does offer insight into gaps in regional availability and linguistic specialization to enhance programme relevance and accessibility.

Chapter 7: Insights From Qualitative Interviews

Based on interviews with 44 academics and practitioners, this chapter describes the quality of language education as being in a state of "extreme distress". It highlights a foundational literacy crisis where 80% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning, leading to a cycle of professional incompetence at higher levels. Stakeholders emphasize that university graduates often lack basic mechanical accuracy and "business language" proficiency. The SALPC is envisioned as the primary body to address these gaps through mandatory CPD, unified accreditation, and the destruction of "institutional silos".

Chapter 8: Policy Implications and Recommendations

This chapter proposes a recalibrated curriculum architecture centred on five pillars: functional mechanics, digital integration, entrepreneurship, specialization, and work-integrated learning. It argues that mechanical precision and AI verification skills must be defined as core graduate attributes to prepare practitioners for the digital language economy. The recommendations call for mandatory Continuing Professional Development (CPD) cycles and the operationalization of professional regulation. Additionally, it advocates for a coordinated national dataset to track employment trends and identify regional or linguistic shortages.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The final chapter establishes a national baseline and identifies priority areas for future research, such as longitudinal labour-market tracking and economic impact studies. It highlights the need for research into the commercial viability of indigenous language economies and the impact of AI on professional identity and pricing. The conclusion also stresses the importance of international benchmarking to inform the development of the SALPC regulatory regime. Ultimately, it frames language not just as a cultural asset, but as strategic economic infrastructure essential for inclusive growth.

Key Recommendations

The key recommendations of the report focus on transitioning South Africa's language sector into a formalised, professionalised, and technologically integrated industry. These recommendations are primarily structured around a recalibrated curriculum architecture, regulatory reform through the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC), and data-driven coordination.

Recalibrated Curriculum Architecture

The report advocates for a five-pillar framework to reform higher education and training:

- **Functional Mechanics:** Explicitly define and assess advanced grammar, syntax, and editing as core graduate attributes to ensure practitioners can produce error-free professional text.

- **Digital and AI Integration:** Formally embed Human Language Technology (HLT), computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, machine translation post-editing, and AI verification/linguistic auditing into standard curricula.
- **Entrepreneurial Capacity:** Integrate business skills—such as pricing literacy, contract negotiation (NDAs, SLAs), tender writing, and digital portfolio development—to support the high proportion of practitioners working as freelancers or SMMEs.
- **Interdisciplinary Specialisation:** Create pathways for discipline-specific literacy (e.g., law, health, STEM) and develop technical terminology in indigenous languages through inter-faculty collaboration.
- **Work-Integrated Learning (WIL):** Formally credit and quality-assure structured internships (8–12 weeks minimum) and mentorship pipelines as essential bridges between academic study and professional practice.

Regulatory and Institutional Reform

To move from an association-based model to a statutory regulatory model, the report recommends:

- **Competency-Based Accreditation:** The SALPC should define clear practitioner categories (e.g., translator, terminologist) with specific competency benchmarks linked to NQF qualification levels.
- **Mandatory Continuous Professional Development (CPD):** Regulate mandatory CPD cycles for accreditation renewal, including micro-credentials in digital technologies and specialized terminology.
- **Standardised Registration:** Distinguish qualified professionals from "hobbyists" through a national registry that enforces ethical codes of conduct and professional standards.

Data Coordination and Sector Intelligence

The report identifies "administrative invisibility" as a major hurdle and recommends:

- **National Dataset Integration:** Develop a coordinated data framework in collaboration with SAQA, DHET, and Statistics South Africa to map training volumes, track employment absorption, and identify regional or linguistic shortages.
- **Open-Access Collaboration:** Eradicate the "silo mentality" by creating open-access national terminology and data banks to ensure linguistic resources developed at specific universities are available nationwide.

"We are lagging significantly behind [in digitisation]... one of the main reasons for that is that we have silo mentality... they don't make it available in an open access platform for all the other universities." — respondent 35.

Strengthening the Foundational Pipeline

While focused on professional training, the report emphasizes advocacy in foundational areas to support the future workforce:

- **Mechanical Literacy Standards:** Promote explicit literacy standards in early education to address the "80% unable to read for meaning" crisis.
- **Indigenous Language Resources:** Develop learning resources and integrate South African languages into digital ecosystems to prevent technological marginalisation.
- **Plain Language Frameworks:** Support the use of plain language in public communication and business documentation to ensure economic inclusion for SMMEs and rural communities.

Conclusion

The findings of this report advocate for a paradigm shift. Language should no longer be viewed merely as a cultural asset or a remedial "add-on," but as strategic economic infrastructure essential for social justice and global competitiveness. By formalizing the SALPC, standardizing Continuous Professional Development (CPD), and embedding digital and business literacy into tertiary training, South Africa can move from a fragmented landscape to a coherent national framework. This report serves as the strategic bridge between current policy intentions and the future professional implementation required to drive inclusive economic participation in South Africa's language economy.

Section A

Overview and Report Context

Chapter 1 Literature Theory Review

1.1. Introduction

The teaching of languages within leading universities has experienced substantial reshaping in recent years. Among the key aspects are the following:

Firstly, there is the need to respond to a shift away from cognitive to experiential learning. This includes the increased realization that language acquisition is a complex process. Apart from comprehension there is a need for more in the way of emotional engagement and socialization. An experiential approach is vital if authentic language proficiency is to be attained.

Secondly, there are encouraging signs that universities are addressing structural constraints such as insufficient contact time and a low degree of socialization into the language via the relevant communities. This entails a reform of teaching practices to allow for more reflexive and conducive settings for language learning.

Thirdly, with the increasing digitalization of learning at universities, there is an emerging role for literature and multi-literacy approaches to help situate and negotiate these new technologies and prepare learners to interact within a complex and inter-connected global world

Fourthly, universities are under increased pressure to emphasize multilingualism and global competencies as educational goals for language learners. Such competencies will include the conservation of linguistic diversity and ecological resources. In the fifth place, HEIs are also encouraged to include decolonial pedagogical approaches that place more emphasis on critical engagement and value locally derived practices. In turn, such approaches look to feed into more incorporative models of global citizenship.

International Competencies, Globalization and Languages

A 2019 World Bank Report (Joynes, Rossignoli, & Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019) about 21st Century Skills with reference to middle-income and developing countries, underlines the diversity in definition of such skills. Nevertheless, synthesis studies indicate a coherent set of skills, competencies and attributes. These can be grouped into five key areas:

1. Communication skills.
2. Collaborative skills including management of social interaction and group activities.
3. Individual learning approaches, including critical thinking, metacognition and new skills acquisition.
4. Individual autonomy, including flexibility, adaptability and entrepreneurship.
5. ICT and digital literacy.

In addition, several core knowledge areas are identified: Literacy; Numeracy and STEM-associated knowledge fields. Furthermore, personal attributes central to a fulfilling life include physical well-being and personal health; social and emotional skills; social citizenship and cultural and creative expression (Joynes et al 2019).

The need for the above skills is clear for those economies experiencing rapid development, such as the East Asian countries where labour markets are increasingly requiring a workforce with non-routine cognitive skills as well as inter-personal skills. Demographic projections indicate that the labour force will decrease in Central Asia, China, Europe and North America and high-income countries in East Asia.

By contrast the workforce should increase in sub-Saharan Africa. One scenario is an anticipated global shortage of high-skilled workers and a surplus of low-skilled workers mainly found in developing countries (ibid.). The growing impact on the use of AI in the global economy is a new imperative to consider. The findings also suggest that the fostering and delivery of 21st century skills in development contexts are seen as limited.

The report notes that education systems are confronted with significant challenges in aligning curriculum, teaching practices and assessment with 21st century skills. Reform efforts should include more emphasis on assessment, and more defined models of skills progression to support curriculum and teacher training (Joynes, Rossignoli, & Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019).

More research is required on the effectiveness of interventions for developing 21st century skills. Furthermore, only modest evidence of ICT uses for developing 21st Century Skills in only three out of 18 countries, namely, South Africa, Russia, Thailand (Joynes, Rossignoli, & Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019).

Going forward, the report advocates stresses that alignment between curriculum, assessment, and pedagogy for appropriate 21st Century Skills teaching. Reforms should capture the nature of the skills and develop authentic assessments. Indeed, systemic reforms should operationalize assessment as a strategy to align educational components with 21st Century goals (ibid).

A more recent study by Scheng (2026) discusses the implications of the emergence of new forms of global in-depth collaboration in the realm of industrial production. These new requirements for technical and vocational universities are now a matter of urgency. Foreign language education is under pressure to focus more directly on value reconstruction, raising awareness of the significance of students' international human capital and enhancing their international competence.

These new emphases and interventions will facilitate the creation of global vocational identities and reinforce the coupling between the respective education and industrial systems, thus contributing in and benefiting from the internationalization of vocational education. Vocationally oriented colleges and technical universities through innovative language planning, content creation, subject construction and functional expansion will be better placed to foster multi-dimensional coordination and help open new paths for reform of foreign language education (Sheng, 2026).

An article by Liu and Pizzi (2016) questions the conventional wisdom that languages, as ethnic markets, helps build communities with shared preferences and strong social networks. In turn ethnolinguistic homogeneity underpins growth. In contrast, this study critiques this conception of language as a 'cultural marker', maintaining that language can also be a practical means of communication: People can become multilingual and second languages are relatively easily learned.

Therefore, the authors argue, language boundaries are not congruent with ethnic boundaries nor static. If this is true then the purported advantages of ethnolinguistic homogeneity should apply to countries with large populations of non-native speakers proficient in official languages. Through a quantitative study the authors find that countries with exogenously high levels of heterogeneity can bypass the 'growth tragedy' through endogenous teaching of the official language in schools (Liu & Pizzi, 2018).

An edited volume by Hampton and Salin (2022) considers the question of innovative language teaching and learning at university level, and the means to facilitate the transition from and to higher education.

The papers in this work reflect the positive choice to be in transition, seen as both an engaged approach to being a linguist at a time when the discipline urgently needs re-orientation, and as a fundamental, 'signature' quality of foreign language learning itself, with its dialectical motion across cultures and forms. They also tackle the current defining topics in 21st century higher education: technology enhanced learning, employability, wellbeing, engagement, and innovation. This set of imperatives present their own distinct challenges as far as facilitating transition is concerned (Hampton & Salin, 2022).

There seems to be uneven response currently to the provision of appropriate foreign language training appropriate to global trade in universities in differing national economies. Among the leading HEIs are those located in China. A recent study by Chen (2024) argues the urgency for higher education in China to undertake interdisciplinary teaching to develop equivalent core competencies for students to respond to the dynamics of rapidly changing global trade.

The study examines the core competencies of foreign language learners in application-oriented universities focusing on finance and economics fields, and to create a frame of four-tier competencies, namely language proficiency; key competencies; interdisciplinary integration; and expanded competencies. The framework in turn underlines that interdisciplinary foreign language education in application-oriented institutions should prioritize industry needs and carry out problem-solving in interdisciplinary integration, to enhance talent development in structured pathways (Chen, 2024).

A case study by Zimotti, Shea and Frances (2025) focuses on the challenges of World Language General Education programmes across HEIs in the United States. The key question is whether these programmes should maintain the current course. The study considers the outcomes of a new model for World Languages General Education introduced into a large US public university (Iowa State University) and examine how the implementation impacts on enrolment across language programmes and the differing levels of language study.

The new model enables students to select from three pathways to complete the World Language General Education requirement, with each pathway incorporating select combinations of language/s and culture courses. The findings show shifts in enrolment trends across languages and levels in the operationalization of the new model, especially a decline in students taking intermediate-level courses and opting for certain of the other pathways (Zimotti, Shea, & Frances, 2025)

Key findings from the case study are as follows.

Firstly, the authors point out that maintaining the status quo is increasingly problematic and curriculum administrators and teachers should adapt for change.

Secondly, adaptation entails a rethinking of a 'one-size fits all' model and outcomes for the applicable GE Language Requirements. Shifts in enrolment patterns at US HEIs have seen the growth in transfer students, non-traditional students, and more students and parents who view the purpose of higher education as a direct route to employment.

Thus, the Iowa State University's Pathways model takes cognizance of the reality that students have differing goals vis-à-vis World Language experiences and allows them scope for selecting an option that best suits them (Zimotti, Shea, & Frances, 2025).

In the shift to an extensively inter-connected world, Nopas & Kerdsoomboon (2024) maintain, global competence in teacher education is crucial. In identifying global competences in education practices, key requirements include the importance of understanding diverse languages, cultures, histories, and the geography of such engagement, in developing inter-cultural empathy and understanding. Among the challenges in fostering global competence within relevant educational systems are curriculum constraints and opportunities for experiential learning.

The need to integrate cross-cultural content into curricula and investing in the professional development were stresses as well as the development of partnerships with reputable international educational institutions. By systematically responding to such imperatives educators and policymakers could contribute to more inclusive and globally oriented educational systems (Nopas & Kerdsoomboon, 2024).

A recent study (Montenegro et al 2023), a academics at a leading Mexican university languages centre raises the importance of professionalization including an increased proficiency in languages for academics. They stress that the teaching of English as a second language is vital for professionalization in Mexico and by implication other established and emerging economies. English, it is argued, is closely entwined with the expectations of the international population, as well as educational demands, research and internationalization.

The most important task of every professor (academic) in Mexico, they believe, is to surmount obstacles in the personal and professional field which 'prevent them from projecting their improvement'. Thus, learning a language and/or developing an existing expertise has a significant influence on those differing fields that enable the development and capitalization of skills and cumulative academic endeavours to transform the process of language acquisition into a 'professionalizing transforming axis'.

There are four key qualities that characterize the professional, namely speed, accuracy, precision and care in the preparation and delivery of each project. In a university institution setting, learning a language entails more than an educational experience, 'but it can very well be the solution for obtaining, managing, and using information, the link of knowledge, and update of the same, in addition to the investigation and dissemination of all professional activity' (Montenegro, Gutiérrez Vázquez, Castillo, & de León Sangabriel, 2023).

Yelubayeva (et al 2025) outline the main challenges in language education in Kazakhstan and consider the implications for sustainable development. With its blend of languages,

Kazakhstan's multilingual terrain provides significant challenges and opportunities for language education (LE) is not without substantive obstacles.

Other challenges include curriculum inflexibility, scarce resources, unsatisfactory teacher training and low levels of student engagement. As the country aims for more effective integration into the global economy, the pivotal role of effective LE is stressed.

The research results reveal the need for a wholesale overhaul of language education in Kazakhstan, to contribute to the country's sustainable development goals. A macro tool for the process is UNESCO's Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) methodology, aiming to provide learners with the skills to grasp the social, cultural, economic and environmental effects of their actions, on local and global levels.

Language education is an appropriate medium for this. This in turn enables them to act sustainably in complex settings. Unlike other subjects with specific content to convey, language teaching (LT) is able to fold in a wide range of subject matter/topics. The authors argue that integrating environmental such as recycling, sustainable energy and animal welfare into language education, including instruction in a second language can foster learners' awareness and encourage participation (Yelubayeva, Kahmidova, Berkinbayeva, & Avakova, 2025)

This study by Van Gorp et al (2024) examines the value placed by undergraduate students on proficiency in languages other than English in terms of their personal interests, major/s and career planning.

The research findings show that students prioritize personal interests followed by career plans and the major/s studies. The study results also suggest that institutions should play a lead role in the emphasizing the learning of languages. Furthermore, language programmes should listen to students' voices and help them link clearly their academic majors, their future career/s, and study plans as well as their personal interests. HEIs must send a 'clear message' regarding the importance of language learning and indeed, raise the bar for language learning at institutional level (Van Gorp, Heidrich Uebel, & Murphy, 2024).

Sholihah et al (2024) via a literature review, stress that modern globalization has highlighted the importance of foreign language learning, where the need to communicate across cultures and participate actively in global job markets is vital for personal and national interests. For individuals it is imperative to master more than one language to ensure competitiveness and relevance in the global economy and markets.

Apart from economic benefits, learning a foreign language contributes to personal development including problem-solving ability, improved memory and individual creativity. At the same time, foreign language acquisition presents a range of obstacles. A lack of exposure to and practices with native speakers can compound the problem of achieving fluency in the foreign language/s chosen.

To mitigate this, structured support, access to cost-effective learning resources and the focused utilization of new technology and innovative approaches are mandatory. Technology provides interactive digital platforms and educational resources to assist the learning process, reducing costs and making it more flexible. Universities must look to play a more direct and reflexive role in the facilitation and accreditation of such endeavours (Sholihah , Imelda, & Annas, 2024).

Darling (2024) via a Finnish university case study, maintains that linguistic diversity associated with international student mobility in non-anglophone universities, is often undercut by tensions between the national language/s and English as a 'lingua franca'.

There is an accompanying emphasis on the use of international student languages as resources for the learning process. There is also evidence that international student languages are recognized in teaching practices, accompanied by concerns over maintaining the national language/s.

This has created some language tensions but, in this study, these emerged along disciplinary lines with more teaching of science subjects usually conducted in English; the concerns were generally centred in the Faculties of Arts and Humanities, and the Educational Sciences. However, as the author points out, this issue tends to obscure the role that international student languages can play in teaching and learning situations. A further tension was the reluctance of international students and staff to learn Finnish (Darling, 2024).

1.1.1. English as a 'Global' Language

This sub-section notes the debates, complexity and increased use of English within the global economy, and its shift internationally to a form of international lingua franca. Its increasing importance within the university sector globally, and its centrality to international academic knowledge production, and the internationalization drive of universities worldwide, is noted.

Such developments have extensive implications to current and future teaching of English and the question of global languages more generally in South Africa, and suggest future curriculum reform and extensions thereof need to be considered for the country's universities to maintain their international competitiveness, and play a more active and reflexive role in contributing to South African industrial and economic development and outreach Africa, and globally.

Ricento (2012) comments on a concerning tendency for the lack of analytical specificity in the invocation of terms and associated discourses such as neoliberalism and globalization in the sub-field of language policy. This practice, the author argues, results in disputes and contrary positions on vital issues where there should be more consensus. There should be more attempt at 'consilience', biologist E.O. Wilson's notion which sees principles from differing disciplines fusing to form a 'comprehensive theory'.

The author argues that the 'lack of sophistication' in political economy inhibits the ability of language policy scholars to address critically the impact of neoliberalism on language policies and practices, globally, including in high-income economies. It also undercuts efforts to understand how globalization interacts with national economies, and the associated trajectory and fortunes of languages. Achieving such understanding might provide a starting point for new research directions in the field of language policy and planning (Ricento, 2012).

The author contends that English is 'not the inherent hegemon, nor the de facto oppressor, nor the ticket to social or economic mobility, nor the crucial factor in promoting a global demos', that is asserted by a variety of scholars in the field of language policy.

While there remains distinct value in the analyses of such scholars, what is missing is 'an overarching framework' to conceptualize English as resource for social mobility and a constraining force of local development, particularly in low-income economies. Such views are better

examined and substantiated via a critical analysis of neoliberal economic policies and its associated values, emphases and effects on the position, modes of learning and the utility of languages, including in the knowledge economy sectors.

The author calls for a more substantive political economy approach in the field of language policy and planning. In such an exercise, the effects of economic systems and processes and their interaction with national and global political systems and planning on the status, value and utility of minority and local languages and their community of speakers will be better understood for more considered corrective interventions. This will help provide the requisite evidence that economic and social development are reinforced by investment in local cultural and linguistic resources, most particularly in low-income countries, many of which are in Africa, and which often have high linguistic diversity (Ricento, 2012).

Salikolo Mufwene (2008), in a Chicago University research report, outlines and examines his misgivings about a range of linguistics publications on language endangerment and the impact globally of the English language. He argues that a range of scholars writing on these linked subjects, have tended to oversimplify reality, depicting globalization as a process that (i) renders the world 'more and more uniform by the world-wide diffusion of intellectual, linguistic, military, technological, and other cultural products' and (ii) is associated with Western countries such as the USA and the United Kingdom (2005: 1).

In addition, a 'special metalanguage' has come to the fore, in which languages are represented as agents, and the speakers of endangered or dead languages as no more than victims. Part of the discourse has been about 'language wars' as well as the depiction of English as a 'killer language'.

However, as Mufwene points out, the distinction between vernacular and lingua franca functions of languages has been neglected in matters of language competition, although it is crucial in determining whether a language is endangered. Moreover, while the literature has generally emphasized the cultural impoverishment of the relevant sections of the population there is little formal evaluation of the losses and gains among the populations in question who have adapted to 'changing socio-economic ecologies'.

The author contends that language competition is more locally grounded than linguists have portrayed it, and the fact that English in comparative settings does not function as a vernacular, has sidelined it from those spaces contested by indigenous vernaculars. This in turn underpins his general thesis that European colonial languages are generally no threat to the indigenous languages of Africa and Asia.

And in the 21st century the large transnational corporations that inform regional and world-wide globalization of an economic kind 'do not make themselves missionaries of the world languages, because they believe in using the most profitable strategies for the most benefits'. Often this approach means using the language of the local workforce and market, except in the high managerial positions.

The author underlines the need to distinguish between language use in professional domains and vernacular language practice. He argues that most English and French users are non-native speakers, who are the prime movers in the spread of these languages (Mufwene, 2008).

Chinese academic, Haoning Zang (2024) explores the ‘profound impact’ of English language development in the field of international education, with reference to its roles in culture, talent development, cross-cultural exchange, and collaborative initiatives.

Zhang notes that English functions not only as a universal means of communication but also promotes cross-cultural understanding and facilitates global cultural exchange.

Secondly, as an international lingua franca, English contributes to the inculcation of talents required in the global workforce and thus enables individuals to flourish in transnational settings.

Thirdly, English is central in cross-cultural communication and cooperation, brokering effective collaboration among persons from diverse linguistic backgrounds, enhancing the implementation of international educational programmes.

Fourthly, English is a gateway to international resources (Zhang, 2024).

1.1.2. Developing Economies, Global Languages and English

A University of Edinburgh research paper on the relationship between internationalization, HE and the growing demand for English by Galloway, Kriukow & Numajiri (2017) examines the increasing number of universities globally offering programmes in English despite having a non-anglophone teaching staff and student body. More specifically EMI (English as a medium of instruction) has become a growing global trend.

In turn this has implication for the use of English as a lingua franca in academia and for teaching practice. The study examines the EMI phenomenon in HE in Japan and China. It is found that English is used more in Japan than China with students’ attitudes on the use of the students’ mother tongue also differing. The report also finds that the teacher’s recourse to the mother tongue, which the authors view as a valuable pedagogical device, is perceived by students as a possible indication of a lack of proficiency in English. The study also reveals that the teacher’s use of the mother tongue, which they see as a useful pedagogic tool, is seen by students as a possible sign of a lack of proficiency in English. The study also questions whether approaching EMI in a monolingual fashion is the most suitable way forward (Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri, 2017)

Staff and students at the Japanese and Chinese universities surveyed, consider EMI is a valuable way for students to improve their overall proficiency in English and thus gain access to cutting-edge knowledge. In addition, staff feel that it is reflective of national government policies to internationalize and enhance the overall competitiveness of the institution in question. The report concludes that the global EMI trend will accelerate, but that the increase in the quantity of the provision should be accompanied by an emphasis on improving its quality (Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri, 2017).

