



**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN PUBLIC HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND THE RETAIL SECTOR IN KWAZULU-
NATAL**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Upaasna Ramraj declare that:

- The content within this thesis is my own work, except where indicated.
- The contribution of my supervisor to the research was consistent with the normal supervisory policy.
- This thesis has not been previously submitted or accepted in any form at this university or any other institution for any degree.

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ABSTRACT

Retail industries are one of the major contributors to the gross domestic product (GDP) and an employment hub that encounters recruitment challenges in a competitive world. A common factor relating to these challenges is the failure to attract skilled employees to occupy vacant positions. A viable prospect is for higher education institutions to establish partnerships with the sector. This study; therefore, aims to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province. It does so by outlining the key success factors influencing partnerships, identifying skills relevant to the retail sector, and determining how to build and strengthen partnerships between higher education and the retail sector.

The study conforms to the pragmatic paradigm, assuming an exploratory descriptive and cross-sectional mixed methods approach. Using descriptive and inferential tests, quantitative data were generated from a survey of 80 exit-level students as well as store managers representing 128 retail stores in KwaZulu-Natal Province. Qualitative data was yielded from interviews and focus group discussions with general managers, regional managers and retail floor supervisors.

The overall findings demonstrated that relationships between education and retail require further strengthening. The main findings show that the transition process for graduates from universities to the labour market is challenging due to the misalignment of skills. The passive approach of stakeholders' is regarded as key to skill misalignment, necessitating crucial intervention. The study recommends significant structured engagement between the sectors to allow a smoother transition into the labour market through the availability of skilled personnel. The study provides a framework for effective partnerships to guide industry partners, academics, and policy developers in establishing and managing partnerships between education institutions and the retail sector.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God Almighty, my source of inspiration, my husband Rajesh, my son Jenaïd Reid, my daughter Tiara-Leigh, my parents, my brother, my sister, and the rest of my family.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

A synopsis of the study with emphasis on the background, purpose, statement of the problem, rationale, significance, aim, objectives and key research questions is provided in this chapter. Furthermore, the justification of the study is elaborated on regarding the current challenges faced by the retail sector, with an emphasis on public higher education. The chapter concludes with an outline of the subsequent chapters in the study.

1.2 Background to the Study

Several sectors of the economy contribute positively towards the gross domestic product (GDP). One of the major contributors is the retail sector, which provides employment opportunities and sustenance for many people (Chizema et al. 2021: 6). Despite this, the sector faces challenges due to shifting consumer behaviour and economic instability (Goel 2023: para. 13 line 1). According to Klynveld Peat Marwick Goerdeler (KPMG) (2021: para. 1 line 1), the South African retail sector is the third-largest economic sector, with new generation merchants merging traditional selling philosophies with modern technologies, supply chain advancements, and functional loyalty programmes; however, these advances can be the difference between failure and success in an increasingly challenging retail industry. Strategies must be developed to address this, as South Africa is known for having an established retail market comparable to some of the world's most advanced countries (Chizema et al. 2021: 6). The industry; however, encounters challenges in attracting skilled employees to occupy vacant positions, with the gap steadily increasing (Campbell et al. 2020: 1). Thus, acquiring education beyond high school is the key to success (Higher Education News, 2023).

Many believe that even though higher education sectors are churning out graduates, they lack experience despite being qualified (Subramanian 2017: 713; Ndebele and Ndlovu 2019: 9; Jabborov 2020: 6685). Experience may translate to technical and soft and hard skills as dictated by employers; thus, “work readiness is the primary goal of post-school education and a key element of job performance” (Borg and Scott-Young 2020: 1364). According to a study by Al-Shehab et al. (2020: 11), employers reflected on the following as the identified gaps in employability skills: decision-making as employees are expected to be able to choose between options; problem-solving as employees are expected to have the ability to ask the correct questions; and life-learning skills as the ability to learn effectively from a wide range of sources.

For fruition, there must be a degree of collaboration; thus, the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA 2016: 141) indicates that there are universities of technologies (UoTs) with whom the SETA can partner towards the achievement of goals by delivering components of occupationally-driven qualifications in which they have a course to establish a fully-fledged retail business, particularly in the UoTs. Partnerships are becoming more prevalent as a means of leveraging shared strategic goals, addressing national problems and sharing resources (Eddy 2013: 1). According to Frølund (2018: 71), collaborations between universities and businesses are key drivers of the innovative economy; therefore, businesses should be involved with universities early to establish an on-going campus presence and educate students on what they are seeking. The need for a stronger partnership was reflected in a study in which respondents stated that businesses should collaborate with universities to build business-related courses and that the education process should be focused on real-world business (Levit, 2014: para. 7 line 3); thus. partnerships seem to be a probable approach in addressing the skills issues.

On the international front, The Chronicle of Higher Education and American Public Media’s Marketplace (2012: 86) reported that new graduates are not always adequately prepared to enter employment, with many lacking vital skills needed by employers. Similarly, Oluwajodu et al. (2015: 1) point out that several factors are

perceived to be the cause of graduate unemployment in South Africa due to discrepancies in employer and graduate expectations, so industry and education sectors must be aware of the mandatory skills requirements; hence, forging partnerships may be critical for success. As a result, this study investigates the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector. In addition, the gap between employer requirements and graduate skills in the retail sector is anticipated to be established during the study.

“Public higher education institutions include universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities” (South Africa, Council on Higher Education 2023). UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal Province will be the focus of this study. Employers interacting with academics to develop a shared framework for jobs and curriculum to address industry requirements would be beneficial, as there is a growing need for creating practices and principles to guide collaborations (Awasthy 2020: 50). As indicated by Frølund (2018: 79), a university partnership canvas can assist businesses in developing a systematic strategy to their interactions with universities, permitting both parties to realise greater benefit. Importantly, employers seek employees who can adapt and act promptly in a constantly changing work environment (Presti et al. 2021: 3). Thus, the significance of this study is to better prepare the retail workforce by investigating the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector. As pointed out by Madhani (2021: 3), since the retail workforce is a critical driver of achievement; retailers who elevate their retail workforces to strategic levels will gain service advantages and competitive costs. Based on this, a skilled and appropriately trained retail workforce becomes critical.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The emphasis on the skills element is represented by potential graduates from the education sector as well as store, regional and general managers representing the retail workforce. This study seeks to identify skills that are relevant to the retail sector in anticipation of

appointing highly skilled and job-ready graduates. It becomes crucial for higher education institutions to partner with the retail sector to co-design the curriculum to develop graduates and provide high-quality degrees (Bravenboer 2016: 14). A proficient and well-equipped retail associate is a key element of the process for increasing revenue, creating devoted customers and providing improved shopping experiences, (Madhani 2021: 3).

1.4 Problem Statement

Universities and businesses should look at collaborating and strengthening their relationships for the following reasons: university-business partnerships can help shape and design courses so that graduates better meet the needs of businesses; resource sharing will be beneficial to all; and partnerships can also help identify opportunities for further business development (Dochery 2013: 1). Improving returns can be achieved by narrowing the gap between business and university, as businesses are facing unprecedented challenges concerning the labour force, for example, shortages of in-demand skills (Moritz 2022: para. 21 line 1). Therefore, if higher education partners with employers, lifelong learning may be fostered whereby universities provide employers with the required skills for economic productivity, as well as improving the quality of education systems (Australian Industry Group 2016: 22). Similarly, industry and academic experts indicated that graduating students lack the very skills required for workforce success (King 2015: para. 4 line 1). In support, King (2015: para.12 line 9) states that it is essential to rejuvenate higher education systems to ensure that students are appropriately prepared to succeed in a rapidly changing world. According to Chowdhury (2024: para. 1 line 1), “the retail industry is staring down a formidable foe, which is the dearth of skilled talent”. Additionally, Zama (2022: 13) stated that a partnership between Youth Employment Services and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research is an example of how national challenges such as the unemployment of young people can be mitigated.

In the context of this study, the South African retail sector plays a crucial role in the lives of retail graduates in search of employment. As reported by Statistics South Africa

(2018: 6), formal employment in the retail sector increased, with dominance in the food, beverage and tobacco sectors. With that being said, employers are looking for graduates who have completed internships during their study at universities or employment during college/university (The Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012: 25). Thus, based on the skills gap identified by Al-Shehab et al. (2020: 11), the suggestions are that employers build durable bonds with universities to improve employability skills. Similarly, the need for this study was prompted by the dissatisfaction of retailers during recruitment processes as a result of being unable to employ suitable employees due to the distinct gap in skills. Consequently, this knowledge gap is linked directly to the training and development of graduates represented by the higher education sectors, which seem to be falling out of sync with employer needs (Asuri 2019: 1). Based on this, the researcher recognised the need for the present study, which was informed by literature, as well as the challenges identified. Additionally, to the best of the researcher's understanding, no studies were conducted to assess the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and supermarket retail sectors in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

1.5 Rationale and Significance of the Study

When new studies are undertaken, a meaningful impact must be made in terms of knowledge enrichment for core stakeholders. The rationale of this study is to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province in an attempt to improve and advance the quality of the workforce through partnerships.

South Africa is noted as having one of the world's highest and rising unemployment rates (Business Tech 2020: para. 2 line 1). As a result, emphasis is placed on narrowing the existing gap between academia and industry by minimising the number of underprepared graduates entering the supermarket retail sector. In retail stores, retaining an acceptable workforce level improves service quality (Madhani 2021: 3).

On reviewing the present literature, it was discovered that limited studies have been conducted within the retail and education sectors in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The emphasis of this study is on the supermarket retail sector due to its contribution to the economy, thus anticipating as a relevant and necessary investigation. For this and other reasons, a study of this nature is appropriate and unique, as the findings may offer guidance to both the education and retail sectors regarding the availability of skilled graduates for the retail sector while universities update their curricula, thus imparting updated skills. Hoffman (2015: 9) echoes similar sentiments stating, that a vocational education and training system is strongly supported by employers who understand the need to equip young people for lucrative and fulfilling employment.

The study's results are anticipated to be valuable to students in expediting the learning process, educational institutions in terms of curriculum reform, and business organisations as a means of improving and growing the labour force. The Wholesale and Retail Sector (2020: 50) supports the notion of partnerships aimed at expanding retail skill development among retail enterprises. The study's contribution to the existing body of knowledge is to propose a partnership framework for effective collaboration between public higher education institutions and the retail sector. Employers and academicians collaborating to create and develop a framework to address specific requirements would be valuable for all. The researcher is optimistic that the community at large, academic institutions, the retail sector and individuals will benefit from the study. The essence of a partnership would be to prepare graduates to better meet the needs of retail, with substantively structured programmes, generating entrepreneurial opportunities, growth acceleration for businesses, and an improved overall structure for stakeholders. Similarly, as pointed out in a study by Mobarak (2021: 123), employers are prepared to engage in university teaching and learning processes, offering opportunities to improve the South African economy's global competitiveness.

1.6 Aim of the research

The study aims to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

1.7 Objectives of the research

- To outline the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector.
- To identify skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between the education provided at universities and the skills required by the retail sector.
- To determine the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.
- To propose a partnership framework for effective partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector.

1.8 Key research questions

The study intends to provide answers to the questions below:

- What are the key success factors that influence the sustainability of partnerships?
- Which skills are considered relevant to the retail sector?
- What are the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships?
- What is the proposed partnership framework for an effective partnership between public higher education institutions and the retail sector?

1.9 Research methodology overview

This study conforms to the pragmatic paradigm, assuming the exploratory research type. The mixed-methods approach is adopted for the study to increase the range. The qualitative elements comprise interviews and focus group discussions with retail representatives, while the quantitative element includes questionnaires administered to exit-level university students and store representatives. The instruments aid in addressing the objectives of identifying skills that are relevant to the retail sector and establishing expectations about the role of partnerships. Literature and communication with stakeholders were influential in informing the instrument design. With this in mind, the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in terms of the mutual transfer of knowledge and a partnership framework was explored.

The probability and cluster sampling methods were deemed appropriate for the qualitative and quantitative elements of the study. Data for the quantitative element of the study will be analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (v27). On the other hand, a thematic analysis will be conducted on the qualitative element of the study by organising the data transcripts into themes. The subsequent section of the chapter discusses ethical commitments, including the researcher's and the institution's role.

1.10 Limitations of the study

The study is limited to the supermarket retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province due to the extensive composition of the retail sector. Food and groceries are daily necessities in today's household, hence the emphasis on this segment. As a result, the population of the sector is exclusive to general, store and regional managers and therefore cannot be generalised to other management statuses and retail sectors. Furthermore, the study focuses on public higher education institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Province with specific reference to exit-level retail and/or retail management students. Therefore,

the findings of the study cannot be generalised to other educational institutions and qualifications.

1.11 Clarification of terminology

1.11.1 Partnerships

“A partnership is a formal arrangement by two or more parties to manage and operate a business and share its profits” (Investopedia 2021: para. 1 line 1).

1.11.2 Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs)

Institutions that are established and funded by the government through the Department of Higher Education and Training (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020: 10).

1.11.3 Department of Basic Education (DBE)

The Department of Basic Education is responsible for primary and secondary schools (South Africa, Department of Basic Education 2021)

1.11.4 Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

The Department of Higher Education and Training was established to focus on post-school education and training (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020: para. 3 line 1).

1.11.5 Gross domestic product (GDP)

“The gross domestic product measures the value of economic activity (finished goods and services produced) within a country” (Investopedia 2021: para. 1 line 1).

1.11.6 University of Technology (UoT)

“A university of technology offers technological career-directed educational programmes, focuses on innovative problem-solving research and engages with government/business/industry with communities as end-users” (Technological Higher Education Network 2020: 38).

1.11.7 Sector Education and training authority (SETA)

SETAs are entities of the Department of Higher Education and Training, and “their main function is to contribute to the raising of skills to bring skills to the employed, or those wanting to be employed, in their section. They have to do this by ensuring that people learn skills that are needed by employers and communities” (South Africa, National Skills Authority 2021: para. 2 line 1).

1.11.8 Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA)

This public entity aims to facilitate the skills development needs of the Wholesale and Retail sectors through the implementation of learning programmes and disbursements of grants as outlined in the National Skills Development Strategy (South Africa, Wholesale and Retail Seta 2021: para. 1 line 2).

1.11.9 National Skills Development Plan (NSDP)

The National Skills Development Plan offers a long-term perspective, defining the desired roles that the various sectors need to play in reaching the goal. Thus, it aims to address the skills issues faced by the nation (South Africa, National Development Plan 2021: para. 1 line 1).

1.12 Structure of the study

The study comprises seven chapters. A brief outline of each chapter will be presented.

Chapter 1: This chapter provides the background to the study, outlining the elements that underpin it. It presents an overview of the retail sector's role within the economy and the current challenges encountered. More specifically, challenges relating to skills and training linked to public higher education institutions are discussed. The purpose, problem statement, rationale, aims, objectives and methodology are explained.

Chapter 2: This chapter provides the reader with an overview of higher education within the South African context. Education in the early years, the evolution of the education system, and government policies and structures are highlighted. Furthermore, challenges encountered by higher education and a brief introduction to partnerships are discussed. This chapter also introduces the retail sector as a pivotal element of the study.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the partnership concept between education and business and/or retail as well as a discussion on its impact, barriers and benefits. The 21st-century workforce and graduate employability are elaborated on. The chapter progresses by highlighting existing partnership frameworks. Lastly, the proposed framework for the study to support the business-education relationship is presented.

Chapter 4: The research methodology for the study is discussed. The research design, paradigm and approach employed in this study are outlined. The chapter also presents the data analysis techniques as well as the instrument design and measurement.

Chapter 5: The analysis of the results for the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study is presented in this chapter

Chapter 6: This chapter discusses the results as per existing literature and the study's objectives.

Chapter 7: The final chapter of the study provides an overview of the study by drawing conclusions and proposing recommendations. It highlights suggestions that may contribute to further research.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter provided the foundation of the study by focusing on the aim, objectives, key research questions and an overview of the research methodology. The rationale and limitations of the study were highlighted. The research problem was emphasised as under-skilled or under-prepared graduates entering the retail sector, thus identifying gaps in skills.

Chapter 2 will commence with a general overview of higher education in South Africa and subsequently progress to the transformation of higher education over the years. In addition, South African government policy issues, contrasting international educational systems and a brief outline of interpretations of partnerships in higher education will be discussed.

In this chapter, a synopsis of the study is provided, with emphasis on the background, purpose, statement of the problem, rationale, significance, aim, objectives and key research questions. Furthermore, the justification of the study is elaborated on regarding the current challenges faced by the retail sector, with an emphasis on public higher education. The chapter concludes with an outline of the subsequent chapters for the study.

CHAPTER 2

HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided an overview of the background of the study, illustrating how the aim of the study will be attained. The overall aim of the study is to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province. This will be accomplished via the following objectives: to outline the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector, as well as to determine the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.

This chapter is the first of two chapters in the literature review of the study, providing an overview of higher education. The literature review, moreover, discusses and explores education in the early years and the evolution of the South African education system. The relevant governmental bodies, policies, acts and structures relating to the South African higher education sector and HEI's link to industry in the form of partnerships are reviewed. The literature review advances by contrasting the South African education system with international education as well as the challenges encountered. A literature review provides an opportunity to build on the work of others, highlighting relevant themes and allowing findings and frameworks to be documented (Sekaran and Bougie 2016: 57). Additionally, a comprehensive review of literature enables the researcher to respond to their specific problem by investigating what others have done, ensuring a deeper insight and complete knowledge of the section (Marume, Jubenkanda and Madziyire 2016: 13).

Furthermore, the discussion progresses with partnerships and how they are interpreted by higher education. The key components of the literature review are to evaluate what has been done in the field to identify the appropriate approach for the investigation of

a study of this nature and the impact thereof. The discussion commences with a presentation on higher education in South Africa.

2.2 Higher Education in South Africa

Despite assertions of improvement in the throughput and dropout rates of the university sector, further enquiry is essential to identify interventions to increase the efficiency of the higher education system (South Africa, Department of Higher Education 2020a: 3). Higher education transformation is regarded an indicator of social progress, pertaining to a complete overhaul of social thinking (Mzangwa, 2019: 1). Moreover, academics are under constant pressure to fulfil the teaching and learning mandate of quality education, given the limited resources (Pillay 2020: 14787). However, the Chief Executive Officer of Universities South Africa, Professor Bawa maintains that progress in the sector is still achievable if there is continued emphasis on the improvement of throughput rates and student success (Bawa 2020: para.16 line 12). Therefore, South Africa cannot waste the human potential nor invest in the youth with a minimal probability of successfully graduating, as indicated in the report on First time entering undergraduate studies for Public Higher Education Institutions (2020a: 164). Emphasis on human potential is taking centre stage; thus, there is an urgent need for the South African education system to be redesigned to focus on student success and equity of outcomes (Scott 2018: 3), which is reliant on an array of factors that have formerly impacted both forthcoming students and the higher education system alike.

As a point of entry, the right to basic education must be afforded to every person with consideration to availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability (South Africa Department of Justice 2012: 22); however, many students are less fortunate in embarking on this journey of education, while others have opportunities to make choices. In some cases, prospective students base their options for entry into higher education on university rankings, which have become an integral part of the education landscape. According to Kiraka et al. (2020: 1), these rankings designate institutions in a numerical position based on quantifiable measurements that focus on institutional resources. Teaching, research, research impact, innovation and international outlook

are measurement indicators as well (Times Higher Education 2020: para. 5 line 1). Institutions benefit from the rankings in terms of admissions, outcomes, recruitment, resources and future reputation, as well as knowing the performance of others, their evolution, and their strengths and weaknesses (Luque-Martínez and Faraoni 2020: 831). For prospective students, this has become a tool used as a deciding factor in the choice of institution; thus, rankings bring attention to measuring performance, providing funding and guidance to students and parents in making university choices (Dasdan, Van Lare and Zivaljevic 2020: 18). Therefore, education can be viewed as the most powerful weapon that can be used to change the world, extending beyond the development of skills needed for economic success, as well as contributing to nation-building and reconciliation (Mandela 2014: 2).

Education, as an instrument, can contribute towards the production of knowledge and life-long learning with ongoing learning networks, fast becoming a prevalent trend as supported by Haanaes (2020: para. 12 line 11). Tchamyu (2020: 2) believes that lifelong learning is a combination of knowledge from primary to secondary school and progressing to tertiary education, whereas Taşçı and Titrek (2020: 3) consider it an extension beyond formal education that contributes to personal development. Hence, from the dialogues presented, it can be deduced that learning is an ongoing process with an emphasis on universities as key players in the development of life-long learning and up-to-date skills (Föll and Thiesse 2017: 2949); therefore, universities ought to churn out quality graduates possessing the highest skills. However, Figure 2.1 reveals that a large number of youths in South Africa are neither employed nor engaged in any form of education or otherwise. Factors contributing to these statistics range from a lack of resources to access to education (Du Preez and Sinha 2020: 15).

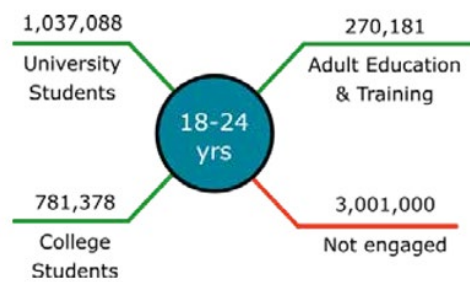


Figure 2.1: Summary of Individual engagement in higher education for persons between 18 and 24

Source: Du Preez and Sinha (2020: 15)

Learning should be promoted to mitigate the effects of being disengaged, as supported by Pham (2022: 10), suggesting that higher education institutes should continue to improve the quality of academic aspects under the responsibility of teaching staff. According to the Constitution of South Africa (1996), “admission to further education must, likewise, be made progressively available and accessible through reasonable measures”. However, who attains access to higher education says a lot about where HEIs are allocated (Goastellec and Välimaa 2019: 2). The dispute over access to higher education incited a judgement by the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, to waive certain fees, creating eligibility for funding for more students; hence, increasing access further (Nzimande 2020b: 1). Ali and Jalal (2018: 81) reiterate higher education as the most important determinant tool for the working world.

At this point, it is important to understand the concept of higher education within the South African context. Hence, “higher education denotes all learning programmes that lead to qualifications that meet the requirements of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), which is a sub-framework of the National Qualifications Framework” (South Africa, Council on Higher Education 2013: 3), playing one of the most significant roles in the development of human skills. As a result, the value of education in South Africa was highlighted in the 2020 budget review, with the education sector being granted the largest share of the national budget (South Africa, Budget Review 2020: 53). This suggests that the sector is prioritised by the South African

government to meeting the ever-copious demands of the higher education sector (Buys 2018: 3). However, Moloj, Mkwanazi and Bojabotseha (2014: 473) believe that the higher education sector receives a large share of the total government expenditure as more money is needed to address the backlogs of apartheid. This claim may be addressed by the theoretical framework presented in Figure 2.2, which depicts two schooling systems consisting of students from wealthy and poor backgrounds and will shed some light on the issue of apartheid.

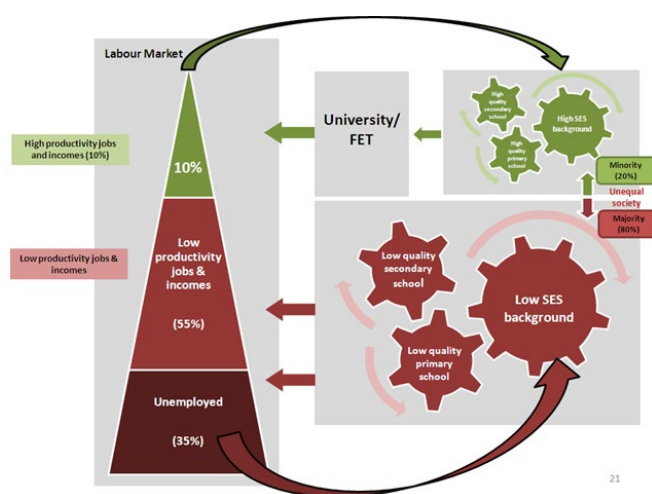


Figure 2.2: Education in South Africa: A Tale of two systems:

Source: Spaul (2012: para. 30 line 31)

According to Spaul (2012: para. 30 line 32), students from wealthy backgrounds (20%) attend quality schools and progress to universities or other post-school institutions; thus, entering the labour market in worthy positions. In contrast, the majority of students from poor backgrounds (80 %) attend low-quality schools and have limited access to post-school education. Hence, these students proceed directly to the labour market with a matric pass, occupying positions in the informal sector with a minimum wage. Others remain unemployed, which is a large part of the economy (35%) and this system of inequality perpetuates the patterns of poverty and privilege. Kromydas (2017: 9) reiterates that poor students are disadvantaged considering the differences in education, their parents'

education and certain traditions that work towards perpetuating power relations in favour of the dominant class.

It is worthwhile noting that the higher education system can fulfil the role of a social institution that ameliorates historical prejudices and comprehends the ramifications for academic curricula and deeply entrenched knowledge conceptions (Kumalo 2021: 11). Walker (2020: 57) concurs that even in the face of the intersecting challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment faced by South African youth, higher education contributes to social mobility pathways through enhanced job prospects. Apart from these challenges, the lack of quality teachers, student dropouts and participation rates at universities, unfortunately, continue to affect higher education (Chetty and Pather 2015: 1). As a result, academics must be willing to transform their complex identities, to bring about transformation in the education sector, which is inevitable (Vandeyar 2020: 790). The next section discusses the role of governing bodies in the South African Higher Education system with a specific focus on the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as the government department that oversees education in South Africa.

2.3 Governing Bodies of the South African Higher education system

Good governance is crucial to “driving the economic prosperity of nations, and finance can facilitate the relevance of good governance in economic development” (Asongu 2020: 1). Governance, in this section, relates to how universities are formally organised and managed (MacGregor 2016: para.5 line 1). The discussion will be led by an overview of the role and significance of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

2.3.1 The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) provides “integrated post-school education and training” so citizens can improve the quality of their lives (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020b: 10). DHET’s strong vision and mission, encompassing fulfilling the economic and social goals of participation in

the economy and competing in an international economy, speak volumes of its pledge to the country's citizens (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020b: 10). Moreover, the future of South Africa is dependent on the continuous production of graduates from the higher education sector to all other sectors, as philosophised by the country's Minister of Higher Education (Nzimande 2020a: para. 5 line 1). As a result of this, the DHET will embark on accomplishing the mission by reducing skills bottlenecks, improving negativities associated with access to higher education and meeting the development goals of the country. However, the world is undergoing transformation and universities are challenged and impacted by economics, policies and moral factors, yet they need to keep up being (Higgins and Thomas 2016: 25).

To a large extent, most higher education institutions have been challenged in innumerable ways during the apartheid era, which did not advance social living standards for all (Mzangwa 2019: 12). Reflecting on the years preceding 1994, it was an ill-fated journey for South Africa's higher education institutions that was skewed in ways that entrenched power and privilege under the apartheid government (Bunting 2006: 52), which left these institutions fragmented and uncoordinated. Despite the government working to rectify the imbalances in education, the apartheid legacy remained (Moloi 2016: 473), with South Africa entering the democratic era with an elitist, ethnically fragmented and inefficient higher education system (Habib 2016: 36). In effect, this meant that universities were separated across racial lines with a distinct division of resources (South Africa, Commission of Inquiry 2016: 5). Provision was made for separate tertiary institutions for all races whereby Blacks were not allowed to attend White universities unless by special governmental permission (South Africa, Department of Education 1959: 506). As a result, higher education governance was reimagined through democratisation in the post-apartheid era, which was reinforced by legislation (Luescher, Webbstock and Bhengu 2020: 16).

In addition, the challenge for South Africa is to "redress past inequalities and transform the higher education system to meet pressing national needs and respond to the realities and opportunities" as reported in the White Paper (2014: 7). Despite these

challenges, stakeholders in higher education must be open to critique of the education system by aiming at producing market-ready graduates, even though assumptions made by policy makers and economists about the relationship between higher education and the labour market prove problematic (Lauder 2020: 1). Hence, Universities of South Africa, an association to form a unified voice for universities was established to promote the interests of South African universities with governance structure, strategy determination and operational planning (Universities South Africa 2019: para. 2 line 2), even though these universities lag behind their counterparts in other developing countries (Habib 2016: 35). According to Universities South Africa (2019: para. 1 line 1), twenty-six public universities in South Africa, distributed in each province are all members of Universities South Africa, which serve to promote the interests of universities.

It is imperative to understand the composition and/or governance of the education system in South Africa, as public higher education institutions constitute a major component of this study. Education in South Africa is essentially governed by two national departments, namely the Department of Basic Education (DBE), which is responsible for primary and secondary schools, and the DHET, which is responsible for tertiary education and vocational training and SETAs (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020b: 1; Nel et al. 2020: 3), though the South African education department was formerly represented by a single unit known as the Department of Education (DOE). DHET is accountable for post-school education and training for all learners who completed primary and secondary schooling, as well as those who did not complete schooling or never attended school (Khuluvhe 2021:19). As a result of the substantial growth in terms of access to universities and vocational education and training colleges in South Africa, universities can meet the National Development Plan enrolment target (Khuluvhe et al. 2021: 3), hence reinforcing the components of quality education and training in producing market-ready graduates.

Of recent times, the South African Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education was promulgated and became legal, with the innovative policy becoming a milestone for South African education (Jooste and Hagenmeier 2022: 1) that is

anticipated to advance higher education in the developing world so that students have an international experience. According to DHET (2019: 9), the policy addresses issues such as student and staff mobility and research collaboration. Jooste and Hagenmeier (2022: 1) further state that the policy is anticipated to assist South African graduates navigate unknown spaces and empower them to become globally competent citizens. As a result, DHET aims “to develop capable, well-educated and skilled citizens who can compete in a sustainable, diversified and knowledge-intensive international economy, which meets the development goals of the country” (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020b: 1). As reiterated by DHET (2020), every country requires well-trained and established individuals who can provide long-term services and create a competent workforce for the future.

Teo (2019: 170) assents to calls made internationally by institutions to prepare students, helping them navigate the world. For that reason, DHET is committed to providing equal opportunities to all learners and to working in solidarity with other partners in higher education and training to achieve the shared goals (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020b: 1) in anticipation of contributing holistically to the development of students. Universities South Africa (2019: para 1 line 2) have emphasised the integral role that universities play in the intellectual life of a country and the impact they have on all sectors. The mandate of DHET is to provide aid to learners in the form of finance, further education, training and skills development (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020c: 11). In a recent media release, the Minister of Higher Education and Training assured South Africans that where challenges exist, the Department of Higher Education and Training stands ready to assist the management of the institutions to speedily resolve those issues (Nzimande 2020c: 1). Interestingly, the retail industry, as a focus area of this study is faced with difficulties like many other industries during strained economic times and executives are required to forecast how their organisations will grow instead of shutting down (Harper 2017: para. 18 line 13). This will determine what needs to be done to attract graduates to the retail industry as there is a positive link between retailer ability and the level of formal education (Suvethika and Shivany 2018: 1966).

Within the ambit of DHET are further sub-committees or departments; thus, legislation governing higher education in South Africa will be highlighted, aimed at understanding the role of the sector in the subsequent section. The Department of Higher Education and Training's Legislative mandate comprises the Higher Education Act, the Council on Higher Education, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the Further Education and Training Act, the National Qualification Framework Act, the Skills Development Act, the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and others (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020d: para. 12 line 11). The Council on Higher Education will be reflected in the next section.

2.3.2 The Council on Higher Education (CHE)

According to Afolabi and Omal (2020: 217), governing bodies of higher education institutions have had to respond to issues around supremacy, race, divisionism and others when addressing core business that could have further affected quality management at institutions. Thus, understanding the role of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and its related sub-bodies is relevant, as a body is responsible for learning programme accreditation for public and private higher education institutions in South Africa, leading to registration of qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (South Africa Council on Higher Education 2020: 4).

To elaborate, functions of the CHE include accreditation and/or reaccreditation of programmes, institutional reviews, national reviews, monitoring of the higher education sector, analysis of achievements and engagement in research projects, thereby enforcing and enhancing the quality of institutions' output (South Africa Council on Higher Education 2020: 4). These programmes or qualifications are the core production of higher education institutions, with quality-assured credible and legitimate qualifications offered to students in preparation for the work environment (Sebola 2022: 50). For example, the retail qualification as an element in this study may require specific amendments as necessitated by the retail sector. Concurring is Scholtz (2020: 414), reiterating that curriculum development is often in response to the need for change due to institutional and/or external imperatives. With that being said, the Higher

Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) is a legislative body provided for the establishment of a single national coordinated higher education system (South Africa, Council on Higher Education 2013: 9). This body allows for the comparison and benchmarking of qualifications and, as a regulatory body, specifying all higher education qualification types (South Africa, South African Qualifications Authority 2020f: 4) as well as considering new qualification types to facilitate access to and address emerging skills and knowledge needs.

Further to that, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is a web-based application system that permits public and private higher education providers to submit applications for the HEQSF alignment of programmes online (HEQSF, Council on Higher Education) as well as allocates the responsibility of developing standards for all higher education qualifications to the CHE. The CHE, in turn, is to ensure that qualifications meet the criteria of SAQA for registration on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). SAQA offers a platform for the verification of qualifications and is responsible for the quality aspects of higher education. Its objectives include advancing the objectives of the NQF, overseeing further development and implementation of the NQF and coordinating the sub-frameworks. The quality of education cannot be compromised; thus, having SAQA as a watchdog in education guarantees that qualifications are verified and valid (South Africa, South African Qualifications Authority 2020f: 4). According to the SAQA Policy (2013: 3), the NQF is a system that is used for the classification, registration and publication of national qualifications. The objectives of the system include creating “a single integrated framework for learning achievements, facilitating access to and mobility/progression within education, training and career paths; enhancing the quality of education and training and redressing past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities” (SAQA 2014: 3).

