

Bridging the Gap: Linguistic Rhetoric in Addressing Workforce Skills and Industry Needs

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ABSTRACT

In today's rapidly evolving job market, the gap between the skills possessed by the workforce and the demands of industry is widening. This phenomenon has posed significant challenges for businesses, individuals, and policymakers alike. For this reason, this paper explores the often-overlooked role of linguistic rhetoric in addressing the dynamic needs of industry, particularly the ongoing need for a blend of technical and soft skills among employees. Recognising that periodic industry assessments are insufficient, this paper further examines how language and rhetoric in public and corporate discourse advocate for educational and governmental reforms to meet these requirements. This complexity is increased by the lack of connection between policies and the actual experiences of employers and employees in various sectors. Using qualitative content analysis, the research focuses on policy documents, industry reports and other texts that proceed from various stakeholders. Employing the Metadiscourse framework alongside with an analysis of rhetorical patterns of contrast, necessity, convergence as well as elements of recalibration and reproduction, the study aims to uncover how these discursive strategies influence and shape educational institutions and government to adapt to the evolving workplace demands. The paper reveals how the correct use of linguistic rhetoric shapes the response of educational institutions and policymakers to the evolving needs of the job market.

Keywords: Linguistic Rhetoric, Workforce Skills, Industry Needs, Metadiscourse, Qualitative Content Analysis, Rhetorical Patterns

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary job market, a critical disparity is emerging, characterised by the misalignment between the skills available within the workforce and the escalating demands of various industries. This divergence not only presents substantial challenges for corporations and individuals but also necessitates urgent intervention from policymakers. While numerous studies have focused on quantifying this skills gap and proposing educational reforms, the nuanced role of linguistic rhetoric in bridging this divide has received considerably less attention. This paper delves into the pivotal role that language and rhetorical strategies play in shaping the discourse surrounding the dynamic requirements of today's industries. By critically analysing a diverse array of texts—including policy documents and industry reports,—through the lens of the Metadiscourse framework, this paper uncovers how strategic linguistic choices influence and compel educational and governmental bodies to respond more effectively to the needs of the evolving workplace. The application of qualitative content analysis facilitates a deeper understanding of rhetorical patterns such as contrast, necessity, convergence, alongside mechanisms of recalibration and reproduction, providing insightful implications on how language can be a potent tool in narrowing the workforce-industry skills gap. Recent studies have highlighted the significance of rhetorical strategies in educational and policy reform, emphasising the role of language as both a reflection and a shaping force in cultivating necessary workforce skills (Rios et al., 2020 & Cernicova-Bucă, 2020). This emphasises that language serves not only as a mirror of cultural and industrial demands, but also as an active agent in developing essential competencies. Based on this, the aim of this research are as follows:
Explore how Linguistic and Rhetorical Strategies are utilised in public and corporate discourse to advocate for changes in educational and governmental policies. This involves a detailed examination of texts, such as policy

documents and industry reports, to realise how the discourse within these documents influence and shape the actions of educational institutions and government bodies. Promote collaboration among key stakeholders—industry, government, and educational institutions—to develop and maintain a workforce that can meet the dynamic needs of the industry in terms of the rhetoric and linguistic functions.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative research design to explore the role of linguistic rhetoric in addressing the gap between workforce skills and industry needs. This design allows for an in-depth examination of the language and rhetorical strategies used in the selected texts to influence educational and governmental reforms. Furthermore, the qualitative approach is chosen in this research for its ability to capture the nuanced ways in which language shapes perceptions, policies, and actions regarding workforce development.

The sample for this study consists of a purposive selection of texts that are relevant to the research topic. These texts include:

- **Policy Documents:** National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (NSTIP) for Namibia (2020- 2030). This document highlights the government's commitment to harnessing knowledge and innovation for sustainable development.
- **Industry Reports:** Namibia-Labour-Market-Outlook-2019. This report provides insights into the skills demand, skills supply, and skills gap in Namibia's labor market.

These sources were published within the last 5 years to ensure their relevance to the current job market and industry needs. They directly address workforce skills, industry requirements, and educational or governmental reforms. The primary method of data analysis used in this research is qualitative content analysis. This involves theme identification. The data was organised into themes that reflected the various rhetorical strategies used to discuss the skills gap and advocate for reforms. Key themes included contrast, necessity, convergence, recalibration, and reproduction. Finally, this methodology provides a comprehensive framework for investigating the role of linguistic rhetoric in aligning workforce skills with industry needs. By employing qualitative content analysis, the study seeks to identify discursive strategies that drive educational and governmental reforms. These insights contribute to developing a more skilled and adaptable workforce that is better equipped to meet the demands of evolving industries.