1.1.3. Curriculum Dynamics

Reyes et al (2024) in a study drawing from the experience of the Philippines in foreign language acquisition, point to the importance of ELT (English language teaching) in equipping local students with requisite skills to communicate in an interconnected and globalized world.

Via an empirical study they investigate the impact of integrating global problems and trends into English language classes. The responses of their student participants, reveal that the incorporation of such global topics enhance language proficiency, critical thinking, inter-cultural awareness, motivation and engagement among students.

Overall, the integration of global issues and trends into the relevant curriculum had a transformative impact on students' language skills and their understanding of the world. In turn, it is argued that the incorporation of such global matters into English Language education can help promote global citizenship and enhance communication skills (Reyes, Almazan, & Cababaro, 2024).

Another Southeast Asian study by Butarbutar et al (2025) discusses the use of an innovative pedagogical model, OCC (Online Collaborative Curriculum) in Indonesia, to integrate local wisdom and the creative economy into English language education in rural areas. The study examines teachers' perceptions and the impact of OCC in business and economics courses.

The researchers find that the integration of local wisdom and the creative economy in OCC, is an innovative approach to ESP teaching for business and economics courses. The curriculum allows teachers to link local potential with international business competencies. The inherent flexibility and cost-efficiency of OCC would appear to have had positive effects on language acquisition, economic knowledge, social interaction and cultural preservation (Butarbutar, Sauhenda, Indriyani, & Wakerkwa, 2025).

1.1.4. Africa – Comparative Perspectives

This sub-section compactly considers select international and African research on the question of language proficiency in English and related global trading languages and associated university programmes.

Mtawa et al (2025) argue that to move towards transformative HE for sustainable development in Africa, the role of language(s) is vital. They look to highlight the role of language-in-education policies and practices and how they might work to help or frustrate such ambitions. They stress the importance of taking a capabilities approach (CA) in such an exercise, arguing that this provides the wherewithal to extend the scope of current debates in Africa and beyond, regarding the value of individually named languages.

Such an approach will also help improve the understanding of the impact of language attitudes, policies and practices across a multidisciplinary set of capabilities. They note that existing research both about language(s)-in-HE and about capabilities in HE is weighted towards the South African experience. It is thus imperative to extend the geographical reach of this work. While some similarities across contexts in sub-Saharan Africa are to be expected, different regions and countries, they stress, have their own specific histories.

The authors contend that the CA has the potential to reshape the language-in-education debate, extending it beyond arguments about monolingual hierarchies, to broader conceptual, empirical and transformation study of capabilities in the African HE landscapes. The authors emphasize three capability themes that they consider central for transformative HE, and in which the role of language is central. These are namely (i) epistemic contribution; (ii) affiliation/social relationships; and (iii) community/societal transformation (Mtawa, Ndivo, & Adamson, 2025).

The authors suggest that global languages such as French and particularly English as reinforcing ‘reductive, neoliberal narratives’ in SSA (Mtawa et al 2025: 573). They argue that a capabilities perspective on language(s)-in-HE has the potential to bring the seemingly polarized narratives of the market value of global languages and critical decolonial perspectives into conversation. However, the literature reviewed is largely drawn from sociolinguistics and education fields with no direct recourse to the relevant scholarship from an economics of language perspective (Mtawa, Ndivo, & Adamson, 2025).

Adeoti et al (2024) discuss the central role of language education in driving facilitation international trade, investment and growth in Nigeria, through an examination of the intricate linkages between language, culture and economic development. They point out that English, as Nigeria’s official language is also the global language of business, international communication and education.

Following OECD research, they contend that proficiency in English is fundamental to Nigeria’s economic growth and development. They also stress that French, Mandarin Chinese and Arabic are also important languages for the country’s economic growth. French is the official language for several of Nigeria’s West African neighbours, and Mandarin Chinese is the language of Nigeria’s developing trade partner (China). Arabic is also essential for trade and diplomacy in North Africa and the Middle East.

The authors highlight the importance of language skills in enhancing employability and entrepreneurship and proposes strategies for improving language education. The article also features success stories and provides a roadmap for policymakers, educators and stakeholder to harness the power of language education and propel Nigeria towards economic growth. By prioritizing language education, Nigeria can unlock its economic potential and position itself for sustainable growth. Language skills boost employability and career opportunities in various industries.

Furthermore, employers in Nigeria prioritize language skills, acknowledging their positive effects on business success and global competitiveness. They also note that proficiency in multiple languages sets job seekers apart from candidates who are monolingual. They point out that Nigerian languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are essential for cultural understanding and facilitating local communication. Developing language skills in these languages can thus enhance employability in industries such as tourism, hospitality and customer service (Adeoti et al (2024). To address the language skills gap in Nigeria, sub-national governments, HEIs and related organizations should prioritize language education and training programmes. Language education should focus on fostering proficiency in English, French, Mandarin Chinese, Arabic, and Nigerian languages (Adeoti, Sibibabio, & Baba, 2024).

Nizonkiza and van de Poel (2022) assesses general foreign language proficiency in higher education in respect of the communicative skills required in professional context, with reference to students who have an English major at the University of Burundi. The article examines how students perceive the linguistic challenges of Burundi’s integration into the East African Community (EAC) and looks to delineate students’ potential role in addressing these challenges.

Via a proficiency measure, the Test of English as Foreign Language (TOEFL) questionnaire significant results were generated. Findings showed that (i) the respondents’ proficiency in

English was low with most graduating students at the intermediate level; (ii) skills/components were grasped in the order of grammar, reading comprehension, vocabulary, and listening; (iii) English majors were very aware of the linguistic challenges to be met as well as their role in the country's regional integration into the EAC. The study then considers option for redefining teaching/learning objectives and outcomes to enhance graduates' overall language proficiency and the and the professional roles of future generations of English majors.

Overall, the authors maintain that the results of this study should help outline a framework for capacity building, learning and teaching, which in turn would assist Burundians to become more proficient and communicate more effectively in English. This would thereby enable them to become fully-fledged members of the regional and international community (Nizonkiza & van de Poel, 2022).

West African researcher, Chika Ezeudo (2024) explores the relationship between language proficiency and national development. The author underlines the importance of language proficiency as a critical determinant of educational attainment, economic empowerment and national development outcomes. The study shows that individuals with high language proficiency are more able to access better education and secure higher-paying jobs and thus contribute to economic growth.

Furthermore, countries with high levels of language proficiency are more equipped to participate in the global economy, attract foreign investment and enable sustainable development. In addition, the research emphasizes the significance of language proficiency in promoting social mobility, poverty reduction and the improvement of health outcomes. Policy makers are urged to prioritize language education and training programmes which can promote economic empowerment and sustainable development (Ezeudo, 2024).

Likoko and Wu (2025) examine the foreign language education policies of Tanzania, and their relationship to the development of Chinese language programme in higher education in the country. They note that to date there has been a dearth of studies on this subject most particularly focusing on Tanzania's increasing economic, cultural and political ties with China. The study deals specifically with the effects of policy evolution, institutional dynamics, and resource allocation in determining the efficacy of Chinese language instruction in Tanzanian universities.

The findings show advancements and well as persistent challenges. Resource limitations including modest levels of funding, a shortage of trained teachers, and the unavailability of teaching materials, inhibit the expansion of Chinese language programs. This shows that substantial student interest, maintaining and ensuring quality Chinese language programs remains strongly reliant on policy and institutional support (Likoko & Wu, 2025).

Other findings are that economic incentives constitute the main incentive for 68 % of students surveyed for learning Chinese, suggesting a distinct pragmatic approach to foreign language acquisition. Furthermore, social perceptions on Chinese language learning are mixed, which complicates processes of policy implementation and the operationalization of programmes.

To undergird the sustainability of programmes the authors recommend (i) an increased investment in educator training and curriculum development; and (ii) strategic partnerships with Chinese HEIs to reinforce resource exchange and longer-term collaboration. Overall, by improved alignment of language education policies with national economic and diplomatic

goals will boost Tanzania's global competitiveness and lead to more extensive international engagement (Likoko and Wu 2025).

Moshtari & Safarpour (2024) argue that with the expansion of the boundaries of science with new technologies and global initiatives can be key to helping less developed countries cope with poverty, climate change and educational initiatives. Through a study of low-income economies in East Asia, the researchers identify 12 main challenges which are grouped into categories.

These include (i) an absence of clear policies and guidelines; (ii) inefficient organizational structures for internationalization; (iii) financial, infrastructural, and equipment problems; (iv) weaknesses in scientific, skills, language competences; and cultural differences; (vi) non-reciprocal relationships; and a (vii) brain drain. Strategies regarding the internal and external environments are proposed. Internal strategies for HEIs include the development of coherent policies and visions, planning for the development of human resources, and sustainable budgeting for internationalization programmes.

External strategies emphasize national policy and regulatory reform, as well as interaction and participation in international meetings to expand communication and use the scientific and economic capacities of international agencies and institutions (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2024).

1.1.5. South African Snapshots

Balfour (2006) argues that South African and the United Kingdom make for a quite compelling comparison as both countries respond to pressures for multilingualism and internationalism in the school and higher education systems in differing ways and effects. The author notes that in the 2000s and earlier, the UK and South Africa policy documents on the role and development of languages that were enshrined were met with a certain cynicism by educators and HEI managers. In the UK Case HEI managers were hostile to the limited space accorded to higher education within such documents. In South Africa, he pointed out further, no universities had

"...conceived of foreign languages as part of visions for international development. Portuguese, French, Swahili, and Mandarin Chinese have either been restructured into language schools and diminished or closed (Balfour 2006: 8)".

Overall, in South Africa, the strategic importance of foreign languages for the country, had been shifted to the outskirts of initiatives such as the UKZN language policy, which while purporting to promote multilingualism was in fact actively focused on the development of 'one or other indigenous language and English' (ibid.). And even such active support was largely dependent on the state which the time had 'shown to little interest in taking the matter seriously' (Balfour 2006: 10.).

The author stressed that in KZN there were no clear-cut distinctions between bi- and multilingual groups. This Afrikaans, the various Indian and regional languages (such as Swahili and Portuguese) also needed to be developed and receive due attention. In short, isiZulu and English could not be supported at the expense of these languages (Balfour 2006:10.) (Balfour, 2007).

De Swaan (2023) considers the predicament of South African universities operating in a global context. He points out that at independence the various language groups would not accept any

one group's language as the new national medium. The language constellations of India and the European Union resemble the South African situation. Thus, like India or the European Union, post-apartheid adopted 11 languages on an equal footing. English remained in the lead and in fact expanded, while Afrikaans found itself in the second position.

Other African languages remained primarily as vernaculars. While South African universities continued to teach in either English or Afrikaans, black and coloured students felt excluded from Afrikaans curricula. The author argues that in a more diverse and flexible academic policy, language choices should be made dependent on (i) the relevant level of education; (ii) the academic discipline in question; and (iii) the intended audience. Currently the appropriate choices are mostly determined by the location of decision makers in three-dimensional space.

However, in the current globalized world, English elicits a strong attraction due to the massive numbers of speakers and its far-reaching prestige. At the other end of the scale, local languages can be brought to bear, not only because many students and teachers may feel more at ease with them, as do a range of academics.

At this stage selection and offering of language is not dissimilar to European conditions, where most nations deploy one 'central' language and one 'hyper-central' language. Under these circumstances, there are only two seemingly possible options as South Africa's languages present a particularly complex picture].

For one, there is no single 'national language' to match global English. Moreover, English in South Africa is itself an indigenous language – a home language spoken by a considerable minority, and outside the home by many. By contrast in various regions outside of the anglophone sphere, English is usually the medium of better educated and more cosmopolitan strata and perceived as the language of former colonizers and today's neo-colonial elite.

In South Africa, English is also the language of liberation and of disadvantaged sections of the population (ibid.). Complicating matters further, is that Afrikaans is a minority language is closely associated with the apartheid governments, but it is also a language spoken by large numbers of, often disadvantaged people of colour. Finally, to add one more layer of complexity, nine African languages are also empowered as the official means of communication under the South African constitution and therefore should also have a role in higher education. That said, English is likely to be the main language at South African universities given global emphasis (de Swaan, 2023).

Such complex problems, argues the author, do allow for solutions predicated on a 'few strict principles' (de Swaan 2023: 6. Rather, pragmatic measures should be adopted for the problem and for the time being. There are nevertheless two principles which should be adhered to in South Africa's unequal society. There are (i) equal opportunity in education; and (ii) given South Africa's position in the global community, universities must strive for excellence in teaching and research (de Swaan, 2023).

Ferreira-Meyers & Horne (2017) scrutinise the role of second additional language (i.e. an optional, non-official language) teaching, with reference to French at school level in South Africa. Apart from the fact that certain additional languages reflect minority cultures and communities (such as Greek, Hebrew and Serbian) the authors maintain their actual and potential place lies in the promotion of multilingualism.

The motivations for studying French in South Africa include its exoticism -- a kind of 'linguistic tourism' -- as well as its potential value in various professional settings. The authors question the rationale for this language market, which takes place within a formalized linguistic space, can claim to promote multilingualism within the South African linguistic ecosystem.

They suggest shifting to a more integrative and plurilingual notion of language acquisition to revive and expand the teaching and learning of French as an authentic form of sociolinguistic construction. They stress that teaching French provides ways in which language acquisition can be a 'collaborative and integrative process', leveraging multiple cultural and language resources (Ferreira-Meyers & Horne, 2017).

The authors argue that by being competent in the plurilingual and pluricultural sense, one can amalgamate resources in different languages and variants to solve problems in lesser-known languages. One can become a form of cultural and attentive intermediary or interlocutor in exolingual exchanges as is very much the case in South Africa. This would allow addressing and articulating diverse experiences to shape/transform them into competencies. At present, the research indicates that many of the desired characteristics and capabilities regarding the understanding and implementation of a plurilingual approach to the teaching of the French language in South Africa are not in place and/or activated. This suggests that teacher training programmes should be informed by new skill-acquisition and skill-transmission teaching approaches. A plurilingual teaching and learning capacity requires a mix of scientific, expert and social knowledge, and a reflexive grasp of one's linguistic and cultural environment.

De Vos, M & Riedel, K (2023) Decolonizing and Transforming Curricula for Teaching Linguistics and Language in South Africa: Taking Stock and Charting the Way Forward. Transformation in Higher Education.

This exploratory study aims to provide a compact overview of curriculum transformation of the language disciplines in South Africa in the early 2020s. The authors focus on the underpinnings of existing curricula regarding the teaching of linguistics and language-related disciplines at HEIs in South Africa, against a backdrop of publishing and academic engagement around access to universities.

A purposive study of academics in language and linguistics fields in the country's universities shows some progress in curriculum reform compared to the preceding decade. Generally, practitioners indicate quite substantive changes in the relevant disciplines over time. Also, there appear to have been some distinct achievements in developing broad curricula responses to learner needs which aim to balance the imperative of equipping students with the means of engaging in global conversations while taking due cognizance of the realities of the South African learning environment, the African continent, and the students' experiences (De Vos & Riedel, 2023).

1.2. Challenges for universities (from report 3)

At HEI levels, universities internationally and in South Africa have come in for criticism in recent decades for a not exploring more inclusive, incorporative means of providing dynamic learning programmes, and thinking more innovatively about the language economy.

A 1999 UC Berkeley survey (Van Deusen-Scholl et al 1998) notes how the narrow identification of lecturers with teaching institutionally sanctions the common divide between language

teaching and literature and theory on the other (Van Deusen-Scholl, Von Hoene and Møller-Irving 1998).

Furthermore, it tends to diminish the project of second language acquisition and the teaching of foreign languages by withholding 'the rigorous scholarly expectations, standards, and respect which characterizes all other aspects of departments of modern languages and literature'. It suggests that whether the lecturers in question will convert their research and professionalization desires into actual projects, the important thing is to construct the necessary framework to allow this to occur.

Béatrice Dupuy and Muriel Grosbois (2020) argue that contemporary institutions of higher education are facing deep-seated challenges in coping with global shifts at the intersection of science and society, which shape new modes of knowing and learning to know with a view to develop professionals able to problem-solve such kinds of problems. To meet these socio-economic imperatives, HEIs are increasingly required to respond to the demand of enhanced soft skills, which are becoming as valued as hard skills in the workplace (Dupuy and Grosbois 2020).

Consequently, developing an array of competencies such intercultural understanding, problem-solving abilities, critical thinking and importantly an ability to speak in multiple Foreign Languages and to participated in networked communication techniques, has become a crucial focus in efforts to develop internationally competitive workforces. There is a growing demand for able intercultural multilingual speakers to facilitate and negotiate with the varied global value chains.

However, a disjunction remains present needs and outcomes. This problematizes the accepted ways in which FLs are taught and learned as well as the content of FL programmes. Moreover, such developments highlight the need for the paradigm shift from education to lifelong learning to be more coherently acknowledged. Lifelong learning has evolved and tends to be viewed a response to social trends and how humans acquire knowledge and skills.

More flexible programmes and learning paths, and modes of assessment, recognition of prior learning, within a reflexive learner-centred approach is necessary. Although there are learning opportunities for professionals across academic and for people at various stages of their career paths, the broader question is whether HEIs can look beyond the completion of a degree and see the degree as a milestone that brings together the learner, the learning community and the institutions involved on a lifelong learning path/s (Dupuy and Grosbois 2020).

A recent study (Montenegro et al 2023) by academics at a leading Mexican university languages centre raises the importance of professionalization including an increased proficiency in languages for academics. They stress that the teaching of English as a second language is vital for professionalization in Mexico and by implication other established and emerging economies. English, it is argued is closely entwined with the expectations of the international population, as well as educational demands, research and internationalization (Montenegro, et al. 2023).

The most important task of every professor (academic) in Mexico the authors underline, is to surmount obstacles in the personal and professional field which 'prevent them from projecting their improvement' (ibid.). Thus, learning a language and/or developing an existing expertise has a significant influence on those differing fields that enable the development and capitalization

of skills and cumulative academic endeavours to transform the process of language acquisition into a 'professionalizing transforming axis' (ibid.). There are four key qualities that characterize the professional, namely speed, accuracy, precision and care in the preparation and delivery of each project.

Professionalization within academia should

- Enable the design of professional training processes
- Encourage practices that enhance quality
- Improve communication in differing areas
- Reinforce the interrelation of knowledge and disciplines in educational and training contexts
- Integrate the needs of institutions and individuals
- Give impetus to the creation of research
- Discern the kinds of information and mass media to provide it.

The authors point out that professionalization should be viewed as a process while professionalism is a competence or skill. In teaching the professionalization path includes the drive to acquire the characteristics of high-status occupations, including the certification and accreditation and the development and maintenance of professional associations. In a university institution setting, learning a language entails more than an educational experience, 'but it can very well be the solution for obtaining, managing, and using information, the link of knowledge, and update of the same, in addition to the investigation and dissemination of all professional activity' (ibid.).

A paper by dos Santos, Chinkes, & Carvalho, M.A.G. *et al* (2023) assesses the digital competence of academics in select Latin American countries and Portugal, with a view to establish the strategic challenges and to provide specific policy recommendations. The study found that around 70% of the academics surveyed had an average intermediate level of competence. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between young and senior academics, as well as between women and men (Dos Santos, et al. 2023).

The study reveals that respective areas in which the educators involved see themselves as the most and least competent. The authors show how the degree of institutional support offered by the universities in question, impacts on the perceptions of the academics of their level of digital competence. The results and recommendations of the study are outlined for HEIs, with the overall aim of assisting academics. assist higher-education institutions and governments in implementing policies capable of improving digital competence.

The results underline the need for further support for academics, in respect of their own practices as well as in improving the digital expertise of their students. With enhanced digital competence, students would be more able to function in society as empowered and reflexive citizens regarding the responsible use of technology. Furthermore, there seems to be scope for inter-institutional collaboration at regional, national and even international levels (ibid. p22).

1.3. Conclusion

This literature review links directly with the policy context chapter that follows. The review has looked to discuss key issues for HEIs internationally in their language teaching with the academy as a whole and internationally. It notes the current disjunction between the demand

by national and world markets for language proficiency in global languages and associated multilingualism and the uneven and inadequate supply by HEIs collectively of such assets. HEI responses as indicated in the above review appear to vary considerably with high performing economies in the East placing a high value on the development of curricula for the increased globalization of work and occupations. In some regions, most particularly Africa and to a lesser degree Latin America, there is more variance in national responses. For instance, select African countries are moving to the structured development of curricula to ensure proficiency by learners of English and certain other global languages such as Mandarin. But in others, including South Africa, debates and curricula responses to matters such as multilingualism, decolonization and language development have been structured more by national than global concerns. There is a need for more coherent and strategic strategies to boost both the use and conservation of indigenous and local languages, while at the same time ensuring there is more of a connect with business, societal and global imperatives and developments.

Chapter 2 Methodology and Research Methods

2.1. Introduction

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the research methodology and methods which were used in this Needs Assessment of the Knowledge and Capacities of Language Practitioners as outlined in the post-1994 Language Legislative Framework.

The chapter explains the mixed-method research approach and supporting methods which included a policy and literature review, stakeholder identification, semi-structured interviews, online surveys, sectoral and ecosystem studies and benchmarking analysis. This research provided the evidence base necessary to design a credible, inclusive, reliable database system which would support professional recognition and sectoral development.

The research content of this report draws on the interviews, literature reviews and desktop research of the previous reports.

2.2. Research Design

2.2.1. Literature Review and Policy Analysis

The research reviewed literature and policy documents—academic papers, government publications, and industry reports—to examine the language economy, focusing on regulatory systems and multilingual governance. The analysis found major coordination difficulties and shortcomings in policy implementation in South Africa's language sector, underscoring the gap between policy goals and execution.

2.2.2. Strategic Stakeholder Interviews

Researchers used semi-structured stakeholder interviews to collect qualitative data on challenges, regulations, training needs, and institutional roles. These insights highlighted policy-practice gaps. The study combined desktop research with fieldwork in a multi-layered design.

2.2.3. Data Collection

A combination of primary and secondary data collection methods was used:

- Primary and secondary literature was reviewed to obtain baseline data
- An online survey aimed at both language experts and general public participants generated quantitative information along with qualitative feedback.
- Researchers employed semi-structured interviews to gather detailed information from stakeholders.
- Primary and secondary literature was reviewed to obtain baseline data.

The research used stakeholder mapping and semi-structured interviews to identify key actors in government, education, professional bodies, translation agencies, and freelancers. Interviews offered qualitative insights into practitioners' experiences, revealing needs, regulatory barriers, and gaps between policy and practice within the language sector.

An online survey, distributed via registries and databases, supplemented these findings with additional data from both primary and secondary sources.

2.2.4. Analytical Approach

Descriptive analysis was used for quantitative data, while qualitative feedback was analysed thematically to highlight key patterns, risks, and opportunities.