From the literature presented, it is evident that the statutory bodies encompassing legislation exist for the primary purpose of prohibiting unfair discrimination within the education system (McConnachie 2017: 93). In summary, the CHE is responsible for

quality assurance and promotion and is tasked to provide timely and independent advice on matters concerning the condition and development of higher education to assess the system. Of significance to this study is the advisory capacity of the CHE to PHEIs, as well as the policies and acts that govern education institutions. Importantly, education partnerships, as discussed in the White Paper for Post-School Education South Africa (2013: 56), will be expanded on in the section below. With that being said, policies and acts governing higher education institutions will be discussed as a means of promoting the integrity of the sector.

2.4 Policies and Acts governing Higher Education Institutions

In keeping with the focus on higher education, the Higher Education Act, the White Paper on Post-School Education, the National Student Financial Aid Scheme and the Skills Development Act will be briefly presented. This study focuses on higher education, with specific reference to the retail sector regarding skills that are considered relevant. Thus, these policies and acts are significant to the study as they provide a basis for leading the discussion and contributing to understanding partnerships.

2.4.1 The Higher Education Act (1997)

The higher education sector in South Africa is governed by the Higher Education Act (1997), which regulates higher education and prohibits discrimination of any kind. This law is the core and initial point of reference for higher education (Buys 2018: 23), established as fundamental to strengthening educational resources, including funding, quality assurance and registration of private higher education institutions. Relevant to this study are the restructuring and transformative aspects of the act in contributing to the economic and development needs of the Republic. This can be done by way of institutions responding better to human resources (South Africa, Higher Education Act 1997: 2).

As reiterated by the Minister of Higher Education, Dr Blade Nzimande, developing a skilled and capable workforce is the directive of the department and ultimately something that would lead to a knowledgeable workforce contributing to an inclusive growth plan (Nzimande 2019: para. 86 line 83). Similar sentiments are echoed by a well-established training organisation, The National Occupational Safety Association demonstrating that skills training is essential to the achievements of businesses (2020: para. 3 line 1), as well as upskilling and investing in employees, which far outweigh the costs. Thus, the role of partnerships as a vital component in this study is being investigated. Partnerships with businesses benefit students directly in fundamental ways by learning about different careers and providing natural support in real-world job settings (Almalky and Alqahtani 2021: 2). The next section will present the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training as one of the leading documents in higher education as well as being significant in this study.

2.4.2 The White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (2013)

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013) proposes “a single, unified system for post-school education, articulating the 2030 vision for such a system that meets the training and educational requirements of learners who were both successful and unsuccessful in completing their secondary education”. Significant to this study is the emphasis on partnerships. The White Paper for Post-School Education (2013: 65) recognises the importance of partnerships between educational institutions and students. Similarly, Almalky and Alqahtani (2021: 1) concur that students may engage in career exposure, volunteering, internships and employment training. With much importance being placed on practical experience in the working world and making certain that employers are integrated in the education and training process, the White Paper became a defining document (White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2013). Unlike other documents, Tumubweinee and Luescher (2019: 8) explain that the paper emphasises the learning experience, educational experience, workplace experience, practical experience and other experiences. As elaborated by Akoojee (2016: 2), the paper intends to build effective post-school education and training systems in response to the country’s development challenges.

Thus, collaboration involving educational institutions and employers is encouraged in the form of internships, workplace learning and learnerships (South Africa, White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2014b: 7). This raises an important link to this study as higher education and retail sector collaborations are probed. Therefore, partnerships in terms of the link between higher education and industry are deliberated further in this chapter. In addition, a detailed discussion on partnerships ensues in Chapter 3. This discussion encompasses developing an understanding of the term, the significance of partnerships, the expectations and experiences of all stakeholders, the sustenance of partnerships and others.

According to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014: 16), redesigning training systems requires good relationships between education and employers, with SETAs playing a significant role in facilitating communication between them. Hence, The White Paper's (2014: 16) main policy objectives are: "a post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa; a single coordinated post-school education and training system; expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision; a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace; a post-school education and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens, employers in both public and private sectors, as well as the broader societal and development goals". In essence, the White Paper both outlines policy directions and provides strategies to improve the capacity of South Africa's post-school education and training system to meet the country's pressing needs. The next section addresses an extremely significant component in the higher education sector, namely the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS).

2.4.3 The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)

In the early 1990s, during South Africa's transition into a democratic country, there was a problem with outstanding debt that would have created a situation where some HEIs would have been unable to continue their activities (de Villiers 2011: 4); hence, financial aid in some form was essential to support those students from previously

disadvantaged communities. Thus, NSFAS was introduced as a South African government financial aid scheme that supports students (Matukane and Bronkhorst 2017: 1). The author further states that NSFAS is for deserving students to have access to universities or to allow young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to pursue a higher education. It is critical for growing South Africa's skills base and powerful for breaking the intergenerational sequence of household poverty and exclusion (South Africa, National Treasury 2015), with the mission to transform NSFAS into an efficient and effective provider of financial aid to students. This, in turn, will contribute to the national and human resource development goals of the country (South Africa, National Government 2012).

It is important to establish the functions of the NSFAS Act (SA, ACT 56 OF 1999) as a tool for prospective students, namely: (a) "to allocate funds for loans and bursaries to eligible students; (b) to develop criteria and conditions for the granting of loans and bursaries to eligible students in consultation with the Minister; (c) to raise funds as contemplated in Section 14(1); (d) to recover loans; (e) to maintain and analyse a database and undertake research for the better utilisation of financial resources; (f) to advise the minister on matters relating to student financial aid; and (g) to perform other functions assigned to it by this Act or by the Minister". It is evident from the literature presented that the scheme played a major role in the lives of several aspirant students, whereby affordability for higher education was once only a far-fetched vision. As a result, people have been able to change the living conditions of their siblings, providing them with better opportunities (Macupe 2020: para. 7 line 2). In line with this, the discussion evolves to the Skills Development Act as a tool in higher education to expand the knowledge of the labour force.

2.4.4 The Skills Development Act 97 (1998)

Despite the socio-economic progress made since apartheid ended, the country is challenged by unemployment, inequality and poverty (South Africa, Skills Authority 2020: 9). Therefore, the Skills Development Act (1998) is significant in the

development of skills among South Africans to contribute positively to the labour force. Thus, the Skills Development Act, South Africa (1998: 1) aims to provide a framework to devise and implement workplace strategies to develop and improve the skills of the South African workforce, the quality of workers' lives, productivity and self-employment. The aims and purposes of the Act (1998) are achieved through the National Skills Authority, the National Skills Fund, Skills Development Levies Act, SETAs and other relevant institutional bodies.

In keeping with the development of skills, the National Skills Development Plan (2030) is another landmark for the education sector. According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2019: 5), the mission of the NSDP is to improve access to occupations in high demand and priority skills to support economic growth, employment creation and social development. Of importance are the strategic outcome goals of the NSDP (2030): to improve the responsiveness of the post-school training system; “strengthen the link between education and the workplace by promoting workplace-based learning and enhancing the role of SETAs in linking learner supply to employer demand; improve the level of skills in the South African workforce by supporting the further training of those already in employment to raise productivity and economic growth; increase access to occupationally directed programmes through new programmes; support skills development for entrepreneurship and cooperative development to boost the jobs creation and economic performance of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and cooperatives; encourage and support the worker-initiated training offered by trade unions and workplace representatives and support career development services to help guide youth in making career choices”.

The National Skills Authority (NSA), which is a statutory body established in terms of the Skills Development Act, consists of stakeholders representing the government, organised labour and other representatives to advise parties (South Africa, National Skills Authority 2015). Besides advising DHET, the NSA monitors the national skills development policies, assists in reviewing the legislative framework and monitors the

work of the SETAs (International Labour Organisation 2020: 24). As an example, students, graduates, employees, HEIs and employers want higher education institutions to include employability skills in the curriculum (Soundararajan et al. 2022: 4583), so the NSA could act in an advisory capacity. It is important to understand that these policies and acts significantly contribute to South African higher education institutions; hence, the structure of these institutions will be presented.

2.5 Structure of Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

South Africa's education system is split into two sectors, namely the schooling and post-schooling systems (Department of Higher Education and Training), whereby the Department of Basic Education oversees elementary and secondary education. Therefore, the stated goals of the DBE, its district and provincial offices are to improve the quality of teaching, undertake regular assessments, improve early childhood development, and ensure a system of outcomes-focused accountability (Macha and Kadakia 2017: 6). On the other hand, the post-school system is made up of a diverse range of education and training institutions (Branson et al. 2020: 3), which are managed by the Department of Higher Education and Training, comprising traditional universities, universities of technology and comprehensive universities. These institutions in South Africa include education for undergraduate and postgraduate degrees, certificates, diplomas and doctoral degrees (South Africa Education 2023: para. 1 line 1). In addition, coursework is arranged in modules, with pupils registering in a unit/credit system (South Africa Education 2023: para. 2 line 1). It is important to note that the structure of higher education includes private higher education institutions and public higher education institutions, each of which has seen a rise in student admissions without an accompanying surge in the different types of resources (Cloete 2014: 284). The next section will provide a brief account of private higher education institutions in South Africa.

2.5.1 Private Higher Education Institutions

The private tertiary sector in South Africa is a prevalent sector that absorbs a large share of higher education playing an important role in meeting the demands for post-school learning opportunities, particularly in areas that are not addressed by public universities (Bridge 2015: para.1 line 1). Private institutions offer the same National Qualifications Framework (NQF) levels (Levels 5 to 10) as public universities or universities of technology (South African Government para 2. line1). The Higher Education Act of 1997 requires private higher education institutions to be registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and their programmes to be accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE). Therefore, the DHET regularly updates the list of registered and accredited private higher education institutions that includes the name of the institution, site of delivery, province and all the qualifications offered (Bridge 2015: para. 3 line 1). Furthermore, each qualification is registered with SAQA, which registers and records qualifications in the National Learner Records Database (NLRD) and before enrolling students these institutions have to be registered with DHET (Stander 2017: 207).

The key difference between public and private institutions is mostly finance-related. As indicated by Levy (2003: 19) with private institutions, the status of a student as a paying client is clear; thus, almost all private institutions depend fully on student payments. The author further elucidates that the link between higher education and jobs goes a long way towards explaining why students pay for private institutions. However, many parents never considered private higher education institutions as a viable option for their children because they either are unaware of their options or have misconceived assumptions regarding fee band levels of quality (Setswe: 2013: 98). Nonetheless, Stander (2017: 221) adds that funding for these institutions refers mainly to self-generated funding. Interesting to note is that private institutions are providing relevant courses and matching skills to the requirements of industry, as explained by PR Newswire (2019: para. 4 line 3). As stated by Setswe (2013: 108), private higher education institutions in Africa have achieved success by enhancing educational

quality and student experiences; increasing access to higher education; boosting the credibility and marketability of their degrees;

According to Essop (2020: 12), private higher education remains relatively small due to stringent regulations and associated costs, thus alternative options such as the public higher education sector may be considered. Hence, the discussion progresses to the public higher education institutions as a significant component in this study.

2.5.2 Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs)

Even though South Africa has over 20 years of democracy, the legacy of apartheid still lingers with discrepancies in higher education leadership that hinder transformation (Yakobi 2020: 165). Yakobi (2020: 165) adds that university policies effectively barred Black students from studying in the early years, which necessitated strategic interventions to reform the outlook of higher education institutions through the process of restructuring. In line with this, the higher education system in South Africa underwent a restructuring process between 2002 and 2005 when mergers were implemented (Hall 2015: 145), bringing with it a new taxonomy of higher education institution types (Ballim and Scott 2016: 91; Council on Higher Education 2016).

Following reports by the Council on Higher Education and the National Commission on Higher Education, the government announced that the restructuring was necessary to reduce the apartheid legacy of 36 universities, technikons and institutes to 23 universities (Council on Higher Education 2000; 2002) due to financial and other burdens. Decisions to consolidate institutions are never easy and should be considered when there is a desire to significantly improve service quality and value to students, faculties and communities and when the growth of institutions needs to be ensured (Hentschke et al. 2017: 1). As a result, Baloyi (2015: 1) declares that “the newly elected post-apartheid South African democratic government was resolute in terms of introducing the HEI mergers as a blueprint in the process of reversing the unsustainable and inefficient pre-democratic higher education landscape”.

During the apartheid era, the higher education system was skewed to the detriment of many; therefore, “discriminatory and racially categorised policies were developed and implemented to redress the intellectual and developmental trajectory of black people while de-mystifying the nuances associated with white domination and supremacy” (Baloyi 2015: 2). Moreover, the merger process has also caused fear and uncertainty among many, and therefore the higher education system must invest in the improvement of morale (Karodia, Shaikh and Soni 2015: 328). Sedgwick (2004: para. 10 line 1) states that the “objective of the restructuring was to establish institutions that are better capable of meeting the current job market demands, equalising access and sustaining student growth”. However, this is only attainable by developing a new generation of academics, as the country is suffering from a brain drain and skills shortages (Ramdass and Kruger 2014: 20).

An institution’s merger decisions must align with the goals of the merger, as merging a research-oriented institution with a teaching-oriented institution does not yield increases in research productivity (Slade et al. 2021: 10). Mergers should not be considered when few resources remain or when political goodwill, staff morale and energy are low (Hentschke et al. 2017: 1). Mergers have both positive and negative consequences for staff. While providing better academic career prospects, they can also create high levels of uncertainty and complexity (Bolbanabad et al. 2017: 523). Thus, a lack of global leaders in South Africa’s merged universities is characterised by a great deal of resistant culture transforming from an apartheid landscape to a post-apartheid one (Yakobi 2020: 168). These challenges must be overcome to move forward.

According to Hentschke et al. (2017: 20), there are seven critical elements for merger success: “a compelling unifying vision and set of common values; a committed and understanding governing body; the right leadership, pragmatically visionary; an appropriate sense of urgency; a strong project management system; a robust and redundant communication plan; and sufficient dedicated resources”. Therefore, the process of a merger does not necessarily have to be doom and gloom for universities,

as Bolbanabad et al. (2017: 521) remark that after the merger, resources and capabilities, as well as improvements in research products were noted. In line with this, the White Paper for Post-School Education South Africa (2013: xi) elucidates that post-school education refers to education after school, comprising public, private, formal and informal training. Thus, these institutions that allow access to relevant education and training, envisioned to educate and contribute to the development goals of the country, operate under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training in South Africa (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2020d). As a result of the public higher education reform in 2004, the merger process and incorporation of some institutions with others resulted in 23 public institutions, classified as universities, universities of technologies, comprehensive universities and others (Setswe 2013: 98). Consequently, the institutions are classified as:

- i. Technical and Vocational Education and Training, known as TVET Colleges (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2023), is an appropriate option for students who require a combination of education, practical training and skills development. TVET prepares people for working in a range of sectors, including construction, waste management and agriculture (Marope, Chakroun and Holmes 2015: 22).
- ii. Traditional universities are largely characterised by offering theoretically-oriented university degree programmes (Mabizela 2014) and training with a focus on academic research, although some programmes may be practically intensive. These universities have been characterised as more traditional, offering qualifications from Bachelor's degrees to doctoral-level qualifications with a focus on research activities (Ballim and Scott 2015: 91) and academics rather than vocational (Smit 2017).
- iii. Comprehensive universities offer a combination of traditional university qualifications and UoT qualifications defined as post-apartheid institutions (Kele and Mzilen 2021). These universities are characterised by varied academic programme offerings, accessibility created by various entry and exit points, responsiveness via "the development of a suite of educational programmes and research, and flexibility through the strengthening of relationships with the community" (Gibbon 2004: 5). Essentially,

qualifications from higher certificate to doctoral levels are offered with some related research activity (Ballim and Scott 2015: 91).

Many significant changes have taken place in the higher education sector, including in the political dispensation from apartheid to democracy, which witnessed a significant reformation of the South African higher education landscape (Mtshali and Sooryamoorthy 2019: 195), hence the transformation from technikons to UoTs. These changes included addressing racial, class, gender, social justice, poverty, inequality and violence issues (Nzimande 2019: 3), as universities are national assets and transformation is needed. Transforming public universities in South Africa is on the national agenda and UoTs present unique opportunities and challenges in the face of transformation (Masinde and Roux 2020: 32). Technikons became UoTs in 2003 and their role was to produce employees for industry, with industry as the dominant partner (Garraway and Winberg 2019: 39). Universities of Technologies (UoTs) provide vocationally oriented diplomas and degree programmes that focus on becoming technically qualified, offering a more hands-on approach; however, they also offer master's and doctoral programmes but are not fully-fledged universities, often because of their histories (Garraway and Winberg 2019: 37).

It is vital to note that the role of these institutions includes intellectual development in addressing social inequalities, meeting the development needs of society, and preparing students for the labour market (South Africa, White Paper on Higher Education 1997: 7). Thus, of relevance to this study is the inclusion of PHEIs by investigating the role of partnerships between retail and PHEIs. Moreover, universities expect to contribute to solving youth unemployment issues and skills shortages (Wedekind and Mutereko 2016: 2), by producing highly intellectual and knowledgeable graduates (Bazana, McLaren and Kabungaidze 2018: 3). Additionally, higher education institutions would need to reorganise programmes to support skills for future graduates, as there are complex loops between new technologies, job creation and others in preparing individuals for jobs (Ehlers 2020: 284).

As reiterated by Du Plessis (2021: 64), universities that want to bring about transformation in South Africa need to profoundly transform the way they think about the curriculum, and what and how they teach and connect with the realities of their students. Interestingly, the input of higher education institutions to the economy is growing, with these institutions now producing their output as well as employing individuals within (Pouris and Inglesi-Lotz 2014: 3). Notably, the contribution to developing the country given its global competitiveness is through competent academics (Moloi, Mkwana and Bojabotseha 2014: 474), leading to the transformation and development of South African universities. In comparison to global trends, South African Universities are facing similar pressure to widen access and endeavour concurrently to address inequalities (Swartz et al. 2019: 570). This is due to the educational trajectory of post-school education over the last two decades (Gopaul 2019: 57). Advancements in the business landscape necessitate universities to shape future leaders that can effectively function in the corporate world (Haanaes 2020: para. 10 line 11). As an example, in Indonesia, the university's core functions of educating students to become smart citizens and develop innovative and creative human resources to promote the nation to becoming a developed one (Rosyada 2017: 40). In support of this, the South African Higher Education Act 101 (1997: 2) affirms that it is desirable to provide optimum prospects for learning and knowledge development.

Bothwell (2018: para. 12 line 11) believes that improving higher education is imperative for the future and stability of many emerging economies. The White Paper on Post-School Education (2013: 2) highlights the significance of universities in terms of reaching the national development objectives that include supporting the post-school system, aligning curricula and endeavouring to overcome poverty, unemployment and inequality challenges. In order to alleviate some of the issues, The National Development Plan 2030 sets out a strategy outlining three main functions of universities: educating and presenting the labour market with high-level skills; being dominant producers of new knowledge and validating knowledge through their curricula and assisting in overcoming the inequalities from the apartheid era (National

Planning Commission 2012: 262). Thus, this study seeks to investigate the role of partnerships between PHEIs and the retail sector.

Scott (2018: 3) maintains that universities have three major purposes, including teaching, research and social engagement, thus engaging with stakeholders is key to procuring timely and relevant information from current research. The author proceeds to say that universities are expected not only to teach but also to contribute to creating societal impact where students are skilled emphasising that universities play a critical role. An integral support structure for skills development in South Africa is the SETA, which aims to improve and develop skills within the various sectors (South Africa, Sector Education and Training Authority 2020g).

2.5.3 Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA)

The South African training system consists of twenty-one different bodies that were established to oversee skills development and training in key sectors of the economy (Kraak 2019: 70). These bodies are known as the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) and their key functions are to contribute to the raising of skills and enhance the skills of the employed or those wanting to be employed (South Africa, National Skills Authority 2020e: para. 2 line 2). According to Kraak (2019: 62), SETAs are required to encourage employers to prepare workplace skills plans and pay a grant to employers who prepare them. In doing so, SETAs are entitled to 10 percent of their allocated funds for administration (South Africa, White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2013: 56). Section 10 of the Skills Development Act (1998: 21) sets out the functions and responsibilities of the Sector Education Training Authority in South Africa: develop and implement a sector skills plan; develop and administer learning programmes; support the implementation of the NQF; undertake quality assurance; accredit education and training providers; monitor and evaluate programmes; disburse levies; and report to the Director-General of DHET. According to the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013: 56), the role of the SETAs is to encourage the development of skills in key economic sectors and aid in addressing challenges encountered.

Table 2.1 presents a list of SETAs available in South Africa, each overseeing the skills development and training of particular industrial sectors. Each of these SETAs was established to meet the needs of different industries in terms of the Skills Development Act 97 of 1998. As an example, the Food and Beverage SETA promotes, facilitates and incentivises skills development in this area, whereas the Banking SETA is established for stakeholders to advance the national and global position of banking.

Table 2.1: SETAS in South Africa

Name of Institutions	
AGRISETA Agriculture Sector Education and Training Authority	INSETA Insurance Sector Education and Training Authority
BANKSETA Banking Sector Education and Training Authority	LGSETA Local Government Sector Education and Training Authority
CATHSSETA Culture, Arts, Tourism, Hospitality and Sports Sector Education and Training Authority	MERSETA Manufacturing, Engineering and Related Services Sector Education and Training Authority
CETA Construction Education and Training Authority	MICT Media, Information and Communication Technologies Sector Education and Training Authority
CHIETA Chemical Industries Education and Training Authority	MQA Mining Qualifications Authority
EWSETA Energy and Water Sector Education and Training Authority	PSETA Public Service Sector Education and Training Authority
ETDP Education, Training and Development Practices Sector Education and Training Authority	SASSETA Safety and Security Sector Education & Training Authority
FASSET Financial and Accounting Services Sector Education and Training Authority	SERVICES SETA Services Sector Education and Training Authority
FP&MSETA Fibre Processing Manufacturing Sector Education and Training Authority	TETA Transport Education and Training Authority
FOODBEV Food and Beverages Manufacturing Industry Sector Education and Training Authority	W&RSETA Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority
HWSETA Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority	

Source: SETA website. <https://nationalgovernment.co.za/units/type/8/seta>

The SETA of interest to this study is the Wholesale and Retail SETA (W&R SETA), which may contribute to addressing some of the challenges faced by the retail sector. The Wholesale and Retail Seta aims to facilitate the skills development needs of the Wholesale and Retail sectors through the implementation of learning programmes and disbursements of grants as outlined in the National Skills Development Strategy (South Africa, Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority 2020h: para. 1 line 2). Individuals in the retail industry recognised and valued the need for establishing the W&R SETA, comprising both employee and employer representatives (South Africa, Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority 2020h).

The SETA's responsibilities extend to ensuring that those in training have access to grants, internships, bursaries and apprenticeships, as stated by Kruss and Petersen (2016a: 4). SETAs or other industry associations can play a role in unblocking bottlenecks, addressing gaps and providing opportunities to promote alignment and linkages. This resonates with the core of this study in anticipation of linking the retail sector to higher education institutions.

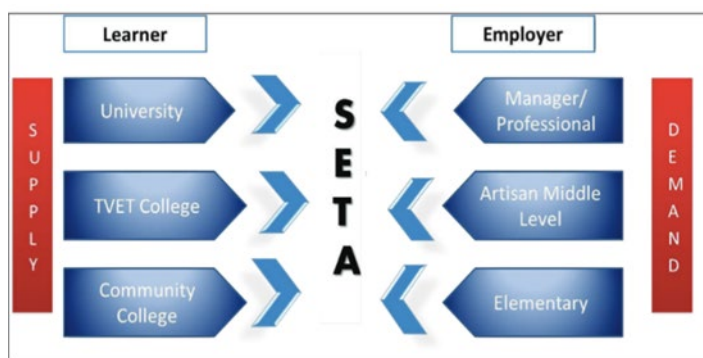


Figure 2.3: Linkage of education and the workplace through SETAs

Source: Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act no. 97 of 1998): Promulgation of the National skills development plan (NSDP)

Figure 2.3 depicts the positioning of skills levy institutions as bodies that seek to link demand with supply. The link between the workplace and labour market is crucial to ensuring that graduates are placed in high demand and priority occupations in the

labour market. Thus, SETAs can enable broker connections between the labour market, employers and sectors with the education and training institutional supply. As formerly mentioned, graduate employability is a key focus in higher education, whereby government policies are aligned with economic prosperity (Higgs, Crisp and Letts 2019: 50), thus continual engagement between stakeholders is a requisite. Balwanz and Ngcwangu (2016: 33) argue that post-school education and training institutions are likely to serve the diverse developmental priorities of South Africa. Therefore, precedence should be afforded to them by the Department of Higher Education and Training; however, these institutions face significant challenges in their efforts to promote student access, retention, persistence and success (Balzer 2020: 11).

2.6 Challenges facing Higher education

Globally, there are a limited number of institutions that function without any challenges (O'Malley 2017: para. 10 line 11) likewise, PHEIs in South Africa are confronted with recurring challenges each year. These universities encounter challenging economic times with increased student intakes and insufficient funding (van Staden 2021: 234). In addition, the development of the HE landscape has been significantly influenced by racial segregation (Cloete 2014: 287) as well as poor student performance, retention and decreased throughput rates (Govender 2020:56). The deficient education system is an obstacle to socio-economic advancement, with unemployment, poverty and inequality cited as concerns (Morris 2018: para. 1 line 1). Regrettably, violent protest actions, accompanied by property destruction, persist at most universities (Fomunyan 2017: 39), despite the demands for free education and decolonisation of the curriculum (Moloi 2016: 56). Tjønneland (2017: 3) warns that if this crisis continues, it may further weaken South African universities, and they may end up being producers of undergraduate students for the public service, competing with private colleges. Therefore, the transformative agenda necessitated changes in many areas, including government funding and increased access to education for all students (Bothma 2015: 66). Among the many challenges that are encountered by higher education institutions, access to higher education, university funding, drop-out rates, redressing challenges of the past and skills transfer will be addressed.

2.6.1 Access to Higher education

Accessibility to higher education should be available without obstruction to students; however, disparities exist concerning the proportion of an age group accessing higher education (Goastellec and Välimaa 2019: 3). In response, the National Development Plan 2030 alludes to different parts of the education system that should work together to allow learners to take different pathways that offer high-quality learning opportunities and include clear linkages between education, training and the world of work. Baijnath (2018: 89) indicates that the SA system faces the challenge of maintaining quality and relevance against the backdrop of demand for access. The reality is that many have been left behind by not having access to higher education in the developing world and this has been problematic for the underprivileged since the apartheid years (Grob-Zakhary and Hjarland 2017: 41; Mekoa 2018: 1). Post-1994, access was a key issue where the new government yearned to see more Black students attend higher education institutions; however, the participation rates were highly skewed by race, with approximately 9 % for Africans as opposed to 70 % for Whites (South Africa, Commission of Inquiry 2016: 5). According to the Commission of Inquiry Report (2016), despite the number of Black students is on the rise, the issue of access is still not equitable, which suggests that high university fees are not affordable to many, leading to the economy being affected.

Also, the academic staffing complement is still largely white, especially at the most senior academic levels (Habib 2016: 40). To provide further clarity, seven barriers to education access that exist are highlighted by Baijnath (2018: 94), which is, likewise, concurred by other scholars (Kettel 2020: 110; Cahalan et al 2021: 7; Goastellec and Valimäa 2019: 4). Financial constraints seem to be a universal issue, severely impacting thousands of students, posing a major challenge. Digital access, family responsibilities, discrimination, a lack of prerequisite qualifications, historical student experiences, and geographical locations in comparison to educational institutions have been cited as other pertinent barriers to education. While fee-free higher education may lessen the access burden, many students still require funding for other basic needs (Martinez-Vargas, Walker and Mkwanaenzi 2020: 428).

Transformation in education is necessary for equity; therefore, Gwatirera (2018: 1) reiterates that education can help one better understand the world and our place in it, equipping one to push for positive social, economic and political changes, yet there are too few institutions to accommodate the high demand for places (Pillay 2020: 14787). It is believed that some form of post-secondary education is a necessary element of successful, independent lives for most people in today's economy (Playdon 2013: para. 14 line 14). Thus, the benefits of tertiary education, according to Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh and Susuman (2018: 78) will have a huge impact on transforming the economy of the country through skills acquisition and retention. To reverse the adverse effects, Maringe and Osman (2016: 134) suggest that post-school education must confront four broad issues: an understanding of the impetus for change; recognising the variety of conceptualisations of transformation; capitalising on the levers of change, and a deep appreciation of the barriers to transformation.

It is known that student poverty or lack of income also shapes university projects for inclusive development in South Africa, and one should not be reticent about these challenges (Walker 2020: 68). Several South African higher education institutions provide some type of foundation programme to broaden access and offer additional support to students who do not meet admission or selection requirements for programmes (Ramrathan 2016: 1). The author further states that higher education institutions should strategise as much as possible to create opportunities for access. Setswe (2013: 98) relates the tragic events at a South African university when a parent died while applicants were competing for places, thus indicating the desperation for access to quality higher education. The discussion on the challenges continues, with university funding being one of the most pertinent issues to be addressed.

2.6.2 University funding

While government funding may decrease, the cost of tuition rises, making Tertiary education less accessible to students (Mitchell, Leachman and Masterson 2016: 1). Thus, affordability becomes a new hurdle for many prospective students from poor communities, even though universities are expected to become more inclusive (South

Africa, Commission of Inquiry 2016: 6). The dispersion of financial and other resources thinly and the decline in higher education funding often result in poor quality education (Musundire and Mumanyi 2020: 107). In the funding framework that South Africa subscribes to, costs are shared among the beneficiaries of university education, mainly the government and students (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2015: para. 1 line 3).

Government funding is available in the form of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to students who have the academic potential to succeed but lack the financial means to do so (Bevan 2019: para. 3 line 2). With universities being dependent on tuition fees as a source of revenue, a capping of fees would leave them with major revenue shortfalls (Price Waterhouse Coopers 2019: para. 2 line 6). Therefore, higher education institutions should search for ways to address some of the aforementioned challenges. As a result, a solution to the funding issues is forging partnerships with industries, thereby providing additional funding and other resources to educational institutions (Venturewell 2019: para. 9 line 1). Furthermore, these partnerships could lead to improvements in the university's access strategies, recruitment and admission procedures (Farruggia et al. 2020: 1909).

Of importance to this study are challenges encountered by the retail sector. Reflecting on this, Suvethika and Shivany (2018: 1965), indicate that retail practical knowledge is lacking in undergraduate qualifications. This should be included in educational policies, with learners being actively involved as retail entrepreneurs, as those universities that are promoting entrepreneurship are supporting their economies (Healy et al. 2014: 27). Reflecting on the aforementioned challenges, Baijnath (2018: 97) provides likely solutions to alleviate some associated challenges with access and resources. The author proposes that one way is through the adoption of open educational resources (OER) to mitigate the barriers to education, demonstrating the role of various stakeholders to ensure a supportive environment. As stated in White Paper 3 (1997: 45), there is substantial scope to improve the internal efficiency of the higher education system with a concerted effort to reduce expenditure, improve efficiency and enhance quality. Such measures include broadening the use of high-

quality but less labour-intensive teaching and learning strategies, improving student throughput and completion rates, reducing duplication and overlap in institutional, programme and service provision (White Paper 1997: 45). Besides access and funding issues that are encountered by the higher education sector, drop-out rates are another challenge that impedes the sector.

2.6.3 Drop-out rates

Universities seem to be burdened by challenges, including the issue of drop-out rates. As stated by Jappie (2020: 190), the higher education sector is struggling to strike a balance between access and success, which is evident in high drop-out rates and low graduation rates. Moreover, Ramrathan and Pillay (2015: 7) affirm that the efficiency of the public higher education system may be compromised by high dropout rates, low throughput rates and extended periods to complete qualifications. Poor choices in qualifications, social circumstances, finances and inadequate academic support could be attributed to these high dropout rates (Chetty and Pather 2015: 1; Govender 2020: 108). The authors further indicate that it is important to consider first-year students transitioning from high school to tertiary education.

Factors influencing academic performance vary from one academic environment to another, between institutions, from one set of students to another, and from one cultural setting to another (Ajoodha, Jadhav and Dukhan 2020: 3); consequently, students find it difficult to adjust to tertiary education. Therefore, higher education institutions need to provide students with the tools to effectively participate in an academic environment, as conditions of inequality and poverty influence the lives of students throughout their university careers (Walker 2020: 57). As a result, The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013: 8) confirms their role in preparing workers for the labour market to be able to make a living for themselves and contribute skills to a developing economy. Redressing the challenges of the past in South Africa is both vital and necessary to transition from the apartheid era, which is discussed in the next section.