2.1 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are observed throughout the research process. These include presenting findings objectively, honestly, and transparently, without misrepresenting the data or the views of the stakeholders. Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process, from data collection to reporting findings. Researchers must present results objectively, honestly, and transparently, without misrepresenting data or stakeholder views (Harper et al., 2017; Kessio & Chang'ach, 2020).

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this research is built upon the intersection of linguistic rhetoric, workforce skill development, and industry needs. This framework aims to elucidate the role of language and rhetorical strategies in shaping educational and governmental reforms to bridge the skills gap in the job market.

Central to this research is the Metadiscourse framework, which refers to how authors interact with their audiences, guiding them through the text. Metadiscourse is underpinned by the idea of 'recipient design' or how communication is shaped to appeal to the current interactants, indicating how the writer understands the knowledge, likely objections, and processing needs of the audience. Metadiscourse therefore offers insights into a communicative context and the perceptions of its participants (Hyland, Wang, & Jiang, 2022). In this research, metadiscourse encompasses both textual and interpersonal aspects of communication, serving as a tool for analysing the language and rhetorical strategies present in policy documents, industry reports, and public statements. By critically examining these texts through the lens of metadiscourse, the research aims to uncover how language is used to persuade, inform, and guide stakeholders towards acknowledging and addressing the skills gap. Moreover, the importance of the Role of Language and Rhetoric ought to be acknowledged and taken into consideration. Language and rhetoric play a pivotal role in advocacy and persuasion, particularly in the context of educational and governmental reforms. This research investigated how language and rhetoric are used to advocate for changes in educational curricula to better align with industry needs. Additionally, the study analysed the rhetorical strategies employed to influence policy decisions and promote investment in skills development.

3.1 Literature review

The intersection of linguistic rhetoric and workforce development is a growing area of study. It examines how language and communication strategies influence policy-making, stakeholder engagement, and the successful implementation of educational and economic reforms. This literature review explores various dimensions of this topic, focusing on the role of linguistic rhetoric in addressing the mismatch between workforce skills and industry needs. The mismatch is increased by the lack of connection between policies and the actual experiences of employers and employees in various sectors. This might require a more localised and integrated approach to skills development programs that truly address the needs of the labor market, (Vinayan et al., 2020).

3.2 The Role of Linguistic Rhetoric in Policy Communication

Linguistic rhetoric refers to the art of using language effectively and persuasively. It plays a crucial role in policy communication, shaping public perception and driving policy implementation. Scholars argue that effective rhetoric can mobilise support, create a sense of urgency, and articulate clear visions for the future. According to Jung (2020), moral rhetoric in party manifestos can effectively mobilize voters who identify with the party by eliciting positive emotions regarding their political preferences. Policy documents often employ specific rhetorical strategies to highlight the importance of addressing workforce skills gaps and aligning them with industry needs (Gee, 2014).

3.3 Narrowing Skills Gaps with Vocational Training for Economic Growth

The skills gap is a global challenge, affecting both developed and developing countries. Studies indicate that a significant mismatch between the skills possessed by the workforce and those demanded by industries hampers economic growth and competitiveness (World Economic Forum, 2020). In Namibia, for instance, the high unemployment rate and the shortage of skilled labour are major concerns. Policy initiatives aimed at Vocational Education and Training (VET) are crucial for bridging this gap (Namibia Statistics Agency, 2019).

Moreover, worldwide governments have recognised the importance of aligning educational outcomes with market needs. VET is a focal point in these efforts. Research shows that effective VET programmes can enhance employability and support economic development (Cedefop, 2018). In Namibia, the government's efforts to reform VET aim to increase enrolment and improve the quality of training, thus addressing the skills shortage in critical sectors (Namibia Vision 2030, 2017).