AI tools supported data mining, analysis, and synthesis, enabling efficient processing of large datasets and enhancing the quality and depth of the research findings.

3.2. Conclusion

This study used mixed methods to examine South Africa's language economy and guide the legal creation of a practitioner database. By integrating analysis, stakeholder feedback, economic mapping, benchmarking, and planning, it highlighted key challenges and opportunities.

The approach ensures the database framework is evidence-based and meets practitioner, institutional, and regulatory requirements. This provides a credible foundation for enhancing professional recognition, sector coordination, and sustainable growth in South African language professions.

Chapter 3 Policy Context and Background

3.1. Introduction - Positioning Report 4 within the EOL Policy Trajectory

3.1.1. Introduction

There is a growing, if uneven realization in relevant policy circles globally that the effects of the language sector and economy on social, economic and civic development are more extensive and more valuable than is commonly realized.

The importance of language in cultural development and inter-cultural communication is often emphasized and evoked there is a need for more critical and systematic research to accommodate often divergent positions and perceptions.

This includes the question of the still relatively unexamined and under-appreciated value of languages (both national and foreign) to national economic development and international competitiveness, as well as the imparting of strategic and sustainable skills for the diversifying global and macro regional economies.

3.1.2. Languages and the Internationalization of Higher Education

Across the world, universities and HEIs are implementing and/or consolidating internationalization strategies to help a growing global community of learners, educators, trainers and researchers (Wong 2023; Finardi et al 2023).

Foreign language promotion and teaching is integral to this process. Foreign language learning helps students and staff communicate more effectively with their peers on a worldwide basis, thereby fostering cultural understanding and enhancing the academic exchange. Furthermore, foreign languages provide students with the skills and understanding to succeed both academically and professionally across the globe.

The advantages of foreign language learning for internationalization include the enhancement of employability; the development of cultural competence; facilitating meaningful academic exchange; and underpinning personal and cognitive development (Finardi 2024; Wong 2023; Martin del Pozo, M (2017).

As Finardi et al (2024) point out, in a study focusing on the Internationalization of Higher Education and the Role of Languages in both Global North and Global South, there has been in recent years an increased convergence and inter-play between the role of languages in the universities involved and the process of IHE.

Indeed, multilingualism and internationalization have become crucial parts of HEIs globally, reshaping the academic landscape and helping students transition to career opportunities on a world-wide scale. The maintenance and co-existence of diverse languages and cultures help enrich societies, facilitate cooperation and stimulate economic development. The cultivation of multilingualism globally has a multi-faceted impact, including the inculcation of academic excellence, cultural diversity, linguistic competencies, as well as contributing to ideals and practices of global citizenship (Philominraj et al 2025).

The main aspects of the relationship between internationalization and language comprise the following.

Firstly, there is the increased recourse to English-medium instruction in non-language programmes to attract top international students (Philominraj et al 2025; Martin del Pozo 2017).

Secondly, notwithstanding the predominance of English, there is an increasing emphasis on the need to boost multilingualism and inter-cultural communication expertise and skills (Philominraj et al 2025).

Thirdly, there is a growing use of new digital and high-tech resources for teaching and learning purposes, and the deployment of hybrid learning. Artificial Intelligence is increasingly invoked to develop more internationalized and reflexive curricula (Pilny et al 2025).

Fourthly, foreign language department are vital for the facilitation of language learning, and the helping cater for current and future demand for the major 'global' languages of business.

However, they quite often face pressure to redefine their roles and costs in a competitive academic environment in which there is significant pressure to publish in English.

There are also significant variations in the process. Especially for sections of scholars in the South, the process can lead to a western-oriented model with institutions in the global south being somewhat peripheralized in the process (Finardi et al 2024).

This has seen the growth of a discourse on the decolonization and diversification of language policies (Finardi et al 2024). Finally, there are efforts to develop more holistic approaches to uses of language in effective university internationalization strategies. These include balancing English proficiency with the reinforcement of diverse culture and languages (Dafouz & Smith 2020)

3.1.3. International Snapshots

Among the significant scholarly trends is the strategic emphasis by the high developing economies in the Middle and Far East on the policy relationship between the promotion of English and other global foreign languages, and the cause of national economic and industrial development.

A good deal of the realization of such strategies and interventions is being fostered by innovative and internationally linked universities in the regions and countries concerned.

The other side of this coin is that while approximately one in five people can speak English, the other four cannot. In June 2022, RAND, a research and development agency, working with Oxford University, published a report indicating that if 10% of UK students become proficient in Mandarin, Arabic, French, and Spanish, the economic returns for the UK would be in the billions of pounds (Rand 2022).

The report argued that the UK could not rely on English as a global language to continue its role in international trade. Young adults entering the job market need to be fluent in a second language. A major finding from this research was that 'not speaking a common language acted as a kind of tax. It made doing business much more difficult and expensive'. The RAND team concludes that people speaking a second language will help business communication by removing a communication barrier. If someone wants to set up a business in China, they need to be able to speak Mandarin (ibid.).

For instance, a newly published article by Dongxue et al (2025) examines the impact of universal English Language Education on the competitiveness of a national economy in a context of globalization.

The study assesses the role of English proficiency in enhancing a country's economic performance and identifies the main factors feeding into this relationship. Covering a sample of 50 countries, the findings show a strong and positive correlation between a country's English proficiency level and its economic competitiveness.

Those countries with higher English proficiency scores deliver consistently better performance in key economic indicators such as GDP per capita, foreign direct investment and international trade.

The case material shows that effective English language education policies, along with supportive economic and social conditions, effectively translate language skills into economic benefits. Such research feeds into the scholarly understanding of the complex interplay between language skills and proficiency on the one hand, and economic competitiveness in global settings on the other.

The authors emphasize the consequent importance of investing in quality English language education as a strategic intervention for enhancing the position of a country within the global economy (Dongxue et al 2025).

An emerging trend in several of the higher-performing economies is the leveraging of foreign language education for broader national economic development purposes. A recent study by Sello (2025) underlines this trend. The research in question assessed the strategic significance of foreign language education (FLE) in enabling the transformation of the University of Botswana (UB) into a high-performing organization (HPO).

The author outlines the two-fold strategy. Firstly, FLE is aligned with UB's institutional goals which comprise the enhancement of graduate employability, expanding international engagement, and reinforcing research excellence.

Secondly, FLE plays a 'pivotal role' in facilitating Botswana's economic diversification and diplomatic diversification as captured in UB's Vision 2036 document. The study identifies and outlines best practices for incorporating FLE into professional degree programmes and notes best practices examples in innovative universities in select US, East Asian and Middle Eastern economies.

These examples show how FLE contributes to inter-cultural competence and competitiveness. There are also structural challenges to such efforts including institutional resistance and scarce resources (ibid).

The research argues for a bespoke approach for UB, and advocates policy changes, inter-departmental language courses, and collaborative alliances to maximize the institutional influence of FLE.

The study provides something of a touchstone for semi-peripheral HEIs to capitalize on multilingualism to boost academic excellence and strengthen global competitiveness. FLE is of vital importance, and goes beyond being an academic option to constituting a strategic initiative

that articulates UB's institutional objectives with Botswana's national economic development objectives (Sello 2025).

3.1.4. Revised Language Policy for Higher Education in South Africa

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) gazetted the Revised Language Policy Framework for Higher Education in October 2020, for implementation in 2022. The policy mandates that universities and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges being to take action to development all of South Africa's official languages, as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning, and administration. While there is flexibility in how institutions achieve this, the policy carries the statutory expectation that they work towards the goal of having all South Africa's languages deployed equitably across the domains of higher education, including teaching and learning and administration.

The underlying aim and objectives of the policy are to provide a framework for the development and strengthening of indigenous languages as languages of scholarship, teaching and learning and communication at South Africa's public higher education institutions.

The Department stresses that 'language continues to be a barrier to access and success for many students at South African higher education institutions'. The Framework also emphasizes the importance of fostering multilingual environments at South Africa's public HEIs as part of a continued effort to open pathways to success in South Africa's multilingual society.

The policy document is not without its contradictions and ambiguities, and its interpretation and reception has differed across the universities (Cele 2021; Rakgogo 2024; de Villiers 2021). Rakgoka 2024, for example, argues that 'the implementation of the South African national language policy framework is 'unmonitored and unresourced'.

Prof Wim de Villiers, the then Rector of Stellenbosch University (SU), commented in 2021 that the application of multilingualism in university settings was complicated, but represented nevertheless and opportunity for collaboration. De Villiers said that while multilingualism is enshrined in the Constitution, and the recognition of official languages, its application in the education sector faced a range of obstacles.

These included financial factors, lack of investment in multilingualism in basic education, the divide between high school and university, and the shift towards internationalization (de Villiers 2021).

In 2017, SU gave extensive feedback on the DHET's conceptual language policy framework in which the University recognised Afrikaans as an indigenous language and requested the same of the draft policy.

Universities had not been given the opportunity to comment on the final draft to the 2020 Framework. It followed up on a 2017 appeal, with one in 2021, in which the University requested that Afrikaans along with the Khoe and San languages be treated as indigenous languages and accepted as part of 'inclusive multilingualism' (de Villiers 2021).

The SU communique pointed out that as the Language Policy Framework required all official internal communication at universities, in addition to English, take place in two more official languages. While SU found this a 'commendable ideal' it was probably not 'practically feasible' if DHET was unable to provide funding for it (ibid.)

3.1.5. Language Resources Audit 2022-2023.

In the period July 2022- July 2023 a languages resources audit was carried out by the South African Centre for Digital Language Resources (SADiLaR) to assess the requisite resources for the implementation of new language policies being development and implemented as by Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Central to these measures was the New Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institution. The audit assessed the readiness and resources of 24 or the 26 public universities.

The audit included questionnaires for staff and students concentrating on five main domains, namely: (i) Language services and infrastructure; (ii) Teaching and learning (including scholarship and multilingual pedagogies); (iii) Communication and administration; Student Life and Co-curricular Activities.

The main finding and outcomes are as follows:

- (i) **Resource Availability:** Preliminary findings suggest that while most universities have substantive existing resources such as cultural capital; expertise; datasets and glossaries, there is a critical shortage of digital language technologies such as grammar editors and spell checkers.
- (ii) **Funding and Implementation:** In the wake of the audit the DHET set aside R70.2m for the period 2024-2026 for Language Development Implementation Plans.
- (iii) **Gaps Identified:** A severe need for funding to train and develop academic and support staff in multi-lingual and digital pedagogies was identified. Almost all universities (96.2%) have either an African language department or a dedicated language unit.

Given the additional funds allocated, the presumption is further improvements will be implemented.

3.1.6. Select Recent Developments in Institutional Language Policy at South African Universities

The main developments at South African universities on language policy have related to institutional response to the 2020 Framework and demands from sections of academic staff and students for increased deployment of national languages.

One of the areas of focus has been on supplementing the academic terminology for indigenous languages for actual or potential use as the means of instruction. Such ventures have tapped into the R70.2million set aside for such purposes for the initial period (2024-2026).

Emerging university level policies have emphasized a multilingualism but primarily with a focus on South African languages; a shift to more translanguaging practices in teaching and learning practices, and terminology development.

Universities such as UFS, Wits and UZKN have been active in the promotion of local languages to operate to work to ideally alongside English (Mthembu 2026). And in December 2024, UCT announced the adoption of its institutional Language Policy. This saw UCT adopting English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans as its official languages.

Moreover, UCT also recognized Kaaps, SASL (South African Sign Language) as well as N|uu, and Khoekhoegowab, and stressed its commitment to their development (USAf 2024).

In addition, in 2025 Walter Sisulu University announced that its institutional language policy was going through an internal process of approval (ibid.). It was also announced that the University of Mpumalanga had developed its draft language policy subject to a consultative internal process.

3.2. Constitutional and Legislative Foundations of the Language Sector

As articulated in Reports 1, 2 and 3, South Africa’s language economy is anchored in a progressive multilingual constitutional framework that is internationally recognised for its commitment to linguistic equality and diversity. The 1996 Constitution affirms:

- Twelve official languages, including South African Sign Language
- The principle of “parity of esteem” for all official languages
- The obligation on the state to take “practical and positive measures” to advance indigenous languages
- Protection of both individual and collective language rights (Sections 30–31)
- The prohibition of discrimination on the basis of language (Section 9).

These constitutional guarantees are given practical effect through a well-established legislative framework, including:

- The Pan South African Language Board Act 59 of 1995, which mandates PanSALB to promote multilingualism, develop marginalised languages, and safeguard linguistic rights
- The Use of Official Languages Act 12 of 2012, which strengthens multilingual governance through the adoption of official language policies, establishment of language units, and systematic monitoring of language use in national government
- The Promotion of Access to Information Act 2 of 2000 (PAIA), which reinforces the right of individuals to access state information in their preferred language where reasonably possible
- The Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000, which embeds language considerations into local governance and participatory processes.

Together, these instruments establish a coherent constitutional and statutory foundation for multilingual governance, access to information, and language-based inclusion across the state.

3.3. The South African Language Practitioners’ Council (SALPC) as a Strategic Policy Instrument

Within this policy framework, the South African Language Practitioners’ Council Act 8 of 2014 represents a strategic institutional innovation, providing the statutory basis for the professional regulation of language practitioners. As detailed in Report 2, the Act tasks the SALPC with:

- Registering and accrediting language practitioners
- Establishing national professional standards

- Enforcing ethical codes of conduct
- Overseeing Continuing Professional Development (CPD)
- Advising the Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture on matters affecting the language profession.

The 2015 Regulations further define practitioner categories, CPD requirements, and ethical compliance mechanisms. Collectively, these instruments position the SALPC as the central professional authority within the national language governance system.

As noted in Report 1, the establishment of the SALPC marks an important transition from a historically association-based profession to a formal statutory regulatory model, comparable to those governing law, health, engineering, education and the built environment. This transition introduces new opportunities for professional coherence, quality assurance, public trust and economic integration.

Report 3 contributes directly to this institutional maturation process by providing the empirical practitioner-level evidence required to inform the Council's future operational design, accreditation thresholds and CPD frameworks.

3.4. Education Policy and Language Skills Formation

As demonstrated in Report 2, education policy plays a foundational role in shaping the long-term sustainability of the language profession. Key policy instruments include:

- The Language in Education Policy (LiEP) of 1997, which promotes additive multilingualism and mother-tongue based learning
- The Incremental Introduction of African Languages (IIAL) Policy (2013–2026), which aims to systematically expand African language learning across the schooling system
- The Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 and the Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions (2020), which guide the promotion of multilingualism in universities.

Collectively, these policies reflect a sustained national commitment to strengthening language skills across the education continuum.

Report 3 complements this policy foundation by examining how education and training pathways translate into professional practice, including how graduates enter the labour market, access professional development, and adapt to evolving language service demands.

3.5. Indigenous, Khoi, Nama and San Languages in the Policy Framework

Report 2 provided important insight into the constitutional recognition of the Khoi, Nama and San languages under Section 6(5) of the Constitution. This recognition affirms South Africa's commitment to linguistic redress and cultural restoration.

Ongoing scholarly refinement of linguistic classification continues to enhance the precision with which these languages can be supported through education, digital resource development, terminology work and professional pathways. The inclusion of these languages within the national policy frame creates growing opportunities for:

- Targeted revitalisation initiatives,
- Community-based education and literacy development,
- Digital language infrastructure expansion,
- And the emergence of new professional roles for speakers of these languages.

Report 3 explores how this constitutional recognition is anticipated within practitioner development and professional opportunity, particularly across training, accreditation and technological integration.

3.6. Global and Comparative Regulatory Context

As demonstrated in Report 2, countries across the world adopt diverse models of language governance. Some focus primarily on language regulation, others on language rights advocacy, and others on terminology development or cultural promotion. Few combine all these functions into a single integrated institutional system.

South Africa's approach—linking:

- Constitutional language rights
- Professional regulation (SALPC)
- Digital language infrastructure (SADiLaR)
- And language development (PanSALB).

This represents a comprehensive and forward-looking governance model. While still evolving, this integrated approach positions South Africa as a global innovator in the institutionalisation of language as a developmental and economic resource.

In parallel, Report 2 benchmarked governance models from established statutory councils, including the:

- Legal Practice Council (LPC)
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)
- Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)
- South African Council for Educators (SACE)
- Council for the Built Environment (CBE).

These models provide valuable guidance for the ongoing institutional strengthening of the SALPC, particularly in relation to sustainable funding, accreditation systems, ethical governance and public accountability.

3.7. Policy Implications for the Overview of Higher Education and Training Programmes

The policy implications for the overview of higher education and training programmes, as detailed in Section 3.7 and related chapters, position the Needs and Capacity Assessment as a strategic bridge between existing policy design and professional implementation.

By aligning practitioner knowledge, skills, ethics, CPD, and technological readiness with South Africa's current legislative framework, the report aims to support multilingualism, access, professionalisation, and inclusive economic participation.

The specific policy implications derived from the audit of these programmes include:

3.7.1. Integration of Professional and Academic Standards

Alignment Framework: There is an urgent need for a coordinated, practice-oriented alignment framework that integrates tertiary curricula with professional accreditation and labour market demands.

National Qualification Audit: Policy must facilitate a structured national audit that explicitly links specific qualifications and occupational categories to SALPC registration thresholds.

Defining Graduate Attributes: Mechanical accuracy, syntactic control, and applied professional writing must be explicitly defined and assessed as core graduate attributes rather than secondary skills.

3.7.2. Recalibrating Curricula for the Digital Economy

Mandatory Digital Training: Digital tool competence, including exposure to Computer Applications Technology (CAT) tools and Human Language Technology (HLT) systems, should be a standard requirement rather than an optional elective.

AI Oversight: Curricula must be updated to train practitioners as supervisors and auditors of automated systems, focusing on AI verification and linguistic auditing.

3.7.3. Enhancing Employability and Economic Sustainability

Business Architecture: Professional programmes should incorporate structured components addressing the commercial realities of language practice, such as pricing structures, contract negotiation, and tender literacy, to improve professional sustainability.

Work-Integrated Learning (WIL): Policy should ensure that internships and mentorships (minimum 8–12 weeks) are formally credited and quality-assured within practitioner-focused qualifications.

Specialisation Pathways: Institutions are encouraged to establish structured pathways for discipline-specific literacy (e.g., law, health, engineering) through inter-faculty collaboration, particularly in indigenous languages.

3.7.4. Regulatory and Data Coordination

Standardised CPD: Continuing Professional Development (CPD) frameworks must be standardised and integrated into a national architecture, with mandatory cycles linked to accreditation renewal.

Data Integration: A coordinated data framework involving SAQA, DHET, and Statistics South Africa is required to map training volumes, track employment trends, and identify regional or linguistic shortages.

Ultimately, the policy task is to recalibrate existing academic structures toward functional alignment and professional sustainability, ensuring that language is recognized as strategic economic infrastructure rather than just a cultural asset.

3.8. Conclusion: Policy Continuity Across the EOL Series

Taken together, the three EOL reports form a sequential and mutually reinforcing policy narrative:

- Report 1 mapped the structure, scale and stakeholder ecosystem of the language economy;
- Report 2 articulated the constitutional, legislative and governance frameworks that guide sector development;
- Report 3 now examines the human and professional capacity required to activate these frameworks in practice.

This chapter affirms that the Needs and Capacity Assessment forms a strategic bridge between policy design and professional implementation. By aligning practitioner knowledge, skills, ethics, CPD and technological readiness with the legislative environment already in place, the report supports the continued advancement of multilingualism, access, professionalisation and inclusive economic participation within South Africa's language economy.

Chapter 4 Key Issues Identified in EOL Reports 1, 2 & 3

4.1. Introduction

This chapter brings together the main policy, institutional, economic and professional issues identified through the first two reports in the Economics of Language research series. *Report 1, A Preliminary Scoping Exercise of the Dynamics, Resources and Access to Data in the South African Language Economy*, provided an initial system-level overview of the South African language economy, including its structure, stakeholder environment and available data. Report 2 then built on this foundation by focusing on policy, regulation, governance and the design of a national database for language practitioners, with specific reference to the mandate of the South African Language Practitioners' Council.

Together, the two reports provide an integrated picture of the institutional setting within which the language economy currently operates, including the policy framework that guides it and the structural conditions that shape its functioning. This chapter therefore serves as a bridge between the macro-level analysis presented in Reports 1 and 2 and the practitioner-focused needs and capacity assessment undertaken in Report 3.

By summarising the key issues arising from the first two reports, this chapter clarifies the conceptual and policy trajectory of the EOL programme, moving from economy-level mapping and governance analysis to an examination of practitioner knowledge, skills and professional readiness.

4.2. Key Issues from EOL Report 1

In June 2025, SACO submitted a report, entitled: “A Preliminary Scoping Exercise of the Dynamics, Resources and Access to Data in the South African Language Economy” to DSAC.

This was the first of a series of four commissioned reports. The report provided a preliminary study of the South African language economy in order to lay the foundation for the subsequent reports. The four reports will collectively inform the establishment of a nationally integrated database of language practitioners. This initiative will draw from best practices in other regulated professions and language councils worldwide. The database will not only serve as a registry but also function as a resource for policymakers, businesses, and government entities seeking qualified language professionals.

The first report contained the following information:

- The South African language economy produces around R10,3 billion GVA while employing approximately 66 000 people and generating R713 million in public revenue.
- The South African government supports multilingualism through constitutional provisions and evaluates PanSALB functions and educational frameworks and other institutional bodies.
- An ecosystem map revealing multiple stakeholders with their value chains and institutional arrangements which shows a disorganized system with duplicated efforts and unmet requirements.

- An examination of current sector conditions and practitioner needs and future developments through survey data from 88 participants and expert interview insights from 13 professionals.
- An overview of international best practices for language work regulation and governance systems and professional development methods.

4.2.1. Key Issues Identified in the First Report

The following key issues were identified in the first report:

4.2.1.1. Fragmentation and Poor Coordination

The language industry operates through multiple separate entities leading to duplicated responsibilities and inadequate coordination between different groups. The lack of a unified professional organization has resulted in training and accreditation challenges and insufficient support for practitioners.

4.2.1.2. Data Gaps and Invisibility

The language sector lacks proper national statistical tracking because it does not have a dedicated "language economy satellite account." The absence of reliable employment statistics and market information hinders policymakers and practitioners from developing effective planning strategies.

4.2.1.3. Policy and Implementation Gaps

While South Africa has strong constitutional and policy frameworks for multilingualism, the implementation of these principles is inconsistent. Funding for indigenous languages remains inadequate allowing English to dominate over other languages.

4.2.1.4. Professionalisation and Standards

There is an urgent need for professional recognition programmes, accreditation systems and ongoing professional development opportunities within the sector. Many struggle to access affordable training or certification programmes, resulting in a lack of professional value and support for practitioners.

4.2.1.5. Technological Disruption

The sector is undergoing transformation due to AI, digital platforms and translation tools, which offer opportunities for productivity growth but also risk creating unequal due to insufficient support for African languages. Practitioners advocate for the preservation of human expertise alongside technological advancements.