2.6.4 Redressing the challenges of the past (apartheid)

Post-1994, a democratic South Africa came into being with high expectations, one of which was education, which was called upon to address the needs of all citizens (Badat 2014: 127). The author further states that there was an expectation that the education system would be fundamentally transformed by dismantling the old apartheid system. However, there were deep-seated challenges in the higher education sector that persist 20 years into the new democracy (Mabokela and Mlambo 2017: 1) and many of the structural elements of the education system remain unchanged (Du Plessis 2021: 57). By 1994, the landscape of 36 higher education institutions included ten historically disadvantaged universities and seven technikons that were designated for the use of Black South Africans (Bunting 2006: 52); therefore, addressing inequalities required reshaping and reforming the higher education systems. However, higher education transformation has been framed using post-conflictual pedagogies that have been preoccupied with reconciliatory and restorative justice (Kumalo 2021: 177).

Despite revisions to South Africa's higher education curriculum following apartheid, fundamental curriculum restructuring has yet to occur (Ramrathan 2016: 2). "Education White Paper 3" and the "National Plan for Higher Education" provided a framework for creating a new, equitable system of higher education, although there has been modest success with the implementation of these policies (Mabokela and Mlambo 2017: 1); therefore, reforms to address inequalities were needed. As a result of this, institutional attempts at redressing access inequalities for previously disadvantaged groups were adopted by including transformation quota systems that guaranteed more than 50 per cent of places being allocated to Black students (van Staden 2021: 236).

As a way forward for education in South Africa, alternative ontological and epistemological ways of knowing must be centred, understood and practised (Du Plessis 2021: 57), thus permeating throughout the education system. One way of doing this is by decolonising schools and universities involving people who were previously marginalised under apartheid, by choosing to embrace their own cultures,

tell their own histories, and run institutions based on values that are reflective of African culture (Du Plessis 2021: 54). The next segment briefly highlights global challenges in higher education.

2.6.5 Global Challenges in Higher Education

There have been profound transformations in systems of Higher Education and institutions focused on new strategies for development globally (Geryk 2017: 458). According to Granados (2011: para. 15 line 11), we live in a world of crises where everything changes and is unstable based on these challenges faced by higher education institutions, namely: “changes in universities as institutions, and at a level of internal organisation; changes in knowledge creation; changes in the educational model; changes in tapping the potential of information and communication technologies” and others. Furthermore, the blatant lack of academic integrity, among others, is something that most educational institutions are confronted with (Denisova-Schmidt 2020: 1). In Worcester, the public higher education system has also been affected by underfunding at universities, thereby creating further challenges (O'Connell 2019: para. 6 line 4). India, as an example, faces one of the greatest challenges of all the BRICs countries with low access rates and extremely high population rates (Altbach 2016: 63). Likewise, China, with a population of over 1.3 billion encountered challenges in providing post-secondary education access to the ever-demanding population (Altbach 2016: 272). Knowing how to shape the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which began at the beginning of the century, is also a concern (Komara 2020: 16); hence, harnessing the tools of the Fourth Industrial Revolution could mean opportunities for the higher education sector in transforming society.

Interestingly, even though British Universities are among the best in the world, they are encountering obstacles to overcome within the higher education sector (Digital Marketing Institute 2019 para. 1 line 1). It is evident from the literature presented that some or most of the aforementioned issues are confronted by South Africa and other countries alike. According to Suvethika and Shivany (2018: 1964), Sri Lanka's unemployment issues are becoming a burning problem for the country; likewise, Arab

universities are calling for the alignment of higher education and scientific research coordination with the job market needs (Sawahel: 2018 para. 18 line 6). Similarly, South Africa's unemployment rate is high due to the many skills-related challenges and inequalities in the labour market that have been shown to be a deterrent to productivity levels (Mncayi and Shuping 2021: 9). As much as the working world depends on being supplied with quality human resources, higher education remains a predictor of employment (Ali and Jalal 2018). This is evident in a study by Franco, Silva and Rodrigues (2019: 180) suggesting that partnerships play a crucial role in introducing students to the labour market as well as anticipating providing relief to sectors that encounter challenges. Thus, this study aims to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in anticipation of addressing the skills concern. In light of this, the issue of skills transfer and the identification of skills will be addressed.

2.6.6 Skills transfer and the identification of skills

"There is a growing demand for HEIs to play an active role in providing help in responding to society's concerns, of which sustainability is a particularly relevant issue" (Soini et al. 2018), thus calling for improved collaborative activities to be able to respond to issues. A key issue of low enrolment levels may lead to critical shortages of highly skilled in the labour market (Matsolo, Ningpuanyeh and Susuman 2018: 2) or a mismatch between skills developed at higher education institutions and employer needs (Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler 2019: 26). The lack of industry-relevant skills among labour market entrants has been a challenge for employers for many years (Arthur-Mensah 2020: 100) and proper engagement is necessary to address it. In response. Kromydas (2017: 3) believes that higher education promotes knowledge, leading to the development of labour market skills in pursuit of employment. Therefore, education programmes must continually be updated to respond to global and local needs in anticipation of equipping students with appropriate skills (Moloi, Mkwanzazi and Bojabotseha 2014: 471; Baijnath 2018: 89), as the quality of education is pivotal for the production of human capital that cannot be compromised (Legotlo 2014: 271).

The reality is that South Africa's education system performs worse than poorer nations such as Zimbabwe, Kenya and Swaziland, and South Africa should be taking lessons from other successful countries on how to move the country towards better education rankings (Mbiza 2018: para. 8 line 1). One of the reasons for this could be that African universities struggle to deliver quality education and link education to socio-economic development through science, technology, innovation and entrepreneurship (Sawahel: 2019 para. 6 line 1). As explained by Scott (2018: 2), to reverse the effects of not producing the required mix of graduates to meet the needs of the country, redesigning the education system is necessary by focusing on students' success and equity outcomes. It is pertinent to be able to identify the skills that are most relevant to industry; thus, Taylor, Fleisch and Shindler (2019: 10) concur in stating that without the human capital base being improved, South Africa will be unable to sustain economic growth.

The set of skills provided by South African education institutions must be in line with the demand for labour required by key economic sectors (Ngepah, Saba and Mabindisa 2021: 2). Being able to identify appropriate skills for the job market is significant, as skilled employees have a positive effect on both economic output and economic growth (Ngepah 2021: 9). Thus, each industry has skills that are deemed relevant to that industry; hence, the importance of skills in retail was demonstrated in a report by Deloitte (2017: para. 6 line 3) indicating that empathy, communication, personal service, problem-solving and decision-making are most valuable. Therefore, employees' and customers' personal interaction is important and it is based on the employee's skills and abilities, which, in turn, determine a customer's satisfaction (Ali et al. 2021: 4129). Likewise, Jacobs and Karpova (2020a: 374) believe that retailers must stress the importance of communication and teamwork to ensure successful collaboration, resulting in speedy decision-making and streamlining business processes.

The retail sector accounts for a large part of the overall workforce; hence, relevant skills must be imparted to future employees by introducing skills workshops in schools and

relevant work experience programmes to provide the head start that the industry needs (Hart et al. 2007b: 284). Jacobs and Karpova (2020b: 13) state that this is highly valued through on-the-job training, in-store retail work and internships, thereby equipping one for success in industry. Thus, the Department of Higher Education and Training, Skills Development Unit promotes and maintains the national skills development strategy. In support, Atkinson (2016: 3) believes ways of fostering engagement with employers include work-based learning and work-integrated learning. The author further expounds that types of work-based learning comprise apprenticeships and traineeships, simulations whereby students are engaged in analysis and decision-making in real work situations in an educational setting, as well as placements in a workplace for some time.

On the other hand, work-integrated learning is an umbrella term that refers to a range of practical experiences designed to give students valuable exposure to work-related activities relevant to their courses (Universities Australia 2019: 4). In addition, “curriculum reform, facilitating improvements in teaching and learning and differentiating the roles of existing higher education institutions are crucial to improving system performance” (Fisher and Scott 2011: 47). It is significant to note that both the business sector and higher education institutions make an important contribution to sustainable economic growth, employment and prosperity (Healy et al. 2014: 5). Bandaranaike (2017: 2) remarks that even employers are referring to the mismatch between university teaching and practice in the workplace; therefore, stakeholders should take a stand and attempt to address the issue. Likewise, it is time for higher education policymakers to reform the curriculum to facilitate employability skills among students (Patil 2019: 5).

As formerly presented, the higher education sector encounters challenges that may or may not be able to be resolved by the sector itself. Probing partnerships may be a likely option to address the issue of skills. Thus, the subsequent section will commence with a presentation on partnerships in terms of the link between education and industry.

2.7 Partnerships: the link between higher education institutions and industry

Creating and ensuring harmony between higher education and the working world is a contextual approach to developing a practical interface between education and the world of work (Ali and Jalal 2018: 81). However, points of friction between the academic institution and industry in potential partnerships can be condensed by considering the following arguments (Hingle et al. 2019: 8), firstly, striking a balance between cultivating a relationship with industry whilst considering the constraints of academic appointments; secondly, agreeing upon timelines; and lastly, selecting appropriate outcomes and lastly evaluation metrics. Though an argument by Nutcache (2018: para. 4 line 1) states that brainstorming, providing value and equal partaking are some of the important aspects that are brought to the table when collaborating, partnerships can still be difficult to manage (Healy et al. 2014: 22).

Providing students with practical content outside of their normal framework greatly improves long-term understanding (Du Preez and Sinha 2020: 17). According to Healy et al. (2014: 22), universities may have a rigorous process for approving qualifications that may not be appreciated by businesses or funding bodies. There is also the possibility of engagements between universities and DHET so that institutional transformation plans and investments are dovetailed with those that are managed by the department (Habib 2016: 42), thus being considered relevant and necessary considering education is a long-term investment.

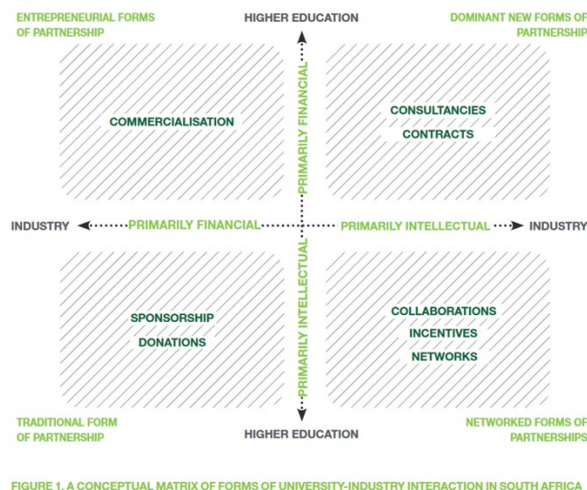


Figure 2.4: Conceptual matrix of forms of university-industry interaction in South Africa

Source: Kruss (2005: 11)

Figure 2.4 depicts a matrix of the intersecting relationship between higher education and industry, resulting in the various forms of partnerships. Ideal forms of partnership in South Africa were defined into four segments and mapped on the matrix (Kruss 2005: 11): traditional, networked, dominant and entrepreneurial forms of partnerships. Traditional forms of partnerships are the long-standing types in which the industry supports academic work, whereas dominant types of partnerships are consultancies and contracts, which were shaped by higher education. It typically involved a researcher in higher education acting as an advisor to address the knowledge problems of firms. Following on, the entrepreneurial form of partnership education researchers adopts entrepreneurial roles for the primary purpose of generating financial imperatives for industry and higher education. Finally, new networked forms of partnerships emerged with a weak form of intellectual collaboration that was stimulated by government funding aimed at developing recreation, development and innovation. Interestingly, the traditional form of partnership appears to be the most relatable to the current study.

As stated earlier, it cannot be disputed that higher education institutions provide theoretical knowledge to graduates; however, they fail to develop the general employability skills required for entry-level jobs (Patil 2019: 5). Yet, the role of these institutions is necessary for success in the world of work (Ali and Jalal 2018: 80). For this and other reasons, university-industry partnerships can help universities leverage stakeholders' resources and allow industry experts to share their expertise with students and others (Igwe, Okolie and Nwokoro 2019: 9). The mutual undertakings by stakeholders are indispensable to future graduates in the world of work; hence, building stakeholder relations will benefit higher education institutions by improving the quality of education (Geryk 2017: 457). To address the concerns around employability, Patil (2019: 5) raised insightful strategies that could be adopted to develop skills required by students, namely: curriculum design; case design and development; mini projects and assignments; on-the-job training and internships; performance testing and evaluation; reciprocal sharing arrangements; setting up a business development cell on partnership; faculty exchange and participation in industry and vice versa in university and promoting entrepreneurship in university. The author further states that considering and adopting these strategies may provide graduates with the much-needed skills to promote employability and sustainability.

Geryk (2017: 457) believe that the quality of higher education can be measured by assessing the satisfaction levels of stakeholders; hence, stakeholders may determine this by the quality of graduates entering industry. Ali and Jalal (2018: 81) suggest that if higher education changes its trends in line with the world of work, it then enables students to investigate career opportunities, thereby supplying highly qualified personnel to the labour force by placing students in lucrative positions. Paterson (2019 para. 6 line 2) adds that the training and knowledge-production functions of universities foster new employment by not only creating a skilled workforce but also meeting employers' staffing needs. The Shoprite group demonstrated how it ensures this is accomplished through its retail readiness programmes (Business Tech 2019: para. 2 line 1). The group offers retail training through Retail Varsity, its registered private further education and training college (Business Tech 2019: para. 2 line 1) to educate

the youth about starting their own business. The literature points out opportunities for collaboration even though South Africa is generally referred to as an emerging economy (Mogaji, Maringe and Hinson 2020: 89).

This study consequently focuses on investigating the role of partnerships within the context of the retail sector and public higher education institutions. Lanford (2020: 29) states that there are benefits that partnerships can offer, with the economy being best served when universities and their stakeholders develop partnerships, thereby creating an impact by solving global challenges. On the other hand, Holton, Jettner and Shaw (2015: 100) argue that not only can strategies leverage the power of partnerships in higher education but also contribute to progress and innovation from a community perspective. Notably, industry-academic partnerships have been most effective due to the shared goal of knowledge and innovation advancement in addressing the needs of the industry as well as contributing to economic growth (Ndlovu 2017: 839). In addition to helping improve graduates' skills and employability, relevant curricula are developed and reviewed to address the changing needs of today's global workplace (Sawahel 2018: para. 16 line 4). With that being said, it is important to establish how partnerships are interpreted by the higher education sector.

2.8 How are partnerships interpreted by higher education in South Africa?

Despite the many unanswered questions such as why we continue to witness the skills gap and how we create synergies between universities and other institutions, universities must endeavour to address the link between academia and industry (Kabaji 2019: para.12 line 12). Moloi (2016: 474) argues that serious involvement is also required by the government to improve access, equity and quality for the youth of South Africa. The world is changing, and therefore the role of higher education is important in enabling learners to become educated citizens that society needs (Ali and Jalal 2018: 82) as well as to articulate the links between skills and attributes considered important by employers (Dicker et al. 2019: 10). Hamburg and Vladut's (2019: 144) stance is that cooperation between universities and industries for innovation and education is important, particularly due to uncertainty in economies.

The National Plan for Higher Education (2001: 4) continues to highlight its pledge towards restructuring the higher education system to ensure it contributes to social and economic development. Thus, the National Development Plan (2014: 4) calls for different parts of the education system to work together, allowing learners to navigate different pathways within the institution, between education and training, as well as the world of work. As dominant producers of new knowledge, universities must fulfil the function of educating and training students with high-level skills for the employment needs of the public and private sectors (National Development Plan 2030). Based on these elements of the plan, this study will investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

The South African Council of Higher Education Report (2018/2019: 40) identified enhancing and expanding strategic partnerships as a critical strategic objective to collaborate with stakeholders to increase organisational effectiveness. As a result, there should be meaningful partnerships to ensure optimal usage of resources, improved quality, and increased relevance that can be achieved by collective approaches, as outlined in the draft National Planning Commission Report (2020: 46). The report further stipulates that significant workplace experiences for students must be available by focusing on practical training and simulation in education and training institutions or through partnerships with workplaces that have training facilities. There are a growing number of opportunities for students and staff in other countries, and therefore appropriate policies are required to support these international collaborations and partnerships (South Africa, Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa 2017: 12). South African higher education institutions have received several requests from foreign institutions to offer collaborative or partnership qualifications; therefore, universities are seen as a strategy to bridge the innovation gap between industry and themselves (Hamburg and Vladut 2019: 148). There have been numerous successful and unsuccessful partnerships within the various sectors of the economy; however, partnerships within the academic sector will be the subsequent section's focus.

2.9 Academic partnerships

There is a global demand for universities as knowledge producers to interact with firms to contribute to sustained economic growth and change in the national economy (Universities South Africa 2012: 1), thus becoming more prevalent today within many sectors. A report by Universities South Africa (2012: 1) incorporated the analysis of trends and practices to recommend an appropriate framework for university-industry interaction in South Africa. For decades, there have been many successful academic partnerships, of which a few will be highlighted as a pathway to this study. Martin and Wooff (2020: 6) focus on a police-academic partnership, indicating that a cooperative style rather than a collaborative style of partnering approach was appropriate for this collaboration. This is indicative that mutual efforts from the different sectors can effortlessly partner yet remain successful based on the agreed collaborative model. Likewise, the initiative that Gorlach (2017: 18) highlights is the partnership between the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University and General Motors South Africa, signifying the importance of close links between engineering educational programmes and industry. The author further emphasises the significance of the partnership in providing a vital link between theory and practice, with a large number of student projects being based on real industrial cases.

The success of the partnership, according to Gorlach (2017: 24), benefits the university, students, community and industry, and with the active participation of all parties, jobs could be created. Unemployment issues have been cited as a major concern, and hence this partnership, as mentioned by Gorlach (2017: 24) may contribute to shrinking the number of unemployed individuals. Furthermore, the transition into the labour market has been prolonged due to these chronic levels of unemployment, indicating that people are not being absorbed into the labour market and the longer they are without employment, the slimmer their chances of finding one (Mncayi and Shuping 2021: 1). As a result, Ndlovu (2017: 844) demonstrates that partnerships with universities and the minerals industry can go a long way, providing benefits to student training, research and entrepreneurial activities. Ndlovu (2017: 844)

argues that understanding the nature of collaboration and respecting each other's work environments, cultures and goals could lead to successful and long-term partnerships.

On the other hand, Wedekind and Mutereko (2016: 385) describe the partnership's link between the Engineering Department at a University of Technology and industry as weakening due to the harsh macro-environment, among other factors. Partnerships can present themselves in various forms, with each having a similar or unique outlook, as evidenced by the examples provided in the previous discussion. The development of skills and their alignment with industry are key and will be discussed in the next section.

2.10 Skills development and alignment to industry: A higher education perspective

It has been established that low skill levels have consistently been identified as a serious impediment to economic development (South Africa, The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2013: 57). This issue of skills has a direct impact on South Africa's employment indicators, yet "the workplace of the 21st century is a highly cosmopolitan environment, where people are expected to work across racial, cultural, religious and linguistic boundaries" (Habib 2016: 38). However, the strength of labour market institutions is important in tackling unemployment levels, and therefore the government should strengthen labour market institutions (Mncayi and Shuping 2021: 9).

According to Statistics South Africa (2019: para. 1 line 3), historical data indicates that unemployment among young graduates increased to over 30 % due to new entrants into the labour force; therefore, it is vital to determine the cause and effects of these high rates of unemployment. Astonishingly, instead of graduates being more employable, they remain unemployed, as indicated in Figure 2.5. Fundamentally, this figure should be low due to graduates possessing the appropriate tertiary qualifications; however, the South African economy has been characterised by

progressive high unemployment rates, as reported in the Skills Supply and Demand Report (2022: 13). There is no doubt that unemployment among graduates has been attributed to skill deficiencies and non-alignment with an organisation's requirements (Jones and Pate 2019: 225-242; Shwab 2019). Booyens (2020: 11) concurs with findings indicating that the course content of post-school educational institutions is not aligned with industry needs and is obsolete, alluding to the lack of engagement between stakeholders as a concern. Based on these findings, Booyens (202: 11) further expounds that robust and ongoing deliberations between the key stakeholders are necessary for positive growth and should occur regularly.

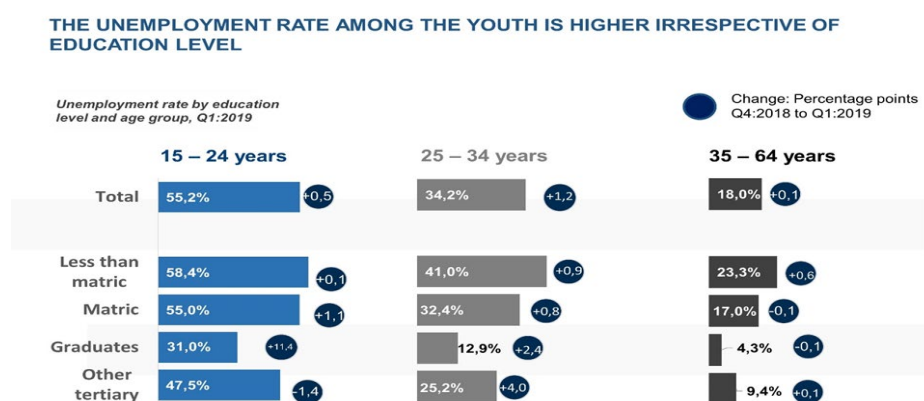


Figure 2.5: Unemployment rates

Source: Statistics South Africa (2019). <http://www.statssa.gov.za/>

As core stakeholders for this study, retail managers and higher education representatives are being probed about the role of partnerships. In addition, stakeholder engagement is necessary for retail curriculum reform as the global retail sector is experiencing radical transformation (Steynberg 2020: 29). With that being said, higher education institutions have been required to include work-integrated learning in the curriculum for purposes of improving graduate employability (Truman, Mason and Venter 2017: 44). Assenting to this is the South African Graduate Development Association, signifying that an extension of internship programmes is

required as well as an alignment of skills to the economic needs of the country (Comins 2020: para. 17 line 12).

As alluded to earlier, skills are directly linked to employment to which prominence must be given. In support of this, Bazana, McLaren and Kabungaidze (2018: 1) point out the importance of skills in building the human capital of the workforce and the role that higher education plays within society. On the other hand, failure by the labour market to offer jobs that graduates expect means that there is a limited return on their higher education, deeming it a wasted investment (Lauder and Mayhew 2020: 8). At this point, it is safe to say that both the higher education and business sectors are in agreement that something is amiss and urgent intervention is essential. As stated by Mncayi and Shuping (2021: 9), there is a need to re-evaluate the labour policies to improve the labour market.

For an understanding of the overall skills concern, Figure 2.6 presents a framework demonstrating the signals for current and future demand for skilled, semi-skilled and low-skilled occupations. It is a commendable effort by DHET from a higher education perspective to simplify the process for both employers and universities. Four interrelated areas, namely the economy, demographics, labour force and current and future demand, affect the job situation. Based on this, the government can determine what the skills shortages and mismatches are with the current demands and address them accordingly (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2019: 19). Implementing this framework would provide stakeholders with relevant information of initiating the analysis of the job situation. It is important to note that within higher education there are four main stakeholder groups, namely: providers (for example, funding bodies); users of products (for example, students); users of output (for example, employers) and employees of higher education (Welzant et al. 2015: 4). Each of the group's actions impacts the other and ultimately concludes with the culmination of the education journey by entering the labour market.

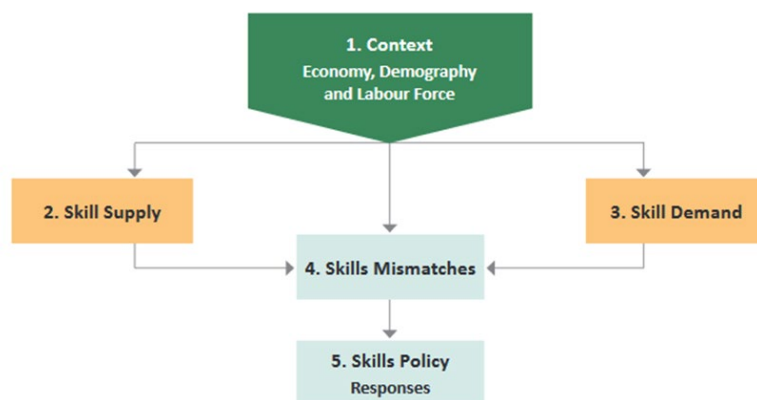


Figure 2.6: Framework for the analysis of skills supply, demand and mismatches

Source: Department of Higher Education and Training (2016: 17).

<http://www.dhet.co.za>

Sutherland (2020: 233) reiterates that South Africa has a significant skills shortage due to the failings of the education system, which are partially attributed to the apartheid era. With governmental support, the skills issue can be appropriately addressed and disparities unleashed thus, a proposition is to ascertain which skills are required in what sectors (International Labour Organisation 2023: para. 1 line 4). As a strategy to address this, the National Skills Development Plan (2030) offers a long-term perspective, defining the desired roles that the various sectors need to play in reaching the goal. Thus, the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) aims to address the skills issues faced by the nation. “An educated, skilled and capable workforce for South Africa” is an apt vision and the intent of prioritising skills aligned to supporting economic growth may well contribute to abating the current issues (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2019: 11).

The outcomes highlighted by the NSDP in an endeavour to address the skills challenges are “to identify and increase the production of occupations in high demand; link education and the workplace; improve the level of skills in the South African workforce; increase access to occupationally directed programmes; support the growth of the public college institutional type as a key provider of skills required for socio-

economic development; develop skills and support for entrepreneurship and cooperative development; encourage and support worker-initiated training and support career development services” (South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training 2019: 11). These noteworthy efforts by the NSDP are anticipated to transform the economy with mutual efforts by the relevant stakeholders. As emphasised by Kraak et al. (2013: 5), there are bound to be challenges in addressing the skills concerns; however, these may be abated with ongoing support and effort from stakeholders. The response to the skills concern by the JPMorgan company is that employers, educators and others have to realise the importance of tackling the skills gap (JP Morgan Chase and Company 2014), thus potentially leading to the transformation of lives and strengthening the economy.

The findings by Arthur-Mensah (2020: 100) regarding the opportunities and challenges encountered by employers indicate that apprenticeship programmes and working with similarly-minded stakeholders are ways to prepare students for industry. Though it may seem that these challenges are limited to new employees, Skevi et al. (2014: 175) argue that existing employees with certain skill sets are insufficient to meet the constantly renewed business objectives. Interestingly, there remains unity among employers about the most needed skills through collaboration (Grob-Zakhary and Hjarland 2017: 60). To further support this, Kruss and Petersen (2016b: 3) present a framework for analysing the skills development system that depicts all the key elements in this process.

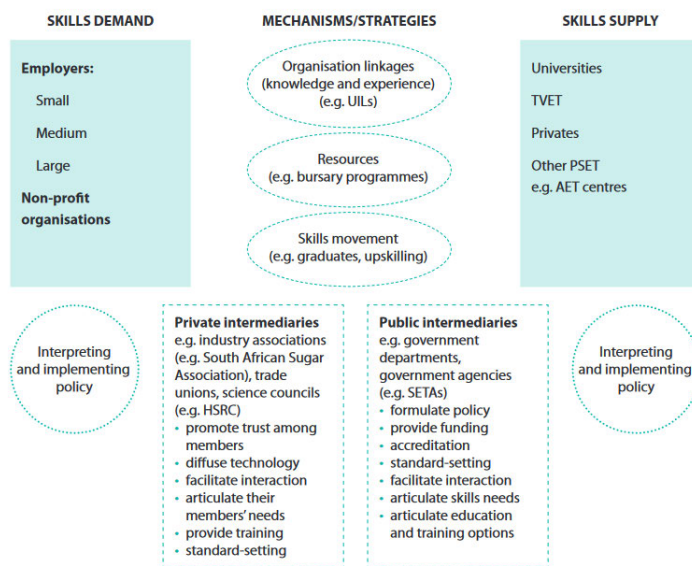


Figure 2.7: Framework for analysing skills development systems

Source: Kruss and Petersen (2016b: 3)

Figure 2.7 provides “a representation of the actors, potential flows and interactive learning in a sectoral system of innovation” in the South African context. The framework encourages higher education institutions to focus on alignment in a skills development network by emphasising skill demand and supply. The stakeholders, being universities and industries, can apply this framework to identify opportunities for inventions to promote learning by employing collaboration. This framework may apply to employers in the retail sector as key stakeholders in this study by way of identifying specific skills required. As an example, if a new ordering system is on the cards for a retail industry-wide launch, skills relating to the use of the system would be identified as a mandatory requirement for graduates. Therefore, one should not assume that the corporate sector cannot be part of the solution (Ruthford 2020: 1).

Regardless of the situation, the corporate sector plays a significant role when transformation is needed. In support, Healy et al. (2014: 38) reiterated that co-designing and co-delivery of course curricular can be done by businesses and universities, hence leading to reinforcement of knowledge and expertise, which is

highly relatable to the study. Whilst the skills concern may seem to be limited to South Africa, it is essentially not as uncommon as it affects graduates and others globally (Winterton and Turner 2019: 538), with concerns exacerbated by a rapidly global economy. Thus, to address the skills and related issues, higher education and industry partnerships should be promoted as critical drivers of the innovation economy (Frølund, Murray and Riedel 2018: 71)

2.11 Promoting higher education-industry partnerships

The South African economy has recorded yet another decline (Statistics South Africa 2022), and plans are in place to get the economy back on track by securing economic growth and addressing unemployment issues, among others. In response to this, South Africa's president, Mr Ramaphosa, alludes to the forging of durable partnerships between government, business and other sectors (South African Government 2019). Further to that, Patil (2019: 5) suggests that the skill gap be filled by government initiatives through probing public-private partnerships, which may be beneficial to both higher education and business alike. According to Wallin et al. (2014: 6), there are reasons why these partnerships should be pursued, namely: they support the recruitment process whereby students and researchers are seen as potential employees and the organisation has access to skilled personnel; they create stability for research initiatives with universities having global networks to build knowledge and they are a source of innovation when competence and creativity can be implemented.

Hitron (2019: para. 4 line 10), believes that students want a more authentic experience that includes hands-on work and assessments that reflect real-world learning. Knowing what industry expects and ensuring that students are labour market-ready will be mutually advantageous for students and employers. This is evident in Franco, Silva and Rodrigues' (2019: 9) study demonstrating students' eagerness to enter the labour market and work in a practical environment, signifying the relevance of preparedness as students are more confident as opposed to those with no practical experience. Students gain higher levels of emotional maturity and hone resilience; therefore, HEIs should include key employability innovations in their curricula (Diver 2020: 24).

Wedekind and Mutereko (2016: 382) argue that a way of promoting the production of situated knowledge is by tailoring vocational programmes. In this way, stakeholders are in accord with what is expected both from industry and what higher education provides.

Mobarak (2020: 9) outlines suggestions that employers deem necessary for collaborations, namely: there should be an engagement between the university and industry specialists to maintain awareness of workplace requirements; collaboration between industry and employer representatives; educators should be encouraged to create awareness of teaching and learning challenges to make the educational material relevant to employers' needs'; recruitment of suitably qualified industry representatives to teach part of the curriculum; or encouraging educators to gain industry experience. Adoption of these recommendations may lead to market-ready graduates assuming immediate employment due to the absence of gaps needing to be filled. Okolie et al. (2020: 9) believe that due to poor linkages between the sectors and the higher education system lacking support from industry, it is essential to secure involvement with industry to change the mindset of students regarding business development and job creation. In addition, it must not be overlooked that the labour market remains under critical observation with persistent joblessness presenting worrying concerns for the labour market (Mncayi and Shuping 2021: 10).

2.12 Conclusion

The overall aim of investigating the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector was addressed via the following objectives: to outline the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector, as well as to determine the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.

It was established through the discussions that education is a vital element for future success. However, higher education institutions encounter challenges, including access, funding and skills issues, drop-out rates, and redressing the challenges associated with apartheid. An introduction to partnerships as a means of addressing some of the aforementioned challenges, was presented. To answer the remaining objectives, the next chapter will present the fundamentals of partnerships in terms of building and strengthening university-industry partnerships. Furthermore, the theoretical framework for the study will be developed.

CHAPTER 3

BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING UNIVERSITY- INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter provided the reader with an overview of education and a discussion of the higher education system in South Africa, including the relevant governmental policies. Additionally, skills development and the importance of partnerships were presented. This chapter advances the discussion of partnerships, specifically building and strengthening university-industry partnerships. In light of the study achieving its overall aim of investigating the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province, the remaining objectives will be addressed, namely: to identify skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between the education provided at universities and the skills required by the retail sector; and to propose a partnership framework for effective partnership between public higher education institutions and the retail sector.

Furthermore, the retail sector as a major component of the study will be highlighted, focusing on skills as a central element. Partnerships between education and industry provide the foundation necessary for the work environment; hence, this chapter commences with an understanding of the terminology and elements of partnerships. It will further examine the types or forms of partnerships as a vital element in determining what contributes to a sustainable partnership. This discussion progresses to stakeholder engagement in terms of the roles, responsibilities and characteristics within a partnership. Additionally, it examines the elements of synergies and success factors of partnerships. The qualitative instrument for general managers encompassed a holistic view of the sector in terms of current partnerships with education, stakeholder expectations, challenges faced, skills gap and sustainability of partnerships. The quantitative instruments for students and store managers probed responses relating to experiences, expectations and satisfaction levels of stakeholders relating to university services and the retail sector.

Lastly, a discussion on theoretical and conceptual frameworks for partnerships underpinning the study will be introduced. Based on the study's findings, a framework will be proposed for effective partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector. This allows the researcher to amend non-concrete assumptions with tangible confirmations. The discussion commences with an outlook on the retail landscape in South Africa, followed by a discussion on partnerships.