3.4 Rhetoric, Policy Implementation, and the Impact of Technical Skills on Namibia's Economic Growth

Namibia's National Development Plans (NDPs) provide a clear example of how linguistic rhetoric is employed to address workforce and industry needs. The NDP5, in particular, uses strategic language to communicate the urgency of economic transformation and the importance of skills development (National Planning Commission [NPC], 2017). Terms like "industrialised nation" and "competitive economy" are designed to mobilise support and convey the strategic vision of national progress. Despite the well-articulated strategies, several challenges persist in implementing skills development policies. Limited access to quality vocational training, insufficient funding, and socio-economic barriers such as poverty and inequality complicate these efforts (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2021). Effective rhetorical strategies must therefore not only communicate policies but also address these underlying challenges to ensure successful outcomes.

In addition, literature highlights the significant impact of technical skills on economic growth. Countries that invest in technical and vocational education tend to have lower unemployment rates and higher levels of industrial productivity (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2019). In Namibia, enhancing technical skills is seen as a key driver for industrialisation and economic diversification (NPC, 2017).

In conclusion, linguistic rhetoric plays a vital role in addressing the workforce skills gap and aligning educational outcomes with industry needs. Through effective communication strategies, policymakers can mobilise support, create a sense of urgency, and articulate clear visions for national development. The Namibian case study illustrates the importance of strategic language in policy documents and the challenges in implementing these policies. Future research should continue to explore this intersection, providing insights and strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of policy communication.

4. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

4.1 Linguistic Rhetoric in Technical Skills Policy under NSTIP 2020-2030

The National Science Technology and Innovation Policy (NSTIP) 2020-2030 has been modelled through a collaborative effort, bringing together diverse stakeholders dedicated to advancing research, science, technology, and innovation in Namibia. With a focus on harnessing knowledge and innovation for sustainable development, to pave the way for a brighter future for all Namibians. The use of language and communication strategies was analysed in this document to determine how effectively they address the skills gap in Namibia. The clarity of language used in the policy document to communicate workforce skills development objectives and industry needs was evaluated. This analysis revealed the extent to which the NSTIP effectively conveyed its goals and priorities regarding workforce development (Ministry of Higher Education, Technology and Innovation, 2021).

4.2 Advancing Science Literacy Through Technology Audits and Research Collaboration

The promotion of public understanding of science and technology, as outlined in the NSTIP, was investigated to see how it could bridge the gap between workforce skills and industry requirements. The linguistic rhetoric used to engage the public in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) education and skills development initiatives was analysed. This exploration provided insights into how effectively the policy encouraged public participation and interest in STEM fields (p. 16). The project emphasises the importance of fostering inquiry and creativity in early years STEM education, recommending policy changes and teacher education to support this approach (Stylianidou et al., 2018). In addition, the role of technology audits by enterprises, as proposed in the policy, in addressing workforce skills gaps was explored. Technology audits can leverage digital tools to facilitate older adults' participation in the workforce, addressing challenges associated with an aging population (Nagarajan & Sixsmith, 2021). The discussion focused on how linguistic rhetoric facilitated collaboration between industries and educational institutions to align skill development with industry needs. This examination highlighted the importance of clear and persuasive communication in fostering cooperative efforts (p. 17).

Moreover, Zakaria et al. (2021) argue that traditional evaluation models are inadequate for assessing research infrastructure's long-term impact, calling for bespoke methodologies that embrace complexity and real-world dynamics. The strategies outlined in the NSTIP to improve research and innovation infrastructure provision were evaluated. The discussion centred on how effective communication and linguistic clarity in infrastructure development supported the alignment of workforce skills with technological advancements in industries. This evaluation highlights the role of language in ensuring that infrastructure initiatives meet the evolving needs of the workforce (p. 16).

4.3 Advancing Gender Equality in STEM Through Innovation and Evaluation

The policy's approach to improving gender equality and mainstreaming in STEM fields was examined. Social media discourse positively represents women in STEM, challenging gender stereotypes and promoting networking through hashtags like #womeninSTEM (Alkhamash, 2019). The linguistic rhetoric used to promote women's participation in STEM and address gender disparities in workforce skills and industry representation was analysed. This analysis provided insights into how effectively the NSTIP addressed gender issues and promoted inclusivity in STEM (p. 19).

In addition, the monitoring and evaluation framework outlined in the NSTIP assessed the impact of policy interventions on bridging the skills gap. The discussion centred on how linguistic analysis could be integrated into the evaluation process to measure the effectiveness of communication strategies in addressing industry needs and workforce skills development. Research suggests that organizational interventions by educational institutions can be effective in bridging this gap, particularly through strategies like case studies, networking, and oral presentations (Otara, 2020). This analysis highlights the importance of continuous evaluation and feedback in policy implementation (p. 13).