4.2.1.6. Funding and Sustainability

SALPC faces sustainability challenges due to unclear funding sources, payment methods and fee structures. Practitioners call for innovative public-private collaborations and business models to replace traditional funding sources.

4.2.1.7. Equity and Inclusion

Khoi, Nama, San and other indigenous languages continue to face marginalization despite constitutional protections. The full potential of language diversity for social inclusion, as well as educational and economic development remains unrealized.

4.2.1.8. Opportunities for Reform

Establishing the SALPC as a single professional organization would promote sector unity, enhance quality standards and strengthen advocacy efforts.

Creating an Economics of Language research unit together and a language economy satellite account system would support evidence-based policy development.

Collaboration among the state, academia and the private sector collaboration would contribute to new innovations, digital systems and trade possibilities.

The first report highlights South Africa's untapped economic potential stemming from its multilingual capabilities. However, the country faces a number of challenges, including sector fragmentation, insufficient data, weak implementation and the undervaluation of indigenous languages. The establishment of SALPC, along with related reforms offer a chance to develop a coherent language sector which is professionalized and economically empowered.

4.3. Key Issues from EOL Report 2

The report identifies significant issues stemming from the fragmentation of the South African language sector and proposes a detailed framework for the establishment and operation of the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) database to address these challenges.

The key issues identified in the report and the resulting recommendations are summarized below.

4.3.1. Issues Identified in the Report

The core problem underlying the need for a national database is the significant fragmentation and poor coordination within the South African language economy. This fragmentation undermines professional standards and limits economic potential.

4.3.1.1. Fragmentation and Lack of Coordination

The language industry operates through multiple separate entities, leading to duplicated efforts, inadequate coordination, and inconsistency in standards and support for practitioners. Many association and professional databases currently rely on rudimentary methods like paper-based records or spreadsheets.

4.3.1.2. Data Gaps and Invisibility

The sector suffers from a lack of reliable national statistical tracking and market information, hindering effective planning and policy development. This lack of a unified system translates directly into a lack of visibility or public recognition of practitioners' work.

4.3.1.3. Inconsistent Professional Standards

There is an urgent need for professional recognition programmes, accreditation systems, and ongoing professional development (CPD) opportunities. Clients often struggle to find qualified professionals, and there is a low appreciation for professional qualifications, which diminishes credibility.

4.3.1.4. Financial Sustainability and Affordability

The SALPC faces sustainability challenges due to unclear funding sources and fee structures. Practitioners voiced substantial concerns (91% of survey respondents) regarding the potential for high registration costs which might exclude grassroots or informal practitioners.

4.3.1.5. Data Security and Privacy Concerns

The misuse or unauthorised sharing of personal data was the foremost concern identified by practitioners (91%). The reliance of current organizations on manual systems increases accountability risks and highlights the lack of standardized POPIA-compliant protocols across the sector.

4.3.1.6. Policy and Implementation Deficiencies

Despite strong constitutional mandates for multilingualism, the implementation of these policies is inconsistent. Funding for indigenous languages remains inadequate, leading to their marginalization. Additionally, the perceived delay in the rollout of the SALPC (legislated in 2014) has impacted its credibility.

4.3.2. Resulting Recommendations

The report provides a detailed roadmap for creating a professionalized, coordinated, and secure language sector, anchored by the national database.

4.3.2.1. Professionalization and Governance Framework

- **Classification System:** Implement a standardized classification system that categorizes practitioners into three levels based on qualifications and experience: Paraprofessional (Level 1), Professional (Level 2), and Expert (Level 3)
- **Accreditation and Quality Assurance:** Accreditation will serve as the primary mechanism for quality assurance. The guiding principle is "alignment over duplication", recognizing existing, credible credentials from bodies like the South African Translators' Institute (SATI) wherever possible.
- **Conduct and Development:** All registered practitioners must adhere to a statutory Code of Conduct covering competency, integrity, and confidentiality. Professional and Expert practitioners are obliged to participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) to maintain registration.

4.3.2.2. Financial Sustainability and Funding Model

- **Hybrid Funding Model:** A purely fees-based model is considered unsustainable in the initial years. The report recommends a hybrid model combining transitional public funding (such

as government grants or baseline appropriations) with a tiered, cost-reflective fee schedule for practitioners.

- **Revenue Streams:** Potential revenue streams include registration fees, accreditation charges, certificate fees, examination fees, and fines for non-compliance.
- **Strategic Opportunity:** The report suggests exploring the possibility of establishing a larger, continent-wide African Language Practitioners Council to access broader pan-African and international funding streams that could support the SALPC.

4.3.2.3. Database Design, Security, and User Experience

- **POPIA Compliance:** The system architecture must ensure strict compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA), treating the SALPC as the "Responsible Party".
- **Security Safeguards:** Implement robust security measures, including role-based access control end-to-end encryption (in transit and at rest), secure backups, and tamper-evident audit trails. The public register should only display minimal, necessary verification data.
- **User-Centred Design:** The User Interface (UI) and User Experience (UX) must be intuitive, accessible, and fully multilingual to reflect South Africa's linguistic diversity and encourage adoption. Accessibility features like screen-reader compatibility and mobile optimization are crucial.

4.3.2.4. Implementation and Adoption Strategy

- **Phased Rollout:** Implementation should proceed via a phased rollout, prioritizing practitioner groups in high-risk fields (e.g., court and health interpreting) before expanding
- **Pathway Before Compulsion:** The guiding principle is "no compulsion without a pathway," meaning accessible routes to registration, including Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), must be established before registration becomes mandatory for any group
- **Incentives:** Incentives, such as increased visibility to potential clients and access to job opportunities and CPD resources, will be used to encourage early adoption and registration
- **Policy Integration:** Policy should incorporate the principles of the Economics of Language (EOL) to ensure a more economically informed and evidence-based planning framework that leverages multilingualism for economic competitiveness.

4.4. Key issues from Report 3

This report investigates the professionalisation and economic impact of language services in South Africa, focusing on the need for a formal regulatory framework. It highlights the role of the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) in establishing national standards, accreditation, and a centralised practitioner database.

The research identifies a significant alignment gap between university curricula and the practical demands of the modern industry, particularly regarding digital literacy and entrepreneurship. Practitioners face challenges such as income instability, the marginalisation of indigenous languages, and the disruptive influence of Artificial Intelligence.

To ensure future growth, the text advocates for continuous professional development and the strategic integration of human language technologies. Ultimately, the findings position language as a vital economic asset essential for social justice and global competitiveness.

The report identifies several interrelated challenges that constrain the professionalisation and economic viability of the South African language sector. These issues span from structural fragmentation to a disconnect between education and industry requirements.

4.4.1. Structural Fragmentation and Lack of Regulation

The language practitioner sector is currently structurally fragmented and operates through multiple uncoordinated entities. A critical issue is the absence of a fully operational regulatory authority; while the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) Act was legislated in 2014, its implementation has been delayed for over a decade. This lack of oversight has resulted in inconsistent professional standards, weak enforcement of ethical norms, and a situation where "hobbyists" often undercut qualified professionals. Over a third of practitioners report no affiliation with any professional association, further isolating them from industry developments.

4.4.2. Systemic Undervaluation and Economic Precarity

Language work is frequently undervalued and under-remunerated, driven by a widespread misconception that simple bilingualism is a sufficient qualification for professional practice. The report reveals that the sector is economically precarious:

Low Income: Only 25% of practitioners earn more than R200 000 per year from language work, and many earn less than R50 000.

Pricing Challenges: There is a lack of bargaining power, leading to "price dumping" where practitioners undersell their services.

Limited Recognition: Practitioners report that their work is not fully recognised within current policy frameworks, and their true value is often ignored by the corporate sector.

4.4.3. Education and Skills Alignment Gaps

There is a significant mismatch between university curricula and the practical realities of the industry. While practitioners are often highly educated (many holding postgraduate degrees), they frequently lack:

Practical Workplace Skills: Graduates are often unprepared for tasks like mechanical editing, sub-editing, and practical interpreting.

Business and Entrepreneurial Skills: Most practitioners lack training in project management, marketing, pricing, and client relationship management.

Legislative Knowledge: Current training programmes often fail to cover the legislative frameworks that govern the profession.

4.4.4. Digital Transformation and Technological Disruption

The rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Human Language Technologies (HLTs) presents both a threat and an opportunity.

Uneven Adoption: Confidence in advanced HLT remains low, and technological adoption has not yet translated into economic gain for most practitioners.

Risk of Displacement: Practitioners who cannot adapt to AI-enabled environments are perceived to be at high risk of economic displacement.

Data Deficit: African languages are significantly under-represented in digital infrastructure, which threatens their long-term viability in the global digital economy.

4.4.5. Marginalisation of Indigenous Languages

Despite constitutional commitments to multilingualism, African languages and South African Sign Language (SASL) continue to lack the institutional support and professional pathways afforded to English and Afrikaans. Indigenous languages are often perceived as having lower economic value, and funding for their development remains inadequate, which reinforces their marginalisation in the labour market.

4.4.6. Policy-Practice Discrepancies

While South Africa has a progressive legislative framework, practical enforcement and monitoring are weak. Government departments have often failed to establish mandated language units due to a lack of political will, and the implementation of official language policies remains inconsistent across different regions and sectors.

4.5. Conclusion

The findings from Reports 1 and 2 outline a language economy that operates within a well-developed constitutional and policy framework for multilingualism, while also reflecting a set of institutional and structural conditions that shape professional practice.

Report 1 showed that the language sector contributes to economic activity and employment across a range of domains, while also identifying ongoing challenges related to institutional coordination, the availability and consistency of data, and uneven levels of visibility across different language groupings. It also highlighted the role of emerging governance structures such as the SALPC and the value of improved economic and institutional monitoring.

Report 2 translated these structural observations into a set of governance, regulatory and systems design considerations. It confirmed the importance of a national practitioner database for regulation, quality assurance and coordination, and outlined practical issues related to professional classification, accreditation, CPD compliance, data protection and sustainable funding.

Taken together, the two reports establish the policy and institutional context within which Report 3 is located. The practitioner-focused needs and capacity assessment therefore builds directly on these earlier findings by examining how existing policy intentions and governance arrangements are reflected in the knowledge, skills, training pathways and professional conditions of language practitioners in practice.

Chapter 5 Assessment of Educational Needs

5.1. Introduction

This chapter examines the extent to which South Africa's current higher education and training landscape is aligned with the professional requirements of language practitioners. It draws on available labour market data, graduate outcome studies, institutional programme reviews, and insights from stakeholder interviews and surveys conducted as part of this study.

A central challenge confronting the sector is the absence of a consolidated, practitioner-focused dataset that maps qualification pathways, professional registration, and labour market outcomes in an integrated manner. While the national qualifications framework provides a comprehensive listing of accredited programmes, it does not readily isolate language-practitioner-specific training routes. Similarly, graduate destination surveys typically aggregate language graduates within broader humanities categories, making it difficult to track the specific transition patterns of translators, interpreters, editors, terminologists, lexicographers, and related professionals.

Available evidence nevertheless points to a recurring structural pattern. Language and humanities graduates tend to experience relatively weak immediate labour market absorption compared with graduates in fields such as health sciences and engineering. However, longitudinal data indicate substantial improvement over time, with long-term employment rates converging toward national graduate averages. This suggests that the issue is not one of systemic irrelevance of language qualifications, but rather one of transition dynamics, alignment, and professional signalling.

At the same time, interviews and sector consultations highlight concerns regarding gaps in applied competencies, including mechanical language accuracy, tool-specific digital proficiency (particularly in Human Language Technologies), domain-specific terminology, and business literacy for freelance and small-enterprise practice. These concerns coexist with evidence of strong academic research output in linguistics and language-related disciplines, underscoring a distinction between academic excellence and professional preparedness.

This chapter therefore does not seek to rank institutions or evaluate research performance. Instead, it assesses the structural features of existing educational provision, identifies areas of misalignment between tertiary training and workplace requirements, and highlights gaps in data and coordination that constrain strategic planning. The analysis forms the evidentiary basis for the policy and professionalisation recommendations developed in subsequent chapters.

5.2. Educational Needs of Language Practitioners Based on Prior Survey Results

Evidence gathered across Reports 1 and 3 of the Economics of Language (EOL) series indicates that language practitioners in South Africa experience a discernible gap between formal academic preparation and the practical demands of contemporary language work. While university programmes provide important theoretical and linguistic foundations, practitioners consistently report that additional competencies are required to function effectively in a rapidly evolving professional environment.

Survey data, semi-structured interviews and focus group engagements reveal several recurring priority areas.

- Practitioners emphasise the need for stronger applied technical competence. This includes structured exposure to computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, terminology management systems, localisation software, subtitling platforms and emerging AI-assisted workflows. Although some institutions have begun incorporating digital tools into their curricula, the extent and depth of such exposure vary considerably across programmes.
- Digital literacy and AI integration have emerged as critical areas of concern. Artificial intelligence, machine translation and natural language processing are reshaping the language services industry. Practitioners expressed both apprehension and opportunity-oriented perspectives: while automation may increase productivity, it also requires new forms of quality control, ethical oversight and workflow adaptation. There is a clear demand for structured training that enables practitioners to use AI responsibly and competitively rather than reactively.
- Business and entrepreneurial skills were repeatedly identified as insufficiently addressed within formal qualifications. A significant proportion of practitioners operate as freelancers or small enterprises. Many respondents indicated that competencies such as pricing strategy, contract negotiation, tax compliance, client management and intellectual property management are acquired informally after graduation rather than through structured coursework.
- There is demand for clearer and more accessible specialisation pathways. Areas such as legal translation, court interpreting, healthcare interpreting, technical and engineering translation, media localisation and terminology development require specialised knowledge beyond general linguistic competence. Practitioners reported limited visibility regarding how to access structured specialisation tracks within the tertiary education system.
- The need for a coherent Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework was consistently raised. Although CPD opportunities exist through professional associations, short courses and ad hoc training initiatives, these are fragmented and not yet systematically aligned with national accreditation pathways. Respondents expressed support for a structured CPD model linked to registration categories under the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC).
- Practitioners emphasised the importance of expanded training in African languages, including terminology development, corpus development, language revitalisation and digital language resource development. The intersection between indigenous language development and Human Language Technologies (HLT) was identified as an emerging priority area.

It must be noted that these findings derive primarily from survey and qualitative data rather than a nationally representative curriculum evaluation study. South Africa currently lacks an integrated dataset linking graduate outcomes, qualification pathways and occupational categories in the language sector. Nonetheless, the convergence of responses across multiple data sources suggests consistent patterns in perceived educational gaps.

5.3. Labour Market Outcomes and Transition Dynamics

Available labour market evidence indicates that the challenge facing language graduates is less one of structural irrelevance and more one of transition and alignment. National graduate

unemployment overall is estimated at approximately 6–10%; however, humanities and language-related graduates experience higher levels of short-term unemployment. Several studies report unemployment rates of 10–15% shortly after graduation, with some cohort-specific analyses indicating substantially higher figures in periods of labour market saturation (Botha & Botha 2022; MacGinty 2024).

Importantly, longitudinal data show that employment outcomes improve significantly over time. Five to seven years after graduation, humanities and language graduates record employment rates of approximately 80–90%, with some estimates indicating absorption levels approaching 90–97% in the longer term (Botha & Botha 2022). These findings suggest delayed labour market integration rather than persistent exclusion. The pattern points to a conversion lag between academic qualification and stable professional positioning.

Variation is also evident across institutional types and socio-economic groups. Research-intensive universities tend to show stronger short-term absorption than universities of technology and historically disadvantaged institutions, although long-term employment rates converge. National labour force analyses further indicate disparities across demographic groups, with Black graduates experiencing higher short-term unemployment rates in comparable fields (MacGinty 2024). At the same time, graduates supported through NSFAS funding schemes demonstrate strong long-term employment outcomes, suggesting that educational completion and sustained progression are key mediating factors.

Taken together, these findings support the interpretation that the central issue is not the inherent value of language and humanities qualifications, but the degree to which curricula facilitate transition into applied professional roles. Competencies such as multilingualism, analytical reasoning and advanced communication remain valued in government, education, policy and civil society contexts. However, evidence consistently indicates that structured workplace exposure, applied skill development and industry-linked training significantly improve early employment prospects.

The educational needs of language practitioners must therefore be understood within this transition framework. Where programmes emphasise theoretical or literary components without sufficient applied integration, graduates may require extended periods to translate academic competence into employable professional capability. This alignment challenge forms the basis for the subsequent evaluation of existing programmes.

5.4. Training and Accreditation

The analysis of educational needs must be situated within the broader institutional framework governing professional regulation. The SALPC Act mandates the Council to regulate training, accreditation and professional standards. However, the current educational landscape does not operate within a unified accreditation-aligned framework specific to language practitioners.

Training provision is dispersed across public universities, universities of technology, private higher education institutions and specialised short-course providers. In many cases, qualifications are academically robust but not formally linked to a recognised professional registration pathway. Conversely, certain forms of technical or tool-specific training are available outside the university system but lack formal recognition within a broader professional standard-setting framework.

This fragmentation creates three structural challenges:

1. **Absence of Clear Qualification-to-Registration Pathways:** There is currently no nationally consolidated mapping that aligns specific qualifications with SALPC registration categories or accreditation thresholds.
2. **Uneven Integration of Practical Competencies:** While theoretical grounding in linguistics and language studies remains strong, applied competencies (particularly digital and industry-specific skills) are inconsistently integrated.
3. **Fragmented CPD Architecture:** Post-qualification development is not systematically coordinated across institutions, associations and regulatory bodies.

The gap, therefore, is not necessarily one of complete absence of training, but of coordination, visibility and alignment. The absence of a coherent accreditation-linked training framework limits the ability of practitioners to navigate professional pathways and constrains the Council's ability to standardise competency thresholds.

5.5. Evaluation of Existing Programmes

South Africa's public universities offer a range of language-related qualifications across faculties of humanities, education and applied sciences. These include degrees in linguistics, applied linguistics, African languages, Afrikaans and Dutch, English language and linguistics, translation and interpreting, multilingual education and related fields.

In addition to traditional language majors, some institutions provide postgraduate diplomas, honours degrees and master's programmes with specialised components in translation studies, language policy, lexicography or language teaching.

However, several structural observations emerge from this review:

1. **Programme visibility is uneven.** While core language majors are identifiable within faculty structures, professional language-practitioner pathways are not always explicitly signposted as such.
2. **Practical tool-based training varies significantly across institutions.** Exposure to CAT tools, localisation software or AI-assisted workflows is not uniformly embedded in curricula.
3. **Geographic distribution of programmes reflects broader higher education concentration patterns.** Access to specialised language-practitioner training is more readily available in major metropolitan centres, with limited offerings in certain provinces.
4. **Private providers and technical institutes increasingly bridge gaps in tool-specific training and short-course certification.** These programmes often respond more rapidly to technological developments but operate outside a consolidated accreditation framework.

Importantly, the national qualifications database maintained by the South African Qualifications Authority lists all NQF-aligned qualifications. However, its search functionality does not permit targeted isolation of language-practitioner-specific programmes. Searches for "language" return a wide array of qualifications in business, engineering, education and other disciplines that reference language-related competencies. This reflects the embedded nature of language within multiple professional domains but also underscores the difficulty of extracting a clear practitioner-focused training map from existing datasets. Consequently, the evaluation of existing programmes must be understood as indicative rather than exhaustive.

5.6. Embedded Language Competencies Across Disciplines

An important finding of this audit is that language-related competencies are embedded across numerous non-language qualifications. Business degrees often include professional communication modules; engineering programmes may incorporate technical writing; legal degrees address courtroom language and drafting; health sciences engage with patient communication and multilingual practice.

These competencies contribute materially to the broader language economy but are not typically classified under a recognised “language practitioner” category. As a result, the scale and scope of language-related training in South Africa may be systematically under-recognised. This dispersion reinforces a key insight from Report 1: the language economy is structurally dispersed and administratively invisible. Without a coherent taxonomy linking embedded language competencies to professional categories, policy planning remains constrained.

5.7. Summary: Implications for Training

The assessment of educational needs and existing programmes reveals a sector characterised less by absence than by fragmentation and misalignment. South Africa possesses significant higher education capacity in linguistics and language studies. However:

- Practical and digital competencies are unevenly integrated.
- Specialisation pathways lack visibility and coordination.
- CPD architecture remains fragmented.
- Qualification-to-accreditation linkages are not systematised.
- National data systems do not permit clean extraction of practitioner-focused training pathways.

These findings have several implications:

1. There is a need for a structured national audit linking qualifications, occupational categories and SALPC registration thresholds.
2. Alignment between academic programmes and professional accreditation standards should be strengthened through structured dialogue between higher education institutions, industry stakeholders and the SALPC.
3. CPD frameworks should be standardised and integrated within a national professional architecture.
4. Future research should focus on graduate employment outcomes and employer satisfaction to better assess curriculum–industry alignment.

In summary, while South Africa’s higher education system provides substantial linguistic capacity, the absence of coordinated alignment mechanisms constrains the full professionalisation and economic activation of the language sector. Addressing these structural gaps is essential to operationalising the SALPC in a manner that is both credible and economically sustainable.

5.8. Analysis of the courses offered by SAQA-accredited higher education institutions and their alignment with the identified needs

South African universities report varying graduation outcomes and employment rates for language graduates, often grouped under humanities or linguistics programmes. Humanities graduates, including those in languages, face higher unemployment challenges compared to STEM fields, with national graduate unemployment around 6-10% but up to 78% in some studies for recent humanities cohorts.

Employment improves over time, reaching 90-97% absorption seven years post-graduation for many (Botha and Botha 2022).

5.8.1. Employment Rates Overview

Humanities and language-related graduates experience unemployment rates of 10-15% shortly after graduation, rising to 78.9% in targeted studies due to skills mismatches with employer needs. UCT's 2023 humanities graduates had a 31.6% immediate employment rate, with 16.6% still seeking work. Overall, graduate employment stands at 84% for degree holders, but humanities lag behind health and education fields (Botha and Botha 2022).

5.8.2. University-Specific Insights

UCT and Stellenbosch show 10% average unemployment two years out, better than CPUT's 15.8%. NSFAS-funded graduates, including humanities, achieve 91% average employment, with full absorption long-term.

Language programmes emphasize employability through translation, policy, and multilingual skills, aligning with SA's 11 official languages, though practical internships boost outcomes (Digital Strategy Institute 2025).

Research conducted by P.A. Botha and A. Botha found that South African universities report humanities and language graduates achieving 80-90% long-term employment (5-7 years post-graduation), but immediate rates hover at 30-50% due to skills mismatches and market saturation. All 26 public universities contribute to national graduate data, with historically white universities (HWUs) like UCT and Stellenbosch outperforming historically black universities (HBUs) in short-term employability. Language-specific outcomes align with humanities trends, emphasizing translation and policy roles amid SA's multilingual economy. (Botha and Botha 2022)

5.8.3. Employment Rates by University Type

Graduation and employment vary by institution category, with comprehensive data from HEMIS and graduate destination surveys (GDS). HWUs lead in absorption, while universities of technology lag initially.