3.2 The Retail landscape in South Africa

The retail sector has a significant role to play globally and is no different in South Africa, with growth being influenced by worldwide happenings (Innovate 2016: 50). "Both statistically and socially, retail is not only relevant but essential and has been a historical and consistent growth sector" (Council 2021: 13) as well as a significant economic sector (Park et al. 2021: 795). For this and other reasons, the study concentrated on the retail sector as an imperative to the economic development of the country. To provide context, an overview of the retail sector in South Africa, followed by its composition, evolution and challenges, will be discussed.

3.2.1 A broad overview of Retail in South Africa

Retail development in South Africa is strongly influenced by current international activities and economic conditions (Innovate 2016: 50). Notably, retailing comprises all actions associated with selling products or services directly to final consumers for their "personal, non-business use" (Kotler and Keller 2007). Ali et al. (2021: 4129) consider the retail sector as one that adds to the growth of the economy and is one of the fastest-moving businesses globally, with shopping centres being at the heart of this economic activity (Stops: 2011). The South African market is the biggest retail market in Africa regarding sales (Wholesale and Retail Report: 2018: 1); thus, the sector is regarded as highly diverse in terms of goods and services provided. The sector is refined in the sense of leading into untapped markets. As reported in the Retail Trade Report (2011: 1), the South African retail sector is sophisticated and is supplied by both local and imported products. Consequently, "the retail industry comprises the following

clusters: general dealers; retailers of food, beverages and tobacco in specialised stores; retailers in pharmaceutical and medical goods, cosmetics and toiletries; retailers in textiles, clothing, footwear and leather goods; retailers in household furniture, appliances and equipment; and retailers in hardware, paint and glass” (Statistics South Africa 2012: 2). However, today’s retail industry is experiencing rapid disruption (Nilsson, 2022: 349). As a result, it is significant to understand the composition of retail for purposes of contextualising this study.

3.2.2 Composition of Retail

In South Africa, the retail landscape spans from sophisticated modern formal retail chain stores, such as Woolworths, Pick ‘n Pay and Checkers, to big-box cash and carry and hybrid stores, such as Makro, to neighbourhood convenience stores and informal retail spaza shops (Lappeman et al. 2021: 89), with each offering a variation of products and services. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the general retail classification in South Africa, encompassing supermarket retailers, online retailers, retail hybrids and spaza stores. While formal retail could be classified as corporate or independent retail, there are different kinds of business-ownership models within these classifications such as franchises and partnerships (Masojada 2021: 90). An additional type of retail that is gaining popularity is known as forecourt retailing, which refers to express stores catering to the convenience retail market (Deloitte Report 2016: para. 14 line 1).

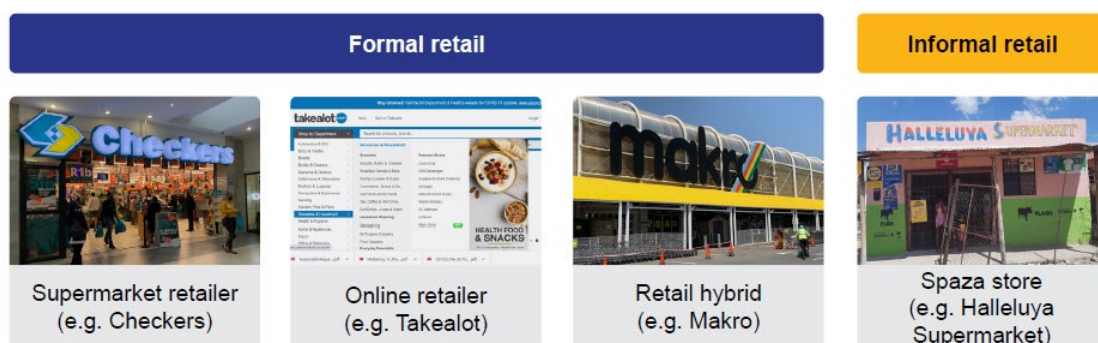


Figure 3.1: Examples of consumer goods retail formats in South Africa
Source: James Lappeman (2021: 89)

Of particular significance to this study is the focus on formal supermarket retailers within the sector, with an emphasis on skills. Recruiting the right employees can be challenging for a key employer, while there may be several graduates. A sentiment echoed by Borg and Scott-Young (2020: 1365), elucidating “the inability of graduates to meet the demand of employers is a pressing concern given the increasing number of emerging university graduates and the highly competitive nature of the labour market”. Thus, it can be concluded that graduate employment is both complex and diverse in the 21st century (Bathmaker 2021: 88). A study by Malgas, Khatle and Mason (2017b: 12) has shown that a comprehensive and viable strategy that is actionable is crucial for alleviating unemployment in the sector, especially youth unemployment. The next section will discuss the evolution and challenges of the retail sector.

3.2.3 Evolution and challenges in retail

A recent report by Deloitte and Touche (2016: para. 1 line 1) indicates that consumers are becoming more informed, product choices are proliferating rapidly, and technological advances are creating new flows of information. The report further states that retailers face new pressures, including “lowered barriers to market entry; online marketplaces transcending geographic proximity and expanding market demand; technologies that are changing how and where retailers hold inventory; and new retail models arising out of new technologies and new ways to connect with consumers”. Therefore, a quest to keep pace with competitors by intensifying customer service, leveraging technology and enhancing data collection or analysis points to a new skilled workforce (Council 2021: 9). While many employers are already implementing strategies to increase retention and advancement in the retail sector (Loprest and Mikelson 2019: 31), others should follow suit with the implementation of training programmes. As a result, this study is concentrated on the area of education concerning the skills and preparedness of graduates.

The food and grocery retail sector is one of the most complex in terms of supply chain and logistics management, as it encompasses critical aspects of both the food and

retail logistics worlds (Lagorio and Pinto 2021: 1). However, the sector is also met with challenges that include changing consumer preferences; “competition from other retailers; competition from alternative products; expanded availability of retail channels; continued penetration of e-commerce; the squeeze between suppliers and consumers; the pace of technological changes; cost and availability of qualified workforce; increased noise diluting messaging; susceptibility to geopolitical and economic factors and disaster events” (Council 2021: 71). On the other hand, creating customer experiences is one of the most compelling challenges for any retailer (Raggiotto et al. 2021: 1). According to the Corporate Finance Institute (2023: para. 1 line 1) customers play a significant role in any business and can be segmented into five main types in the retail industry, namely: “loyal customers, impulse customers, discount customers, need-based customers and wandering customers”.

As a result of some of the above-mentioned challenges, staff turnover is an additional challenge, as supported by Warden, Han and Nzawou (2018: 3), who indicate that five internal factors driving high levels of staff turnover are poor training, working conditions, management practices, rate of pay, recruitment and staff selection processes. These factors are vital and techniques to address employee-related matters should be a priority as employees play a significant role in implementing leaders’ directives (Dey et al. 2022: 2). A study by Park et al. (2021: 804) indicates that when managers deal with a high rate of turnover, understanding organisational behaviour is useful, such as considering employees' emotional expectations and actual emotional labour to reduce the emotional propensity to leave.

Within the formal sector, it is evident that companies are moving towards a more flexible workforce, and in some cases, employees are expected to multitask, (Teuteberg 2020: 2). In terms of retail education, it is unclear whether the industry is looking for the current competencies provided by education institutions if there is realignment between the demand and supply of retail education (Pantano, Pizzi and Rogers 2020: 3). In saying this, it is evident that education stakeholders should be conversing with industry stakeholders to find the missing link, as retail accounts for a

large percentage of the overall workforce (Hart et al. 2007a: 284). Thus, essential skills for retail must be taught to potential employees, as the face of retail is evolving (Broll Property 2019: 15). As a result, the discussion progresses to partnerships as a means of addressing the skills issues.

3.3 Partnerships

A recent study by Stachová et al. (2019: 13) states that cooperation with universities will be indispensable in highlighting the importance of graduate education. Woolworths, a popular retailer, collaborates with the education sector to ensure there is adequate alignment between the sectors, thus potentially creating reciprocal benefits for both sectors (Woolworths 2020). The benefits, challenges and the need for partnerships, as well as citing successful partnerships, will be further elaborated on in Section 3.3.10. The drive behind the relationship in partnerships may be based on the probability that individuals are incapable of operating as a single unit, as supported by Parisi's assertion (2017 para. 1 line), that two heads are better than one, as a "do it alone" approach is not always the best strategy for growth. Although partnerships have been extensively defined, it is important to ascertain an understanding of them, and thus a discussion by esteemed scholars will be presented.

3.3.1 Understanding the term "partnership"

In the field of business and in general, partnerships are viewed from different perspectives and elements or themes emanating from these perspectives will be outlined. Maringe and De Wit (2016:301) and Abdulrahman and Zahed (2020: 3) point out that partnerships are any formal or informal working together by two or more entities to conduct a task in pursuit of common goals. Partnerships, thus, are voluntary associations of individuals whereby they agree to share proportionally the business's profits or losses (Randall 2020: 303) while combining human and material resources (Kolbe et al. 2015). This suggests that increased participation and shared accountability and responsibility in exploring and addressing needs form the basis of the partnership (Badgett 2016: 100). As can be noted from the perspectives provided

by the authors, central elements of cohesiveness, or working together, are the sharing of responsibilities and participation in the achievement of a common goal.

Despite being classified largely within a business context, it is clear that the success of partnerships as presented in the literature depends on the aforementioned elements. The information presented from the literature is critical and relevant in the context of higher education within this study, with the notion of sharing as a leading component. It becomes evident that higher education institutions can be functional if multiple stakeholders, such as learners, business representatives and academics, work in harmony towards a shared goal. To illustrate this, Rufai and Rashid's (2015: 518) study presented the following emergent themes, representing the views of educationalists and industrialists and characterised them as "cooperative study programmes, technical support and programme delivery representation in the institution's governing council, as well as collaboration through shared facilities". The authors further stated that attempts were made to provide new ways of thinking in terms of partnerships to share needs as well as issues to produce work-ready graduates.

In an attempt to promote work-integrated learning, Truman, Mason and Venter's (2017: 53) study focused on the development of a retail store on a university campus to enable students to gain work experience towards their qualifications. According to the authors, retailers, educators, lecturers and other stakeholders were engaged during this process, as the aim was the employment of students in the retail industry. Therefore, integrating education, research and development can improve the efficiency of stakeholder relationships (Kettunen 2015: 64). It is not only about the industry working with education to help improve the latter's performance; likewise, education helps the industry to improve its performance (Cicero 1996: 23). With this in mind, education may contribute to bringing about and reinforcing change in society and is gaining significance as a viable solution to combat issues such as economic slowdown, poverty and illiteracy (Tiwari and Malati 2020: 218).

Educational partnerships have become mainstream in higher education, and while they cannot accomplish certain ambitions alone, they may seek partners to fulfil shared goals (Chou 2012: 86). Morgan-Klein and Osborne (2007: 40) maintain that there is potential for synergy of some form, alluding to the fact that the sum is greater than the parts. Of relevance to this study, is the potential synergy between higher education institutions and the retail sector in bridging the gaps that exist. Through this study, partnerships may likely be an option as they have the opportunity to transcend a basic give-and-take relationship (Eberline and Jones 2020: 4). Thus, in the context of collaborations within the higher education sector, the most common partnerships are exchange partnerships established for the facilitation of student and staff mobility (Sutton et al. 2012), demonstrating that a partnership of this type should be based on the principles of egalitarianism and continuous relationships.

Throughout this study, the term partnership will be used to describe the practice between education and business sectors, with specific reference to the retail sector where the study was located. Partnerships manifest themselves in various types or forms and those between start-ups and large corporations have become increasingly common, with benefits offered to both sides and the chances of success improving (Freytag 2019: 19). These collaborations provide an opportunity to achieve more than what each partner might accomplish on their own (Heltberg 2015: 1). It is safe to say from the discussions that, through the process of joint accord between partners, the type or form of the partnership will largely depend on the present situation of each sector. South Africa is characterised by a very large pool of relatively low-skilled workers (Malgas, Khatle and Mason 2017a: 5), with the retail sector being part of it. As mentioned by Teuteberg (2020: 2), companies expect employees to be able to multitask; however, this is not always possible. The lack of industry-relevant skills among new entrants to the labour market has been a challenge for employers for a long time (Arthur-Mensah 2020: 100); therefore, industry and education should be involved in continuous engagement. Based on this, the study aims to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KwaZulu-Natal Province.

3.3.2 Forms or types of partnerships

Despite decades of research on what is the most appropriate form of partnership, many still grapple with the best fit due to partnerships facing several obstacles (Partnerships 2006: 3). Furthermore, it depends on the type of organisation; as an example, in an academic setting, partnerships may be between researchers from the same department or institution or different departments and institutions (Abdulrahman and Zahed 2020: 3), thus resulting in diverse partnerships. In a study, Strickland (2016: 14) explored community partnerships in urban elementary schools and the central function of implementing effective partnership programmes was the engagement of community partners who would benefit the programme. Thus, the notion of agreement and collaboration alludes to partnerships involving dialogue in some form or shape, in turn creating potential opportunities for business organisations (Kitsak 2020: 21).

For the purpose of creating a general understanding of the types of partnerships and their functions, Randall (2020: 304) outlines a few forms of partnerships. The first is a general partnership that involves the full participation of all partners in running the business and sharing equally in the profits and losses (Phillips 2020: para. 12 line). Positive results may be obtained if stakeholders join forces as partners to forge a strong relationship (Khuzwayo 2019: 21). The general partnership appears to be a prevalent form, indicating a slant towards this study due to the nature of the sectors. Erkabaeva (2020: 48) indicates that general partners have the benefits of control and structure; therefore, it is suggestive that stakeholders in the education and retail sectors, as an example, could consider this as a potential option in addressing their imminent needs. Secondly, “a limited partnership is composed of one or more people who control the business and are personally liable for the partnership’s debts. The main purpose of this form is to allow people to invest in a business without having to manage it and without risking more than the invested sum”. Even though limited partnerships may be common in private equity (Gullifer and Payne 2015: 810), a drawback for this study would be the limited management responsibilities, as continuous engagement is a requisite in the fields of education and retail.

Partnerships with silent partners are the third type, where a partner shares in the profits but has no active voice in the management of the business (Randall 2020: 304). Contrary to the dynamics of a silent partnership, a partnership with secret partners involves a partner whose connection to the business is concealed from the public but who may participate in the management of the business, as stated by the author. The concealed identity may indicate that the partner prefers to operate anonymously due to one or more reasons, such as previous business failure. Finally, partnerships by estoppel are based on an equitable doctrine in which a partnership is implied when one or more people represent themselves as partners to a third party who relies on that representation (Randall 2020: 304). However, partners are not entitled to profits but are liable to the firm's obligations (Ghosh, Baig and Goyal 2020: 34).

This study aims to investigate the role of partnerships between higher education and the retail sector and draws on the principle of a general partnership. This area of research, in terms of education and retail, has been surprisingly neglected, although both sectors are pertinent to contributing to the economy (Statistics South Africa 2020). In the same context, Jonbekova et al. (2020: 4) identified the two most prominent forms of collaboration relating to the involvement of employers in educational programmes and activities associated with improving students' employability. So, this means that the relationship would include employers not only teaching courses but also joint development of academic matters (Jonbekova et al. 2020: 4), indicating the value of these alliances for the betterment of the future generation. More recently, the concept of public-private partnerships has become a buzzword encompassing interactions between public authorities and the private sector for the effective provision of the necessary public benefit (Yatsechko 2020). Likewise, in this study, the reference to the public sector is higher education institutions, whereas the private sector is retail. The next section will present a general review of education and business partnerships.

3.3.3 The notion of education-business partnerships

The Department of Higher Education and Training absorbs approximately 20% of school leavers, and the graduation rate is even lower, with only about half of them

completing, according to the report on Post-School Education and Training (2016: 3). Regrettably, this could be attributed to past regimes such as the apartheid system that perpetuated racial division and marginalisation among people in society (Mzangwa 2019: 12). Despite these challenges, higher education aims to prepare students to play their part well as enlightened members of society (Singh 2015: 4); therefore, this preparation impacts the job market in terms of graduate readiness. Allais (2017: 152) points out three main approaches to measuring the value of higher education: firstly, funding policies draw on explanations by analysing the rates of return to individuals; this is followed by tracer studies of graduate destinations and lastly, employer perceptions and requirements in terms of the capacity of graduates. As a result of the enormity of education challenges, African countries must find creative ways of financing development through education; seeking partnerships and private investments to deliver transformational education is a sensible option (Jegede 2015: 4).

In broad terms, education and business partnerships can be characterised as “a mutually supportive relationship between a business and a school or school district in which the partners commit themselves to specific goals and activities intended to benefit students and schools” (Macmillan Education: 2019). Therefore, partnerships that align school needs with a business’s purpose should be classified by shared accountability for mutually agreed-upon tasks and responsibilities (Badgett 2016:100). At this stage, it is significant to note that the word school is used synonymously for higher education in one or more countries. According to Khoruzha and Tadeush (2020: 16), partnerships between higher education and business are a very specific type of cooperation involving a wide range of activities, multifaceted goals and multifunctional opportunities. Thus, relatable to this study, in investigating the role of partnerships.

Alkaher and Gan (2020: 14) describe steps for managing the partnership if other educational institutions wish to promote it, namely: include “partnership establishment and development as part of the school's agenda; identify specific and common goals; develop an open dialogue to address the needs of the different partners; and engage

all partners in environmental citizenship to protect the societal common good". As evidenced by the steps outlined by the author, the elements of synergy, including cooperation with stakeholders, are vital in the partnership process. Educating young people is the responsibility of the entire community, and therefore schools, businesses and communities form partnerships to improve the outcomes by working together and achieving more (Australian Department of Education 2020). It is through mutual functioning, the sharing of knowledge and the involvement of external partners that the process of training and development of human resources is improved (Stachová et al. 2019: 4).

Although cooperation between organisations can be achieved through various mechanisms, it must be highlighted that trust is of utmost importance (Marinho, Silva and Santos 2020: 39). The key elements of building trust (Haines et al. 2015: 235) and strong personal relationships cannot be emphasised enough (Johnston and Huggins: 2016) and can be achieved through ongoing dialogues. Upon establishing sufficient trust to share content and issues, it would be easier to begin working on solutions. Thus, with this in mind, Berbegal-Mirabent, Gil-Doménech and Ribeiro-Soriano (2020: 272) identified categories of educational crowdsourcing platforms based on their focus on education, crowdsourcing, or networking. It was revealed from their study that benefits to all stakeholders were provided "by facilitating experiential learning, promoting skills and encouraging the development of new ideas to meet industry needs". Moreover, universities can be positively affected by knowledge management in ways that are related to industry collaborations, better researchers' and students' learning and cost reduction of operational activities. (Tzavidas, Enevoldsen and Xydis 2020: 1).

Businesses should combine scarce resources to achieve critical mass to boost the introduction of innovation and improve collaboration to build and sustain a high-performance organisation (Marinho, Silva and Santos 2020: 37). The authors further stress that some key aspects should be addressed by universities and enterprises when engaging in relationships to gain a competitive advantage through collaboration

and enable future collaborations. With that being said, “university-industry links and their impact on innovation processes have been widely acknowledged” (Berbegal-Mirabent, Gil-Doménech and Ribeiro-Soriano 2020: 263). However, Marinho, Silva and Santos (2020: 4) highlight the most neglected factors in partnerships as being: partner selection; collaboration management; interface management; the use of champions; long-term partnerships, and shared vision and strategy. Therefore, society as a whole must support education given its role in promoting sustainable economic, social and cultural development (Singh 2015: 10). Having established a generic understanding of the concepts of education and business partnerships, it is vital to focus on the core of this study, namely public higher education institutions and the retail sector. Therefore, the successive segments in the literature will focus specifically on these sectors in an attempt to address the aims and objectives of the study. It is essential to understand that the sectors contribute to being part of the public and private entities in South Africa, and hence, a brief discussion on these partnership forms is necessary.

Generally, the public service space is the largest employer in the country (Gabara 2022: para. 1 line 1) comprising the national, provincial and local governments and state-owned enterprises, including education. On the other hand, the private sector is a segment of the national economy that is owned, controlled and managed by private individuals or enterprises that make up a larger portion of the economy (Investopedia 2020: para. 2 line 1) of which large retailers are part. In addition, the private sector plays an integral role in the development of the economy and some of the more specific elements according to Birt (2023: para. 3 line 3) are: being significant stakeholders of the economy; generating employment; assisting in the development of the economy; providing goods and services and diversifying business. As can be noted from the literature presented, this sector is an engine of growth, providing several opportunities to which retailers are contributing significantly. In support, Tetani and Sifuba (2016: 19) reiterate that many of these entities operate solely, yet the South African government has identified the efficiency and effectiveness of the collaboration between the public and private sectors.

3.3.4 The concept of public-private partnerships

The South African Supplier Diversity Council (SADC) (2013) indicates that the Public and Private Sectors are closely linked, with both sectors being equally important to each other, thus enabling fostering of partnerships between them. The public sector deals with service delivery to citizens according to SADC (2013), thus the distinction between these sectors is becoming more blurred. Wong et al. (2015: 256) go on to suggest that public-private partnerships are a means of mobilising resources where the private sector includes for-profit organisations and not-for-profit organisations for the government that can be represented by different forms of interactions and modes of collaboration. Depending on the sector, different types of public-private partnerships can be adopted according to the jurisdiction in which they operate (Colverson and Perera 2012: 6). However, the Department of National Treasury (2007) indicates that two types of partnerships exist, namely a contractual relationship where the private party performs an institutional function and secondly, where the private party acquires the use of state property for its purposes.

Public-private partnerships provide a mechanism to attract private investment and institutional development of organisations, which fosters the mutual interest of the state and businesses to participate in the development of the activities (Tikhomirov et al. 2016: 256). If effectively established, stakeholders from both sectors would “jointly develop products and services, share risks, costs and resources that are connected with these products” (Hodge et al. 2018: 1106). It implies that the partners have agreed to work closely together to improve the quality of services, using qualified professionals (Tikhomirov et al. 2016: 256) thus leading to a productive working affiliation. In essence, public-private partnerships describe the structure of the relationship between the parties, ensuring that the best of both contributes to optimal services (Colverson and Perera 2012: 2). Most importantly, these partnerships have to be structured to foster innovation (Carbonara and Pellegrino 2020). Colverson and Perera (2012: 5) documented a few benefits of public-private partnership, namely: value for money; optimisation of the design and operation; quicker delivery of a project; risk transfer; increased investments; improved service delivery and access to additional capital.

As presented in the literature above these sectors can contribute to building the economy in more ways than one by sharing resources, offering services and products and essentially committing to the improvement of both sectors. Therefore, it is becoming a well-known model that governments use to close infrastructure gaps as it offers several benefits to them in trying to address the infrastructure shortages or improve the efficiency of their organisations (Grimsey and Lewis 2004). Hence, the next section will examine why it is necessary to consider these and similar collaborations with specific reference to the education and retail sectors in South Africa.

3.3.5 Opportunities for partnerships with institutions of higher education

With drastic changes to post-school education and the state of the economy unemployment remains high as reported by Statistics South Africa, the unemployment rate for the second quarter of 2020 stands at 23.3% (Statistics South Africa 2020). In an attempt to address this and other associated challenges, a report by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (2019: 17) demonstrated outcomes for the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) and of significance to this study are the subsequent outcomes in terms of linking education and the workplace; improving the level of skills in the South African workforce; skills development support for entrepreneurship and cooperative development and encourage and support worker-initiated training. Interestingly, the wholesale and retail industry is one of the largest contributors to South Africa's Gross Domestic Profit, employing over 21% of the total workforce (South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training 2020: 6). With this in mind, companies in South Africa contribute towards a levy to fund Sector education and training authorities (SETAs), for the facilitation of training and to encourage learning and development (Faro 2021: para. 2 line 1) in their specific industries. Thus, the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSeta) facilitates skills development through the implementation of learning programmes (WRSETA), which may potentially address retail issues.

In Spain, the retail banking industry's compulsory requirement is a university degree for an entry-level job (Osseiran 2020: 64). In contrast, particular individuals operate retail processes irrespective of their training or knowledge (Gunn, Cappuccitti and Lee: 2020), thus emphasis should be placed on collaborative initiatives. As it is imperative for higher education institutions to be updated with industry trends, likewise businesses can improve their innovation output by collaborating with universities (Winkelbach and Walter 2015: 105). Also, businesses are among the external partners that offer high promise since they provide access to a global pool of skills and expertise (Perkmann and Salter 2012: 1). Thus, retail sector empowerment and transformation are critical (Koyana and Mason: 2018), denoting that the sector cannot be a bystander but rather an active stakeholder in developing and modifying the sector.

Considering the potential benefits and barriers to successful university-business-community projects, businesses are advised to manage these partnerships in a way that considers the particularities of this type of collaboration and the role of university academics (Clauss and Kesting 2017: 186). Learning in a retail workplace refers to the ongoing process of improving employee competence and performance through training and development within the organisational context (Aspeling and Mason 2020: 2) so that employees have advanced skills to remain at the forefront of the industry. To demonstrate the value of these partnerships, Price, Zavotka and Teaford (2004) presented a university-community-retail partnership model used to develop and implement an education programme that was unique in the sense that there were a variety of partners involved, valuable assets provided by each partner and the creativity that resulted from this teamwork approach. This example validated the significance of collaborations that resulted in increased interest and awareness about universal design changes. It must be remembered that public-private partnership reforms are complex and multifaceted and their outcomes are conditioned by how these reforms interact with educational policies and administrative capacities (Verger, Moschetti and Fontdevila 2020), thus communication is key. Currently, the potential of public-private partnerships in education is not used to capacity by a minor number of projects as well as educational institutions that are actively cooperating with the private sector (Wong

et al. 2015: 260), hence there is a need for strengthening partnerships. Therefore, investigating the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector for this study is deemed relevant.

Figure 3.2 demonstrates a study conducted by Gunn, Cappuccitti and Lee (2020: 292) that identifies potential career awareness strategies in the retail industry. According to the authors, there were five sources of influential messages to potential career entrants, which contribute to the development of retail career perceptions. The sources include part-time retail work experience, educational institutions, parents, the retail industry and the media. It was identified that part-time work experience had an impact on student perceptions of retail careers and secondary school as being a source of information about retailing as a career option, although their view is limited. With retailers, mention was made of the influential role of the retail industry in developing perceptions of the professional nature of retail management careers. Lastly, it was identified that social media is influential in creating negative perceptions about retail management careers. Furthermore, the content themes, educational requirements, occupational roles and the value of careers were identified as influential sources. Importantly, post-secondary education was cited as a requirement for retail careers and perceptions of retail management roles were inaccurate regarding the nature and scope of the occupation in the study. As stated by Gunn, Cappuccitti and Lee (2020: 292) the value of the career was perceived as being unprofessional with poor working conditions.

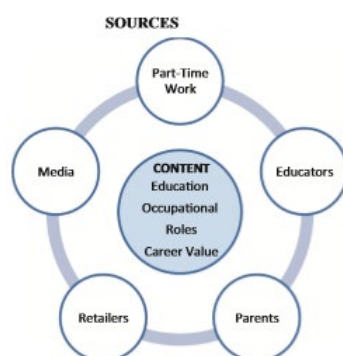


Figure 3.2: Towards professionalising Canadian retail management careers
Source: Gunn, Cappuccitti and Lee (2020: 292)

It has been shown from the aforementioned discussion that careers in the retail industry exist, yet several influential elements negatively affect them. Higher education institutions play a significant role in upskilling the workforce and creating corporate-education partnerships will address this (Paullet, Behling and Behling 2020: 52). Partnerships are not limited to the borders of a country but rather developing on a global scale, which will be discussed in the succeeding segment.

3.3.6 Global development of partnerships

According to the National Development Plan (2030), the “globalisation of labour and technology markets requires education systems to collaborate across national borders and sectors”. However, a global partnership between higher education institutions requires a lot of thought, understanding of each other’s needs and willingness to work in a slightly different way to ensure success (Van Teijlingen et al. 2017: 99). The authors further explain that it becomes a personal investment of academics collaborating across borders and making long-term commitments. A direct link to this study is the possibility of retail organisations extending their goods and services to a global market by employing partnerships. A retail supermarket group in South Africa extended its operations to the wider African market, through a partnership to aid the underserved consumer market (Dludla 2020: para. 3 line 1). According to the author even though there may be challenges the retail supermarket chain found the risky market attractive and is confident of success. On the other hand, present circumstances have taught us that education can occur anywhere, anytime (Al Rawashdeh et al. 2021: 107) due to the availability of online platforms and thus collaborations can continue. Online learning is currently being implemented due to the education world being faced with the Covid-19 pandemic (Adha 2021: 256), allowing instructors to communicate with students and maximise the learning facilities. The next section presents a discussion on the impact and significance of partnerships.

3.3.7 The impact and significance of partnerships

According to the National Development Plan 2030 (2020: 328), a partnership is important for drawing the capabilities, interests and resources of different stakeholders. Markova, Modliński and Pinto (2020: 106) believe that interaction with the corporate and academic world could be the basis for the sustainable development of a business. This statement resonates with this study denoting the interconnection between higher education and retail sector stakeholders. Armstrong (2020) draws attention to a partnership in education as being a central element to achieving the desired improvements for future generations while eliminating the gaps between the level of competence and a student's knowledge, which is key to improving the efficiency of education systems (Gawrycka, Kujawska and Tomczak 2020: 1098).

Meanwhile, top universities are revamping programmes by emphasising the importance of incorporating partnerships, collaborative alliances and joint programmes with fellow families, business leaders, owners' and educators to provide outreach and networking opportunities (Ahmad 2020: 64). At the same time, "engaging in university-industry partnerships aids in improving the quality and relevance of higher education, enhancing students' future employability, understanding market trends and integrating theoretical knowledge with practice" (Jonbekova et al. 2020: 4). Supporting and demonstrating interest by stakeholders will serve as an anchor to the sustainability of the partnership; therefore, making stakeholder engagement a crucial component (Sustenuto 2023: para. 2 line 3). This is demonstrated by a partnership whereby the school and community were provided with opportunities to better connect to their local surroundings, leading to an improved physical infrastructure of the school (Alkaher and Gan 2020). The authors believe that the financial support from one of the businesses was a defining element in contributing to this success. South African universities are facing challenging economic times and insufficient institutional funding (van Staden 2019: 234). In support, Istratii and Lewis (2020: 7), state how tight deadlines for funding schemes seemed to hinder academics from outlining and negotiating with their partners. Decision-makers and others globally can relate to the challenges around

higher education funding (Grbić, Jakšić and Todorović 2020: 1), thus partnerships could be a significant element in the funding issues for higher education.

Grbić, Jakšić and Todorović (2020: 1) state that only economies that value knowledge, innovation and investing in adequate resources in innovation, research and development can progress. These partnerships could therefore positively impact funding and hence also lead to an increase in the number of collaborative publications (Warren, Behar-Horenstein and Heard 2019: 102). As is in the case of the European Union providing financial support to European Universities for student mobility and enabling student exchange (European Union Erasmus Programme). Increasing the diversity and quality of educational services contributes to economic growth, provides employment, increases labour productivity and helps alleviate social problems (Rakhimovich 2020: 11). Moreover, the interacting forces of a graduate labour market, massification and the declining value of degree qualifications have a bearing on a graduate's position in the labour market (Tomlinson and Nghia 2020: 2), thus investigations, why this occurs, will help strengthen one's entry into the labour force.

As reported by News24 (2012) universities are producing the wrong type of graduates and finding ways of increasing the employability of the youth is vital; therefore, HEIs are pressurised to enhance the employability of students. Similarly, employers should establish a durable bond with universities to enhance employability skills (AlHashimi, Razzaque and Hamdan 2020: 12), which may include potential partners communicating to establish their aims, roles and expectations of the partnership. Manivannan and Suseendran (2017: 108) state that the majority of graduates are entering industry, government and public sectors, thus the curriculum should be developed according to the requirements of the industry. As an example, retailers can recruit young professionals as a means of filling their demand for talent with skills such as communication, critical thinking and teamwork (Oh and Polidan 2018: 31). Employers have expressed their need for graduates who can solve problems, value teamwork and acquire in-depth knowledge for their job, claiming that graduates are often unprepared and lack the necessary skills (Al-Shehab et al. 2020: 14).

3.3.8 Expectations of stakeholders in terms of their roles and responsibilities

Stakeholder engagement and management are arguably one of the most crucial factors that could be the deciding element of the success or failure of a partnership; therefore, it is important to build relationships of trust by discussing the expectations and deliverables of a project with partners (Istratii and Lewis 2020: 7). Strong partnerships are about creating shared value and working collaboratively with other organisations to produce development results when working together (Heltberg 2015: 11), which must be decided on before their undertakings. In his study, Badgett (2016: 103) expresses that business leaders in a partnership were articulate when sharing what they can do to provide students with experience, skills and personal vision. The author goes on to say that are active partners in the process of equipping students for life as opposed to being passive partners, demonstrating commitment from partners.