In conclusion, it is important to assert that by exploring the research analysis and discussion points within the context of Namibia's NSTIP 2020-2030, researchers gained valuable insights into the role of linguistic rhetoric in addressing the skills gap and fostering a more innovative and skilled workforce aligned with industry requirements. This comprehensive analysis highlighted the importance of clear, persuasive, and inclusive communication in achieving the policies' objectives.

4.4 Linguistic Rhetoric in Namibia labour market outlook report 2019

This section analysed the rhetoric used in the document – Namibia Labour Market Outlook Report 2019. This document explores the dynamics of skills demand and supply in Namibia's labor market. It highlights the importance of skills for economic growth and employment, providing a comprehensive analysis of the current state and future outlook of the Namibian labor market.

As per the aims of this research, the current workforce and skills landscape is deeply influenced by the role of linguistic rhetoric in public and corporate discourse to advocate for educational and governmental reforms. Effective communication helps highlight skill gaps and pushes for the necessary changes to align education with labor market demands. Employers consistently report dissatisfaction with graduates' communication skills, prompting educational institutions to revise curricula (Kleckner & Butz, 2020).

The analysis of the Namibia Labour Market Outlook Report 2019 reveals several key themes regarding the dynamics of skills demand and supply in Namibia's labor market. The document emphasizes the critical role of skills in driving economic growth and employment, providing a thorough examination of the current workforce landscape and future projections.

4.5 Current Workforce and Skills Landscape: Government Initiatives and Strategic Approaches

Namibia's labor market is characterized by a high unemployment rate, particularly among the youth, with approximately 37% of the population aged 16-35 being unemployed. This situation is exacerbated by a significant skills mismatch, where there is an oversupply of low-skilled workers and a shortage of skilled labor necessary for a competitive economy. The report highlights that VET is essential for addressing this skills gap, yet current enrollment in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs is inadequate (pg.28). Moreover, the Namibian government has acknowledged the necessity for a robust education system that aligns with industrial needs. Reforms in TVET are aimed at attracting a broader range of learners and preparing them for high-demand jobs in the labor market. The goal is to significantly increase TVET enrollment and completion rates by 2022, thereby creating a more skilled workforce that meets industry requirements (p.11).

4.6 Linguistic Rhetoric used on Rhetoric in Technical Skills Development Policy

The effective use of clear and persuasive linguistic rhetoric in policy documents, such as the National Development Plan 5 (NDP5), is crucial for communicating the urgency and importance of bridging the skills gap. Terms like "economic transformation," "industrialised nation," and "competitive economy" are strategically employed to underscore desired outcomes and garner support for educational reforms and skills development (p. 23).

Moreover, the report posits that the development of technical skills is a prerequisite for Namibia's industrialisation and economic growth. Enhancing vocational technical skills is anticipated to reduce unemployment and bolster manufacturing and value addition activities. Upgrading TVET centers and establishing new training facilities are identified as critical steps toward achieving these objectives. The focus on both infrastructure and program enhancement aims to cultivate a more capable and efficient workforce (p. 5).

In summary, the Namibia Labour Market Outlook Report 2019 serves as a vital resource for understanding the interplay between skills development and economic growth in Namibia, highlighting the need for strategic reforms and effective communication to address the existing skills gap.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The linguistic rhetoric in technical skills policy, particularly within the framework of the National Science, Technology, and Innovation Policy (NSTIP) 2020-2030, reveals significant insights into how language and communication strategies shape workforce development in Namibia. By effectively leveraging rhetoric, policymakers have articulated the importance of aligning technical skills with industry needs, promoting innovation, and driving economic growth. The clarity and persuasive power of the language used in the NSTIP were crucial in conveying the policy's objectives, ensuring that key stakeholders understood and supported the necessary reforms.