Table 1: Employment rates by university type. (Botha and Botha 2022)

Category	Immediate Employment (Humanities, Languages)	7 year absorption rate	Key Notes unisapressjournals+2
Research Universities (UCT, Wits, Stellenbosch, UP, UJ)	31-48% (e.g., UCT Humanities 31.6%).	90-97%	Strong networks; UCT 16.6% seeking work at graduation.
Comprehensive (NWU, UFS, UKZN, Rhodes, NMU)	35-45%.	85-95%	Multilingual focus boosts policy jobs; NWU 74% overall.
Traditional HBUs (Fort Hare, Limpopo, Venda, Walter Sisulu)	25-40%.	80-90%	Higher initial unemployment; slower absorption.
Universities of Technology (TUT, CPUT, DUT, VUT)	20-35% (e.g., CPUT 15.8% two years out).	80-92%	Practical diplomas aid entry- level roles.
Distance (UNISA)	30-40%.	85-90%	High volume; 1.1% of UCT peers pursued further study.

5.8.4. Outcomes Across All Universities

MacGinty (2024) reports that, according to Quarterly Labour Force Survey data from 2008 to 2023, which aggregates all 26 public institutions: humanities/language graduates face 10-15% unemployment short-term (vs. 2,1% overall graduates), peaking at 78.9% in some cohorts due to oversupply.

NSFAS-funded graduates from any university reach 91% employment long-term.

Competencies like multilingualism and critical thinking enhance employability in education, government, and NGOs, though internships improve immediate prospects. Black graduates across universities experience 6,5% higher unemployment than whites (MacGinty 2024).

5.9. Evaluation of existing programmes

5.9.1. Tertiary Education Programmes for Language Practitioners

South African tertiary institutions provide accredited programmes for language practitioners in translation, interpreting, editing, lexicography, and terminology management, covering diplomas through to doctorates.

The programmes focus on official languages such as Afrikaans, English, isiZulu, Sesotho, and SASL, and meet national multilingual policy requirements while equipping students with practical professional skills.

5.9.2. The role of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC)

The mandate of the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC) is to promote and develop all eleven official languages of the Republic of South Africa through its National Language Service unit.

The unit consists of four directorates, namely: Human Language Technologies; Language Planning and Development; Terminology Development and Translation and Editing.

DSAC prioritizes modules like Translation/Editing, Interpreting, Lexicography, Terminology, Language Planning, HLT, Document Design, and indigenous languages/SASL.

Through the Human Language Technologies (HLT) directorate, the Department provides financial support towards the development of language applications, software and systems that use all official languages.

HLT conducts workshops to train translators and students on the use of computer-aided translation (CAT) tools. The tools are open source, so they are downloadable at no cost to translators, and HLT training is free.

Autshumato Integrated Translation Environment (ITE) is a free computer-aided translation tool with translation memory, machine translation, and glossary features. Based on OmegaT, it is tailored for South Africa (DSAC 2026).

5.9.3. Leading Arts Universities – Times Higher Education

South African universities included in the Times Higher Education World University Rankings by Subject 2026 Arts and Humanities Rankings are the University of Cape Town (151-175), University of Witwatersrand (176-200,) Stellenbosch University (201-250), University of Johannesburg (251-300), University of Pretoria (301-400), University of KwaZulu-Natal (401-500), University of Free State (401-500), University of Western Cape (401-500), North-West University (501-600), University of South Africa (501-600), and Nelson Mandela University (601-800). (Times Higher Education 2026)

The five core pillars of evaluation are the teaching reputation; research environment, research quality, industry, and international outlook.

The highest ranked South African university in the industry category is the University of the Witwatersrand, followed by Stellenbosch and then the University of Cape Town, North West University and the University of Pretoria. The category measures the university's ability to assist industry with innovations and inventions.

The University of Johannesburg, University of Witwatersrand and University of Cape Town are the highest-ranked in the International Outlook category, which measures the ability of the university to attract undergraduates, graduates and faculty members.

5.9.4. Top-Ranked Linguistics Programmes

Edurank has based the following ranking based on the research performance of South African universities in Linguistics. A graph of 1,04 million citations received by 75.8K academic papers made by 24 universities in South Africa was used to calculate publications' ratings, which then were adjusted for release dates and added to final scores.

UCT leads with strengths in phonetics, syntax, and African languages, praised for multilingual pedagogies and international collaborations. Wits follows closely, offering applied sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics with urban fieldwork opportunities. Stellenbosch and UP provide robust theoretical linguistics, policy focus, and translation tech, noted for research output. (EduRank 2025)

5.9.5. Adequacy of Current Offerings in Terms of Curriculum, Specialisation, and Practical Skills Training

Evaluations draw from research rankings (citations/publications), student feedback, policy alignment, and multilingual offerings across all 26 public universities. 92% have African language departments; strengths include decolonization efforts, but challenges persist in non-English instruction.

The evaluation exercise was conducted by EduRank, which used 1,04 million citations received by 75,8 thousand academic papers made by 24 universities in South Africa to calculate publications' ratings, which then were adjusted for release dates and added to final scores.

The researchers did not distinguish between undergraduate and graduate programmes and did not adjust for current majors offered (EduRank 2025).

Table 2: Evaluation of language courses offered by universities. (EduRank 2025)

University (Category)	Key Offerings	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	SA Ranking
UCT (Traditional)	Linguistics, African languages, multilingualism	Research excellence, phonetics	Limited non-English undergrad	1
Wits (Traditional)	Sociolinguistic, psycholinguistics.	Fieldwork, urban context	Admin feedback varies	2
UP (Traditional)	Translation, African languages, tech.	Practical projects	Afrikaans focus	3
Stellenbosch (Traditional)	Theoretical linguistics, policy	Development research	Decolonization pace	4
UKZN (Traditional)	Zulu immersion, English support	Cultural programmes	Resource access	5
UNISA (Comprehensive)	Distance African languages, translation	Accessibility, all indigenous languages.	Interaction limits	6
NWU (Traditional)	Multilingual (Afrikaans/Setswana), literature	Critical thinking	English dominance	7
UJ (Traditional)	Multilingual curriculum	Inclusive, global skills	Newer programmes	8
UFS (Traditional)	Linguistics, terminology	Community engagement	Visibility	9
UWC (Traditional)	African languages, applied linguistics	Equity focus	Funding	10

University (Category)	Key Offerings	Strengths	Areas for Improvement	SA Ranking
Rhodes (Traditional)	English/isiXhosa, cultural studies	Responsive teaching	Scale	11
NMU (Comprehensive)	isiXhosa, practical skills	Local relevance	Admin issues	12
TUT (Tech)	Basic linguistics	Vocational	Depth	13
Fort Hare (Traditional)	African languages	Indigenous focus	Resources	14
Limpopo (Traditional)	Multilingual studies (N. Sotho)	Decolonized options	Infrastructure	15
Zululand (Traditional)	isiZulu programmes	Regional strength	Research output	16
CPUT (Tech)	Language practice	Practical diplomas	Academic rigor	17
DUT (Tech)	Translation basics	Employability	Theory	18
Venda (Comprehensive)	African languages choice	Postgraduate flexibility	National profile	19
VUT (Tech)	English support	Entry-level	Specialization	20
CUT (Tech)	Language units	Tech integration	Breadth	21
WSU (Comprehensive)	African languages	Community ties	Data gaps	22
SMU (Specialized)	Health linguistics	Niche	Scope	23
MUT (Tech)	Basic multilingual	Local needs	Rankings low	24
UMP (Comprehensive)	Emerging languages	New initiatives	Maturity	Not ranked
SPU (Comprehensive)	Developing programmes	Policy alignment	Establishment	Not ranked

5.9.6. Additional Ranking Sources

5.9.6.1. QS World University Rankings

The University of Cape Town is ranked first in South Africa and between 101 and 150 globally in the QS World University Rankings by Subject for English. Wits is ranked #1 for citations.

Table 3: QS World Rankings of SA University language departments.

2025	Institution	Academic	AR rank	Employer	ER Rank	Citations	CPP Rank
101-150	University of Cape Town	63,3	101+	64,0	101+	83,8	72
151-200	University of Witwatersrand	57,9	101+	58,5	101+	100,0	1=
201-250	Stellenbosch University	55,9	101+	55,8	101+	92,4	11
301-350	University of Pretoria	50,6	101+	58,2	101+	83,6	74

UCT is the only one ranked in the Linguistics category, in the 301-350 band.

5.9.6.2. Youth Village ranking

Youth Village ranks UCT second nationally for linguistics programmes, emphasizing phonetics and syntax strengths.

1. University of the Witwatersrand (Wits)

The University of the Witwatersrand, located in Johannesburg, offers a highly regarded linguistics programme through its School of Language and Literature. Wits' programme is noted for its strong research focus, particularly in applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. The university's strategic position in a multilingual city also provides students with unique fieldwork opportunities.

2. University of Cape Town (UCT)

The University of Cape Town's Department of Linguistics is another top contender. UCT is celebrated for its comprehensive approach to linguistic studies, including phonetics, syntax, and language acquisition. The programme also benefits from UCT's extensive research resources and collaborations with international institutions.

3. University of Stellenbosch

Stellenbosch University's Department of General Linguistics offers a robust programme with a focus on both theoretical and applied linguistics. The department is known for its research in language development and language policy, making it a strong choice for students interested in these areas.

4. University of Pretoria

The University of Pretoria's Department of Linguistics and Language Practice provides a diverse range of courses, including language technology and translation studies. The programme is distinguished by its emphasis on practical skills and its involvement in significant language-related research projects.

5. University of South Africa (UNISA)

As a leading distance education institution, the University of South Africa (UNISA) offers flexible linguistics programmes that cater to a broad range of students. The Department of Linguistics at UNISA is known for its research in indigenous languages and language education.

6. University of the Free State

The University of the Free State's Department of Linguistics is recognized for its focus on language and society, including language contact and multilingualism. The program's strong research component is complemented by practical language training and community engagement projects.

7. Rhodes University

Rhodes University in Grahamstown offers a dynamic linguistics programme through its Department of English Language and Linguistics. The programme stands out for its innovative research and emphasis on language in cultural and social contexts.

8. North-West University (NWU)

North-West University's Department of Linguistics provides a comprehensive linguistics curriculum with a focus on both African languages and language technology. The university's commitment to multilingualism is reflected in its diverse course offerings and research initiatives.

9. University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN)

The University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Arts offers a linguistics programme with strengths in sociolinguistics and language education. The programme benefits from UKZN's location in a linguistically rich region and its strong research output.

10. University of Limpopo

The University of Limpopo's Department of Linguistics and Language Studies is known for its focus on indigenous African languages and language development. The programme emphasizes practical language skills and community-based research (Youthvillage 2025).

5.9.6.3. Mastersportal and Bachelorsportal Ranking

1. University of Cape Town
2. University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg
3. Stellenbosch University
4. University of Pretoria
5. University of Johannesburg
6. University of South Africa (UNISA)
7. University of KwaZulu Natal
8. University of the Western Cape
9. North-West University (NWU)
10. University of the Free State

5.9.7. Practical and short course programmes

There is a wide range of practical courses available.

Table 4: Practical skills and short course programmes.

Institution	Programmes Offered
Central University of Technology (CUT)	Postgraduate Diploma in Language Practice (NQF 8); Advanced Diploma prerequisites
North-West University (NWU)	BA in Language Practice (3-year); BA Honours, MA, PhD; campuses in Potch & Vaal
University of the Free State (UFS)	BA Honours, MA (coursework/mini-dissertation), PhD in Language Practice

Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)	NDip, BTech, MTech, DTech in Language Practice
Durban University of Technology (DUT)	Translation & Interpreting Practice; short courses in isiZulu/SASL
Nelson Mandela University (NMU)	BA Honours (Applied Languages); MA (Applied Language Studies)
University of the Western Cape (UWC)	Postgraduate Diploma in Language Practice
University of Stellenbosch (SU)	Short courses in translation (Afr-Eng, Eng-Afr/Xhosa); SASL beginner

5.9.8. Meeting Industry Needs

Language graduates from all universities benefit from SA's multilingual policy, but face initial hurdles; HWUs (e.g., UCT, Wits) show 31-48% immediate employment vs. 20-40% at HBUs/UTs. UNISA's distance learners achieve 85-90% long-term absorption despite high volume.

Table 5: Language courses offered by SA universities. (StudentRoom 2025)

University	Main Language Courses Offered
UCT	Linguistics, English Lit, African Languages & Literature, Arabic, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Spanish, isiXhosa, Translation & Linguistics, Language & Communication.
Wits	Linguistics, African Languages, English, Translation, Communication Studies, Sociolinguistics
Stellenbosch	Theoretical/Applied Linguistics, Afrikaans, African Langs, Language Policy
UP	BA qualifications in Languages, Linguistics, Translation & Prof Writing. Languages taught include English, Afrikaans, German, French, Sepedi, isiZulu, Portuguese
UJ	Multilingual Curriculum, English Hons/PhD, African Langs (Coursework/Research)
UKZN	Linguistics, African Languages, English Studies, Intercultural Communication.
NWU	Language Practice, Communication, Language Tech, Afrikaans, Setswana, Sesotho, English, BA in Ancient Languages, BA in Language Technology.
UFS	Sesotho/isiZulu (mother/non-mother tongue), Linguistics, Terminology
UWC	Afrikaans, English, Setswana Hons, African Languages, Applied Linguistics, Arabic, French, German, Latin.
Rhodes	English Language & Linguistics, isiXhosa, French, German, Translation & Interpreting, Afrikaans/Netherlandic, Chinese, Classics.
UNISA	African Languages (isiZulu/isiXhosa/Sepedi/Setswana), Linguistics, English/Afrikaans/Arabic/French/Portuguese/Mandarin, Communication Studies, Translation and Interpreting, Theory of Literature.
NMU	isiXhosa, English Lit, Translation Studies, Language Practice.
CPUT	Language Practice Diplomas, English Support.
DUT	Translation Basics, Multilingual Communication.

University	Main Language Courses Offered
TUT	Basic Linguistics, English Proficiency.
VUT	English Support, Entry-Level Multilingual.
CUT	Language Units, Tech-Integrated Langs.
Fort Hare	African Langs (isiXhosa focus).
Limpopo (UL)	Contemporary English and Multilingual Studies, Translation and Linguistics, Language Practice (N. Sotho).
Zululand	isiZulu Programmes, African Langs.
Venda	African Langs (incl. Venda), Postgraduate Flexibility.
WSU	African Langs, Community-Focused Langs.
SMU	Health Linguistics, Specialized Languages.
MUT	Basic Multilingual, Local Language Needs.
UMP	Emerging African Langs.
SPU	BA Honours in Languages (Afrikaans, English, Setswana. MA in Afrikaans, English, Setswana.

5.10. Gap Analysis: Workplace Requirements vs. Tertiary Training

Stakeholder feedback across the EOL survey, interviews and focus-group engagements indicates a recurrent perception of misalignment between the orientation of tertiary language training and the functional requirements of professional language practice. While many programmes provide important theoretical grounding and disciplinary depth, respondents from practice environments emphasised a stronger demand for applied competence, digital fluency and professional service capability. Within the limits of available evidence, five gaps were most consistently identified.

1. Stakeholders highlighted a gap in applied language mechanics and technical writing discipline. Employers and senior practitioners in media, publishing and professional communication contexts reported that graduates frequently require substantial workplace remediation before they can consistently produce mechanically accurate, error-free professional text. This concern was not framed as a rejection of academic training, but as an indication that foundational competencies in grammar, syntax, punctuation and editing practice are unevenly cultivated and assessed across programmes.
2. Respondents identified an emerging digital and AI literacy gap. The adoption of Human Language Technologies (HLT), machine translation and large language models is reshaping professional workflows, creating new requirements for tool-mediated practice, post-editing, verification and digital information management. Stakeholders noted uneven institutional approaches to AI integration and a perceived shortage of computationally oriented language skills, including basic data and coding competencies, particularly in relation to the development of digital resources for South Africa's indigenous languages.
3. Practitioners and employers identified limited preparation for the commercial and professional realities of language work. Given the prevalence of freelancing and SMME-based practice within the language economy, respondents described a need for basic business competencies such as pricing, quoting, contracting, client relationship

management, tender literacy and professional ethics in service delivery. These competencies are often acquired informally rather than through structured training pathways.

4. Stakeholders highlighted a gap in domain-specific competence and specialised terminology. Generalist language proficiency was widely regarded as insufficient for work that requires specialised vocabulary and contextual knowledge (e.g., legal, health, engineering, ICT). This issue is amplified in multilingual contexts where technical terminology in indigenous languages is underdeveloped or inconsistently standardised, constraining both service delivery and the growth of language-based economic activity.
5. Respondents consistently emphasised the importance of work-integrated learning and mentorship as bridging mechanisms. Practical competence is frequently acquired through workplace exposure and feedback cycles, suggesting that structured internships, service learning and mentorship arrangements are a critical complement to formal coursework. Stakeholders indicated that such pathways are unevenly available and not systematically coordinated across institutions or aligned to national professionalisation objectives.

These findings do not constitute a nationally representative curriculum evaluation. However, the convergence of stakeholder perspectives across multiple EOL data sources suggests that alignment mechanisms between tertiary provision and professional practice remain underdeveloped, and that applied competencies relevant to contemporary language work are unevenly embedded within current training pathways.

5.11. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that South Africa's training ecosystem for language practitioners is characterised less by a complete absence of provision than by fragmentation, uneven visibility and limited alignment between educational pathways and professional practice requirements. Public universities and other providers offer substantial academic capacity in language and linguistics disciplines, yet there is no consolidated national mapping of qualifications, specialisations and applied competencies linked to occupational categories or SALPC registration pathways.

A key constraint encountered in this assessment is the absence of an integrated dataset capable of supporting a systematic national audit of language-practitioner training. While the SAQA register provides public access to qualifications, its structure and search functionality do not readily support targeted identification of language-practitioner-specific programmes, and language-related modules embedded across other disciplines remain largely administratively invisible.

Within these constraints, the evidence from surveys and qualitative engagements indicates persistent gaps in applied mechanics, digital and AI literacy, business preparedness, domain-specific competence and structured transition pathways into employment. Addressing these issues will require coordinated alignment efforts between higher education institutions, professional bodies and the SALPC, including the development of a coherent CPD framework and partnerships that expand work-integrated learning and mentorship.

The policy implications of these findings, including options for accreditation-linked alignment, CPD prioritisation, and structured partnerships for internships and specialist training, are developed in Chapter 8.

Section B

Needs Assessment and Recommendations

Chapter 6 Online Survey Review

6.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the online survey titled “An Audit of Language Programme and Course Offerings at Public and Private Universities and TVET Colleges”. This online survey was aimed to serve as a basic audit of the language programmes and courses that are offered at our public and private higher education institutions and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges. This survey, was to obtain information that could be used by the SALPC (when established) to make decisions and policies in terms of accrediting language practitioners, developing and implementing standard practices, and in so doing establishing career paths for language professionals.

The survey was designed to create a record of current qualifications, modules and short learning programmes as well as future planned programmes. This information is crucial in assessing the capacity of the training sector and identifying potential vacancies that may indicate a need for development, thereby informing national development policies that will ensure proper professionalisation and standardisation of language services in a multilingual South Africa.

Unfortunately, though, only ten questionnaires were returned. This did not allow for the planned detailed analysis. Therefore, the possibility of making the results representative for the intended target group is extremely poor, and it is not possible to regard the comments given on some of the institutions as being characteristic for language education and training in general.

6.2. Methodology

Given that an understanding of the current capacity, and the anticipation of future professional development needs within the language sector is essential in drawing up an audit of Language Programme and Course Offerings at Public and Private Universities and TVET Colleges, information on existing offerings, as well as planned or proposed future programmes, was sought through a variety of fronts.

For one, this study embarked on drawing up a listing of the existing offerings from the various institutions’ online platforms, i.e. webpages, online documents, etc.

This effort of obtaining information to establish a database of language-related qualifications, modules, and short courses offered by public and private universities and TVET colleges is supplemented by a survey of individuals and/or organisations involved with the language practice, who were contacted via e-mail, through the SACO database, which included participants who took part in the previous studies of these economics of language series of papers.

The contact concerned with these individuals and/or entities was made on two occasions so far, first on the 12th of February 2026, and secondly on the 19th of February 2026, as a reminder. The newsletter about this survey was sent to no less than 7 000 SACO subscribers.

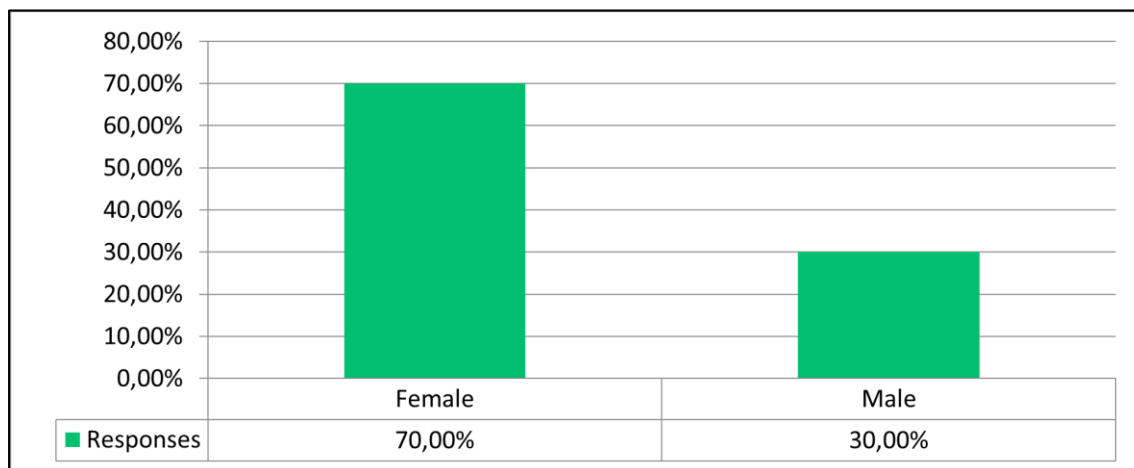
Further to these efforts, engagement with directors and/or leaders of language studies at the various public and private universities and TVET colleges within this country is in the works. That

is, upon completion of the listing of the existing offerings by the various institutions, engagement is going to be had following the outcome of the exercise.

6.3. Overview of Respondents

Table 6 below shows that of the 10 respondents, seven were female and 3 were male.

Table 6: Online Survey breakdown by gender.



Error! Reference source not found. below presents the racial composition of survey respondents, with the majority being African (6) followed by White (3). One respondent did not answer this question.

Table 7: Racial composition of respondents.