Diaz-Gibson et al. (2016) point out that leaders are the drivers and collaborators who facilitate the partnership outcomes over and above their normal operational and managerial duties. A collaborative leadership style involves being open, exchanging information, and understanding differences to reach solutions that are acceptable to all parties (Kaimal, Metzl and Millrod 2017: 146) thus minimising conflict (Som et al. 2020: 542). Within the context of higher education, academic leadership has become increasingly complex (Frantz, Marais and Du Plessis 2022: 137), with issues of the curriculum being relevant to the skills required by industry as an example. Drucker (2017), one of the renowned leadership gurus says to be an effective leader is to do the following: ask what needs to be done; ask what is right for the enterprise; develop action plans; take responsibility for decisions and communicate; focus on opportunities and think “we” and not I. An example of an academic-clinical partnership reveals that uncommon mutual leadership, exemplary collaboration and shared vision between stakeholders will bring together key stakeholders in creating a successful partnership (Broome and Marshall 2020: 158). A critical element of this study is the relationship between the education and retail sectors in producing workplace-ready graduates.

For purposes of understanding stakeholders and their impact on a collaborative environment, the researcher consulted a stimulating theory to explain the value and role of the stakeholders within partnerships. According to the Stakeholder theory (Figure 3.3), an organisation is responsible for the well-being of its stakeholders (Jones et al. 2007: 187). Thus, an accurate reflection for the higher education sector, as education is an investment in the human factor in which society and the state are interested (Rakhimovich 2020: 11). To understand the dynamics of the stakeholders, Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997: 872) present the Stakeholder Typology depicting the three attributes of power, legitimacy and urgency, of which stakeholders could possess one or all of the attributes. Essentially, the typology proposes that if stakeholders possess more of these attributes, the more salient the stakeholder is in terms of managerial attention. Parent and Deephouse (2007: 2) describe the attributes of power as the “ability of stakeholders to impose their will on a given relationship through coercive, utilitarian or normative means; a legitimate stakeholder as one whose actions and claims are seen as appropriate, proper and desirable” and lastly, urgency is the degree to which a stakeholder believes its claims are time-sensitive or critical.

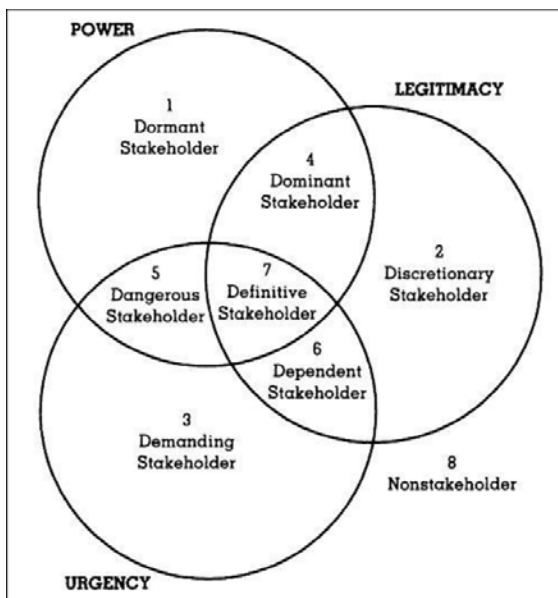


Figure 3.3: Stakeholder Typology

Source: Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997: 872)

This typology (Figure 3.3) can be applied to the current study as the ideology behind the partnership is that of a unified structure and dynamic relationships that are reciprocally favourable for all stakeholders. Randall (2020: 310) maintains that all partners have equal rights to manage a partnership but can divide the responsibility of daily management activities as required, based on the partnership model. The author further endorses that due to the partnerships being a fiduciary relationship, partners owe each other duties as a result of their relationship of trust and confidence and not forgetting these relationships serve as a critical linchpin in the process (Eddy 2013: 1755). Based on these relationships, duties within the partnerships should be mutually approved for efficient operations.

A study by Sommarström, Oikkonen and Pihkala (2020: 7) examining cooperation with external stakeholders, indicates that shared responsibilities increase collaboration in partnerships. However, there is still significant room for enhanced and intense cooperation between universities and businesses but difficulties remain in terms of trust and understanding of the operation on both sides (Pařová, Czaja and Vejačka 2018; Roud and Vlasova 2018). As established by Som et al. (2020: 555), among the key roles of leaders, are building a collaborative culture, leading and influencing the process by developing trust and encouraging commitment and fairness, involving being approachable, showing support to team members and maintaining respect. It is enriching for leaders to be able to work with new friends, new perspectives and new supporters outside the daily work environment (Broome and Marshall 2020: 166). Sometimes, the contradictory needs of partner institutions would create challenges when objectives conflict with each other (Baily 2015: 281), hence, confronting these issues before the finalisation of the agreement is necessary. Also, to become successful leaders the vision of senior management and other teams is obligatory (Ada Cheung 2020: 347), translating unequivocally to an encouraging working relationship in a partnership. The next section will discuss the elements of synergies, commitment and sustenance of partnerships.

3.3.9 Synergies, commitment and sustenance of partnerships in the context of higher education

Presently many institutions are adopting unique initiatives and revamping their curriculum to better prepare students to meet this requirement (Ahmad 2020: 59). According to Burch et al. (2015) universities and other higher education institutions need to rethink to allow students to operate in a new environment in which they will work. In support, Ahmad (2020: 59) states that increasing the investment in human capital training ensures that students are better equipped to meet future challenges and opportunities of their enterprises and family-owned businesses. To accommodate the outgoing graduate there has to be an element of synergy between higher education and prospective employers by fostering collaborative partnerships (Hazelkorn 2020: 10). Synergy is the process that describes people that work together and accomplish more than they would alone (Oyinloye and Asonibare 2020: 96).

While some universities are highly skilled at working with industrial partners and collaborating with industry, others have limited experience (Perkmann and Salter 2012: 18), as well as limited consensus among key stakeholders about what skills matter most (Tomlinson and Nghia 2020: 7). A degree of compromise between the sectors is necessary to ensure that they are prepared and committed to developing the human capital, as supported by Badgett (2016: 84) who states that to build partnerships it is important to understand what they should look like and how they should operate. A high-quality and efficient higher education system is a prerequisite for increasing the human capital fund of which these education institutions are the basis for productivity growth (Grbić, Jakšić and Todorović 2020: 1). Remarkably, even people working in the field of education may have different interests as they have been educated differently and do not share the same identity (Arcidiacono et al. 2020: 10), though higher education is the innovative basis of the economy and the only indisputable alternative to the country's sustainable development. Therefore, in modern conditions, "only an economy that values knowledge and innovation and invests adequate resources in innovation, research, and development can make progress". (Grbić, Jakšić and Todorović 2020: 1).

Higher education plays a major role in social, cultural and economic development (Hazelkorn 2020: 13) encompassing the area of skills development, thus must be nurtured. A study by Oyinloye and Asonibare (2020: 102) examining the synergy and collaboration between institutions and industry found that if synergies are identified, all stakeholders will benefit immensely from it. The study further points out that these benefits, in the case of the curriculum will provide professional development, equipping stakeholders with skills needed to design new curricula, promote mutual understanding, contribute to shared resources for sustainability and most importantly provide common employability skills desired by employers to be reinforced in the classroom. However, dynamic changes in economic structures influence the demand for certain labour resources as new jobs require new knowledge and skills (Gawrycka, Kujawska and Tomczak 2020: 1097). As previously alluded to, conversations between higher education and organisations as a means of addressing these requirements may be necessary. Bennett and Stephens (2020: 1972) believe that improving access to a higher and further level of education and training is a likelihood of collaboration. A manner in which to aid in the creation of long-term partnerships would be the benefits that are evident from higher education institutions and companies working together which encourages the transfer and sharing of knowledge (Guan and Zhao 2013).

Institutions must be cautioned when considering the approaches, they take in making partnership opportunities available as many are unpaid, small-scale or extracurricular, although this may not be the idea for many institutions of higher learning (Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill 2019: 2). As stated by Marinho, Silva and Santos (2020: 42) if a good foundation for a sustainable, successful collaboration is desired, then the relationships between people in business and academia must include reducing complexity, fostering relationships and introducing effective intermediation. Besides, there is general agreement that the secret of success in sustainability is the adherence to democratic principles such as communication, collaboration, decision-making, assignment and shared responsibility (Tschannen-Moran 2014). Businesses can structure their relationships with universities in ways that make them more valuable by embracing universities, using the differences between them to their advantage

(Perkmann and Salter 2012: 2) as well as overcoming the challenges of synergy and collaboration (Oyinloye and Asonibare 2020). Moreover, educational institutions should be prepared to face industry 4.0 by integrating industry as a joint partner in advancing the education sector (Adnan and Hasan 2020: 103) to promote an industry-ready workforce.

For institutions that are looking for South African partners, Chasi (2020) provides the following recommendations by familiarising oneself with the SA higher education context; being targeted and specific in a partner search; aligning partnership interests, objectives and goals with priorities and needs; learning from others; to be actively committed to mutually beneficial partnerships and adopt a consultative and participatory approach. Thus, the benefits of partnerships will be presented in the subsequent section.

3.3.10 Benefits of partnerships within the context of higher education

With collaborative activities on the rise, the question that many grapple with is whether a decision to enter into such a partnership is beneficial and sustainable to all. Fitzgerald et al. (2020: 136) believe that partnerships need to be nurtured over time for them to become effective and those created at strategic levels may warrant constructive transformation (Kolbe et al. 2015: 770). Hence, however difficult the situation is to measure and evaluate, the success of partnerships should be highlighted. More recent evidence by Ada Cheung (2020: 345) indicates that there are indeed benefits in partnerships namely: exposure to experts to provide guidance; becoming independent with achievements and being recognised.

In the case of educational partnerships, as demonstrated by Chou (2012: 86), a variety of benefits may be gained including cost reduction; resource allocation and innovation; partnership practice allowing institutions to reduce duplication, improve efficiency and accountability, expand relations, promoting institution's reputation and increasing student enrolment, implying that organisations embark on partnerships to achieve

specific goals that may not necessarily be achieved solely. A study by Borg and Scott-Young (2020: 1363) provides valuable insights into employers' perspectives of work-ready graduates who can serve as feedback to universities to assist in aligning their educational programmes with industry needs. In addition, collaborative activities such as apprenticeship programmes and other types of work-based learning should be highlighted as there has been an increase in apprenticeships, which combine on-the-job training with class-based study, providing a smooth transition from school to work (OECD 2019). In support of this Koyana and Mason (2018: 190) reiterate that internships produce a more accomplished worker with higher employability and retention potential due to the student possessing both tacit and practical knowledge. Additionally, Koyana and Mason (2018: 190) assert that internships, as a form of partnership have immense potential to play an enabling role in transforming retail graduates from being unemployed to being knowledgeable, experienced employees with the potential of becoming senior retail executives. More importantly, today's retail landscape is changing drastically hence reducing barriers to entry and creating an increasingly competitive retail marketplace (Oh and Polidan 2018: 31).

As can be noted, a common thread that lingers from the discussion is the element of sharing and educating to achieve a common goal due to shared working goals. In a multi-stakeholder partnership, several benefits were yielded for all stakeholders as stated by Jonbekova et al. (2020: 4) namely: for students, the benefits were gaining practical skills, enhanced employment opportunities and additional certification for skills by some employers; for the faculty, it was improved knowledge, increased financial benefits and an opportunity to influence government policies and legislation and finally, for the university a benefit was linked to receiving financial bonuses and promotions. The author further stated that the collaboration was valuable to all stakeholders within the process as each was compensated in some way with the general idea being that students are linked to the cooperative world during as well as after formal education.

Orta et al. (2020: 3) emphasise that an increase in student motivation was noted when students shared an eagerness to apply the skills learned from a programme, indicating an element of confidence by being able to convert theoretical into practical knowledge. Even though business leaders are faced with increasing competition, globalisation, technological changes and new strategic thinking, university-industry knowledge transfer contributes significantly to an increase in the quality, productivity and economic value of businesses (Marinho, Silva and Santos 2020: 37). But the reality is that profits are the aim of the game, of which Lee (2020: 558) points out that partners earn significantly more than single owners, hence another reason for collaborations. The development of university-industry partnerships proved beneficial for two universities that aimed to equip students with quality and relevant education to enhance their employability (Jonbekova et al. 2020: 4). According to the senior leadership at both universities, the business council meets a few times to review the curriculum, which involves contributing to the revision of existing programmes and the introduction of new courses. Knight (2011: 221) highlights a few outstanding points in a different environment in terms of possible returns consisting of research, namely: building research capacity and drawing together required research expertise; providing students with an international experience; combining research beneficiaries and helping avoid the problem of free riding and underfunding. Regrettably, while there may be evidence supporting the benefits of collaborating, there are likewise barriers/challenges that impede partnerships, which will be highlighted in the next section.

3.3.11 Barriers/challenges to partnership

Even though the partnership process as indicated by Babatunde et al. (2020) contributes to sustainable development by creating networks of resources, regrettably risks or challenges exist. Marinho, Silva and Santos (2020: 35) point out that the process of knowledge transfer has some weaknesses, particularly with communication and collaboration between universities and companies with influence their capacity for innovation and hence may compromise relationships. According to Ada Cheung (2020: 347), with a concerted effort of all parties working together, challenges in a

partnership contributed to its eventual opportunities and success. Therefore, private and public institutions must work together to create the educational infrastructure needed to support a thriving economy, according to the National Development Plan 2030. The digitalisation of the retail sector is an example to consider, thus if digitalisation occurs gradually in the retail sector (Skans 2021: 10), those that are skilled will secure other jobs; however, the majority that has general skills may find it difficult to secure new jobs. Based on this challenge, industry should understand the relevance of partnerships to achieve quality skill development (Mbah et al. 2018: 13). If physical retail shops disappear during the pandemic and when labour demand has fallen in other sectors, it will be difficult for those who lose their jobs as many unemployed will be competing for a few jobs (Skans 2021: 10).

The labour market is changing at a ferocious pace (Husbands 2022: para.13 line 5) therefore there is a need for higher education and industries to engage with one another for the probability of better-prepared graduates. This is no small undertaking as stated by Oh and Polidan (2018: 31) as it requires rethinking traditional education methods to provide the skills necessary for success in today's retail landscape. The authors further state that critical thinking skills, cross-functional teamwork, data analytical skills, communication and leadership were identified as the requisite skills for retailers when deciding on the hiring of fresh talent. Compromising within the partnership encompasses developing relationships and relinquishing certain ways of conducting business, thus we have to caution ourselves in partnerships that potentially prioritise voices that are already privileged and engaged (Mercer-Mapstone et al. 2017: 17). The authors stress that partners must deliberate on their respective contributions working in an unbiased manner. Besides policy design factors, several other factors may impact collaborations, even though these collaborations start with handshakes between stakeholders (Heltberg 2015: 4). It is found that the lack of leadership (Som et al. 2020: 445), accountability (Tetani and Sifuba 2016: 19), exerting power over another (Badgett 2016: 85) and the lack of efficient communication paths have a strong negative impact on collaboration (Marinho, Silva and Santos 2020: 42).

Partnerships often fail to properly address the expected outcomes for both parties; therefore, addressing the aims and intended processes when beginning partnerships is important (Weldon 2011: 1); however, too much early attention to the structure can stifle the development of authentic partnerships. As stated by Mercer-Mapstone and Bovill (2019: 12), one of the challenges of any partnership scheme is to ensure it is inclusive of all parties, as validated by Jonbekova et al. (2020: 4), where employers as active partners had little or no interest in committing to partnerships with universities. This was due to them disregarding students and assigning menial tasks, as well as not investing time or funding in them, according to the authors. From the literature presented, it is beyond a doubt that partnerships do create challenges and how they will be addressed will impact their future.

Formal partnership programmes are complex to set up in most cases. In agreement Heltberg (2015: 4) states that it has taken several years before they begin their activities and even longer until they achieve impact. Similarly, Ramirez (2020: 8) points out that the lack of good governance, limited access to information and lack of transparency are major inhibiting factors of which regular communication may eliminate misconceptions. As in the case of the public health sector, the following barriers to collaboration were noted: “health is either not valued by a business or not seen as central to its mission; there is a lack of corporate experience in how and where to invest in health; there is no way of measuring impact or demonstrating broad values to stakeholders; there may be limited public concern or advocacy to motivate companies” (Kassler 2020: 444). It is the company’s internal potential that affects its ability to become a valuable partner (Stachová et al. 2019: 2). In light of these barriers or challenges, there is general agreement that most collaborative engagements or partnerships will experience trials during their engagement, yet there is still a dire need to seek viable partnerships in anticipation of creating sustainable jobs (Hlebela 2020: 62).

Over the years, education has gone through a remarkable journey in terms of transformation and what and how we teach is also evolving rapidly (Mohamed,

Tlemsani and Matthews 2021: 2). Classroom presence is the traditional way of learning, which is the “chalk and talk” method that has persisted for hundreds of years (Stephen Perse Foundation 2017 para. 5 line 3); however, newer models have been introduced. One of these models is the integration of practice and theory, providing graduates with enhanced opportunities when entering the labour force. As mentioned by Mbah (2018: 4), school-industry partnerships are collaborations to create an enabling training environment. As an example, essential skillsets, such as “critical thinking, cross-functional teamwork, data analytics and communication/leadership can help retail” organisations navigate the retail environment (Oh and Polidan 2018: 44); thus, a proficient retail system will be able to supply products and services to the public. The obvious link to this is that higher education prepares workers to join their chosen industries and flourish in the workforce (The Business Journals Leadership Trust 2020:1). Therefore, a discussion on the need for collaborations between the retail sector and educational institutions will be highlighted in the next section as a central element of the study.

3.3.12 The need for retail-education partnerships

In their case study analysis of a group of schools, Carvalho and Franco (2015: 77) reported that there is a need to equip young people with skills, through partnerships with local and regional bodies to provide pupils with benefits from the entrepreneurship programme. It has been established from earlier discussions that collaborating may aid in unravelling some of the challenges that exist in the field of education as well as retail for this study. It all begins with finding a partner, which turns out to be one of the most important decisions for potential start-up owners (Lee 2020: 531). Knight, Forney and Mihalick (2019: 15) emphasise that the preparation of students for careers in retail, unified by digitisation, means that retail programmes need continuous revision to stay relevant, comprising essential skill sets to help them through the turbulent environment. As a result, Oh and Polidan (2018: 44) proposed an articulated skillset through the experiential learning platform of a retail consulting class to ensure the appropriate preparedness of graduates. At this point, it is important to understand that retail involves the sale of merchandise from a single point of purchase directly to a customer

who intends to use the product, signifying the importance of the sector (Farfan 2020: para. 3 line 1).

The retail sector is considered one of the most important sectors in the world (Busu et al. 2020: 125), occupying a vital role in the lifecycle of goods and providing services to society. In addition, the Consumer Goods Council of South Africa (CGCSA) is an industry association that represents retail and manufacturing companies in a sector that is one of the largest sources of employment in South Africa (Consumer Goods Council, 2016). According to the Consumer Goods Council (2016), the purpose of CGCSA is to collaborate and present best practices in Africa, demonstrating its pledge to ensure alignment with global sustainable development goals and the National Development Plan, as the retail sector is a major contributor to the economy both locally and globally. While the world is facing a pandemic, Opperman (2021: para. 2 line 1) lauds the retail and manufacturing industries for their resilience and commitment during trying times, which has further emphasised the importance of closer collaboration between the government and business sectors to grow the economy. A significant change for the retail sector is the digital impact of shifting from bricks and mortar to the online platform and the effects thereof (Accenture 2019: 5). A typical example is being able to trade online during a pandemic meant that business continued as normal with minimal losses to the retail industry. The digital age, which was noted in an earlier retail report by Price Waterhouse Coopers (2016: 12), showed promising potential and could be a game-changer. Moreover, Vokes, Boehnke and Glynn (2014: ix) state that technological advancements have further created challenges that have consequences for the sectors' skills supply and needs.

Although the retail sector is broadly classified, the central focus of this study is supermarket chains in KwaZulu-Natal Province. The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) facilitates skills development through the implementation of learning programmes, grant disbursements and monitoring of education and training (W&RSETA, 2016). Their role in the retail industry is significant in contributing to the human development of the industry. In addition, Koyana and

Mason (2018: 187) reported that internship programmes in the retail sector are extremely beneficial because they expose students to real work opportunities and the previously disadvantaged are empowered with the requisite skills. The authors further state that it teaches valuable soft skills such as leadership, teamwork, communication and, most importantly, work-related skills. Employers maintain that students lack the practical skills needed in the workplace (Pop and Barkhuizen 2013: 29); therefore, innovative ways must be adopted to create a balance of the requisite skills to thrive in the workplace. There is a great need for businesses to create partnerships with educational institutions to solve socio-economic issues in schools in South Africa (Dlulemnyango-Sopotela 2000: 4). As stated in the National Development Plan 2030 (2020: 151), the formal retail sector in South Africa accounts for almost two million jobs and a further three million in the informal sector, with retail and business services, being the biggest employers in most middle-and high-income economies. Therefore, retail is regarded as a growth sector of the economy and a major employer (W&RSETA 2016), indicating that the sector will always be regarded as most relevant.

The lack of industry-relevant skills among new entrants to the labour market has been a challenge for employers for a long time among young people in the province, the retail industry has been able to absorb and train them as cashiers and other professionals (The Quarterly Bulletin Report 2012: 24), with many students beginning to see the renewed opportunities in retailing careers (Oh, Weitz and Lim 2016: 345). It is encouraging to note from the presented literature that this sector can provide graduates with diverse opportunities to advance within the retail environment. Also, graduates want to pursue careers in retailing due to the changing retail landscape due to the pivotal role that the sector plays within the South African economy and its positive contribution to the GDP (Statistics South Africa 2016). With this in mind, Malgas, Khatle and Mason (2017a: 10) draw our attention to creating sustainable jobs in the retail sector by crafting a viable strategy for the alleviation of unemployment, especially youth unemployment.

The significance of the retail sector to the South African economy (Sewell, Mason and Venter 2014: 235) and the potential for internships to create jobs (Mabiza, Mahlalela and Mbohwa 2017: 3) further highlight the need for collaboration. Collaboration is increasingly becoming a powerful source of competitive advantage. This is evident from a survey conducted where employers indicated that they prefer candidates with a university degree as well as experience (Cvetić, Vasiljević and Danilović 2018: 152) demonstrating the need to join forces. The authors go on to state that students who do not have experiential learning may be at a disadvantage, thus securing employment becomes a challenge. An investigation by McHugh (2017: 379) suggests that employers should take note of the following major lessons in terms of internships: firstly, adopting a paid internship programme will enhance an employer's ability to retain interns as full-time employees; secondly, paid interns may have a reputational benefit that may improve the organisation's reputation; and lastly, interns should be assigned strong supervisors or mentors.

It can be argued that there is a dire need for industry and academia to partner and Khalid et al. (2019: 173) suggest that further studies must view both academia and industry at the same time for collaborations to thrive. Employers are now realising the different work values, expectations and preferences of graduates (Oh, Weitz and Lim 2016: 353), thus leading to enhanced learning and work experiences. The next section progresses to a discussion encompassing elements of a successful partnership, with local and global examples.

3.3.13 Successful partnerships and studies on existing partnerships

Partnerships have been around for decades, and to be sustainable they need to be based on the key principles of good governance, transparency, fairness, equity and social justice (Tille 2021: 49). Mwangi (2017:33) states that “a critical aspect of a successful partnership was the time and attention given to planning before implementation, as it allowed for the development of effective and realistic goals”, known to be one of the most pertinent stages in successful collaborations. Moreover, Talib et al. (2015: 7) state that partnerships have created a culture of collaboration

allowing resources to be mobilised, generating locally relevant curricula based on best practices and providing support to new schools. This is evident in other cases where universities in China are partnering with organisations to cement their global position and boost their innovation, as a sustainable world needs highly educated people (Sharma 2016). A successful collaboration does not just occur; it must be carefully planned and nurtured due to the importance of fully understanding what makes it a success (Rajalo and Vadi 2017; Mwangi 2017: 32; Marinho et al 2020:42).

Partnerships can take different forms or shapes, involving a host of sectors, as demonstrated. The first of which is a university-community partnership in teacher education, and through this partnership, the programmes hoped to provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to engage with community mentors in authentic ways co-designed by local community members (Guillen and Zeichner 2018). The authors state that it included university teachers gaining the disposition and skills necessary to learn from students' families and communities in their future teaching. The composition of stakeholders in the above-mentioned partnership demonstrated an understanding of their roles, accepting responsibility to help pre-service teachers work in solidarity with families and communities. This partnership demonstrated that working together is of the utmost importance in striving for a common goal. In another example, Salie (2005: 90) highlights a different kind of partnership whereby two schools, one from a privileged background and the other from a disadvantaged background, decided to collaborate. Interestingly, partners did not incur considerable expenses in terms of resources, yet mutual benefits were acquired. This was evident when the privileged school assisted the disadvantaged school with much-needed facilities, qualified teaching staff, pupils being exposed to a different learning and social environment, and lastly, staff being exposed to incidental skills, such as rugby and cricket coaching. The partnership presented the privileged school with an extremely successful outreach project, thus creating awareness of cultural diversity in both schools. These findings suggest a win-win situation for both schools, signifying that the key to successful partnerships seems to be rooted in understanding that partnerships depend on structures and attitudes (Salie 2005: 92).

Hunter, Broad and Jeanneret (2018: 1) highlighted a partnership that aims to improve the export potential of the music industry and contribute to the music curriculum. The organisation involved professional songwriters and producers with international recording experience working as mentors to students who create and produce new music in intensive two-day workshops. This student partnership demonstrated evidence of the positive impact on students' music knowledge, skill development, understanding of the music industry, engagement, confidence in learning and self-efficacy. Additionally, there was an improvement in students' motivation and engagement in learning and teachers' increased confidence in teaching the arts as well as strengthened school-community relationships. It is refreshing to note that in most cases presented in the literature, understanding each partner and their needs, as well as compromising, has led to these success stories.

On that note, an "identified gap between scientific knowledge and implementation" in the fields of biodiversity conservation prompted researchers to pursue a partnership between a local municipality and an academic institution to bridge the "science-action gap" (Cockburn et al. 2016: 4). It was established through continuous evaluation and reflection of successes and failures that the partnership was on a successful trajectory based on strong working relationships, trust and social capital development, human capacity development, and implementation-driven knowledge generation. Even though collaborations have occurred in dissimilar industries, they were nevertheless relevant and successful, which can improve if stakeholders listen, respect, understand and work together (Trudeau 2015: 34).

Determining what makes a successful union depends on varying factors, as pointed out by Eddy (2013: 1755) even motivation to partners based on the alignment of strategic objectives may not be enough to assure success. Thus, partnerships denote relationships that are mutually beneficial to the parties involved, resulting in mutual benefits for those who create and engage in them (Walker, Conner and Pelham 2020: 2). As illustrated in Figure 3.4, internal partnerships, external partnerships and reciprocal mentoring are elements of success. This conceptual framework denotes the

ongoing relationship cycle whereby authentic collaboration, shared goals, mutual respect, a commitment to completion and reflective practices were noted as contributing to the overall success of the partnership (Walker, Conner and Pelham 2020: 68).

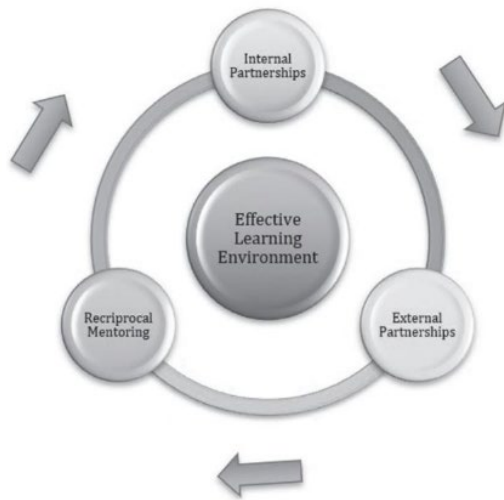


Figure 3.4: Conceptual Framework Cycle

Source: Walker, Conner and Pelham (2020: 68)

A distinct message being depicted here is that the success of partnerships begins and ends with people reaching a consensus to work together and achieve the desired outcome. Snijder et al.'s (2020: 343) study demonstrates four key elements pertinent to the participatory process: complementary expertise of researchers and community-based partners; openness to learning; trust and local community leadership. Therefore, managers must carefully assess the level of collaborative capability of potential universities (Perkmann and Salter 2012: 18) and the context within which partnerships will be implemented. It must be remembered that essential elements, including strategic balance, stakeholder alignment and understanding of the negotiation space, are key to allowing start-ups to partner with companies systematically and efficiently (Freytag 2019: 25). The literature above demonstrates the value of partnerships, especially those between education and business; thus, due

to the retail industry being centrally focused in this study, a few partnerships within this industry in South Africa will be highlighted.

3.3.13.1 *Retail partnerships in South Africa*

With the retail sector being one of the most significant sectors in the economy, as presented in the literature above, existing partnerships are highlighted. An example of a partnership was emphasised in Business Tech (2016: para. 2 line 1) whereby new businesses struggled to enter the retail space. Within this industry, competition is rife and one way of ensuring support for new businesses was demonstrated in a partnership between a giant supermarket chain, Pick 'n Pay and the Gauteng Department of Economic Development. Although not academic, this partnership provided opportunities in terms of accessibility to stock at competitive pricing, thus permitting greater prospects of entering the retail space. This example demonstrated one way in which partnering can sustain businesses, especially during tough economic times. Furthermore, the unemployment rates of the youth are incredibly high due to the mismatch between the skills that they are equipped with as opposed to what is required (Lackay 2020: para. 4 line 1); therefore, partnering should be considered an option for advancement. As a result, Momentum Metropolitan Foundation and partners dedicated themselves to assisting with youth employability to make certain that they enter the workplace with the appropriate training and tools (Lackay 2020: para. 12 line 12).

Another well-known brand in South Africa, Woolworths, with its “Making the Difference Education Programme” has been collaborating with the Department of Education (Woolworths 2020). A key objective of the programme was to create alignment with the curriculum to support the country’s aim of enhancing teaching and learning. It was further elaborated that engagement with stakeholders was imperative for the success of the programme (Woolworths 2020). Additionally, Woolworths and the National Education Collaboration Trust support initiatives that help the Department of Basic Education improve access to educational resources during the country’s crisis

(Woolworths 2020). Additionally, three of the four largest petrol players in the South African market have partnerships with established retailers, namely: Engen and Woolworths, Caltex and Freshstop, BP and Pick 'n Pay, and Shell and Spar. Each of these partnerships brings merchandising, supply chain and retail expertise to elevate the retail offering. It is motivating to know that organisations are taking a stand to drive and support these initiatives for the advancement of the country (Global Convenience Store Focus 2021: para. 26 line 2). As demonstrated from the discussions, collaboration is conceivable in almost any sector, provided there is a degree of reciprocity. Mkamwa and Naila (2020: 41) believe that higher education institutions should strategise so that students are prepared before seeking employment, and therefore, the discussion continues to the workforce of the 21st century in the next section, as the issue of skills is pertinent to this study.

3.4 The 21st-century workforce with specific reference to a university-work transition

In this chapter, skills as one of the central components of the study was introduced within the context of higher education. The skills discussion is an ongoing one as the world needs a continual upgrade of its supply, hence the need for this upskilling should not be overlooked (Basit et al. 2015). In light of this, higher education institutions are a major source for producing the human capital necessary for knowledge production in the 21st century (Adediji 2013: 4), significant to economic growth (Hazelkorn 2015: 203). Students being prepared with the necessary skills for future professional activity demonstrates a vital link between educational institutions and industry (Gawrycka, Kujawska and Tomczak 2020: 1096). Bhorat, Cassim and Tseng (2016: 325) concur that education is a strong predictor of labour market outcomes in terms of employment and hence is a determinant of economic growth, which depends on the match in skills between what was done at university and what is expected in the industry.

A recent study by Jonbekova et al. (2020: 4) demonstrated that student employability was enhanced and was a key performance indicator for university rankings. This included internships in industry and organising career fairs jointly with employers,

suggesting an element of the learning experience is enhanced by internships. Employers look for a balance of hard and soft skills when making hiring decisions (Investopedia 2022: para. 3 line 1). As a result, some of the skills required by the retail sector include communication and customer service, which are of utmost importance. As indicated by Zhan et al. (2021: 11), issues with marketing, customer service and product are key improvement areas in retail. It must be borne in mind that many changes are occurring in the 21st-century workforce, one being people of colour entering the workforce and people working longer during their lives Clifton (2011). Surprisingly, growth in the labour force has decreased each decade and a way of addressing this is to strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders by effectively communicating their transformative skills development agenda and to optimise administrative efficiency by using relevant information technology systems (Koyana and Mason 2018: 197).

As formerly mentioned, in addition to the industry-specific skills required, a host of soft skills, such as value, personality, creativity and problem-solving (Gawrycka, Kujawska and Tomczak 2020: 1097) are necessary for the labour market. It does not only relate to the employer's demand but also to the future-proofing of the employee against redundancy, disempowerment and marginalisation (Edmondson, Formica and Mitra 2020: 223). Throughout the review of literature, gaps in the sectors have been identified and importantly the effect this would have on future graduates. As a result, retail employers face skill shortages, which create difficulties in recruiting suitable employees (Nickson et al. 2012: 68). As previously implied, the stated gaps are between what is taught at universities and what is required in companies, as concurred by Pantano, Pizzi and Rogers (2020: 27), demonstrating the extent of the mismatch between leading university offerings and the demand for specific expertise from retailers. Delving deeper into the link between qualifications and jobs is necessary to determine ways of minimising the issue of gaps.