5.1 Linguistic Rhetoric in Technical Skills Policy under NSTIP 2020-2030

The NSTIP 2020-2030, developed through a collaborative effort, emphasizes the strategic use of linguistic rhetoric to address Namibia's skills gap. The policy highlights the role of technical skills development in achieving sustainable economic growth and highlights the necessity for clear communication in advocating for educational reforms. This analysis shows that the NSTIP's language was instrumental in rallying support for workforce development initiatives, particularly in enhancing vocational and technical education. Rhetorical techniques play a significant role in educational discourse, all over the world (Susilowati, 2020). Furthermore, the policy's focus on advancing science literacy through technology audits and research collaboration illustrates the importance of linguistic rhetoric in fostering industry-education partnerships, which are essential for closing the skills gap. The NSTIP also addresses gender equality in STEM fields, using inclusive rhetoric to promote women's participation in these areas. The policy's approach to gender mainstreaming is supported by clear and persuasive communication, which is vital for challenging stereotypes and encouraging diversity in the workforce. Additionally, the discussion highlighted the importance of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of the policy's implementation, with linguistic analysis playing a key role in assessing the effectiveness of communication strategies.

5.2 Linguistic Rhetoric in Namibia Labour Market Outlook Report 2019

The analysis of the Namibia Labour Market Outlook Report 2019 further illustrates the impact of linguistic rhetoric on the discourse surrounding workforce skills development. This report, which provides a comprehensive overview of Namibia's labor market, highlights the critical role of skills in driving economic growth and employment. The effective use of language in the report communicates the urgency of addressing the skills mismatch and advocates for reforms in technical and vocational education.

The report's emphasis on vocational education and training (VET) as a solution to the skills gap is supported by the strategic use of terms like "economic transformation" and "competitive economy," which resonate with stakeholders and drive home the importance of these initiatives. The report also highlights the Namibian government's efforts to reform the education system to better align with industry needs, with a particular focus on increasing enrollment in Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs.

Finally, the analysis in both documents highlights various rhetorical patterns such as:

Contrast: This strategy was used to highlight the differences between current workforce skills and industry needs, emphasizing the urgency of addressing the skills gap.

Necessity: This pattern highlighted the importance of aligning educational outcomes with industry requirements, advocating for immediate action.

Convergence: This strategy focused on bringing together the interests of different stakeholders (industry, government, and educational institutions) to work collaboratively towards common goals.

5.3 Implications

The findings from these analyses highlight the pivotal role of linguistic rhetoric in shaping public and corporate discourse on workforce skills development in Namibia. Hyland (1998) suggests a descriptive framework for metadiscourse in business communication and points to the need for a rhetorical awareness of this persuasive genre. Clear and persuasive communication is essential for advocating educational and governmental reforms that align with the needs of the labor market. By effectively employing rhetorical strategies, policymakers can influence public opinion, garner support for reforms, and ultimately drive the development of a skilled and adaptable workforce. This, in turn, is crucial for fostering economic growth and ensuring that Namibia remains competitive in a rapidly changing global economy.

In addition, the integration of linguistic rhetoric in policy documents like the NSTIP 2020-2030 and the Namibia Labour Market Outlook Report 2019 demonstrates the importance of strategic communication in achieving policy objectives. The implications of these findings suggest that ongoing evaluation of communication strategies, coupled with a focus on inclusivity and gender equality, will be critical in ensuring that workforce development policies are both effective and equitable.

6. CONCLUSION

In today's rapidly evolving job market, it has become increasingly crucial for educational institutions and industry stakeholders to work collaboratively in ensuring that workforce skills align with the demands of the ever-changing industry landscape. This requires a concerted effort to bridge the gap between academia and the workforce,

fostering a deeper understanding of industry needs and ensuring that educational programs are designed to equip individuals with the skills and knowledge required to succeed in today's job market. By leveraging linguistic rhetoric, stakeholders can effectively communicate and align their goals, facilitating a more seamless transition for individuals entering the workforce and addressing the evolving needs of industries in the contemporary economy.

RECOMMENDATION

To bridge the gap between workforce skills and industry needs, it is recommended that the following actions be undertaken:

1. Align Curricula with Industry Needs:

Collaborate with industry leaders to develop curricula that are not only technically relevant but also communicated through clear, industry-aligned linguistic rhetoric. This ensures that graduates are well-prepared for the specific demands of employers, reducing the skills mismatch.

2. Promote Lifelong Learning:

Use persuasive linguistic rhetoric in the promotion of continuous professional development (CPD) programs, encouraging a culture of lifelong learning. This helps maintain workforce relevance in a rapidly changing economic environment.

3. Leverage Linguistic Rhetoric for Policy Impact:

Employ clear, impactful language in policy documents and public communications to effectively address workforce skills gaps. Persuasive rhetoric can mobilise support, articulate the importance of skills alignment with industry needs, and drive successful policy implementation.

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