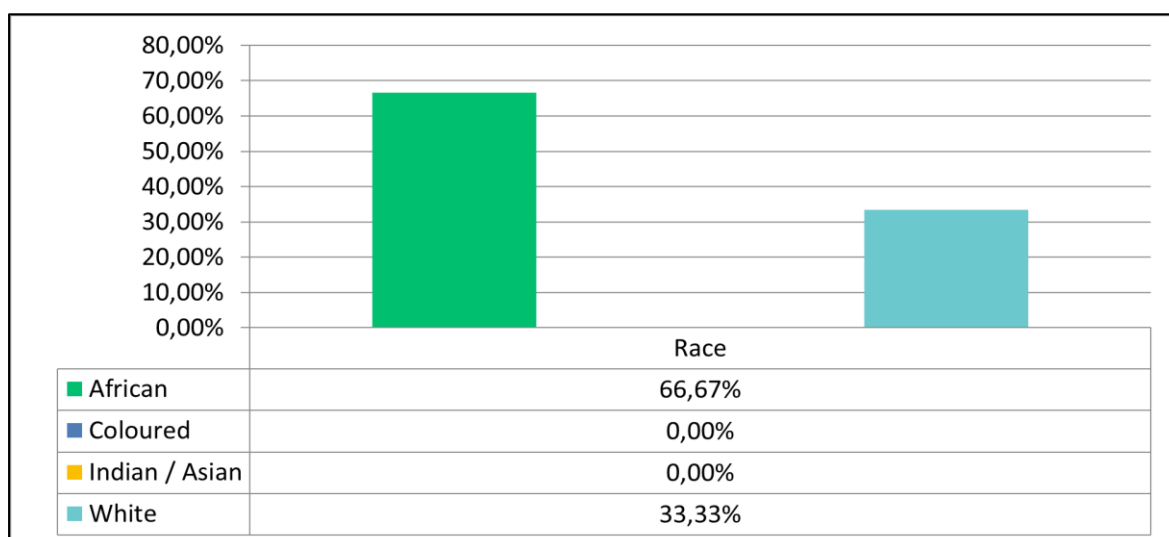


Table 8 below presents the distribution of respondents across various age groups, with an even distribution between the ages of 30-39; 40-49; 60-69 and 70 and older.

Table 8: Age range of respondents.

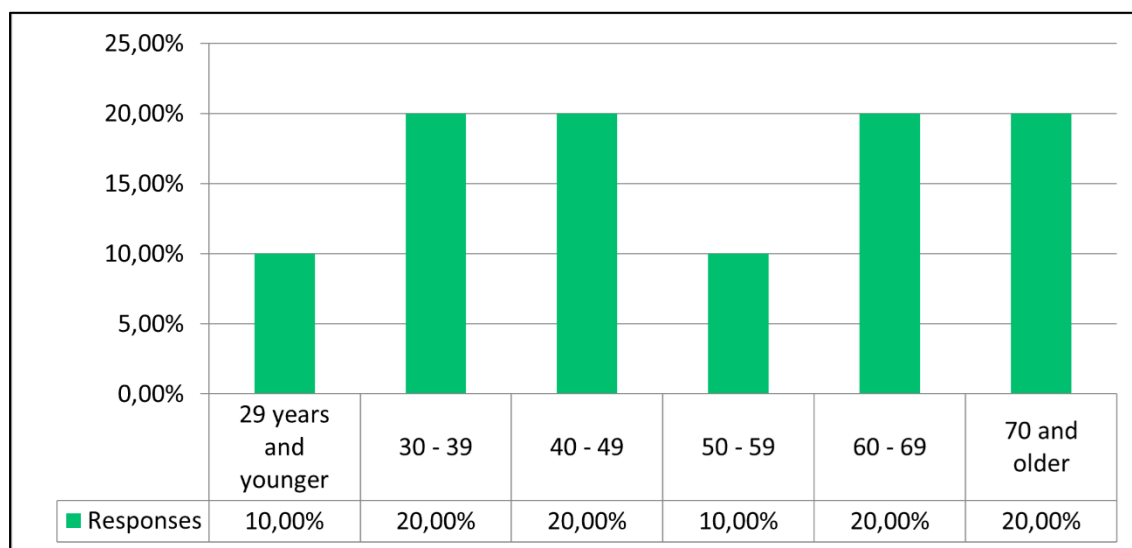


Table 9 below shows that four respondents were based in Gauteng, two in the Western Cape and one each in North West, Free State and Eastern Cape.

Table 9: Geographic distribution of respondents.

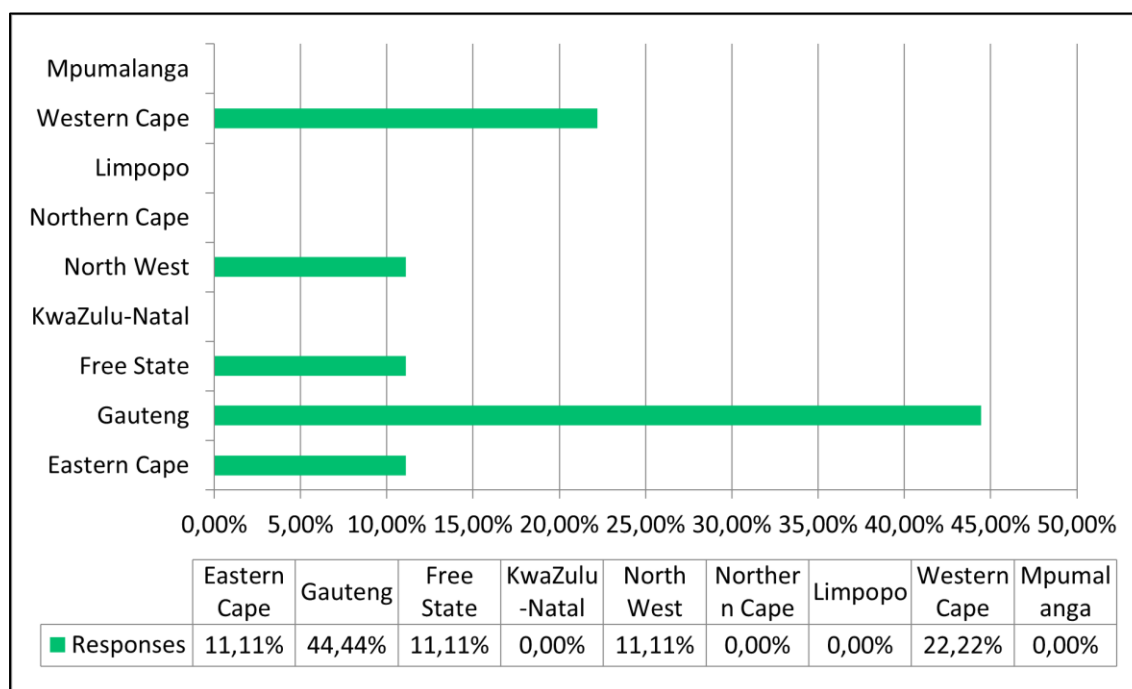
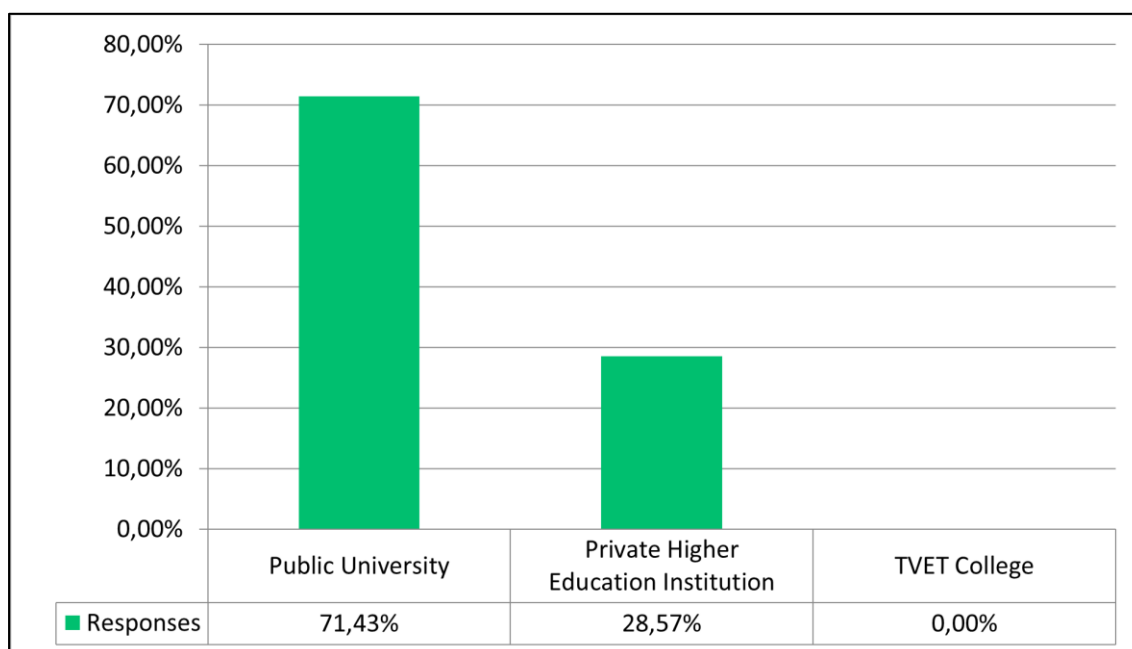


Table 10 below shows that while three respondents skipped this question, of the remaining seven – 5 are based in public universities and 2 in private institutions.

Table 10: Type of institution.



6.4. Institutional Information

Table 11 that follows, lists the details provided by nine of the 10 respondents of the faculty, school, or department responsible for language-related offerings at their institutions. Although the overall number of responses is limited, the data provides a useful snapshot of how language provision is institutionally located and structured across participating institutions.

Table 11: Overview of institutional responsibility for language offerings

Department Of Literature
Eden Language Academy
Faculty Of Humanities: Department Of African Languages and Literature
Centre For Language Research and Development
Department Of African Languages, School of Arts, College of Human Sciences
Faculty of Humanities, School Of Languages
Department Of South Africa Sign Language
Department Of Afrikaans and Dutch, German and French; Department of Language Practice, Department of Sign Language and Deaf Studies

Language Research

The responses indicate that language offerings are most commonly housed within Faculties of Humanities or Schools of Languages. Several institutions reported structures such as a Faculty of Humanities: Department of African Languages and Literature, a Faculty of Humanities, School of Languages, and a Department of African Languages within a School of Arts, College of Human Sciences. This reflects the traditional positioning of language studies within humanities-oriented academic frameworks, often alongside literature, linguistics, and cultural studies.

A number of responses highlight specialised or discipline-specific departments. These include a Department of South African Sign Language, as well as a combined structure incorporating Afrikaans and Dutch, German and French; Language Practice; and Sign Language and Deaf Studies. Such configurations suggest varying levels of differentiation within institutions, with some maintaining distinct departments for individual language groupings, while others consolidate language practice and applied language disciplines under broader academic umbrellas.

Two respondents referenced research-oriented entities, namely a Centre for Language Research and Development and Language Research, indicating that in some cases language provision may be linked to research centres rather than solely to traditional teaching departments. Additionally, one respondent identified Eden Language Academy, suggesting participation from a private or specialised language institution operating outside the conventional public university faculty structure.

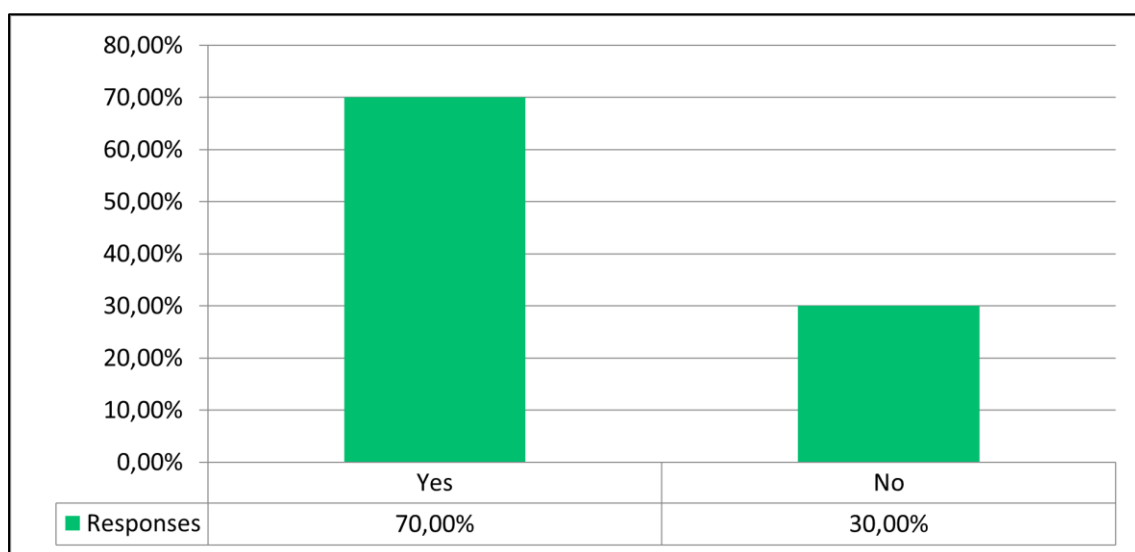
6.5. Languages Offered

Table 12 that follows shows that ten respondents answered this question, which asked if their college/university offered any language related degrees, diplomas or certificates. Seven of the colleges/universities (70%) did offer at least one degree, diploma or certificate related to language, while three did not. The respondent who put "Other" explained that his institution is only involved in research and development.

From the survey results it can be inferred that the majority of the institutions represented are engaged in formal language teaching and training at some level. Formal, accredited language education and training appears to be still very much entrenched as a core academic discipline within both the public and private sectors of education.

However, these results should be treated with caution due to the low number of completed questionnaires. At present, it appears that the language teaching and learning sector offers a diverse, mixed institutional landscape with formal programmes of study sitting alongside non-formal or alternative forms of language provision. Therefore, in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the sector and to plan and standardise system-wide, it is crucial to produce mappings of formal programmes of study but also to look at the wider diversity of language-related training and qualifications that exist in the sector.

Table 12: Does your institution offer formal language-related qualifications?



After the above question, respondents were requested to upload their institutional prospectus or documents containing details about their language degrees, diplomas, certificates or other programmes.

Unfortunately, no respondents submitted the requested documentation.

The absence of uploaded prospectus' and the list of structured programmes is one of the key challenges encountered during the audit process. Although the institutions indicated that they offer specific language learning and qualified qualifications; the lack of detailed information makes it difficult to confirm the nature of the programme (extremes/medians) as well as to establish the articulation with NQF levels and confirm the Language in which the programme is offered.

Table 13 that follows shows that nine respondents answered the question regarding whether their institution offers language-related short courses or modules for non-language students. Of those who responded, seven respondents indicated that their institutions offer such courses, while two respondents reported that their institutions do not. One respondent clarified that their institution develops learning programmes,

The data indicates that, within this limited sample, a significant majority of institutions provide language-related offerings beyond formal degree pathways. These may include service courses for students enrolled in other disciplines, elective modules, workplace-oriented language training, or supplementary language development programmes. This suggests that language teaching functions not only as a standalone academic discipline but also as a cross-cutting support area within institutional curricula.

The presence of such offerings is particularly relevant in the context of multilingualism, employability, and workplace communication competencies. Service modules and short courses often play an important role in equipping students from non-language disciplines with

practical language skills required for professional environments, community engagement, or sector-specific communication demands.

Unfortunately, none of the respondents provided requested prospectus or documents containing details of the courses offered. This, together with the small number of survey responses, means that the findings should be interpreted with caution. While the data suggests that short course and service provision is relatively widespread among participating institutions, further investigation would be required to assess the scale, scope, credit-bearing status, and alignment of these offerings with broader national professionalisation objectives in the language sector.

Table 13: Does your institution offer language-related short courses or modules for non-language students?

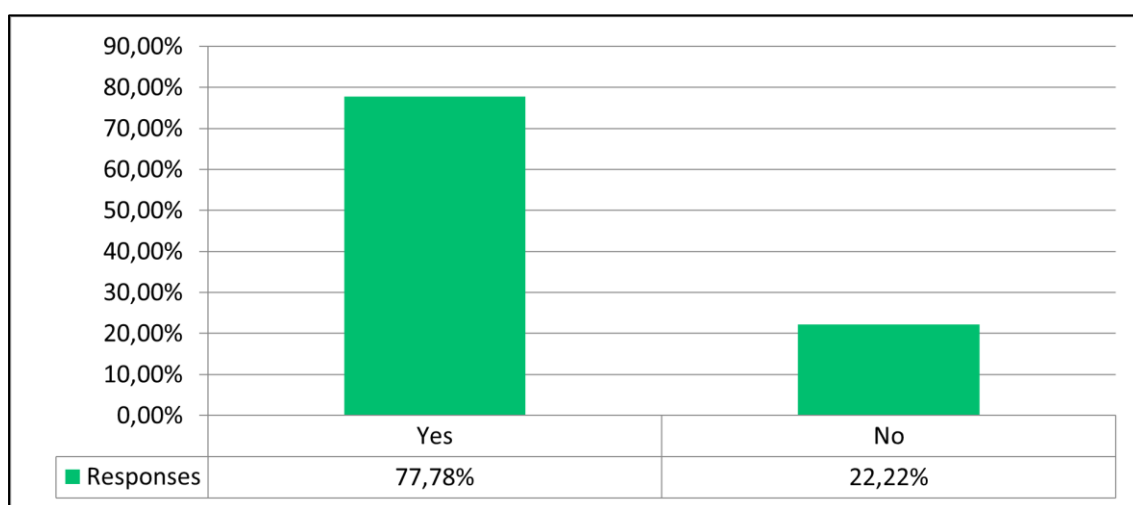


Table 14 that follows highlights the information provided by respondents on which of South Africa’s 12 official languages are offered as courses at their institutions. While the sample size remains limited, the responses provide indicative insights into patterns of language provision within participating institutions.

English was offered by all nine responding institutions (100%), confirming its dominant position within the higher education and training landscape. This is consistent with English’s role as the primary language of teaching, learning, and academic administration across much of the sector.

Among the other official languages, Sesotho was the most frequently offered (66.67%, six institutions), followed by isiZulu and Afrikaans (each 55.56%, five institutions). IsiXhosa, Setswana, and South African Sign Language (SASL) were each offered by four institutions (44.44%). Sepedi was offered by three institutions (33.33%).

Provision of the remaining official languages—Xitsonga, siSwati, Tshivenda, and isiNdebele—was limited, with each offered by only one institution (11.11%). This suggests that while there is some representation of a broad range of languages, institutional capacity for certain languages remains highly concentrated and potentially vulnerable.

The inclusion of South African Sign Language by four institutions is notable, particularly in light of its recent recognition as an official language and growing national focus on inclusive language access. Its presence within nearly half of responding institutions suggests emerging or established capacity in this area, although further detail would be required to assess the level and depth of provision.

Table 14: Which of South Africa's 12 official languages are offered as courses at your institution?

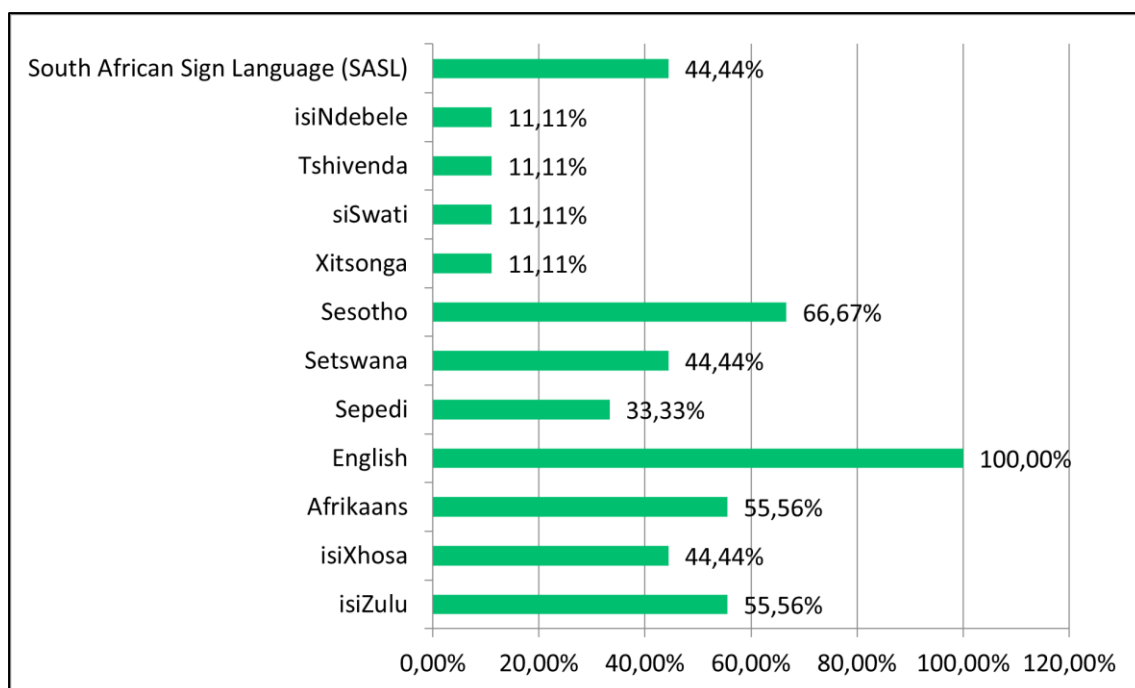
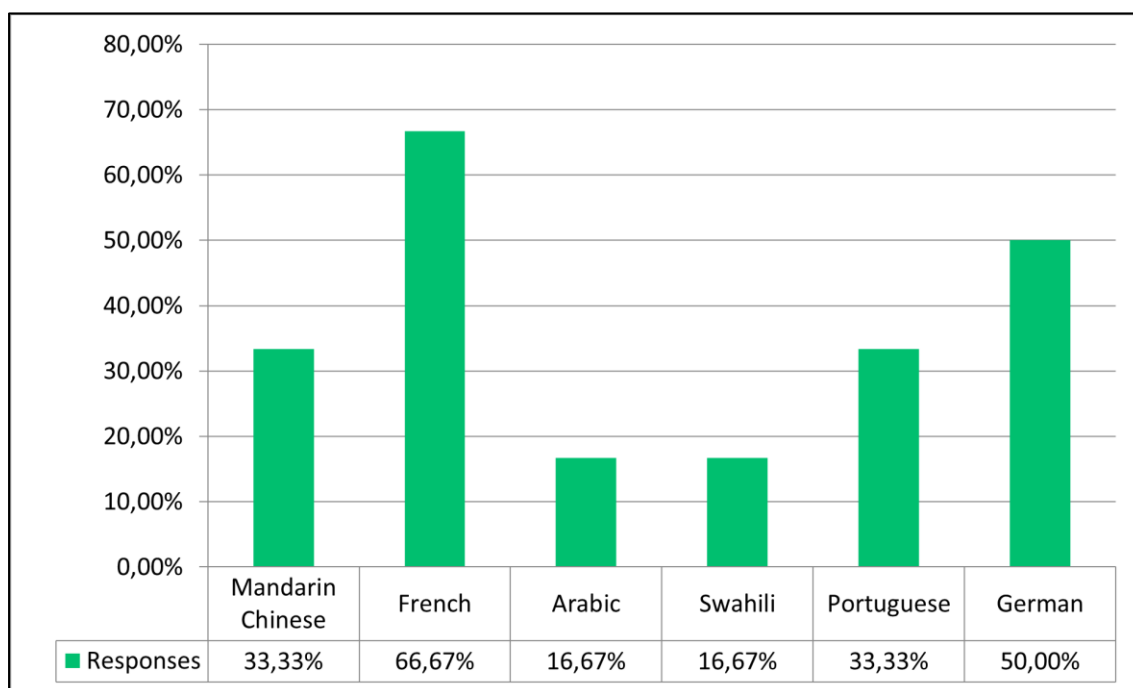


Table 15 below, provides an overview of the information provided by six respondents about the additional international languages taught at their institutions. As depicted, French emerged as the most frequently taught International Language, being taught in 66.67% of institutions, followed by German (50.00%). Mandarin Chinese and Portuguese were each taught in two institutions (33.33%), while Arabic and Swahili were each taught in one (16.67%).