3.4.1 The relationship between qualifications and jobs: Tacit knowledge versus knowledge in the real world

Higher education institutions receive thousands of applications from aspiring students who are optimistic about furthering their studies in anticipation of a better life, which requires close cooperation between education and/or training providers and employers (The White Paper for Post-school Education and Training 2013: xvi). There is a need for policy to facilitate the matching between university degrees and jobs in areas of labour market demand (Li, Harris and Sloane 2018: 314). Therefore, it is important to understand the dynamics of employability and how higher education institutions can contribute to this in meaningful ways to help graduates manage what has become an uncertain transition from higher education to employment (Tomlinson and Nghia 2020: 7).

Many employers nowadays look beyond formal academic credentials by placing a stronger emphasis on skills or relevant working experience (Choo 2019: para. 3 line 1). At the same time, Higher Education problems have been exacerbated by weak infrastructure, incompetent teaching staff, inadequate pedagogy, a lack of professional development and corporate governance (Nwajiuba et al. 2020: 364), indicating that the government is a dominant partner in education; however, its efforts have not been adequately complemented by other stakeholders. Thus, the employability agenda in higher education needs to be more agile to prepare students to cope with eventualities instead of focussing on developing concrete skills to look for jobs upon graduating (Tomlinson and Nghia 2020: 15). According to Murugan and Ganapathy (2020: 40), hard skills are mechanical or technical skills, whereas soft skills are those that make an individual capable of dealing with oneself and others.

An important and relevant question that we need to ask ourselves is how tacit knowledge impacts graduates when entering the labour force, as they are expected to have a broad range of competencies (Gawrycka, Kujawska and Tomczak 2020: 1105). The authors further mention that recruiters stated that future employees lack sufficient practical experience and an understanding of work standards, thus they are not

prepared to use the theoretical knowledge in practice. Hence, higher education institutions must ensure that the curriculum is relevant to society (Oviawe and Uwameiye 2020: 26); therefore, the relationship between higher education institutions and industry needs to be revived if it has not already been done. As a step in addressing this, Tomlinson (2017: 340) developed a graduate capital model that highlights five main resource forms that constitute dimensions in how successfully graduates transition from higher education to the labour market to enhance career readiness. The forms are as follows: human capital in the form of capital valued by graduates and utilised; social capital is understood to be the advantages derived from embedded sets of social relations, which enable human capital to be mobilised within a wider social context in which it may be utilised; cultural capital in the form of culturally valued knowledge, dispositions, and practices and is an important dimension of employability; identity capital is an important dimension in terms of how they approach the labour market and think about themselves a future employee. Tomlinson (2017: 340) states that a crucial resource required by graduates in the fast-changing and uncertain employment landscape is psychological capital based on the capacity for individuals to respond to challenging or adverse events within the job market; thus, the graduate capital model would be exceedingly useful to graduates, educators and employers. Furthermore, a university qualification may not guarantee a position in the labour market; thus, for a smooth transition, grooming a student in terms of career guidance has a potentially important role to play, as mentioned by Li, Harris and Sloane (2018: 314). Thus, the roles of academics, graduates and employers will be discussed in the next section.

3.4.2 The role of academics, graduates and employers

As presented in the aforementioned literature, simply possessing a formal degree is insufficient for the labour market, as discrepancies exist between the skills possessed by graduates and those required by industry. This could be attributed to the deterioration or accumulation of skills that may suit workers with extensive labour experience (Sevilla and Farías 2020: 287). A rising percentage of students with university degrees do not have employment in their area of study within 12 months of

graduation (Sotiriadou et al. 2020: 2133); thus, for a seamless entry into the working world, there should be a degree of communication. Information such as internships, job opportunities, recruitment activities and partnering in career preparedness events (University of Illinois, Career Development Centre 2022: para. 1 line 2) are useful for the prospective employee.

According to Daubney (2021: 11), there is an urgent need to revisit and renew the value of mainstream academic curriculum to ensure that it remains relevant to learners, as there have been reports of labour market mismatches despite possessing qualifications (Li, Harris and Sloane 2018: 313), although higher education institutions play a significant role in implementing this. It is argued that academics must acknowledge that well-designed policies can contribute to increasing labour productivity and reducing the skills mismatch (Li, Harris and Sloane 2018: 302). Preparing students to transition into market-ready graduates depends on a host of elements to be able to achieve this; thus, a discussion on graduate employability is presented in the next segment.

3.4.3 Graduate Employability, career development and career readiness

A concern for higher education institutions has been the employability of graduates in terms of preparing workers for the labour market (White Paper for Post-school Education and Training 2013: 8). The alignment of graduate employability between the higher education sector and industry is of utmost importance to future generations, and thus employability should be viewed as an activity that involves planning and preparation during study years (Tomlinson and Nghia 2020). Therefore, many higher education institutions have attempted to implement strategies to support students to enhance employment opportunities and better prepare them by focusing on competencies that are relevant to the job market (Margaryan et al. 2020: 2). A study by Nwajiuba et al. (2020: 363) revealed that with the current infrastructure at universities, it was difficult for HEIs to deliver high-quality education to develop the skills that industry demands.

Tiwari and Malati (2020: 226) highlighted via skills construct identification skills that were considered relevant, which included workplace skills, professional practice, interpersonal skills and integration of theory and practice. Employability should be an explicit outcome of vocational education, as training is gaining popularity everywhere, as stated by Tiwari and Malati (2020: 219). According to Tomlinson and Nghia (2020: 10), it will be important for HEIs to think carefully about how they define key notions and how they connect to the wider goals: for graduates and HEIs to build meaningful links with the labour market; the building of networks and relationships with stakeholders; and promoting work-related/work-integrated learning with tangible benefits for graduates. Gubler, Biemann and Herzog (2017: 11) imply that after entering the workforce, occupational inheritance seems to become weaker for individuals, whereas factors leading them to leave the occupation gain importance. To understand these aspects in the context of the study, a reference to theoretical frameworks will be made in the subsequent section. These frameworks are applied as lenses to aid the researcher in understanding the implications within the context of education and business.

3.5 Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

For any prospective study, an understanding of the phenomena being studied is important and one way of supporting research would be to employ a theoretical framework. Thus, Sekaran and Bougie (2016a: 72) state that a theoretical framework represents one's beliefs on how these phenomena are related to each other, and developing a good framework is central to examining the problem under investigation; thus, aiding this research in interpreting information based on the framework in which the study is located. Although theories should not be viewed as strict recipes, they provide guidance and serve as sensitising concepts that help direct attention to meaningful data (Tracy 2019: 33); therefore, a theoretical framework should be presented early in the study. Significant to this study is the relationship between the higher education and retail sectors; hence, an understanding of the collaboration or partnership process is crucial to the development of a specific framework applicable to these sectors.

Consequently, this section of the literature review will probe existing theoretical frameworks, providing the researcher with an opportunity to engage with each to determine its relevance to the study. It must be further stated that the objective of this study is to propose an effective partnership framework specifically for the retail sector and higher education institutions in anticipation of the collaborative undertaking, as well as to offer guidance and support to stakeholders. Furthermore, suggestions and support for higher education institutions in terms of fostering student success and for the retail sector in integrating students into the workforce will be proposed. Hence, the aim would be to develop, enhance and sustain the partnership by employing the proposed partnership framework.

As a result of the misperceptions between theoretical and conceptual frameworks, Adom et al. (2016: 440) attempt to provide the difference between the theoretical and conceptual frameworks as they believe that sometimes researchers develop their conceptual frameworks from the theories that underpin their research. The authors go on to say that though these frameworks work hand-in-hand, they both have characteristics that make them different from each other. Interestingly, this study incorporates both frameworks, but the conceptual framework is primarily discussed within the literature survey, and the theoretical perspectives of the main constructs provide context for the whole study and will be reviewed in this section. A prominent feature that portrays the difference between the theoretical and conceptual frameworks is that the theoretical framework focuses explicitly on theories (Adom et al. 2016: 440), whereas the conceptual theories focus on concepts that are interrelated and aid the researcher in explaining these concepts with the aim of addressing the research problem.

The next section includes the following four frameworks identified by the researcher that may either partially or fully align with this study and will be outlined and subsequently discussed critically: the collaboration framework, a model of successful educational partnerships, a partnering model for education and the relationship model between institutions and industries. The purpose of reviewing and examining these

models or frameworks is to ensure that the process of partnership or collaboration is viewed through different lenses to explain the relations between the key sectors as well as provide an appropriate deduction. It should be noted that elements from one or all of the theories or frameworks may be used to conclude this study. This would depend on the outcome of the reviewed models and frameworks in terms of their relation to the study's context, loopholes being established, as well as any commonalities that may apply. Hence, based on these and other decisions, the researcher will present a theory or framework of the main variables with a comprehensive explanation.

3.5.1 The Collaboration Framework

Firstly, a general collaboration framework will be presented to frame the broad area of the research, thereafter, proceeding to the review of other frameworks that may align with this study. As illustrated in Figure 3.5, successful alliances are dependent on a plan of action that includes revisiting and reviewing strategies that may lead to the desired outcome. Thus, the collaboration framework presented by Lambert and Enz (2012: 1591), demonstrates six key activities:

Assess drivers for each company: This segment requires that each organisation's representatives independently identify their business goals for the relationship in terms of four driver categories: asset/cost efficiencies, service improvements, marketing advantage, and profit growth/stability. In conclusion, each management team presents its drivers to the other organisation's management team and key "organisations". In this study, these organisations comprise the educational and retail sectors. Due to the organisations not being part of the same sector, this and subsequent steps in the process may be otherwise stated. It must, at the outset, be mentioned that profit in the retail sector refers to the business prospering financially, but in the education sector reference is made to learners successfully graduating, securing employment and, as a result, funding for the university.

Align expectations: In the align expectations segment, the teams mutually establish goals based on the drivers of both organisations. For both sectors, the expectation would benefit them reciprocally. Hence, the expectation for retail may relate to job-ready graduates, while for education, it may be to co-create the retail curriculum, with the possibility of leading to adequately prepared graduates. This can only be achieved if both sectors explicitly outline their expectations.

Develop an action plan: Action plan development requires teams to prioritise initiatives, assign responsibilities, establish timelines, and agree on the appropriate metrics. Once the expectations are set out and discussed, the actual planning process begins. As an example, the education sector would block a period during a specified time to accommodate retail experts to impart relevant and timely information to the students. This step may comprise a host of activities, including intensive planning and preparation, due to both industries being exceedingly precise about timing. The retail managers' role within the store is vital as they regularly deal with customers and thus their presence is required constantly. On the other hand, academic activities include lecturing, administration and secondary functions, for which precision timing is pertinent.

Develop a product and service agreement: The product and service agreement is a written summary of the rules of engagement and action plans. This element may be limiting to this study as there is a definite business-exclusive slant to this framework. Aligning this segment with the education and retail sectors would be somewhat different from the standard products and services offered by general businesses. Thus an HEI churning out graduates may apply to the so-called products and services that may relate to the retail sector's input to education.

Review performance and periodically re-examine drivers. This step is necessary to analyse performance to ensure that each firm has achieved its drivers. For a partnership to be successful, a continual review of the process is required. As an example, the two sectors may have to consider revising the curriculum if national changes in the retail sector have been implemented. These changes may occur at any

stage, depending on the status of the industries and possibly revised the protocols to be administered. It is important to note that sectors may encounter unexpected circumstances, for example, the current pandemic that is ravaging the world. This calls for instantaneous amendments to both the education and retail sectors for this study.

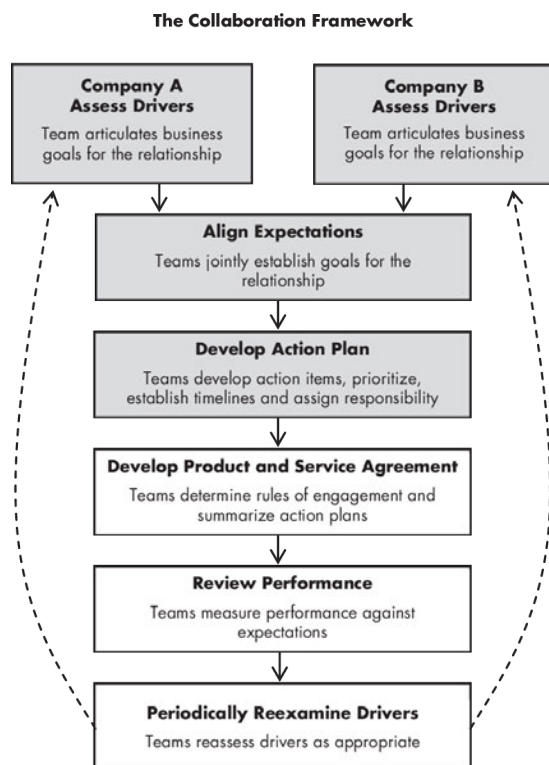


Figure 3.5: Building High-Performance Business Relationships

Source: Lambert and Enz (2012: 1591)

The researcher has endeavoured to apply the framework to guide this study that aims to establish the role of partnerships by exploring the perspectives of all stakeholders, with the objective of developing a framework for the education and retail sectors. A well-constructed framework would be a guiding tool for store managers as well as educational institutions in addressing the gaps that exist and sustaining partnerships. The existing framework aids the researcher in laying the fundamentals of the study in terms of methodological steps, but it is restrictive. As noted from the discussion, the framework may be limiting to an extent as this study's focus is education and business,

unlike the model, which implies business organisations exclusively. Therefore, the focus should not be restricted to business organisations only but extended to include the education sector to be of value to this study. The retail sector is generally regarded as a business with products and services as fundamental elements; hence, it can be simply aligned with the model. However, the education sector is the second sector; therefore, it poses a challenge in terms of alignment with this framework. Thus, the missing links in this framework are the explicit elements of students, graduates, academics and skills, as well as the difficulty in linking education to retail.

The next section presents a model for successful educational partnerships in anticipation of linking it to the current study.

3.5.2 A model for successful educational partnerships

Essential to this study is the higher education sector, which feeds directly into the greater economy with graduates entering the world of work in the retail sector. Thus an investigation between these sectors in terms of prospective partnerships is explored. The subsequent model is an educational partnership model by Chou (2012: 91), which states that several determinants contribute to successful educational partnerships. These determinants can be categorised into five major components, as depicted in Figure 3.6, and the implications of individual constructs will be elaborated on below.

Commitment to partnership: This relates to higher education institutions being aware of global partnerships and therefore intend to advance study abroad programmes, hence building relationships. Once institutions have established the relationship and partnership, they need to maintain and strengthen their commitment to further development. This commitment consists of relationship management, resource sharing and resource allocation.

Curriculum and learning: Most educational partnerships offer academic programmes and internships for their partners, for which the curriculum must be innovative. Creating an innovative learning experience for students can lead to a successful partnership.

Quality and risk management: The quality of education is important for the success of the partnership. A sustainable collaborative project should fulfil the needs and requirements of the contract. Quality and risk management construct consist of educational quality and reputation. Maintaining a partnership may be difficult, as uncertainties and risks may impede the growth of existing collaborations.

Geographic and economic settings: While higher education institutions select global partners, the geography and economic realities may be judged. Understanding the cultural, political, geographic and economic settings allows institutions to establish suitable programmes for students. The geographic and economic settings construct consists of cultural and political settings as well as location and economic environment.

Change management: Pursuing partnerships may result in organisational changes affecting areas such as organisational structure, tasks, people, culture and others. Institutions should control possible organisational turbulence and chaos through the creation of a change management strategy.

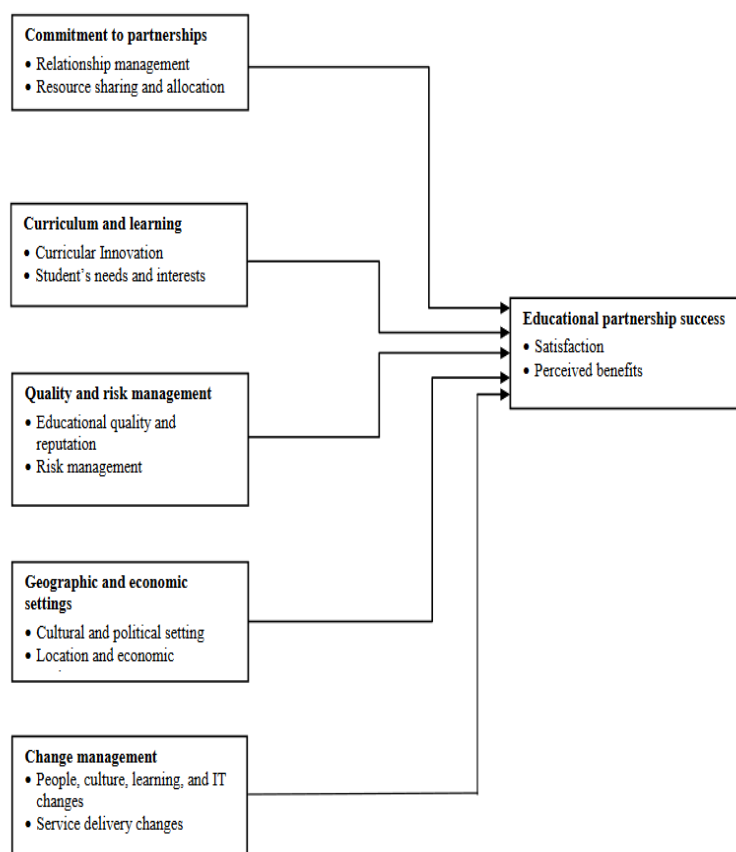


Figure 3.6: Model of successful educational partnerships

Source: Chou (2012: 91)

The model of successful educational partnerships is argued to be a valuable tool, demonstrating that the majority of the determinants would be applicable within the context of this study. The elements of commitment, curriculum and quality from this model are pertinent to education, hence this study as well. However, the only limiting factor of the model is that it relates to two educational partnerships and not necessarily an education-business partnership, as alluded to in this study. Similarly, the previous framework focused on business organisations only and therefore was restrictive to this study. Unlike traditional profit and loss indicating success or failure in collaborations, a profit or loss within a partnership between higher education and retail business, may be determined by the type of graduate entering the labour force, as the learner is viewed as a customer within the educational setting. Furthermore, this is critically

dependent on the skills acquired by the graduate, indicating that gaps may exist. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the learners or graduates are key subjects to this study, signifying that higher education institutions are pertinent in the delivery of quality education. Therefore, this will have a ripple effect if industry expectations are not aligned with skills output and may further contribute to issues such as the high unemployment rates in the country. In the present study, the researcher will assess the applicability of the model within the study's context by investigating the role of partnerships and addressing the gaps that exist. The most significant weakness of this model is that there is no consideration for any other organisation type except those associated with education. As a result of this model's considerable limitation, the researcher will review other models or frameworks in anticipation of addressing the research problem.

The partnership model developed by Amey, Eddy, and Campbell (2010: 336) will be explored in the next section to provide the researcher with an opportunity to review a different perspective to aid in the construction of the most relevant framework for this study.

3.5.3 A Partnering Model for Education

The subsequent model review having a bearing on this study will be the model proposed by Amey, Eddy and Campbell (2010: 336). In this model, the authors, after studying educational partnerships for many years, have developed a partnership model that reflects critical elements, which were found after consultations with a community college advisory panel and reviewing community college partnerships. Of importance, this model highlights the elements of social and organisational capital as well as introduces the concept of partnership capital as an outcome of cross-unit relationships. According to Amey, Eddy and Campbell (2010: 336), the research provides leaders with a better way of understanding the implications of policies on educational practices. The initial phase of the model includes the antecedents for each of the partners that

contribute to the reasons for initiating or joining an existing partnership. Some of these antecedents, according to Figure 3.7, are resources available to individual partners, motivation for partnering and the context in which they operate. In addition, the roles and responsibilities of the partners must be clear.

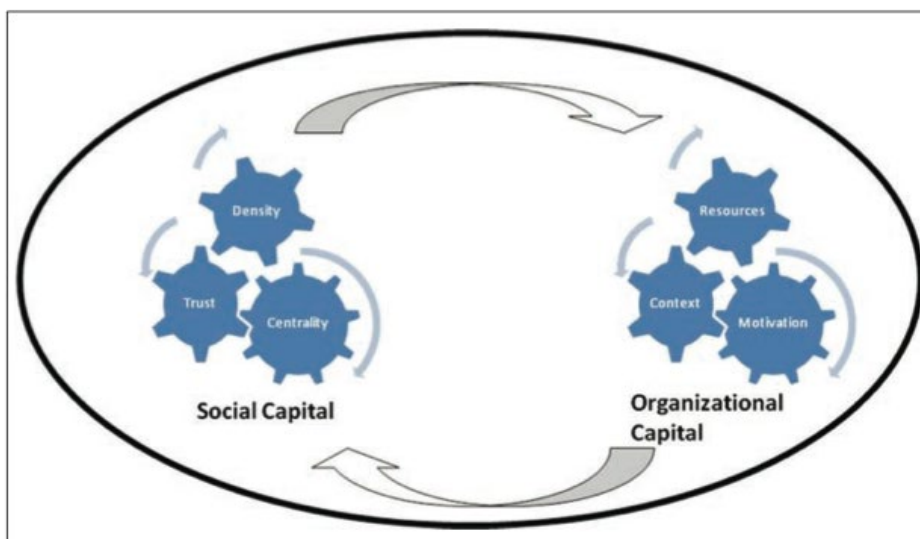


Figure 3.7: A Partnering Model for Education

Source: Amey, Eddy and Campbell (2010: 336)

Social capital is an intangible resource for productive ends and is inherent in social relationships and structures. Social capital exists in the structure of relationships and networks between and among actors, including components such as density, trust and centrality. These three components of social capital affect partnerships, and the extent of the relationship networks that individual actors have helps determine the range of opportunities for developing and activating one's social capital on behalf of partnerships. Density refers to the strength and closeness of relationships and high levels of density relate to trust. In terms of reciprocal expectancies, this is significant for stakeholders in this study. Centrality refers to the extent to which a person is central to the overall structure of the partnership. Lastly, trust is built through the development of network relationships and working relationships between individuals and groups affected by organisational capital. This is pivotal in the partnership process, as

stakeholders depend on each other. On the other hand, organisational capital refers to resources, power, influence and authority that may accrue to a formal position. Social capital and organisational capital are critical at the beginning of the partnership and early assessments of them may be easier when potential partners already know each other.

This model is relatively significant to this study as mention is made of leaders understanding the effects of policies on educational practices, as well as relationships and trust. As an example, store managers as leaders would need to ensure that, if in a partnership with an educational institution, the relevant policies and their effects on education are understood. From the organisational capital perspective, resources, context and motivation apply to the retail sector as pertinent elements that should be considered in partnerships. Furthermore, in an education-retail partnership, a host of stakeholders will be involved in the process, including graduates, retail employers, academic representatives and others. Therefore, these stakeholders cannot be viewed in isolation, as there is a direct link with each stakeholder within the partnership. Thus, the most significant weakness of this model is that it deals with human capital as a resource despite the presence of the social and economic context. Furthermore, the focus on the curriculum, which is a vital component in the partnership process, is limited in this model. As a result, this study believes that stakeholders should work in cohesion as the continuous imparting of relevant skills and knowledge is a necessity. In essence, linking every aspect from stakeholders to the content in terms of generating competent employees to occupy new positions is pertinent to this study.

On that note, the relationship model will be elaborated on. It is anticipated that specific elements that were absent in previous models and frameworks may be present in this model.

3.5.4 The relationship model between institutions and the industry by the Council of Ontario Universities: Sector skills needs

The Council of Ontario Universities (1998) presented a model that demonstrates the link between industry and the technical and vocational education institution system. As illustrated in Figure 3.8, the industry is represented as an important element in the system and can be classified as a key source of new employees for potential employment. Thus, the institution is the official body that places a stamp on certain skills and hence designs the products as per their specific conditions. However, this may be limiting, as both parties should contribute to the partnership process, even though curriculum design and implementation, skills training and innovation are tasks that the institution is generally responsible for. On the other hand, the industry, in the form of employers has the right to assess the activity and education through the product being issued. The product referred to in this case is the graduate that enters the world of work in terms of meeting the demands of the industry. This should be done in collaboration with the industry and institution to ensure that the curriculum and skills training is developed to meet the needs of the employer. Significantly, it must be understood that the relationship between these two sectors is vital as it comprises reciprocal benefits for both sectors, especially, producing knowledgeable workers that can fulfil the demands of the industry.

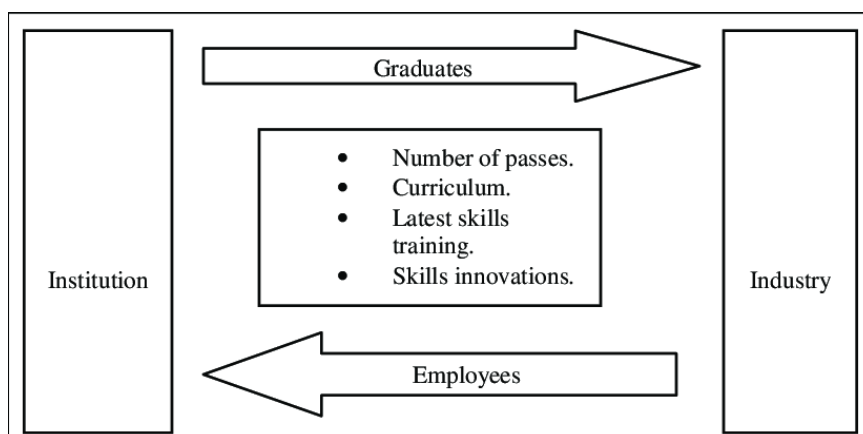


Figure 3.8: Relationship model between institutions and industry (Council of Ontario Universities: Sector skills needs 1998

Source: Boud and Solomon (2001)

Similarly, the core of this study is the higher education and retail sectors, as actors represent the institution and industry as per the model. This model is particularly relevant to this study, as opposed to the previously reviewed models. Unlike the preceding models, this model is explicit in demonstrating a relationship between an institution and industry, hence clearly aligning it with the current study. As a result, it is critical to emphasise the importance of a continuous two-way relationship between higher education and retail, implying that both sectors must communicate so that graduates are market-ready and may commence employment without additional training and development. One approach to accomplishing this is to have the retail industry contribute to the curriculum as and when significant developments occur in the industry. In response, higher education should incorporate these developments into the curriculum, ensuring that their implementation is in line with present industry requirements, resulting in graduates possessing relevant skills. As a result, securing employment should be a hassle-free task.

The researcher proposes that the retail sector be regularly involved in higher education institutions, by imparting relevant information based on advancements in their field. These developments could include new policies, regulatory bodies, system developments and other industry-related information. Similarly, Bomani et al. (2019: 11) concur that HEIs are instrumental in the development of SMEs through training, technology transfer, clubs, research and the commercialisation of research. The inference of a work-integrated learning experience in which the student completes a predefined period in the retail sector to accrue hours and experience is in no way implied. Rather, the goal of this study is to ensure that retail industries are not only appropriately advising higher education institutions but are also actively engaging in addressing relevant issues on a practical level. As a result, students gain unique insights from retail practice, just as retailers gain in-depth knowledge about the competencies of young employees (Lange et al. 2018). Having retail experts in a classroom would immensely benefit students transitioning into the world of work, as supported by Stephens (2015: 133), who indicates that proper instruction by industry

professionals helps to ensure students are properly trained in the occupational areas they pursue.

Of all the models or frameworks presented, the relationship model is the most appropriate and closely linked to this study. Vital elements of the institution, industry, employees and graduates are highlighted, which applies to the higher education sector as well as the industry. The elements that restrain the model are synergy identification and collaborative activity. Continual collaborative efforts may ensure that both these sectors flourish, leading to overall benefits in addressing issues that plague society. In addition, the institution is the only official body placing a stamp of approval in terms of specific skills; therefore, this may be a limiting factor. An objective of the study is to identify relevant retail skills, thus contributing to addressing the skills issue and aiding in decreasing unemployment rates, as well as building capacity. Thus, it is important to include the retail sector during the initial process of the partnership as they are aware of changes and are privy to the most updated retail information. After an intense review of the four models and frameworks, the subsequent section presents the proposed framework for this study.

3.5.5 The proposed framework for this study

In light of the reviewed models and frameworks, it was established that specific elements may or may not have a bearing on this study; thus, those elements deemed valuable were identified and linked to the study. An adequate explanation was not provided about the role of academics, employers and graduates who are considered the vital link to the holistic partnership process. Furthermore, elements of synergy, commitment and stakeholder expectations were not prioritised. Besides, collaborative initiatives between the stakeholders are required to be recurring and will be highlighted as a crucial element in this study. It cannot be assumed that stakeholders can work in isolation, as there is a clear link between the education process and the labour market. If disregarded, the sector may potentially be presented with graduates who struggle to transition into the labour market. It is important to understand this methodically; the entire process of entering and exiting a university may be viewed as a production

process. Kumar (2011: 60) explains the process as demonstrated in Figure 3.9, which depicts the educational cycle, comprising input, process and output stages.

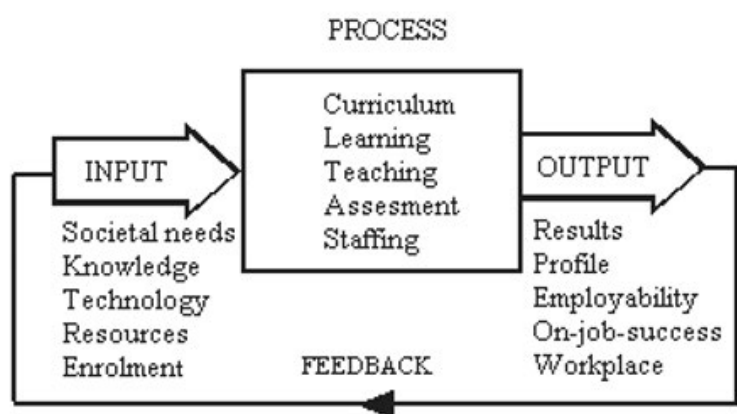


Figure 3.9: The Block Diagram of an Educational Cycle

Source: Ajitkumar (2011: 60)

The process begins with the student entering the university, known as the input stage, which includes the application and enrolment procedures. The process stage is the next stage where the actual teaching and learning occur, and finally, the output stage is where a student graduates and is in search of employment. The feedback that is gained from the output stage can be utilised to improve the quality of the process, meaning that the industry may supply universities with the much-required information to make changes. This study proposes that stakeholders from both the education and retail networks form the initial phase of the process. This could be directly linked to the lack of skills, as an example, or other relevant information from employers.

As formerly mentioned, each model or framework presented specific limitations or weaknesses, which will be reiterated to provide a background and support for the proposed framework, thereby aiding in the development of the framework for the study. Firstly, the collaboration framework represents a framework most applicable to a business-to-business model, thus eliminating the educational sector as a vital component of this study. The academic components of the educational sector,

including graduates, academics and skills, are omitted from this framework. The roles of the stakeholders, comprising academics, graduates and employers, are essential for career development. Secondly, the model for successful educational partnerships focuses primarily on partnering with two educational partners, yet the business sector is overlooked. As mentioned, the retail sector is the core sector of this study and thus cannot be incorporated into the model and therefore presents as a weakness. However, commitment, curriculum and quality aspects within the context of education are incorporated, forming the crux of the discussion. Thirdly, the partnering model weighed substantially on this study; however, the components of cohesiveness and the curriculum are lacking. When in a partnership, working in isolation may be a hindrance to the entire process; therefore, linking aspects from initiation to completion is pertinent. Finally, the relationship model was one of the most appropriate for the study, apart from the absence of identifying synergies and continual collaborative activities.

Most important for this study is the aim of investigating the role of partnerships and objectives by outlining the key success factors, identifying skills relevant to retail, and determining the perceptions of stakeholders with regard to building and strengthening partnerships. It was, therefore, necessary to interrogate each model or framework to better understand its applicability to the process between higher education institutions and the retail sector. The most significant stakeholders in this process are retail employers, university academics and graduates; hence, the development and implementation of a framework may act as an enabling tool for both universities and industry in contributing to narrowing the existing gaps. Additionally, the proposition of a framework for this study intends to improve the effectiveness of university and industry collaborations. It is important to note that the construction of this framework is based on critically reviewing the existing literature as well as input from the various stakeholders through the data collection process.

As far as the researcher is aware, there are no existing frameworks for the education and retail sectors specifically; hence, the proposed framework may serve as a guide

for the sectors. As previously reviewed and discussed, several generic frameworks exist, but none can be applied exclusively to these sectors. As reiterated by Edmondson et al. (2012), universities need to redefine their mission, and collaboration with industry needs to be included as an important part of universities. The essence of the partnership would be to prepare graduates to better meet the needs of industry with substantively structured programmes, generating entrepreneurial opportunities, growth acceleration for businesses, and an improved overall structure for stakeholders. After a critical review, the proposed framework for this study is anticipated to incorporate elements from the findings of this study as well as elements that were excluded from the aforementioned models and frameworks.

Based on this chapter, a discussion of partnerships was presented, with a description of the various forms that exist as well as an overview of education-business partnerships. The discussion was structured within the context of the two core sectors of the study: higher education institutions and the retail sector. Therefore, the key stakeholders referred to in the study were academics, employers and students. These stakeholders were not incorporated in some frameworks or models, even though they are pertinent within a partnership. Each of them must be aware of the other in terms of expectations and what the common links are. Additionally, the conversation progressed to opportunities, the impact and the significance of partnerships. Communication among stakeholders is imperative within a partnership and therefore synergies, level of commitment and expectations of stakeholders, among others, were elaborated on. Thus, the latter section of the chapter focused on elements of the workforce and employability. It was emphasised that partnerships can be successful if people work together, thus leading to the accomplishment of outcomes. It is vital to recognise that being open-minded, enthusiastic and willing to work as a unified team allows one to transcend in a partnership.

After a critical review of the literature, as well as input from the findings, the following themes were identified and crafted as appropriate for the framework.

Theme 1: **The role of academics, employers and graduates.** This theme was linked to the objectives of outlining the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships as well as perceptions with regard to building and strengthening partnerships. In addition, the theme was formulated from the findings, namely: building leaders and entrepreneurs through succession planning initiatives; collaborative relationship management to create harmony and support and promote psychological preparedness; the evolving business environment; and advancements in the retail business landscape.

Theme 2: **Collaborative relationship management.** This theme was linked to the objective of identifying skills that are relevant to the retail sector as well as the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships. Additionally, the findings of the study, namely: collaborative relationship management to create harmony, support and opportunities; developing occupational-directed programmes to address the skills deficiency; and higher education reform: a predictor of employment, was instrumental in the development of this theme.

It is anticipated that stakeholders from education and industry will benefit from the framework, and more importantly, the framework may aid similar sectors. Therefore, the first theme is the role of academics, employers and graduates encompass stakeholders who each contribute to the partnership in a significant manner. Academics at the educational institution are key stakeholders and a vital link to the external organisation. Therefore, the role of academics in the partnering process is pertinent with regard to university protocols, policies and qualifications, thus aligning the university and retail sectors. Matters such as curriculum design, academic administration and others can be regulated by academics. On the other hand, retail employers, upon liaison with academics, can structure retail material, include retail experts and arrange on-site visits, among others, thereby finalising the link between the two sectors. As a result, graduates should be work-ready, and thus the aim of developing well-prepared graduates will be accomplished.

It is important to point out that academics, employers and graduates each have a key role to play in this education-business partnership thus, being committed and identifying synergies is paramount. For a partnership to be successful, a degree of cohesion is necessary; therefore, managing the relationship is critical in terms of understanding reciprocal expectations. Also, a strong element of recurrent collaborative initiatives is vital as a key factor in ensuring that graduates are sufficiently prepared. This goes beyond traditional work-integrated learning, whereby students complete a specified period at an organisation. The element of having retail experts present during formal academic activities and imparting updated information is proposed, which was found to be lacking in all the frameworks and models.

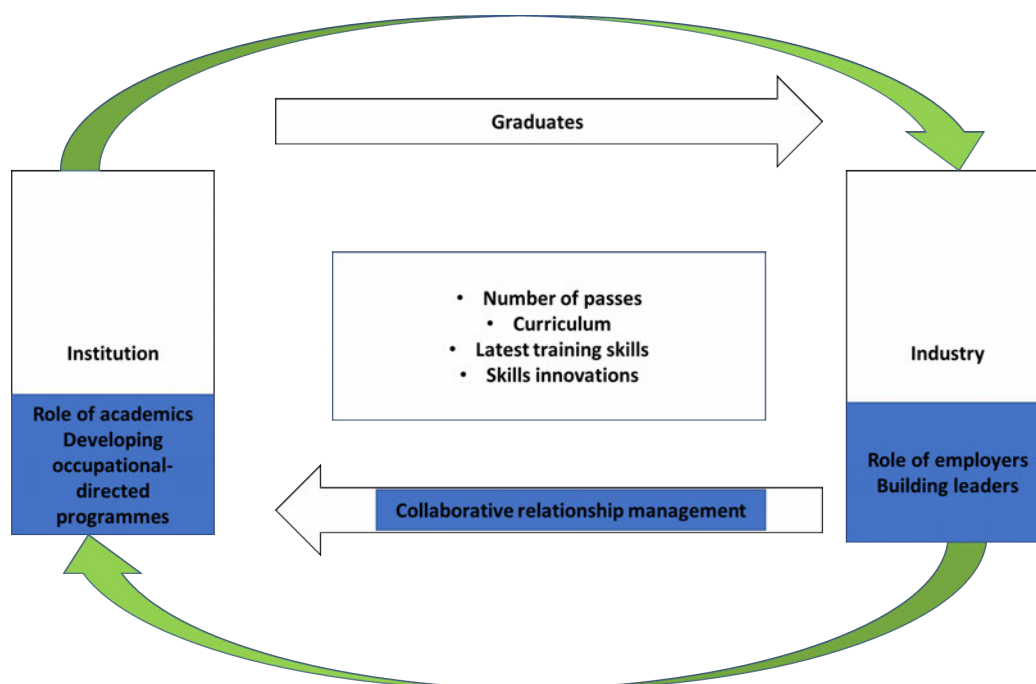


Figure 3.10: Proposed Theoretical Framework for this study

Source: Based on the Relationship model between institutions and industry (Council of Ontario Universities: Sector skills need 1998 and adapted by the researcher)

Figure 3.10 shows that the proposed framework was based on the relationship model between institutions and industry, developed by the Council of Ontario Universities and

adapted by the researcher for this study. It includes pertinent elements of the institution, industry, graduates, employees and academic elements such as curriculum and skills. Furthermore, it demonstrates that the key stakeholders must cooperate to prepare graduates for the world of work. However, the model lacks synergy identification and recurrent collaborative activities. The arrows from the institution to industry and industry to institution, therefore incorporate this element as demonstrated in Figure 3.10. Besides, the roles of academics, employers and graduates are not sufficiently accentuated in this model in terms of collaborative relationship management. Nonetheless, of all the models or frameworks presented, the relationship model is the most appropriate and closely linked to this study. The framework will be presented as a guiding tool for stakeholders within the context of this study, by linking education to industry and vice versa.

In light of the objectives of the study, the proposed framework could provide a foundation for prospective partnerships between education and industry. It is anticipated that the framework may contribute to abating some of the aforementioned issues, for example, graduates who are underprepared for the workforce. This can be achieved by establishing stakeholder expectations, identifying synergies, and ensuring recurring collaborative activities within the partnership. For the overall success of the partnership, stakeholders should work together to accomplish the stated outcomes in anticipation of bridging the gaps that exist.

3.5.6 Addressing the gaps

Upon reviewing the literature within the context of the study, it was discovered that a large section of the study remains under-researched. Generally identifying gaps and generating research questions are the first and most important steps in writing a research paper (Moeini 2014: para. 2 line 3). To identify these gaps, a thorough review of the literature is required to find something that will contribute to new research, as supported by Snyder (2019: 333), indicating that it provides an overview of areas in which research is disparate and interdisciplinary as well as uncovering areas in which

more research is needed. This study commenced with a broad review of the literature on education in South Africa and globally, progressing to how the education sector responds to partnerships. Partnerships constitute a large part of this study, and hence the next section of the literature focuses on this core element. The review advanced to the retail sector with specific reference to retail supermarket chains and the relationship between business and education partnerships. With limited studies on retail and education partnerships, the focus of the study was on the role of partnerships between higher education institutions and retail sectors in South Africa. Thus, the gap in the study was identified.

The study was initiated to investigate the role of partnerships between public higher education institutions and retail sectors, with a specific focus on ascertaining the skills gap. It progressed further by deconstructing the aim into objectives, which discussions in this chapter and the previous one sufficiently addressed. As a means of crafting a concrete discussion on partnerships, existing partnerships and their success factors were presented. Relevant examples demonstrated that even though partnerships differed and, in some instances, did not follow a traditional academic-business partnership, they positively contributed to both sectors. However, it cannot be overlooked that barriers and challenges do exist and must be appropriately addressed to ensure continuity. To be assured that partnerships will succeed, the element of synergy between the stakeholders is vital, as this is the first and foremost phase of determining if there is a need for both sectors to collaborate. This is closely followed by the commitment of the parties, with consensus and compromise being highlighted as factors that could determine the success or failure of the partnership.

For this study, higher education institutions should benefit from the retail sector in terms of its current issues being incorporated into the syllabi. This, in turn, will be valuable to the retail sector, as there are possibilities of the skill gaps being narrowed due to graduates being adequately prepared. In concluding the discussions, it was established that a partnership should be guided by a tool, for which models and frameworks were presented. However, of the several models and frameworks

presented, it was discovered that none of the existing models and frameworks was the best fit for this study, except for the relationship model, which was a close fit. Based on this, a framework was proposed for higher education and industry as a recommendation to guide the partnership process.

In addition, it is anticipated that the proposed framework could offer workable solutions intended to close the identified skill gaps between education and industry. Further work is needed to create and grow institutional partnerships to foster academic success (Campbell et al. 2020: 6). For this reason, a framework may aid in creating and guiding relationships within a partnership. The design of the study instruments based on the gaps in the literature, as well as the development of constructs, aided in vital input towards the framework.

3.6 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlighted the core concept of partnerships and their related elements. The overall aim of the study in investigating the role of partnerships between the public higher education sector and the retail sector was addressed by the following objectives: to identify skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between the education provided at universities and the skills required by the retail sector, as well as to propose a partnership framework for effective collaboration between public higher education institutions and the retail sector.

The review of the literature was significant in highlighting that establishing industry partnerships could aid higher education institutions in better preparing learners for the workforce. In essence, partnerships between education and industry are a means of ensuring that skill gaps can be identified and addressed. The fieldwork will test this by investigating the role of partnerships and assessing the skill gaps between public higher education institutions and the retail sector. Gaps in the literature were highlighted, thus contributing to the development of instrument items linked to the study objectives. Frameworks by esteemed authors were reviewed and the subsequent

development of a framework for the study was proposed. Thus, the objective of proposing a framework for effective partnership between public higher education institutions and the retail sector was achieved. The framework was developed by explaining the link between business and education. The literature review as well as the findings were key in constructing the framework.

The literature presented in this chapter revealed that partnerships between higher education institutions and industry may aid in identifying the skills gap. The next chapter will provide a detailed discussion of the methodology employed for the study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

The literature chapters presented the South African Higher education system, focusing on Public Higher Education Institutions and the challenges encountered by Higher education and other sectors. The promotion of partnerships between Higher education and industry was deliberated on. Furthermore, the development of a theoretical framework for the study, depicting the roles of each stakeholder in a partnership and the need for enhancing the relationship between the education and retail sectors, was discussed. The research design, research paradigm, research approach, population and sampling are presented in this chapter. A discussion on the instrument design, pilot study, validity, reliability, trustworthiness and credibility techniques is also presented. The chapter further describes the study's fieldwork execution, data analysis techniques and ethical processes.

4.2 Research design

Sekaran and Bougie (2016b: 95) describe a research design as a blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data created to answer the research questions. The research problem determines the type of design that can be used (Sacred Heart University 2020). While many types of research designs exist, the main purpose of the design is to reduce the ambiguity of research evidence by providing a step-by-step approach to the entire research plan (Baran 2020: para. 3 line 1). Figure 4.1 provides a representation of research designs, as well as a description of each design type that may be used in business research. Research designs comprise, exploratory, conclusive, descriptive, cross-sectional, casual and longitudinal types. An

exploratory research design is employed in this study to attain an understanding of the role of partnerships and skills relevant to the retail sector.

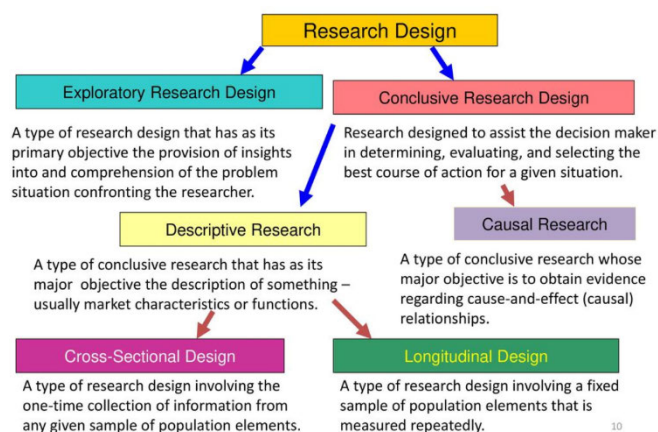


Figure 4.1: Classification of Research Designs used in Business

Source: RSTCA Business Research (2019)

Vincze (2013: 28) explains that exploratory research is a form of research “where there are few or no earlier studies to refer to, with a focus on gaining insights for later investigation, or it is undertaken when problems are in the preliminary stage of the investigation”. Exploratory studies can be significant by obtaining valuable primary knowledge on the object of the research and determining the reliability of methodological and psychometric characteristics and the weaknesses of the questionnaire (Žukauskas, Vveinhardt and Andriukaitienė 2018: 190). Therefore, exploratory studies are generally adopted when not much is known about a particular phenomenon.

On the other hand, descriptive research is aimed at helping the researcher understand the characteristics of a group and make certain decisions within a study. Descriptive cross-sectional studies provide data to describe the state of phenomena at a fixed point in time to answer a research question. Thus, a gap in skills being identified supports the study, as the role of partnerships would be to better prepare graduates to meet the needs of industry; hence, the study is oriented with exploratory, descriptive and cross-

sectional designs. In addition, it is important to establish the paradigm under which the research is undertaken.

4.3 Research paradigm

Sułkowski, Lenart-Gansiniec and Bilan (2020: 421) believe that paradigms are not templates or models but a valid worldview, including postulates connected with organisational reality and common philosophical positions that business research relies on (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2015: 18). Philosophical concepts of positivism and post-positivism state that the goal of knowledge is to describe phenomena and how scientists think and work, whereas critical realism distinguishes between the real world and the observable world. Interpretivism shares the objectives of understanding lived experience, while constructivism is knowledge emerging through interaction with the environment. Rehman and Alharthi (2016: 51) describe a theoretical framework as assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods, or merely understanding the reality of the world. Ontology is based on the assumption that a “single tangible reality exists that is understood, identified and measured” (Park, Konge and Artino Jr 2020: 691), whereas epistemology is how the nature of knowledge is conceived.

A supplementary paradigm known as pragmatism states that research on objectively observable phenomena and subjective meanings may yield beneficial knowledge based on the study’s research questions (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 29). Thus, this study adopts the pragmatism paradigm, orientating itself towards solving practical problems (Kaushik and Walsh 2019: 4) by probing partnerships in anticipation of addressing the skills issue. Pragmatism allows researchers working in organisational settings to move beyond objective conceptualisations to explore and understand the connections between knowledge and action in context (Kelly and Cordeiro 2020: 1). Hence, “pragmatism encourages researchers to base their choices on relevant methods and methodologies” from the world of practice to the world of theory, using research experiences to understand people (Kaushik and Walsh 2019: 10).

4.4 Research approach: Mixed methods

Research methods can be viewed as rules and procedures for solving problems, playing roles such as ways of reasoning to arrive at solutions, rules for communication and inter-subjectivity (Ghauri, Grønhaug and Strange 2020: 42). It involves specific approaches to data collection, analysis and interpretation used in studies (Creswell and Creswell 2014: 45) by conducting experiments, tests, surveys and others (Goundar 2012: 9). This study employs a mixed methods approach to provide depth in investigating the role of partnerships, as the limitations of one methodology generally compensate for those of another. The key aim of mixed methods is to answer research questions that cannot be answered solely by qualitative or quantitative approaches (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 106); hence, interviews and questionnaires were used to gather information. Table 4.1 details quantitative, mixed and qualitative data collection methods.

Table 4.1: Quantitative, Mixed and Qualitative Method

Quantitative Methods	Mixed Methods	Qualitative Methods
Pre-determined	Both predetermined and emerging methods	Emerging methods
Instrument based questions	Both open- and closed-ended questions	Open-ended questions
Performance data, attitude data, observational data, and census data	Multiple forms of data drawing on all possibilities	Interview data, observation data, document data, and audiovisual data
Statistical analysis	Statistical and text analysis	Text and image analysis
Statistical interpretation	Across databases interpretation	Themes, patterns interpretation

Source: Creswell and Creswell (2014: 45)

According to Creswell and Creswell (2014: 50), a “mixed-methods strategy may allow the researcher to capitalise on the strengths and offset the weaknesses of each method”, as well as for the broad purposes of breadth and depth of corroboration (Schoonenboom and Johnson 2017: 2). The study’s approach focuses on reasoning, perceptions and insight into the problem for the qualitative component, as well as a variety of responses in a measurable form for the quantitative component. The quantitative data is presented in the form of questionnaires to students and retail staff,

with carefully designed content for richer data. The “qualitative and quantitative data are merged on one end of the continuum, kept separate on the other, or combined in some way between the two extremes” (Willan 2016: 249).

Many forms of mixed methods design exist, including convergent, explanatory sequential, exploratory sequential and transformative. The convergent design merges quantitative and qualitative data collected roughly at the same time and used for the interpretation of the overall results (Creswell and Creswell 2014: 44). Explanatory sequential mixed methods are quantitative research results being analysed and built on to explain further with qualitative data. Exploratory sequential design is the reverse sequence of the explanatory method, as the researcher first begins with qualitative research before progressing to quantitative research. This study adopts a convergent design as it permits for contradictions or incongruent findings to be explained or further probing on completion of analysis.

4.5 Quantitative Approach

The quantitative approach to this study includes “testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables” (Creswell and Creswell 2014: 32). As a result, these variables can be measured, typically on instruments, so that numbered data can be analysed using statistical procedures. Survey research, correlational research, casual comparative research and experimental research are common methodologies in quantitative research. In this study, the survey research methodology is employed as it allows for a “variety of methods to recruit participants and collect data” (Ponto, 2015: 168). In addition, survey research can use quantitative, qualitative or mixed research strategies.

4.5.1 Population

The population of interest is the study’s target population that is intended to be studied (Majid 2018: 3). Hence, every object involved in any type of inquiry constitutes a universe or population (Mishra and Alok 2017: 8). Therefore, the research objective

and scope of the study play a crucial role in defining the target population (Sekaran and Bougie 2016a: 240). The target population for the quantitative element of the study encompasses 80 final-year Retail Management students from a University of Technology in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN), as well as 128 store managers from two of the largest retail organisations headquartered in KZN. The initial target population was the big five retailers based on their regional significance, however, some of the retailers opted not to participate. Nevertheless, the in-depth probing of the participating retailers provides a holistic view of the retail landscape, ensuring that the study objectives are adequately addressed. Students or prospective graduates validate the target population in terms of analysing the role of partnerships in relation to skills relevant to the retail sector. In addition, retail store managers are directly involved in training and skills development within the sector, thus constituting a fundamental element of this study.

4.5.2 Sampling

Igwenagu (2016: 32) indicates that “sampling is concerned with the selection of a subset of individuals from within a defined population”. A sample is selected from the population and findings are generalised or extended back to the population (Korb 2012 para. 4 line 3). Once a decision has been taken on the adoption of sampling for a study, the method of sampling must then be concluded.

4.5.2.1 Sampling Technique

The sampling method is essentially the technique by which the researcher selects the sample (Setia 2016: 1). Two sampling techniques: probability and non-probability are available. “In probability, each sample has an equal probability of being chosen”, and the “non-probability sampling method mostly involves judgement”, whereby participants are selected because they are easy to access (Showkat and Parveen 2017: 3).

As indicated in Table 4.2, non-probability sampling includes convenience, purposive, quota, dimensional and snowball sampling. Convenience sampling may suit studies where participants are most accessible (Majid 2018: 4). On the other hand, simple random, systematic, stratified, cluster and stage sampling are probability sampling techniques. Simple random sampling allows for all prospective participants to be part of a study, whereas stratified random sampling permits divisions among groups and cluster sampling is concluded within subgroups (Majid 2018: 4).

Table 4.2: Probability and Non-probability sampling

Probability Sampling	Non-Probability Sampling
Simple random sampling (SRS)	Convenience Sampling
Systematic sampling	Purposive Sampling
Stratified sampling	Quota Sampling
Cluster sampling	Dimensional Sampling
Stage or multi-stage sampling.	Snowball Sampling

Source: Pace (2021: 3)

A snapshot of this study's sampling strategy is demonstrated in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Snapshot of the study's sampling strategy

PARAMETERS	QUALITATIVE APPROACH	QUANTITATIVE APPROACH
Sampling technique	A non-probability purposive sample technique was selected based on the retailers participating in the study.	A probability-cluster sampling technique was selected for the study.
Sample population	Largest retail organisations that are situated in KZN. General managers and front-line supervisors constitute the population.	Students from a UoT in KZN offering the retail management qualification. Store managers from two of the largest retail organisations headquartered in KZN
Sample size	Two of the largest retail organisations, with the head/support offices in KZN 10 front-line retail supervisors	80 respondents (census) representing the higher education sector. 128 respondents from retail organisations in KZN

Data collection method	Interviews were conducted with the general and/or regional managers from each retail organisation that is responsible for overseeing the KZN region. Focus group interviews were conducted with front-line retail store supervisors.	Questionnaires were administered to students from the higher education institution and store managers in KZN.

4.5.2.2 Sampling Frame

The sampling frame is “a representation of all the elements in the population from which the sample is drawn” (Sekaran and Bougie 2016a: 240). For the quantitative approach, the sampling frame for the student population was the final year class list of retail management students from the relevant department at the UoT. In addition, the area listing for retail stores in KZN constituted the sample frame for the subsequent quantitative element.

4.5.2.3 Sample size

Sample sizes for the study was computed using the Raosoft sample size calculator, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% error margin. The sample size for store managers was calculated based on the sampling technique used to generate the requisite samples. Therefore, for this element of the study, probability sampling was employed, ensuring that all respondents had an equal opportunity of being selected and were representative of the population (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 242). Furthermore, Cluster sampling is one of the efficient methods of random sampling in which the population is first divided into clusters, and then a sample is selected from the clusters randomly (Showkat and Parveen, 2017:6). For every cluster, either all the elements or a sample of the elements are included in the sample (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 246). Area sampling, which consists of geographical areas, is a type of cluster sampling that was applied to this study.

To determine the sample for store managers, retail stores were divided into 21 areas in KZN with each area consisting of multiple stores. A simple random sample of each stratum was conducted and samples were selected. Of 191 stores representing all areas, the sample size was 128. Drawing samples from each stratum ensured that

every retail subgroup or area was appropriately represented. The census sampling technique counts all elements in the population (Sekaran 2016: 237) and was employed for the student population of 80 students.

4.5.3 Research instrument

For the quantitative approach of the study, questionnaires were distributed to store managers and students. A description of the design process for these instruments will be highlighted.

4.5.4 Instrument Design

Instruments for the quantitative element of the study were informed by the discussions reported in the literature chapters. Gaps in the literature were highlighted, thus prompting the development of questionnaire items linked to the study objectives. Pantano, Pizzi and Rogers (2020: 1) reiterate the gaps between what is taught at universities and what companies require. Therefore, the study objectives, incorporating skills, partnership experiences and expectations, were integrated to address these gaps. Of significance to this study is the university-to-work transition, thus contributing a major part to the instrument design. As echoed by Sutherland (2020: 233), there is a significant skills shortage due to the failings of the education system; hence, this study attempts to analyse the role of partnerships to identify the gaps and address the challenges.

“A questionnaire is a pre-formulated written set of questions to which respondents record their answers, usually within rather closely defined alternatives” (Sekaran and Bougie 2013). The design of the questionnaires is used to attain the most relevant data by permitting both restrictive and open responses, thus allowing for a range of responses. The five-point Likert scale was used to gauge information from participants about the restrictive component. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016b: 216), using a Likert scale allows responses over many statements to be analysed item by item.

4.5.5 Measurement and scaling

Measurement of variables is an essential component of research (Sekaran and Bougie 2016a: 193) that can “occur at different levels and the relationship among the values assigned determines the level of measurement” (Matthews 2017: 2). Certain variables lend themselves to easy measurement, while measuring more abstract and subjective attributes such as feelings, emotions attitudes and perceptions is more difficult (Sekaran and Bougie 2016a: 195). The measuring instruments for this study focus on the role of partnerships in terms of the key success factors influencing their sustainability, relevant skills, expectations, experiences and knowledge of stakeholders. For this study, a description of how the constructs were operationalised for the quantitative element of the study is presented in Table 4.4. Success factors, skills, expectations, experiences and knowledge, as well as the number of items for measurement, are provided.

Table 4.4: Description of constructs

Constructs	Authors	Items
Success factors	Pantano, Pizzi and Rogers (2020: 1) and Gorlach (2017)	Sustainability, cooperation, commitment, resources, employment & communication,
Skills	Pantano, Pizzi and Rogers (2020: 1) and Arthur-Mensah (2020)	Training & development, problem-solving, decision-making, customer service, graduate preparedness, university-industry communication & transition and employability
Expectations, experiences & knowledge	Abul-Ola (2016) and Gorlach (2017)	Collaboration, effective partnering, skills development, resources and policies.

On the other hand, “scaling is the process of generating the continuum, a continuous sequence of values, upon which the measured objects are placed” (Taherdoost 2016: 2), allowing for statistical analysis of the resulting data (Sekaran and Bougie 2016a: 206). According to Ghauri, Grønhaug and Strange (2020: 81), the four basic scale types are nominal, ordinal, interval and ratio. Nominal is used for identification purposes; ordinal indicates the rank order of attributes; measurements that have consistent distances between values are intervals and measurements that have an absolute zero point are ratios. For this study, nominal, ordinal and ratio scales were used for the quantitative approach.

4.5.6 Data Analysis

Analysis of data comprises inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and modelling data to highlight useful information, suggest conclusions, and support decision-making. “Data analysis has multiple facets and approaches, encompassing diverse techniques under a variety of names in different business, science, and social science domains” (Vincze 2013: 4). Data for this study was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V27) for the management and analysis of social science data. Furthermore, the data analysis process was completed in consultation with a statistician.

Descriptive statistics (Appendices D, E), which are concerned with the numerical description of a particular group observed (Singh 2006: 224), as well as inferential statistics that help draw conclusions about the population from a sample (Sekaran 2016: 301), were executed for the quantitative element of the study. Measures of frequency, central tendency, dispersion and position are the major types of descriptive statistics (Olayemi 2022: 31). Count, percent and frequency are included in measures of frequency based on how often a response is provided, whereas mean, median and mode are tests for measures of central tendency used to demonstrate an average or most commonly indicated response. Moreover, measures of dispersion consist of range, variance and standard deviation, while measures of position include percentile ranks and quartile ranks (Nasir 2022: 34).

Inferential tests were performed so that inferences could be drawn from the sample population (Creswell 2014: 209) for the study. As a result, cross-tabulation, chi-square tests, factor analysis and regression analysis were executed to determine the relationship between the variables, whereas the independent samples t-test was used to make comparisons between the groups for this study.

4.5.7 Validity and Reliability

In any research project, validity and reliability are of utmost importance and requisites for enhancing the quality of the research. As essential elements of a study, every effort must be made to ensure validity and reliability are addressed appropriately in analysing the usefulness of the study. The “validity and reliability of scores on instruments lead to meaningful interpretations of data” (Creswell and Creswell 2014: 200). Details of how validity and reliability are assured for this study will be provided in the forthcoming section.

“Validity establishes how well a technique, instrument, or process measures a particular concept” (Sekaran and Bougie 2016a: 176). In other words, validity testing in quantitative research investigates how well a survey instrument measures what it aims to measure. There are numerous methods of testing the validity of an instrument, and for this study, the content validity method was used. Using content validity involves testing whether the instrument for the quantitative element of this study covers all the content adequately. The process of content validation involves extracting representative questions/statements from the questionnaires and evaluating them against the desired outcome of the study. For this study, content validity was assessed by synchronising the study constructs with its objectives using both student and store instruments. If the test measured what it claimed to measure consistently, it is valid, which was the case for this study.

Secondly, face validity, which is a sub-category of content validity, was employed, whereby experts were asked for opinions about whether the instrument measured the

intended objectives. A statistician and two experts from the education and retail sectors assessed the face validity of this study. This process aids the researcher in identifying any errors and amending the instrument if required. In addition, factor analysis was conducted to further validate variables and how they relate to one another. The principle component analysis is a common factor extraction method used to analyse the factor loading of variables.

“Reliability is an indicator of the stability of the measured values obtained in repeated measurements under the same circumstances using the same measuring instrument” (Sürücü and Maslakçi 2020: 2695). When measuring reliability, it refers to how accurate the instrument is. Different methods of testing reliability are available, which will be discussed further in this study. To test the reliability of the quantitative element of the study, Cronbach’s alpha test was conducted. Sürücü and Maslakçi (2020: 2713) believe that the most commonly employed research approach to test internal consistency is the determination of the alpha coefficient, and if it is between 0 and 1, it is high.

4.5.8 Pilot Study

To determine the validity and reliability of the study, the piloting of quantitative instruments was conducted before the main data collection, comprising a smaller sample. With recommendations varying between 10 to 12 per group (Lewis 2021: 2), a total of 27 independent participants excluded from the main data collection process participated in the pilot study. “A pilot study is conducted to prevent the occurrence of a fatal flaw in a study that is costly in time and money” (Polit and Beck 2017: 23). The purpose of the pilot study is to ensure that instruments are a valid, reliable and true reflection of the study, with no errors, thus reducing bias. Therefore, a meticulously executed pilot study is not only significant but essential for high research quality (Malmqvist et al. 2019: 1). The instrument reliability of the pilot study is presented in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5: Reliability statistics for the student instrument

Reliability Statistics				
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items		
.967		31		
Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item	Scale Variance if Item	Corrected Item-Total	Cronbach's Alpha if Item
SF1	120.1111	539.861	-.082	.969
SF2	120.0000	529.750	.406	.967
SF3	120.5556	503.028	.785	.965
SF4	119.8889	525.611	.816	.967
SF5	120.6667	481.750	.911	.964
SF6	120.7778	494.944	.844	.965
SF7	121.4444	486.528	.929	.964
Apa1	121.1111	507.111	.778	.965
Apa2	121.3333	493.000	.875	.965
Apa3	120.8889	503.611	.708	.966
Skil1	120.8889	492.111	.790	.965
Skil2	121.0000	505.750	.721	.966
Skil3	121.2222	493.194	.679	.966
Skil4	120.8889	513.611	.439	.968
Skil5	121.2222	504.944	.707	.966
Skil6	120.1111	541.111	-.104	.969
Skil7	120.5556	507.028	.691	.966
Skil8	120.6667	516.250	.601	.966
Skil9	120.6667	485.500	.913	.964
Skil10	120.8889	519.111	.431	.967
Skil11	120.7778	501.444	.928	.965
Exp1	121.4444	511.278	.508	.967
Exp2	120.7778	485.444	.950	.964
Exp3	120.4444	499.528	.843	.965
Exp4	120.6667	504.250	.694	.966
Exp5	120.8889	500.611	.633	.966
Exp6	120.4444	502.278	.779	.965
Exp7	120.7778	485.444	.950	.964
Exp8	120.6667	497.500	.962	.964
Exp9	120.7778	524.694	.214	.969
Exp10	120.7778	485.944	.866	.965

Cronbach's Alpha was applied to all 31 questions on the student instrument. The overall reliability score of all items was determined and the results are indicated in Table 4.5. The overall reliability score of 0.967 indicated a high level of reliability for partnership expectations, experiences and skills. George and Mallery (2003) and Hair et al. (2016) provide a general rule of thumb, if $\alpha > 0.9$, it indicates an excellent level of reliability, while 0.7 is good and 0.6 is acceptable (Field 2018).

Table 4.6: Reliability statistics for the store instrument

Reliability Statistics				
Cronbach's Alpha		N of Items		
.732		44		
Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
EE1	186.5000	100.000	-.358	.745
EE2	186.7500	89.000	.358	.719
EE3	186.5000	94.133	.221	.728
EE5	186.4375	93.996	.233	.728
EE6	186.5000	95.333	.100	.732
EE7	186.6875	85.296	.748	.701
EE8	186.4375	95.196	.112	.731
EE9	186.3125	97.429	-.110	.738
EE10	186.4375	96.129	-.030	.743
EE11	186.7500	95.267	.019	.739
EE12	186.3125	97.829	-.150	.739
SF1	186.7500	86.200	.706	.704
SF2	186.8125	84.296	.521	.706
SF3	186.2500	95.533	.089	.732
SF4	186.6250	87.183	.443	.713
SF5	186.7500	94.333	.068	.736
SF7	186.3750	90.517	.597	.716
SF8	186.6875	83.163	.682	.698
Skill1	186.6875	99.962	-.256	.749
Skill2	186.3750	93.717	.141	.731
Skill3	186.5625	95.463	.062	.733
Skill4	186.8750	96.383	-.019	.737
Skill5	186.6250	94.783	.170	.730

Skill6	186.6250	97.583	-.101	.744
Skill7	186.8125	101.363	-.295	.756
Skill8	186.5625	91.196	.273	.724
Skill9	187.1250	85.450	.382	.716
Skill10	186.7500	99.000	-.249	.743
Skill11	186.6250	97.850	-.157	.739
Skill12	186.4375	95.329	.070	.733
Skill13	186.6875	85.963	.520	.709
Skill14	186.5625	85.729	.684	.704
Skill15	186.5625	99.463	-.263	.745
Skill16	186.5000	100.800	-.434	.748
Skill17	186.3125	95.429	.094	.732
Barrier1	186.5000	85.600	.686	.703
Barrier2	186.7500	85.533	.449	.711
Barrier3	186.5000	94.000	.235	.728
Barrier4	186.7500	85.000	.588	.705
Barrier5	186.5000	100.800	-.434	.748
PF1	186.5625	99.063	-.273	.743
PF2	186.8750	81.583	.843	.690
PF4	186.6250	95.050	.059	.735
PF5	186.6875	81.563	.638	.697

To verify the reliability of the store instrument, Cronbach's alpha test was conducted on 44 relevant questions yielding an overall reliability score of 0.732, indicating an acceptable level of reliability. Generally, if a result > 0.7 is achieved, it demonstrates that the level of reliability is within the acceptable range (George and Mallery 2003). Results are shown in Table 4.6.