Table 15: Which additional international or trading languages are offered?



6.6. Overview of Key Challenges Affecting Language-Related Programmes

Nine respondents provided qualitative feedback on the challenges affecting the delivery, development, or sustainability of language-related programmes and courses at their institutions. Although responses were brief and varied in focus, several recurring themes emerge, particularly in relation to funding, institutional sustainability, market demand, and systemic support.

Funding constraints were the most prominent concern. Multiple respondents referred directly to a lack of funding for research, insufficient financial support from industry and government, and the instability of government tenders. One respondent highlighted the cancellation of government-funded training orders despite prior allocation, describing this as a significant barrier to programme continuity and planning. These responses collectively point to financial volatility and limited sector prioritisation as core structural challenges.

Economic sustainability and employability were also identified as key concerns. One respondent noted that language-related courses struggle to demonstrate clear employment pathways, particularly in sectors such as media, which are perceived to be heavily dominated by English. This reflects broader tensions between multilingual policy aspirations and labour market realities, where English often retains a dominant functional status.

Marketing, student awareness, and language attitudes were additional challenges. One respondent indicated that students are not always well informed about available language-related courses, while another emphasised the need for stronger marketing strategies and a

shift in language attitudes. These responses suggest that beyond structural funding issues, language programmes may face reputational or perception-related barriers that influence enrolment and long-term viability.

Specialised capacity constraints were also noted. In particular, the shortage of teachers with both specialised training in Deaf education and proficiency in South African Sign Language (SASL) highlights a human resource gap in an area of growing national importance. This underscores the broader challenge of developing adequately trained language professionals across specialised domains.

One respondent indicated that their institution has developed an AI language model designed to overcome many challenges. While not elaborated upon, this response suggests emerging technological strategies aimed at addressing capacity, delivery, or access constraints within language education.

Finally, one response emphasised the importance of cultural grounding and respect for African values, pointing to the ideological and sociocultural dimensions of language provision. This highlights that challenges in the sector are not solely financial or administrative, but are also linked to identity, heritage, and the broader positioning of African languages within higher education.

6.7. Suggested Improvements to Enhance Language Programme Provision

Nine respondents shared their idea of the single improvement that would most enhance the design, delivery, or support of language-related programmes at their institutions. A number of respondents highlighted the need for strengthened academic and curriculum resources. One respondent specifically identified improved access to curriculum documents as a key enhancement, while another emphasised the broader need for necessary resources alongside a shift in attitudes toward African and indigenous languages. These responses suggest that both material support and ideological repositioning are viewed as essential for strengthening programme quality and legitimacy.

Human resource capacity emerged as another priority. One respondent identified the hiring of additional lecturers as the most important improvement, pointing to staffing pressures that may affect programme delivery, supervision, and expansion. Similarly, calls for greater awareness of language programmes suggest that institutional or public visibility may require dedicated strategic attention.

Technology, particularly artificial intelligence, featured in the responses. Two respondents identified the development or expansion of AI-based learning programmes or AI courses as a key improvement area. Another respondent indicated that their institution has already adopted a neurodevelopmentally informed approach and contrasted this with competitors' reliance on rote or "parrot learning," arguing that traditional methods do not align with how the adult brain acquires language. These responses collectively reflect growing interest in pedagogical innovation and digital or cognitive approaches to language instruction.

Sectoral integration and articulation were also raised as critical improvement areas. One respondent suggested stronger alignment between language-related courses and sectors such

as the media industry, arguing that integration across institutions and industry would enhance employability and societal relevance in a multilingual country. Another respondent's reference to schools, universities, and crèches may be interpreted as a call for stronger vertical articulation across the education system, from early childhood through higher education.

6.8. Conclusion

The responses to the online survey, while limited in number, still offers an instructive glimpse into the current configuration of language-related education and training across various institutions. The findings confirm a diversity of institutional arrangements, with language provision primarily located within Faculties of Humanities, Schools of Languages, and specialised departments. While it is not possible to generalise based on the sample size, the responses suggest that language education remains structurally anchored in traditional humanities frameworks, with varying degrees of differentiation and specialisation.

The data further reflects a tiered pattern of language provision. English is universally offered, while several major African languages and Afrikaans enjoy moderate representation. In contrast, a smaller group of official languages appears only sporadically across institutions. This uneven distribution raises important questions about long-term sustainability, institutional capacity, and alignment with national multilingual policy objectives. While these findings cannot be regarded as nationally representative, they point to potential imbalances in institutional language coverage that warrant more systematic investigation.

A similar pattern emerges in relation to international and trading languages. A relatively small number of institutions appear to have capacity to deliver courses in languages such as French, German, Mandarin Chinese, and Portuguese, and these offerings seem selective rather than widespread. However, the absence of detailed quantitative data, particularly regarding student enrolments, qualification levels, and integration into broader national skills development or economic diplomacy strategies, limits the depth of analysis that can be undertaken. Further research would be required to assess the scale, reach, and strategic positioning of such programmes.

The qualitative responses highlight a complex set of structural and systemic challenges affecting language-related programmes. These include funding instability, limited and inconsistent support from government and industry, concerns about employability and labour market relevance, marketing and awareness gaps, and shortages of specialised staff (particularly in areas such as South African Sign Language) that shape demand and institutional prioritisation. These themes are consistent with longstanding structural pressures within the language sector and underscore the need for coordinated policy alignment and sustained institutional support.

At the same time, respondents articulated a forward-looking agenda for improvement. Priorities identified include enhanced access to curriculum resources, expanded staffing capacity, stronger awareness and advocacy, improved sector integration (including articulation with industry and earlier educational phases), and pedagogical innovation through artificial intelligence and neurodevelopmentally informed approaches. Collectively, these proposals suggest a recognition that strengthening language provision requires attention to both structural support mechanisms and evolving teaching methodologies.

Thus, while the survey's limited response rate constrains its representativity, the findings inform key patterns and pressures within the language education landscape. They reinforce the importance of more comprehensive data collection, deeper institutional engagement, and sustained coordination between policy frameworks, funding mechanisms, and professionalisation initiatives to ensure the long-term viability and equitable development of language-related programmes in South Africa.

Chapter 7 Insights From Qualitative Interviews

7.1. Introduction

This chapter delivers a comprehensive analysis of qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews featured in Economics of Language Reports 1, 2, and 3.

Collectively, these interviews offer a longitudinal and multi-faceted view of the South African language sector by synthesizing the experiences, insights, and evaluations of academics, practitioners, government representatives, industry stakeholders, and civil society participants.

Each interview phase was designed with a specific analytical objective.

Report 1 concentrated on delineating the role of the language practitioner, assessing the impact of the language economy, identifying sectoral challenges, and evaluating the concept of a professional council.

Report 2 examined the feasibility, architecture, and governance of a national practitioner database as a critical instrument for professionalisation.

Report 3 advanced this body of work by conducting a national needs and capacity assessment of language practitioners within the framework of post-1994 legislation, with a particular focus on competencies, training, accreditation, policy awareness, digital preparedness, and economic engagement.

Collectively, these interviews establish a robust qualitative evidence base that informs the professionalisation strategy, guides the formation of the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC), and elucidates the interplay among language, regulation, skills development, and economic inclusion. All participants were volunteers who provided informed consent and were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality.

The interviews, typically lasting between 30 and 120 minutes, were recorded, transcribed, and archived. Summaries of each interview have also been preserved. The schedule of interviews is detailed in Appendix 1 of this report. Respondents represented a diverse and knowledgeable cohort, contributing invaluable information, perspectives, and enhanced understanding of the complexities inherent in the language sector.

The team conducted interviews with a wide cross-section of 44 academics, policy advisors, and language practitioners exploring the requirements of language education.

The total excludes participants in online workshops.

There is consensus that urgent attention needs to be paid to the quality of language education in the country.

7.1.1. Language Education Needs for Students

The most urgent need identified is for reading for meaning and foundational literacy, as approximately 80% of Grade 4 learners are currently unable to read for meaning in any language.

- **Mother Tongue Instruction:** Experts agree that foundational education in a child's mother tongue is essential for building cognitive foundations and confidence. Proficiency in an indigenous language allows students to better grasp complex concepts in subjects like mathematics and physics before transitioning to secondary languages.

"I believe those foundational phases in mother tongue... [are] absolutely important to build community ties and also develop stronger cognitive foundations that will allow them to acquire... secondary languages." — respondent 36.

- **Critical Literacy:** Beyond basic mechanics, education must focus on critical thinking. Students need to learn how to sort through information, identify manipulation, and understand the "cadence" and "beauty" of language that AI cannot replicate.

"The key thing we need to teach [students] to do is to be able to sort through that information... to find what's good information and what's valuable information, and also to see where they're being manipulated." — respondent 23.

- **Mechanical Accuracy:** Tertiary educators note a disturbing trend where graduates possess degrees but lack the practical mechanics of language, such as identifying parts of speech or using punctuation correctly.

7.1.2. Language Education Needs for Business

The business sector requires a dual approach that balances global competitiveness with local accessibility.

- **English as a Global Tool:** English remains the undisputed lingua franca for international trade, exports, and multinational corporate correspondence.

"The issue is that a lot of practitioners are not aware of the effort [of standardisation]... you have really profound and deeply felt disagreements... where even things as simple as spelling can turn into a huge, huge, huge debate." — respondent 4.

- **Empowering SMMEs:** There is a critical need to empower township and rural entrepreneurs by providing training in business language. Many SMME owners are "locked out" of the economy because they cannot navigate the "big English" used in government grant and loan application forms.

"How do we empower [entrepreneurs] to be able to understand application forms? These forms, unfortunately, do not come on indigenous language... they just come in English. How do they package that and respond strategically?" — respondent 17.

- **Plain Language Principles:** There is a growing demand for the "translation" of complex legal and business English into plain English to ensure contracts are understandable to the general public.
- **Niche Market Content:** The publishing and streaming industries are severely "underserved"; businesses need practitioners who can create high-quality content in indigenous languages to meet a high consumer demand that is currently ignored.

7.1.3. Language Education Needs for Academia

In academia, the focus is on professionalisation and the breaking down of silos.

- **Professionalising Academic Literacy:** Academic literacy is often wrongly viewed as a remedial "add-on." Instead, it must be treated as a specialised discipline requiring practitioners who are immersed in research and writing.

"There tends to be the assumption that anybody can teach academic literacy. That is not the case... you have to be immersed in the discipline. You need to research in the discipline, you need to write in the discipline." — respondent 34.

- **Open Data and Silo Destruction:** There is a desperate need for a centralised, open-access hub for language data. Currently, universities often create valuable linguistic resources (like glossaries or corpora) but keep them behind paywalls or within departmental silos, leading others to "reinvent the wheel".
- **Human Language Technology (HLT) Integration:** Curricula must adapt to include digital skills and AI ethics. Students need to learn how to "babysit the machine"—using AI for efficiency while providing the critical human verification that maintains accuracy and nuance.

Table 16: Primary needs as identified by interviewees.

Sector	Primary Education Needs	Key Objectives
Students	Mother tongue foundations, reading for meaning, and critical literacy.	To eliminate the "shame" associated with native languages and build cognitive confidence.
Business	Plain language training, business-specific vocabulary, and global English proficiency.	To ensure economic inclusion for SMMEs and facilitate international trade.
Academia	HLT and digital literacy, professionalised academic writing, and open-science collaboration.	To restore the dignity of indigenous knowledge and ensure global academic exchange.

7.2. Perceived Quality of Language Education

The quality of language education in South Africa is currently described in the sources as being in a state of "extreme distress", failing both international academic benchmarks and the practical requirements of the modern market-place. While policy frameworks are often praised as being "beautifully laid out" and "well thought out", there is a profound disconnect between these ideals and their implementation in schools and universities.

"English is taught quite poorly... we don't actually teach them the practical mechanics of how to identify parts of speech and how to use punctuation correctly... it permeates into the quality of language that's published." — respondent 25.

7.2.1. Academic Standards vs. Foundational Literacy

A primary measure of the quality crisis is the finding that 80% of Grade 4 learners cannot read for meaning in any language. This foundational failure creates a "vicious cycle" where students enter high school and eventually tertiary institutions unable to critically engage with information or decipher complex texts.

"Lowering the pass mark to 30%... is a recipe for incompetence. How can a country lift itself from poverty when you allow students to graduate from matric with 40% averages?" — respondent 29.

"The media industry is in extreme distress... senior individuals have been retrenched and people have been brought in at two or three levels below... the level of scripts from people that had degrees in journalism... I was shocked." — respondent 29.

Furthermore, international academic comparisons, such as the PIRLS study, serve as an "indictment" of the current literacy levels in the country. Experts note that the "idiotic decision" by the government to lower pass marks to 30% or 40% has led to a broad-based diminishing of skills, which one academic described as a "recipe for incompetence".

"We have children who enter high school unable to make sense, unable to critically engage with the world around them, because words do not have all those attended meanings... that is an indictment on literacy levels." — respondent 36.

7.2.2. Market-place Requirements and Professional Gaps

The market-place requires practitioners with high-level technical accuracy, yet employers in sectors like media and publishing report a "serious short supply" of quality writing. Specific requirements include:

- **Practical Mechanics:** There is a noted lack of mastery over basic grammar, punctuation, and "parts of speech," even among university graduates with degrees in journalism.
- **Plain Language Principles:** The market increasingly demands the ability to "translate" complex legal and business English into plain English to make documents accessible to the public and SMMEs.
- **Digital and AI Literacy:** The modern workforce needs practitioners who can "babysit the machine"—effectively prompting and verifying AI-generated content rather than just passively using it.
- **Global vs. Local Competence:** While English remains the undisputed status language for international trade (e.g., with BRICS partners like Brazil or China), there is an underserved market for content in indigenous languages, particularly in the streaming and publishing sectors.

Table 17: Comparative Quality Assessment.

Level	Current Quality Status	Market-place/Academic Requirement	Impact of Gap
Foundational (Grade 4)	80% unable to read for meaning; "dumbed down" system.	Foundational literacy and cognitive development in mother tongue.	Students enter high school "floundering" and unable to think critically.
Tertiary (University)	Focus on set-works over practical mechanics; degrees granted with 30-40% averages.	Proficiency in "business language" and technical accuracy (grammar/syntax).	Graduates are "shockingly" unable to string a coherent sentence together in professional roles.
Professional (Market)	Senior staff retrenched; quality of sub-editing in major papers has "plunged".	Specialized technical terminology and "Digital Literacy" (AI/HLT skills).	Loss of audience trust and credibility; financial decline of traditional media houses.

7.3. Role of the SALPC in addressing the challenges

A future South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC), mandated by the Act of 2014, is envisioned as a statutory body that will address the "extreme distress" in the language sector by regulating accreditation, training, and professional standards.

Its primary objective is to transition language work from being perceived as a "nice-to-have" cultural project to being recognized as a strategic professional skill. The council is expected to address language education challenges through the following key interventions:

7.3.1. Professionalisation and Standardisation

The council will establish a National Registry of Language Practitioners to provide visibility and legitimacy to the sector. This includes creating structured salary bands and standardised entry requirements to ensure practitioners are adequately remunerated for their expertise. By setting minimum entry requirements, it aims to distinguish qualified professionals from "hobbyists" or those with only mother-tongue fluency but no technical training.

"What I would like to see at some point is... a level of professionalizing of academic literacy practitioners... something that might really, I think, give us the gravitas that we might need." — respondent 34.

"The council should regulate and accredit language practitioners... set ethical and professional standards, advocate for better working conditions, and offer continuous development." — respondent 37.

7.3.2. Implementing Mandatory Continuous Professional Development

To ensure language educators and practitioners remain relevant in a shifting economy, the council will regulate Continuous Professional Development (CPD) frameworks. This includes

upskilling in digital literacy, ethics, and the use of Human Language Technologies (HLT) to ensure practitioners can effectively "babysit the machine" while maintaining accuracy.

"It would be very good for all the bodies to have regulation... so that when you're interacting with these practitioners, we know and we understand the professional context." — respondent 5.

7.3.3. Facilitate Mother Tongue and Foundational Literacy

The council will play a pivotal role in promoting mother-tongue instruction, which is viewed as essential for building the cognitive foundations necessary for students to eventually acquire secondary languages like English. This includes developing technical terminology for subjects like mathematics and physics in indigenous languages, removing the language barrier that currently hinders students from grasping complex concepts.

"I believe those foundational phases in mother tongue... is absolutely important to build community ties and also develop stronger cognitive foundations that will allow them to acquire... secondary languages." — respondent 36.

7.3.4. Advocacy for Marginalised and Indigenous Voices

Respondents go further by saying the Council is expected to act as a watchdog for linguistic equity, specifically protecting indigenous languages that are "at risk" or currently marginalised in formal sectors

This involves ensuring that rural and historically disadvantaged communities are not excluded from the language economy. It includes creating structured salary bands and pressuring government departments to budget for and hire qualified language professionals.

"Advocating for marginalised voices. It is unfair for all disciplines to be formalised and people without formal language to be excluded from the discussions and earnings." — respondent 41.

7.3.5. Eradicate "Silo Mentality" through Centralised Database

Currently, language resources (glossaries, dictionaries, corpora) are often developed in silos at specific universities and kept behind paywalls or departmental barriers. The SALPC will act as a bridge, ensuring that these resources are made available through open-access platforms for use in schools and government departments nationwide.

"We are lagging significantly behind [in digitisation]... one of the main reasons for that is that we have silo mentality... they don't make it available in an open access platform for all the other universities." — respondent 35.

7.3.6. Leading Digital Transformation and AI Strategy

With the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence and Large Language Models (LLMs), the Council must prioritize "getting ahead of the game" to ensure human practitioners are not replaced but rather empowered by technology.

This includes a massive effort to develop big data sets for African languages so they are accessible in the global "Internet of Things"

7.3.7. Enabling Economic Inclusion and SMME Support

A vital priority is breaking the language barrier in the economy, particularly for township entrepreneurs who are currently "locked out" of government grants and loans due to complex English documentation

The Council should facilitate the "laymanization" of technical business language into indigenous tongues to foster true economic reform

"How do we empower [entrepreneurs] to be able to understand application forms? These forms... just come in English. How do they package that and respond strategically?" — respondent 17.

7.3.8. Protecting Freedom of Speech and Ethical Standards

Beyond technical skills, the Council must prioritize the protection of freedom of expression, ensuring that language is never used as a tool for intimidation or exclusion

It should establish a national code of ethics to maintain high standards of accuracy and cultural sensitivity across the media and legal sectors.

Table 18: Summary of actions required of the SALPC to address challenges.

Area of Intervention	Proposed Action	Intended Outcome
Accreditation	Unified system for certification and career progression.	Quality assurance and improved remuneration.
Centralisation	Break "institutionalised silos".	Open-access national terminology and data banks.
Regulation	Unified accreditation and registry.	Elimination of "hobbyists," fair remuneration.
Curriculum	Integration of digital tools and HLT into language training.	Practitioners capable of working alongside AI.
Digitisation	Build corpora for all 12 languages.	Integration into global AI and voice technologies.
Foundational Literacy	Support for mother-tongue reading materials and foundational literacy.	Solving the "80% unable to read for meaning" crisis.
Economic empowerment	Plain language business training.	Financial inclusion for SMMEs and rural communities.
Resource Sharing	Establishing an open-access National Terminology Bank.	Efficient use of linguistic data across all 26 public universities.

7.4. Respondents' Roles and Experience in the Language Sector

(Summarised from previous reports)

The respondents interviewed across Reports 1, 2 and 3 represent a broad cross-section of South Africa's language economy, spanning policy, education, professional practice, research, publishing, media, civil society, and cultural production. This diversity enables the interviews to reflect both strategic and operational perspectives on the sector.

Table 19: Overview of Respondents' Roles and Experience (Reports 1–3)

Sector Category	Description of Roles Represented
Higher Education & Research	University-based academics involved in linguistics, applied language studies, academic literacy, curriculum development, translation studies, and postgraduate supervision.
Government & Statutory Bodies	Officials working in national departments, language policy development, terminology coordination, multilingualism promotion, and regulatory planning.
Professional Language Practice	Freelance and independent editors, translators, copy editors, and language service providers working across commercial, academic, legal and media environments.
Media, Publishing & Creative Industries	Journalists, editors, publishing professionals, content directors and creative writers involved in book publishing, news production and cultural content development.
Professional & Sectoral Bodies	Leaders and representatives from professional associations linked to translation, editing, linguistics and language advocacy.
Education (School Sector)	Teachers and school-based practitioners involved in literacy development, language teaching and learner support.
Civil Society, Arts & Cultural Organisations	Practitioners and managers working in theatre, heritage, community arts, advocacy and cultural development initiatives.
Foreign Missions & International Representation	Respondents involved in language and communication work within diplomatic and consular environments.
Business & Administrative Support Services	Independent providers of language-related administrative, documentation and secretarial services.

Collectively, these respondents bring institutional, practitioner-led, entrepreneurial and community-based experience into the research. Their combined perspectives provide insight into how language functions simultaneously as a professional discipline, a service economy, a policy domain and a social infrastructure.

7.5. Capacities and Skills of Interviewees

The interviewees, all of whom are involved in the language economy, provided detailed and valuable information and insights. The group interviewed is largely well qualified, and has extensive experience. The interviews highlighted significant gaps and challenges.

There is some consensus that there is often a disconnect between formal qualifications and expertise. As interviewee 42 put it:

"I think it's a misconception, because we need people that are highly qualified and have the knowledge and the expertise to perform such work."

Many interviewees feel language practitioners are undervalued and underpaid compared to other professions.

Despite their advanced qualifications, their skills are often underutilized, so many supplement their incomes with other roles or bespoke services, especially due to AI threats and funding issues. A regulated council is viewed as essential for setting professional standards and ensuring fair pay in the sector.

Chapter 8 Policy Implications and Recommendations

8.1. Introduction

The policy implications arising from the Economics of Language (EOL) series, culminating in Report 4, focus on transitioning South Africa's language sector from a fragmented, association-based profession to a formal, statutory regulatory model. The sources outline a comprehensive strategy for aligning higher education with industry demands, professionalising the workforce through the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC), and addressing the digital transformation of the language economy.

South Africa's language sector sits at the intersection of education, professional practice, technological transformation, and economic participation. While the country possesses a well-developed higher education system and a constitutionally entrenched multilingual framework, persistent structural misalignments remain between academic language training and the functional demands of the contemporary language economy.

Evidence from graduate outcomes, stakeholder consultations, and sector analysis points to a recurring pattern: language qualifications retain long-term labour market value, yet many graduates experience delayed professional absorption and uneven preparedness for applied practice. At the same time, employers report shortages in specific competencies, particularly in mechanical accuracy, digital workflow management, domain-specific terminology, and commercial literacy.

These dynamics suggest that the central policy issue is not the irrelevance of language education, but rather the absence of a coordinated, practice-oriented alignment framework that integrates tertiary curricula, professional accreditation, technological change, and labour market demand.

The recommendations that follow are designed to strengthen that alignment. They address curriculum design, work-integrated learning, digital integration, professional regulation, and data coordination, with particular attention to the role of the emerging South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) and related institutional actors.

8.1.1. Recommendations from literature and theory review

The literature review identifies several key policy recommendations for South African language policy, particularly within the higher education sector, to address the disjunction between local needs and global imperatives.

8.1.1.1. Strategic Curriculum Reform and Internationalization

- **Aligning with Global Trends:** Universities should undertake curriculum reform to maintain international competitiveness and contribute more effectively to South African industrial and economic development. This involves moving beyond a focus on national concerns to include global perspectives.
- **Integrating Foreign Languages into Development Visions:** Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are encouraged to conceive of foreign languages (such as Mandarin, French, Portuguese, and Swahili) as integral parts of their visions for international

development. Historically, these have often been marginalized in favour of a binary focus on English and a single indigenous language.

- **Balancing Global and Local Needs:** Curricula must balance the imperative of equipping students for global conversations with the specific realities of the South African learning environment and the broader African continent.

8.1.1.2. Multilingualism and Plurilingual Pedagogies

- **Broadening Multilingual Support:** Language policies should not support English and a dominant indigenous language at the expense of other official languages.
- **Adopting Plurilingual Approaches:** There is a recommendation to shift toward an integrative and plurilingual notion of language acquisition. This approach allows learners to leverage multiple cultural and linguistic resources to solve problems in exolingual exchanges.
- **Decolonial Pedagogies:** HEIs are encouraged to include decolonial pedagogical approaches that emphasize critical engagement and value locally derived practices, feeding into models of global citizenship.

8.1.1.3. Pragmatic and Economic Policy Frameworks

- **Pragmatism over Strict Principles:** Given the complexity of the South African linguistic landscape, policy should be guided by pragmatic measures rather than rigid ideological principles.
- **Political Economy Approach:** Scholars call for a substantive political economy approach to language planning. This would provide evidence of how investment in local cultural and linguistic resources can reinforce economic and social development, particularly in high-diversity contexts.
- **Connecting with Industry:** Language strategies need a stronger connection with business and societal imperatives, ensuring that language proficiency meets the demands of national and world markets.

8.1.1.4. Teacher Training and Professionalization

- **Skill-Acquisition Teaching:** Teacher training programmes should be updated with new skill-acquisition and skill-transmission approaches to support plurilingual teaching capacities.
- **ICT and Digital Literacy:** Policy should address the need for enhanced digital competence among academics and students, as South Africa shows only modest evidence of ICT use for developing 21st-century skills.

8.1.2. Professionalisation and Regulatory Oversight

The central policy imperative is the full operationalisation of the **SALPC**, as mandated by the Act of 2014. Key implications include:

- **Mandatory Registration and Accreditation:** Establishing a national registry to distinguish qualified professionals from "hobbyists," thereby ensuring quality assurance and improved remuneration.
- **Competency-Based Classification:** Implementing a three-tier system (Paraprofessional, Professional, and Expert) based on qualifications and experience.

- **Continuous Professional Development (CPD):** Regulating mandatory CPD cycles to ensure practitioners remain current with shifting economic and technological trends, particularly digital literacy.
- **Hybrid Funding Models:** Since a purely fee-based model is unsustainable initially, policy must secure transitional public funding combined with tiered, cost-reflective registration fees.

8.1.3. Curriculum Reform and Educational Alignment

Reports 3 and 4 identify a significant "alignment gap" between university curricula and workplace requirements. Policy recommendations for a recalibrated curriculum architecture include five pillars:

- **Functional Mechanics:** Explicitly defining and assessing mechanical accuracy (grammar, syntax, punctuation) as a core graduate attribute.
- **Digital and AI Integration:** Formally embedding Human Language Technology (HLT), computer-assisted translation (CAT) tools, and AI verification skills into standard curricula.
- **Entrepreneurial Capacity:** Integrating business skills—such as pricing, contract negotiation, and tender literacy—to support the high proportion of practitioners operating as freelancers or SMMEs.
- **Interdisciplinary Specialisation:** Establishing pathways for discipline-specific literacy (e.g., legal, health, or engineering translation) through inter-faculty collaboration.
- **Work-Integrated Learning (WIL):** Formally crediting structured internships and mentorship as essential bridging mechanisms between education and professional practice.

8.1.4. Linguistic Equity and Indigenous Languages

To move beyond the historical marginalisation of African languages, the sources advocate for several strategic interventions:

- **Linguistic Redress:** Policy must provide practical and positive measures to advance indigenous languages, including South African Sign Language (SASL), through targeted revitalisation and digital infrastructure expansion.
- **Terminology Development:** There is an urgent need to develop technical terminology in indigenous languages for STEM and vocational domains to remove language barriers in education and the economy.
- **Digital Sovereignty:** Policy must prioritise the development of large datasets and corpora for all 12 official languages to ensure their integration into the global "Internet of Things" and prevent technological marginalisation.

8.1.5. Data Coordination and Institutional Reform

The "administrative invisibility" of the language economy requires new data-driven governance structures:

- **National Dataset Integration:** Developing a coordinated data framework with SAQA, DHET, and Stats SA to track training volumes, employment trends, and skills gaps.
- **Breaking "Silo Mentality":** Establishing open-access national terminology and data banks to ensure linguistic resources developed at specific universities are available for nationwide use.
- **Economic Impact Monitoring:** Future policy should be informed by longitudinal labour-market tracking and sector-specific impact studies to quantify the language sector's contribution to the broader economy.

In summary, the EOL reports argue that language should no longer be viewed merely as a cultural asset, but as strategic economic infrastructure that requires a coherent national framework for training, regulation, and technological integration.

8.2. Consolidated Gap Analysis

A structured gap analysis reveals five interlocking areas of misalignment between tertiary training and professional language practice.

8.2.1. Mechanical and Functional Competence

Professional environments require high levels of grammatical precision, syntactic control, editorial discipline, and clarity in applied writing. Stakeholder consultations indicate that these competencies are unevenly developed in graduates, particularly where curricula privilege literary analysis over functional usage.

This gap does not imply academic failure; rather, it reflects insufficient weighting of applied mechanical competence as a measurable professional outcome.

Policy implication: Mechanical accuracy and applied writing must be explicitly defined as core graduate attributes within language-related qualifications, supported by rigorous assessment standards.

8.2.2. Digital and Human Language Technology Integration

The rapid integration of AI-assisted workflows, computer-assisted translation tools, terminology management systems, and machine translation post-editing has reshaped professional practice. In this environment, practitioners increasingly function as supervisors, editors, and auditors of automated systems.

Institutional responses to AI remain uneven. There is a shortage of hybrid linguistic-technological skills, particularly in relation to indigenous languages and domain-specific terminology databases.

Policy implication: Digital tool competence and AI verification skills should be formally embedded in curricula. Exposure to Computer Applications Technology (CAT) tools, HLT systems, and linguistic auditing methodologies should be standard rather than optional.

8.2.3. Business and Entrepreneurial Capacity

A significant proportion of language practitioners operate as freelancers or small enterprises. Yet commercial literacy—pricing structures, contract negotiation, intellectual property protection, tender processes, and client management—is seldom integrated into formal qualifications.

This contributes to under-remuneration, price instability, and weak professional sustainability.

Policy implication: Professional programmes should include structured components addressing the business architecture of language practice, without compromising academic integrity.

8.2.4. Domain-Specific and Multilingual Specialisation

General language proficiency does not automatically translate into competence in technical or disciplinary contexts. There is a documented shortage of practitioners capable of translating specialised terminology in fields such as law, engineering, ICT, and health sciences, particularly in indigenous languages.

Policy implication: Institutions should establish structured pathways for discipline-immersed literacy and technical terminology development through inter-faculty collaboration.

8.2.5. Weak Transition Mechanisms

Labour market data suggest that employment improves significantly over time, implying that graduates eventually adapt to professional expectations. However, the delayed absorption pattern indicates insufficient structured transition mechanisms between education and practice.

Internships, mentorship, and work-integrated learning (WIL) repeatedly emerge as effective bridging mechanisms.

Policy implication: WIL should be formally credited and quality-assured within practitioner-focused qualifications, supported through partnerships with government departments, terminology units, media institutions, and private language service providers.

8.3. Curriculum Reform Framework

To address the identified gaps, a recalibrated curriculum architecture is recommended, built around five integrated pillars.

Pillar 1: Functional Mechanics and Applied Writing

- Advanced grammar, syntax, and editing as explicit competencies.
- Plain language training for public communication and economic inclusion.
- Portfolio-based assessments demonstrating precision and clarity.

Assessment standards should prioritise applied competence rather than theoretical familiarity alone.

Pillar 2: Digital and AI-Integrated Practice

- Structured training in CAT tools and terminology systems.
- Machine translation post-editing workflows.
- AI verification and linguistic auditing.
- Introductory computational linguistics where feasible.

The objective is to professionalise human oversight within AI-augmented workflows.

Pillar 3: Language Entrepreneurship and Professional Sustainability

- Pricing literacy and reference rate frameworks.
- Contractual literacy, including NDAs and service-level agreements.
- Tender writing and procurement navigation.
- Digital portfolio development and client engagement strategies.

This pillar strengthens economic resilience within the language economy.

Pillar 4: Multilingualism and Interdisciplinary Integration

- Collaboration between language departments and technical faculties.
- Indigenous terminology development in STEM and vocational domains.
- Recognition of academic literacy as a specialised professional function.

This approach strengthens the link between language, technical knowledge, and socio-economic participation.

Pillar 5: Work-Integrated Learning and Mentorship

- Structured internship placements (8–12 weeks minimum).
- Mentorship pipelines linking practitioners and graduates.
- Service learning in public communication and translation contexts.

Experiential learning should form a credited component of practitioner training.

8.4. Regulatory and Institutional Implications

The establishment of the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC) presents an opportunity to align training standards and professional accreditation.

8.4.1. Competency-Based Accreditation

- Development of defined practitioner categories (e.g., translator, editor, interpreter, terminology specialist).
- Clear competency benchmarks linked to qualification levels.

- Recognition of digital tool competence as a professional requirement.

8.4.2. Continuing Professional Development

- Mandatory CPD cycles linked to accreditation renewal.
- Micro-credentials in digital language technologies and domain-specific terminology.
- Peer review and mentorship recognition mechanisms.

8.4.3. Data Coordination and Sector Intelligence

There is currently no consolidated national dataset linking qualification outputs, practitioner registration, and labour market outcomes. This constrains strategic planning.

A coordinated data framework should be developed in collaboration with SAQA, DHET, and Statistics South Africa to:

- Map practitioner training volumes.
- Track employment absorption trends.
- Monitor digital competence gaps.
- Identify regional and linguistic shortages.

The absence of reliable practitioner-level data represents a structural governance gap.

8.5. Strengthening the Foundational Pipeline

Although the primary focus of this report is professional training, foundational literacy levels affect long-term practitioner capacity. Persistent weaknesses in early reading competence have downstream implications for tertiary readiness.

While primary education reform falls outside the direct mandate of language professional bodies, coordinated advocacy is possible in the following areas:

- Promotion of explicit mechanical literacy standards.
- Development of indigenous language learning resources.
- Integration of South African languages into digital ecosystems to prevent technological marginalisation.
- Support for plain language frameworks in public communication.

8.6. Professional Profile for the Digital Language Economy

The emerging professional archetype is neither solely literary nor purely technical. The future practitioner must combine:

- Mechanical precision.
- Digital and AI oversight competence.

- Domain-specific literacy.
- Entrepreneurial awareness.
- Ethical and regulatory accountability.

As automated systems assume routine text generation, professional value shifts toward verification, contextual judgment, and cultural mediation. Language thus functions not merely as a cultural asset, but as strategic economic infrastructure.

8.7. Concluding Position

South Africa possesses a robust multilingual constitutional framework and a capable higher education system. The policy task is not to dismantle existing academic structures, but to recalibrate them toward functional alignment, digital integration, and professional sustainability.

By strengthening applied competencies, formalising work-integrated learning, embedding digital literacy, and operationalising professional regulation, the language sector can move from fragmented training pathways to a coherent national framework that recognises language as a driver of economic inclusion and technological sovereignty.

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1. Introduction

This sub-section has focused on recent policy developments regarding language provision, teaching and promotion in universities globally and in South Africa. The key role of foreign languages teaching in the internationalization drives of universities is considered, as is the positive impact of foreign language acquisition and proficiency within national economies and in the world economy.

The question of English as international academic currency as well its significance for global business and professional activity, and by implication university language planning, is raised. The discussion also considers the importance attached to foreign language programmes in raising the profile of the university in question, and in contributing to national economic development and international competitiveness.

Select examples from emerging African economies, and high performing economies in East Asia are compactly discussed.

Recent developments in South Africa are considered, most particularly the Revised Language Policy for Higher Education in South Africa (2020) and select institutional responses from the public South African universities.

The specificity of the multilingualism discourse in South Africa with its close engagement with on the official and indigenous languages of the country is revealed in the compact discussion of these recent developments.

9.2. The Training Ecosystem for Language Practitioners

This report has undertaken a structured review of higher education and training programmes available to language practitioners in South Africa. The analysis demonstrates that the country does not lack academic capacity in language and linguistics disciplines. Universities, language centres and private providers collectively offer a range of programmes covering translation, interpreting, editing, linguistics, and language practice.

However, the ecosystem is characterised by fragmentation, uneven visibility, and limited alignment between academic curricula and the practical requirements of professional language work.

One of the most significant constraints encountered in this study is the absence of an integrated national dataset capable of mapping training pathways, specialisations and professional outcomes across the sector.

While the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) register lists accredited programmes, it does not readily enable the identification of language-practitioner-specific training routes. As a result, many qualifications relevant to the language professions remain administratively invisible, particularly where language modules are embedded in broader humanities or communication degrees.

The evidence gathered through surveys, interviews and programme reviews nevertheless reveals a consistent pattern of misalignment between formal academic training and the applied competencies required in contemporary language practice. Practitioners repeatedly identified gaps in applied mechanics, digital and AI literacy, domain-specific terminology, business and entrepreneurial skills, and structured transition pathways into employment.

These gaps do not suggest that language qualifications lack value. Labour market evidence indicates that language graduates ultimately achieve strong long-term employment outcomes, with employment rates rising significantly several years after graduation. The key challenge lies in the transition period between qualification and professional practice, during which graduates must convert theoretical knowledge into applied competence within the language services economy.

Addressing this alignment challenge requires stronger coordination between universities, professional bodies, and the emerging regulatory architecture of the South African Language Practitioners' Council (SALPC). Structured partnerships that expand work-integrated learning, internships, mentorships, and industry-linked training will be essential to improve early career integration for graduates entering the language professions.

9.3. Implications for Professionalisation and Skills Development

The findings of this report also highlight the growing importance of digital competence and Human Language Technologies (HLT) within the language economy. Artificial intelligence, machine translation, terminology databases and localisation tools are rapidly transforming language services worldwide. South African practitioners increasingly require structured training in these technologies to remain competitive and to participate meaningfully in emerging digital language markets.

At the same time, the research underscores the importance of developing specialisation pathways within the profession. Language practitioners frequently operate in highly specialised domains such as legal translation, court interpreting, healthcare communication, media localisation, and technical documentation. However, structured academic routes into these areas remain uneven or poorly defined within the tertiary education system.

The study therefore points to the need for a coherent Continuing Professional Development (CPD) framework, linked to SALPC registration categories and supported through partnerships between universities, professional associations and government institutions. Such a framework would allow practitioners to update their skills throughout their careers while strengthening professional standards across the sector.

9.4. Synthesising the Findings of the Economics of Language Report Series

This report represents the fourth and final component of the Economics of Language research programme commissioned by the South African Cultural Observatory. Taken together, the four reports form a cumulative body of evidence designed to support the operationalisation of the South African Language Practitioners' Council and to strengthen the institutional foundations of the language economy in South Africa.

The series began with **Report 1**, which provided the first systematic mapping of the South African language economy. That study demonstrated that the sector generates significant economic value and employs tens of thousands of professionals across translation, interpretation, publishing, education, media and digital language services. At the same time, the report identified structural fragmentation, weak coordination among stakeholders, and limited statistical visibility as key constraints on the sector's development.

Report 2 addressed one of the most critical structural gaps identified in the first study: the absence of a national system for identifying and coordinating language practitioners. It proposed the design and governance of a comprehensive national database that would allow practitioners to register, verify their qualifications, record continuing professional development activities, and provide policymakers with reliable data for planning and regulatory purposes.

Report 3 then examined the knowledge, capacities and professional conditions of language practitioners themselves. Through a national survey, interviews and focus groups, the report identified a range of challenges including uneven access to training opportunities, limited awareness of policy frameworks, gaps in digital readiness, and fragmented professional development pathways. It also confirmed strong stakeholder support for the operationalisation of the SALPC as a mechanism to introduce professional standards, accreditation systems and structured CPD programmes.

Building on these foundations, **Report 4** has focused on the educational pipeline, examining whether the tertiary training system is adequately preparing practitioners for the evolving demands of the language economy. The analysis confirms that while South Africa possesses considerable academic expertise in linguistics and language-related disciplines, the institutional architecture linking education, professional practice and regulatory oversight remains incomplete.

9.5. Towards an Integrated Language Economy

Taken together, the four reports reveal a consistent pattern. South Africa possesses a strong constitutional mandate for multilingualism, a diverse ecosystem of language professionals, and significant intellectual and academic capacity. Yet the institutional mechanisms required to transform these assets into a coherent and economically sustainable language sector remain underdeveloped.

The establishment and operationalisation of the South African Language Practitioners' Council therefore represents a critical institutional step. By regulating accreditation, supporting professional development, and coordinating training standards, the Council can provide the structural framework needed to integrate education, practice and policy within the language economy.

If successfully implemented, this framework has the potential to deliver multiple benefits. It can strengthen professional standards in translation and interpretation, improve access to multilingual public services, support the development of indigenous languages in digital environments, and unlock new economic opportunities within the cultural and knowledge sectors.

More broadly, the Economics of Language programme demonstrates that language policy should not be understood solely as a cultural or symbolic issue. In a multilingual society such

as South Africa, language constitutes a form of economic infrastructure that underpins governance, education, justice, and social inclusion.

Developing this infrastructure requires investment in institutions, skills, data systems and professional standards. The four reports in this series collectively provide a roadmap for that process.

9.6. Future Research

While this study establishes an essential national baseline, it also highlights several priority areas for future research that are necessary to strengthen policy design, institutional planning and economic modelling within the language sector. These are:

1. There is a critical need for longitudinal labour-market tracking of language practitioners, including income trajectories, employment stability, platform-based work patterns, cross-sector mobility and generational entry and exit dynamics. Such data would enable more accurate forecasting of skills demand and supply under conditions of rapid digital transformation.
2. Sector-specific economic impact studies are required to quantify the contribution of language services to key value chains such as justice, health, education, tourism, creative industries, business process outsourcing (BPO), and localisation for global digital markets. These studies would strengthen the economic case for targeted public and private investment in language infrastructure.
3. Further research is needed into indigenous and minority language economies, including the commercial viability of local publishing, multilingual digital platforms, community interpretation services, localisation for public service delivery, and language-linked entrepreneurship in township and rural economies. Such research would directly inform inclusive growth strategies.
4. Sustained research into the impact of AI and HLT on professional identity, pricing, ethics, data governance and labour displacement is essential. This includes the legal and economic implications of language data ownership, consent, cultural representation and automated content deployment in high-stakes environments.
5. Future studies should examine the effectiveness of CPD models, accreditation pathways and professional regulatory regimes in comparable international contexts, to inform evidence-based benchmarking for the South African SALPC system as it becomes operational.

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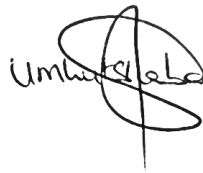
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APPROVALS FOR THE SOUTH AFRICAN CULTURAL OBSERVATORY - A preliminary Audit/Overview of the Higher Education and Training Programmes for Language Practitioners - March 2026.

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Approved by:		DSAC Acting Chief Director: Arts, Culture Promotion and Development		
Approved by:	Mr Sibusiso Tsanyane	DSAC Acting: Deputy Director-General: Arts, Culture Promotion and Development		

Annexure 1: Anonymised details of interviews

Institution	Description
Statistics South Africa	Government Research Institution
Statistics South Africa	Government Research Institution
Department of Sports, Arts and Culture	National Government Department
Publishing	Book Publisher
SADiLaR	Academic Institution / Research Centre
University of the Western Cape Faculty of Humanities	Academic Institution / Research Centre
SADiLaR	Academic Institution / Research Centre
SADiLaR	Academic Institution / Research Centre
SALALS	Professional Association
Museum	Uganda National Museum
University of the Witwatersrand	Academic Institution / Research Centre
University of the Witwatersrand	Academic Institution / Research Centre
Freelance	Journalist / lecturer
Indigenous Languages Action Forum	Network of Language Practitioners
SA Small, Emerging and Informal Association	Business Network
University of South Africa	Research Fellow
Township Economic Commission South Africa	Business Network
University of South Africa	Academic Institution / University
University of South Africa	Academic Institution / University
University of Pretoria	Academic Institution / University
Editor	Media
Freelance editor / writer	Freelance editor / writer
Teacher	Teacher / Academic
Freelance	Independent secretarial services contractor
Editor	News agency
Consulate	Consul
University of the Western Cape	Academic Institution / University
Department of Sports, Arts and Culture	Government Institution
ENCA	Sub-editor
Advertising Agency	Content Director of ad agency
Freelance	Independent contractor and Copy Editor
Freelance	Theatre CEO and Freelance Editor
BEentreprenurLING	Management consulting
University of Pretoria	Academic Institution / University

Institution	Description
African Union	Media Group Director
University of Pretoria	Academic Institution / Research Centre
University of Stellenbosch	IsiXhosa Language Expert
PanSALB	Government Institution
University of South Africa	Academic Institution / University
CPUT	Academic Institution / University
Nelson Mandela University	Academic Institution / University
University of Pretoria	Academic Institution / University
Nelson Mandela University	Academic Institution / University