Table 4.7: Validity statistics for the student instrument

Factor AVE and Correlation Measures												
Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
B. Success	-.924	0.629	0.903	0.954	0.815	0.671	0.792					0.674
C. Partnership	0.759	0.786	0.614									0.524
D. Skills	0.708	0.715	0.50	0.920	-0.674	0.792	0.935	0.719	0.900	.852	.906	0.631
E. Expectations	0.829	0.933	0.878	0.836	0.866	0.872	0.933	0.889	0.918	0.800		0.768

Table 4.8: Validity statistics for the store instrument

Factor AVE and Correlation Measures																	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
B. Expectations		-0.877		0.873	-0.855		0.883	-0.870	0.861	0.885	-0.877	0.860					0.760
C. success	0.890	0.711	0.580	0.577	0.726	-0.614	0.523	0.794									0.523
D. Skills	0.768	0.626	0.580	0.666	0.578	0.558	0.760			0.810	0.667	0.630	0.648	0.889		0.630	0.678
E. Barriers	0.688	0.647	0.525	0.738													0.428
F. Partnership	-0.538	0.826	0.908	0.616	0.790												0.520

Results of the student and store instruments in Tables 4.7 and 4.8, respectively, indicate that average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than 0,50, thus convergent validity is acceptable. As demonstrated for the store instrument, the value of AVE for expectations is (0.76), success is (0.52) and skills are (0.67), thus all ranging above the adequate level. As reiterated by Carlson and Herdman (2012: 1), 0,70 is recommended, whereas those below 0,50 should be avoided. Therefore, barriers that indicate a value of (0.42) were removed as they will reduce validity. These items were

included as supplementary items and would not adversely impact the final results of the study.

4.6 Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach to this study involves case study research to analyse partnerships between the education and retail sectors by interviewing general and/or regional managers. As stated by Krusenvik (2016: 9), the benefits associated with using case study methods are that they are “grounded in and applicable to real-life, contemporary human situations and provide in-depth relevant data”, hence deemed appropriate for this study. Qualitative methods can be used to understand the meaning of numbers obtained from quantitative research, of which experimental and simulation are categorised as quantitative (Locharoenrat 2017: 96). These methods include “narrative research, phenomenological methods, grounded theory, ethnography and case study research” (Creswell and Creswell 2014: 42).

4.6.1 Population

The target population for the qualitative aspect of the study comprised large retail organisations in KZN, with specific reference to supermarket chains, consisting of either corporate, franchise or local store types. These organisations, as key sectors in the economy, justify the role of partnerships as the focus of this study. Two general and/or regional managers, in upper management who are largely responsible for decision-making for all stores are incorporated into the qualitative component of the study through interviews. These managers represent their retail organisations holistically in KZN, providing an all-encompassing viewpoint in terms of their pivotal role which includes overseeing the smooth operations within the organisation. Consequently, using mixed methods allows one to examine different aspects of a research question, with fuller and richer information being obtained (Schoonenboom and Johnson 2017: 6).

4.6.2 Sampling

The sampling method for the qualitative element of the study is non-probability purposive sampling to ensure the selected sample provides relevant data for the study. The inclusion criteria for the qualitative component encompassed managers who possessed at least 5 years of cumulative experience in the retail industry. Furthermore, it was required that they occupied senior management positions, signifying a verifiable leadership record. The criteria were important to ensure that suitable managers presented a depth of experience and leadership acumen. Conversely, the exclusion criteria included managers who had not actively participated in operational planning and management roles within the organisation. Additionally, managers with limited retail experience were also excluded based on the criteria.

4.6.2.1 Sampling Technique

When sampling is confined to specific types of people who can provide the desired information due to conforming to some criteria, it is known as purposive sampling (Sekaran 2016: 248). Purposive sampling was employed to select retail general and/or regional managers, as well as front line supervisors who may provide comprehensive responses of their experiences within the organisation.

4.6.2.2 Sample Size

The sample size for the qualitative component of the study comprised two general/regional managers, each holistically representing their retail organisations. In addition, focus group interviews included 10 front line retail supervisors based on their expertise within the retail environment, allowing for depth of understanding rather than breadth (Boddy 2016: 430) for the study. For this component of the study, data saturation was achieved, meaning that the data collected reached a point of thematic redundancy. The comprehensive analysis of interviews and focus group interviews revealed saturation after intense engagement with the participants affirming the richness of the data collected, thus providing a foundation for encouraging conclusions.

4.6.3 Research instrument

The qualitative element of the study comprised semi-structured interviews with General and/or Regional Managers of retail organisations. Sekaran and Bougie (2016b: 248) state that it sometimes becomes necessary to obtain information from specific groups, either because they are the only ones who have it or because they conform to some criteria set by the researcher. Social research is reliant on the interview as a method of gathering information (King, Horrocks and Brooks 2018: 124). The next section will discuss the instrument design for the study.

4.6.4 Instrument design

The qualitative instrument for this study was based on items developed by Abul-Ola (2016) and Flynn (2015). Moreover, additional questions were informed by the debates reported on in Chapters 2 and 3, including the theoretical framework as a foundation for the qualitative instrument design. The development of the interview schedule for general and/or regional managers was informed by the need to gather robust data pertaining to the link between education and the retail sectors in terms of the role, expectations and sustainability of partnerships. The interview schedule (Appendix F) comprised twenty-one (21) open-ended questions to provide an array of responses, adding depth to the study.

There is a range of interview formats where semi-structured interviews are becoming increasingly prevalent (McGrath, Palmgren and Liljedahl 2019: 1002). On the other hand, structured interviews give more in-depth information about specific variables of interest, and unstructured interviews are usually conducted to obtain definite ideas about what is and is not (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 123). Thus, “the use of interviews enables the researcher to explore issues with participants through encouraging depth and rigour”, contributing to the richness of the data (Doody and Noonan 2013: 2). The semi-structured interview is more powerful as it allows for the acquisition of in-depth information as well as being flexible and adaptable (Ruslin et al. 2022: 29), thus it was adopted for this study.

4.6.5 Measurement

Qualitative research focuses on understanding a research query as a humanistic or idealistic approach used to comprehend people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behaviour and interactions (Pathak, Jena and Kalra 2013: 1). According to Davey et al. (2010: 142), measurement is an indispensable aspect of research, and measurement occurs during the coding process for qualitative research. Therefore, the qualitative measurement for this study involved using semi-structured interviews, which were informed by literature with items incorporated from Abul-Ola (2016) and Flynn (2015).

4.6.6 Data Analysis

The coding of qualitative data is vital to determining a deeper understanding of the data set. Thus, data analysis for the qualitative element of the study was presented in the form of a thematic analysis. Interviews were recorded on a password-protected device to keep the participants anonymous and the confidential information safe. The study's data transcript was arranged into themes and subsequently analysed using thematic analysis to conclude the data analysis.

"Thematic analysis is a divergent, compatible and much more flexible research tool as compared to the other qualitative techniques that help create a richly detailed as well as complex account of the data set" (Majumdar 2022: 198). It is a flexible and robust method that can help develop insights into complex phenomena. When engaging in thematic analysis, themes can be identified regardless of how frequently an idea or item linked to that theme appears in the data set (Kiger et al. 2020: 3).

An inductive or deductive approach to theme identification can be employed. An inductive approach derives themes from the data, whereas a deductive approach uses pre-existing theories or frameworks to identify themes (Kiger et al. 2020: 3). For this study, a combination of inductive and deductive approaches was deemed appropriate, as inductive approaches tend to provide a broader, more expansive analysis of the

entire body of data, while deductive approaches are useful for honing in on a particular aspect of data. The coding process will be presented in the next section.

4.6.6.1 Coding

Microsoft Office Suite software was used to organise, code and analyse the data from the two participating organisations. The two general/regional/divisional managers were interviewed, each making a holistic representation of their retail organisation. The findings of the coding process revealed that the identified elements were influenced by each of the managers' experiences, job specifications, as well as structures of their relevant organisations. In addition, although both organisations are classified as retail organisations, each has its own approach in terms of its operations and functions. The subsequent sections will present the coding process and the findings for the qualitative component of the study.

4.6.6.2 Open coding

The process of assigning a code or breaking data into discrete parts (Delve 2022) to represent a concept shown in the data, known as open coding, was used as the coding process for qualitative data. Open coding is the first level of coding that is organised by creating initial broad thematic domains for data assemblage (Williams 2019: 48).

4.6.6.2.1 Axial coding

The next step in the coding process involved axial coding, where connections were drawn from the open coding. This type of coding helps elucidate patterns, connections and structures between or within sub-categories (Mende 2022: 344), which was applied to this study.

4.6.6.2.2 Selective coding

This process involved connecting all the categories from the axle coding step into one core category. This core category represents the central focus area in this research by organising other concepts identified (Li and Zhang 2022: 3).

4.6.7 Trustworthiness and Credibility

While qualitative research is a valued paradigm, it requires rigorous methods to create useful results, as well as sophisticated tools for conducting trustworthy research (Nowell et al. 2017: 1). Studies are trustworthy only if readers of the research report judge them to be so (Espedal et al. 2022). Guba and Lincoln (1994) state that trustworthiness is further divided into credibility, dependability, transferability and confirmability. To ensure credibility for this study, triangulation, which is often associated with mixed methods (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 106) is employed.

Method triangulation employs various data collection methods and analysis, whereas data triangulation involves collecting data from several sources and/or at different periods (Sekaran and Bougie 2016b: 106). On the other hand, researcher triangulation includes multiple researchers collecting and/or analysing the data and theory triangulation includes multiple theories and/or perspectives used to interpret and explain the data.

Triangulation, comprising different data collection methods, was deemed suitable for this study. In addition to questionnaires and interviews, focus group discussions consisting of front-line/floor supervisors that occupy key, all-encompassing positions within the retail sector were included as a technique to triangulate the study. Using focus group discussions with a view to “triangulation does more than simply make the data more complete; it also affords a better understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Caillaud and Flick 2017: 155). Triangulation approaches provide rich data to analyse the various perspectives concerning the skills gap and potential partnerships in this study. Its objective is to increase confidence in the findings, as the combination

of findings from two or more rigorous approaches may provide a comprehensive picture of the results (Heale and Forbes 2013: 98). This allows the researcher to corroborate and support the results (Bentahar and Cameron 2015: 6).

In addition to ensuring the study's credibility, other measures of trustworthiness was incorporated, including dependability, transferability and confirmability. Dependability for the study included process logs of activities that impacted the study, leading to the robustness of the selection of managers. This process encompassed sourcing of the most relevant managers for the study by engaging with retail representatives through e-mails, telephone calls and meetings. The selection criteria for managers were determined by elements such as experience, expertise and relevance, aiming to contribute to the overall dependability of the study, thus providing a trustworthy foundation for insightful exploration of the requested information. It must be emphasised that managers surpassed expectations by furnishing additional information than was required. The methodology of the study and the research documentation throughout the study was designed to enhance the transferability of its findings to other research with similar populations and contexts. Confirmability for the study was ensured by maintaining detailed records of each step of the interview process from the selection phase of managers to the data analysis phase. External persons, including a statistician conducted a review of the interview notes and transcripts, serving as a precautionary measure against potential biases originating solely from the researcher.

4.6.8 Pilot study

Pilot studies are commonly associated with a quantitative approach to testing a research instrument; however, the importance of pilot work has also been expanded to include qualitative inquiries (Majid et al. 2017: 1074). Therefore, the interview schedule for the study was piloted to identify any flaws or restrictions that may be present. Two independent managers from similar organisations were interviewed to determine likely misunderstandings, participant suitability and whether amendments to the instrument were required. It was noted that no amendments were required and

results of the pilot study remained independent from the main study. According to Malmqvist et al. (2019: 1), “a carefully organised and managed pilot study has the potential to increase the quality of the research, as results from such studies can inform subsequent parts of the research process”.

4.7 Fieldwork execution

The process of executing fieldwork is a key stage during the research journey. For this study, primary data was obtained first-hand by the researcher on the variables of interest comprising questionnaires and interviews. Surveys were used for the quantitative aspect of the study, consisting of self-administered questionnaires. Questionnaires were distributed electronically to store participants who preferred no contact due to the global pandemic. In addition, questionnaires were distributed to specific participants through appointments in stores and collected immediately after completion or a short period was granted before collection.

Questionnaires were forwarded electronically to the second group of participants, encompassing higher education students. Two weeks were permitted for completion, followed by a reminder. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016b: 143), the distribution of electronic questionnaires is easy and fast, but it can also be disadvantageous with low response rates, making it difficult to generalise the findings. The MS-Teams softphone feature, or voice-over-internet protocol (VoIP) was considered as an alternate collection method. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews were used for the qualitative element of the study, encouraging depth and rigour (Doody and Noonan 2013: 2). Interviews were available as face-to-face or electronic options to accommodate participants. All participants were notified of the study background, aims and objectives during the informed consent process. Lastly, on-site and/or electronic focus group interviews were conducted with a group of front-line/floor supervisors as a means of triangulating the study.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethics in research refers to when one starts research and follows the rules and regulations (Sarker 2019: 1). Thus, for this study, all protocols were observed. Rule and John (2011) state that researching in an ethically sound manner will enhance the quality of the research, contributing to its trustworthiness as ethical relationships and practices are key aspects. Throughout this study, the researcher ensured that all regulations were complied with, in line with the Institutional Ethics regulations. Gatekeeper consents (Appendices L, M, N, O and P). were secured from all relevant parties who either authorised the study or participated in it. These permissions were received before the commencement of data collection, and voluntary participation was emphasised, as participants should have a full understanding of what being involved in research will entail (Goodwin, Mays and Pope 2020: 30). Respect for persons requires that the research subjects freely participate in research after informed consent (Bitter et al. 2020: 2). Participants were informed that anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained throughout the process. As reiterated by Creswell and Creswell (2014: 139) steps must be taken to avoid disclosing information that would harm participants.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter highlighted the research methodology employed in the study. The research design, paradigm, approach and sampling techniques were presented. In addition, the research instrument design, fieldwork execution, measurement, scaling and data analysis for the study were provided. The chapter concluded with measures implemented to ensure validity and reliability, as well as an account of the ethics of the study. The next chapter will present the analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the research methodology employed in this study. This chapter presents the findings for the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study. In addition, graphs and tables have been used to present the information. Data for the quantitative component of the study was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27 software. Moreover, Microsoft Office Suite software was used to organise, code and analyse the data for the qualitative component of the study.

5.2 Findings of the quantitative study

Descriptive and inferential statistics, including cross-tabulation and chi-square tests, were used to analyse the data.

5.2.1 Sectional analysis for student responses

This section presents the scoring patterns per variable for the student population. For explanation purposes, the levels of agreement (positive responses) and disagreement (negative responses) were collapsed into a single category of “agree” and “disagree”, respectively. The research instrument comprised six sections as displayed in Appendix I.

5.2.1.1 *Response rate*

As demonstrated in Table 5.1, a response rate of 83 % was achieved for the student population. According to Baruch (2008), a response rate of at least 70 % is adequate to prevent bias based on responses, thus the response rate is acceptable for this study.

Table 5.1: Response Rate

Respondents	Projected sample	Actual sample	Response rate
Student	80	66	83 %

5.2.1.2 Demographic Profile of respondents

The demographic profiles of the respondents as displayed in Table 5.2, indicate the variables used in the study. Age, gender, race, residence and academic advice constituted the variables for this component of the study. Sixty-one percent of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 22, indicating that the majority of respondents enrolled in tertiary education upon completion of schooling or soon thereafter. Thirty-three percent and 6.1 % of the respondents were between the ages of 23 and 27, and 28 and 32, respectively.

Forty-seven percent of the respondents were male and 53 % were female as indicated in Table 5.2, signifying that the gender distribution was closely correlated. The race profile of the respondents was 97 % African, 1.5 % White and 1.5 % Indian. The dissimilarities in terms of the race profile stem from the study being undertaken in the KwaZulu-Natal Province where the majority of the population is African.

In terms of respondents' residences, 53 % were housed within the university campus, which constituted the majority of the sample. 6.1 % resided outside the university campus, 34.8 % resided at home (personal) and 6.1 % boarded privately.

With regards to whether students received academic advice at school about post-school decisions, 40.9 % indicated that they did, whereas 59.1 % pointed out that no advice was provided. An overwhelming 98.5 % of students stated that they intended to further their studies and 1.5 % indicated that they had no intention of studying further.

Table 5.2: Demographic Profile of respondents (students)

Demographics	n=	Percentage		Cumulative Percentage
Age				
18-22	40	60.6		60.6
23-27	22	33.3		93.9
28-32	4	6.1		100
Gender				
Male	31	47		47
Female	35	53		100
Race				
African	64	97		97
White	1	1.5		98.5
Indian	1	1.5		100
Coloured	0	0		0
Other	0	0		0
Residence				
University residence (within campus)	35	53		53
University residence (outside campus)	4	6.1		59.1
Personal (home)	23	34.8		93.9
Boarding (private accommodation)	4	6.1		100
Academic advice				
Yes	27	40.9		40.9
No	39	59.1		100
Furthering studies				
Yes	65	98.5		98.5
No	1	1.5		100

5.2.1.3 Sustainability of partnerships

With regards to the respondents' perception of whether proper systems will ensure partnership sustainability, Table 5.3 indicates that 90.9 % felt that the sustainability of partnerships will be guaranteed if systems are in place, whereas 9.1 % were unsure. This indicates a positive outlook for prospective partnerships if suitable structures are secured.

Table 5.3: Sustainability of partnerships

Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Total	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
26	39.4 %	34	51.5 %	6	9.1 %	66	100

5.2.1.4 Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership

In terms of partnership contracts between organisations, 95.5 % of respondents were in agreement that the formalisation of activities within the partnership is an absolute necessity, whereas 4.5 % remained neutral, as demonstrated in Table 5.4. This is closely related to the response above on the requirements of having proper systems in place.

Table 5.4: Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure

Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Total	
N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
25	37.9 %	38	57.6 %	3	4.5 %	66	100

5.2.1.5 Status of qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work collectively

As reported in Table 5.5, the majority of the respondents (97.0 %) believed that the status of qualifications at educational institutions would improve due to affiliations with other organisations. The minority of respondents (3.0 %) were undecided on whether the qualification statuses would be affected.

Table 5.5: The status of qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work collectively

Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Total	
n	%	N	%	n	%	N	%
30	45.5 %	34	51.5 %	2	3.0 %	66	100

5.2.1.6 *Commitment, respect, trust, support, communication, resolving conflict and adequate resources contribute to partnership sustainability*

This section presents the findings relating to soft skills, resources and conflict as some of the factors relating to sustaining a partnership.

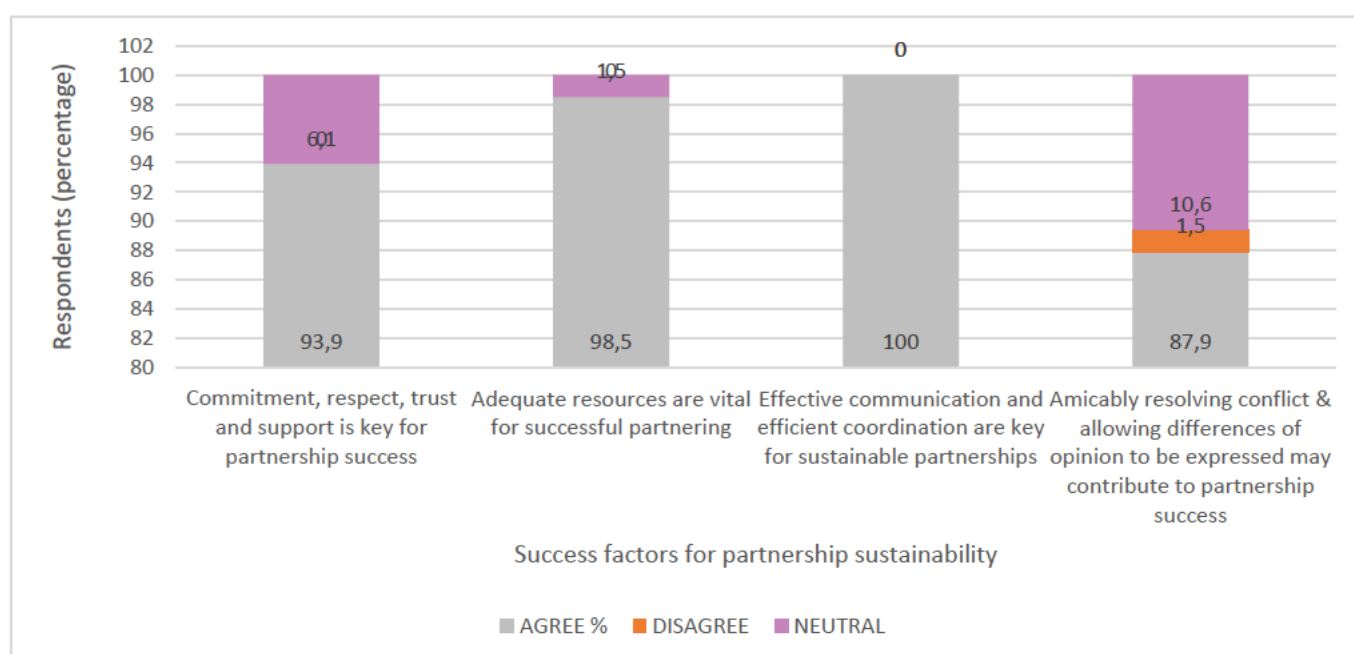


Figure 5.1: Success Factors for partnership sustainability

As indicated in Figure 5.1, 93.9 % and 100 % of respondents agreed, respectively that commitment, respect, trust and support, as well as communication and coordination, were pertinent in a partnership. Ninety-nine percent of respondents believed strongly that resources within a partnership are key to ensuring successful operations, as

demonstrated in Figure 5.1. Besides, partnerships enable participating organisations to reap reciprocal benefits in terms of resources and competencies. Resources may include machinery/equipment, human resources, financial resources and physical office space. In contrast, 1.5 % of the respondents were unsure of how resources would contribute to successful partnerships.

Every affiliation has its challenges and therefore being able to resolve conflicts is important. Thus, 87.9 % were of the opinion that amicably resolving conflict as well as allowing differences of opinion to be expressed may contribute to success in a partnership. On the contrary, a minor number of respondents (1.5 %) were of the perception that these factors do not contribute to partnership success. Eleven percent of the respondents were uncertain if conflict resolutions or expressing opinions would play a role in sustaining partnerships.

With regards to the open responses, respondents believed that having mutual understanding, open communication, supportive partners, trust, commitment and cohesive relationships will most certainly contribute positively towards sustaining a partnership. Additionally, having clear guidelines, time management and leadership for collaboration purposes will add value to the partnership. These elements will ensure a smooth transition from university to the working world for graduates with positive stakeholder cohesion. Students would have a broader knowledge base in terms of current trends in the retail industry, thus leading to improved employment opportunities due to being equipped with in-demand skills. Through partnerships, students can establish meaningful connections that may lead to job offers, as well as foster a culture of innovation and creativity.

5.2.1.7 *Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements*

Table 5.6 depicts the results in terms of industry exposure that students may or may not have had during their university formal programmes. A small number of respondents (6.1 %) indicated that they had no exposure to industry in any way,

whereas 66.7 % of respondents were in agreement that they had some sort of exposure. However, 27.3 % of respondents were uncertain as to what constituted exposure to industry. This could be directly linked to the global pandemic that affected on-site activities, thus impacting the formal programme.

Table 5.6: Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements

Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Total	
N	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
11	16.7 %	33	50.0 %	18	27.3 %	4	6.1	66	100

5.2.1.8 Framework for effective collaboration

This section provides the findings relating to the necessity of a framework for partnerships in terms of a support structure for collaboration. Respondents were asked if they believed that a framework could assist in the partnership process and if it was indeed essential. As indicated in Figure 5.2, the majority of the respondents (86.4 %) believed that if an existing framework is available or a new framework is introduced, it would aid in guiding the activities within the partnership. Additionally, 90.9 % of the respondents agreed that any partnership requires some sort of support structure to be successful. On the other hand, 13.6 % of the respondents were uncertain as to whether a framework would be beneficial in guiding the partnership process or whether a support structure was a necessity within a partnership. This could be attributed to respondents not being familiar with the concept.

The results as depicted in Figure 5.2, indicate that 92.4 % of the respondents were of the perception that if a specific structure was in place, it could contribute to reducing the skills gap between universities and retail organisations. This refers to dialogues between stakeholders in terms of what is taught at universities and what is required by the retail sector. Eight percent of the respondents were unsure if this could be a contributing factor. Similarly, a large number of respondents (93.9 %) were confident

that a framework may improve the transition from universities to the business environment. 6.1 % of the respondents remained uncertain if a framework could contribute positively to this process.

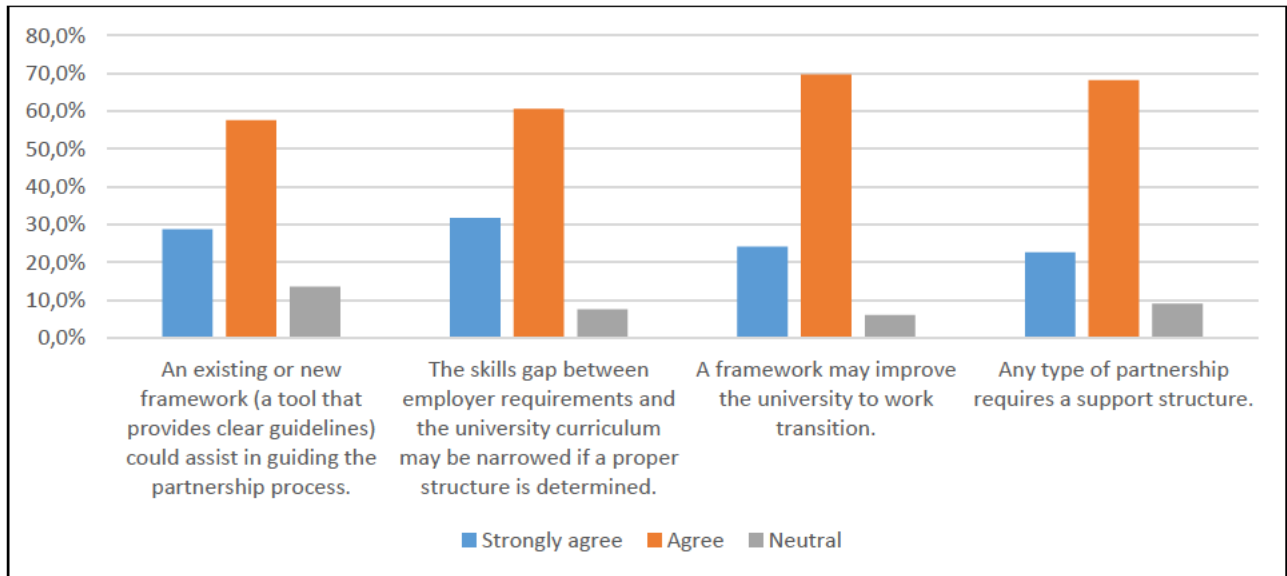


Figure 5.2: Framework for effective collaboration

5.2.1.9 Skills that are deemed relevant

This section will provide the results based on student responses to skills that they perceived as being relevant to the retail sector. It includes all the items relating to the impact of skills as well as training and the effect it has on the future of the graduates.

Table 5.7: Skills that are deemed relevant

No.	Questions	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %
D1	The current structure of the qualification in terms of industry requirements is adequate.	4	6.1%	34	51.1%	21	31.8%	7	10.6%	0	0
D2	Practical work-based training is a compulsory requirement of the qualification.	1	1.5%	23	34.8%	25	37.9%	16	24.2%	1	1.5%
D3	Skills imparted at university are relevant and adequate, hence graduates are prepared to enter the workforce.	27	40.9%	22	33.3%	17	25.8%	0	0	0	0
D4	Skills imparted are easy to comprehend and interesting.	42	63.6%	19	28.8%	5	7.6%	0	0	0	0
D5	Materials provided help create a better understanding of the retail sector.	5	7.6%	54	81.8%	4	6.1%	3	4.5%	0	0
D6	Skills accumulated prepare one to undertake virtually any retail position.	2	3.0%	31	47.0%	24	36.4%	9	13.6%	0	0
D7	Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices.	27	40.9%	33	50.0%	6	9.1%	0	0	0	0
D8	Retail graduates face difficulties transitioning from university to the labour market due to certain gaps in skills.	25	37.9%	38	57.6%	3	4.5%	0	0	0	0
D9	Customer service, communication and problem-solving are pertinent in the retail sector.	22	33.3%	41	62.1%	3	4.5%	0	0	0	0
D10	Educational institutions and industries should liaise to create and maintain a relationship to promote employability.	26	39.4%	39	59.1%	1	1.5%	0	0	0	0
D11	Retail graduates will have promising career opportunities.	1	1.5%	32	48.5%	17	25.8%	15	22.7%	1	1.5%
D12	Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships.	21	31.8%	41	62.1%	4	6.1%	0	0	0	0

As shown in Table 5.7, a small percentage of the respondents (10.6 %) disagreed that the current qualification in relation to what the industry requires is adequate, whereas 31.8 % remained neutral and 57.2 % agreed. Respondents were asked if practical

training was a compulsory requirement within the qualification. The responses varied, with 36.3 % of the respondents agreeing that work-based training is compulsory, 37.9 % of the respondents remaining neutral and 24.2 % disagreeing. The results may indicate that either, respondents were not exposed to training or remained uncertain.

With regards to skills imparted at university, 74.2 % were certain that graduates would be prepared to enter the world of work due to the preparedness by universities, whereas 25.8 % were unsure that the current skills taught at university were relevant or adequate. As a result of this item, 92.4 % believed that skills imparted at universities were simple to understand; however, 7.6 % were unsure if this was the case. The latter figures indicate that respondents may not have engaged with the content adequately to be able to decipher whether the skills were interesting. A high response rate of 89.4 % was noted, whereby students felt that learning material creates an understanding of the retail sector. A small number of respondents (6.1 % and 4.5 %) were unsure or disagreed, respectively that this was the case. Respondents were asked whether skills acquired at university prepared them to undertake retail positions. Only half of the respondents (50.0 %) were in agreement that they were sufficiently prepared for any retail position. 36.4 % of the respondents were unsure and 13.6 % disagreed that the skills they were exposed to would be appropriate in the workplace. The results indicate that even though the skills imparted at universities seemed interesting and the materials distributed supported learning, respondents were sceptical about how these skills would be of benefit in the working world.

As shown in Table 5.7, 90.9 % of respondents believed that retail experts would be of huge benefit if they conducted retail lectures from a retail/practical point of view. 9.1 % of the respondents decided to remain neutral. The majority of the respondents are certain that having retail experts in a class would mean real exposure to the retail industry. Interestingly, 95.5 % of the respondents agreed that they, as future graduates, will most certainly encounter challenges when entering the labour market, whereas 4.5 % of the respondents were unsure. This links closely to having retail experts at universities to ensure the most relevant knowledge is imparted.

The majority of the respondents (95.4 %) felt strongly that customer service, communication and problem-solving were pertinent in the retail industry as it is indicative of the industry type. On the other hand, 4.5 % of the respondents were uncertain that these elements were instrumental in the sector. There was an overwhelming agreement among respondents (94.2 %), indicating that they believed skills are imparted due to partnerships. These skills are considered valuable, denoting a positive future impact. 6.1 % of the respondents were uncertain.

As shown in Table 5.7, 98.5 % of the respondents indicated that they felt strongly about the partnership, specifically for purposes of employability. A small percentage (1.5 %) of respondents was unsure if partnerships would have an impact on employability. Respondents were asked what their thoughts were on retail graduates having promising career opportunities. Fifty percent of respondents were of the opinion that, as graduates, they would have good career opportunities. Twenty-six were uncertain and 24.2 % disagreed that they would be successful in the working world.

5.2.1.10 *Expectations, experiences and knowledge regarding partnerships*

This section discusses the results with regard to students' expectations, experiences and knowledge in terms of building and strengthening partnerships. The responses from the open-ended segment indicate that respondents believed that enhanced learning opportunities will be created, improvements in terms of the curriculum will follow and a narrowing of the skills gap will ensue. Furthermore, partnerships will create opportunities to network, access real-world experiences and build interpersonal and other skills.

Table 5.8: Expectations, experiences and knowledge regarding partnerships

Expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.											
No.	Questions	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %
E1	Lecturing is effective and collaborative efforts are possible.	5	7.6%	45	68.2%	13	19.7%	3	4.5%	0	0
E2	Students are prepared for the world of work.	16	24.2%	31	47.0%	18	27.3%	1	1.5%	0	0
E3	Structured collaborative initiatives are important for partnerships	18	27.3%	46	69.7%	2	3.0%	0	0	0	0
E4	Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning.	25	37.9%	40	60.6%	1	1.5%	0	0	0	0
E5	There are existing partnerships with local or other retailers.	3	4.5%	38	57.6%	19	28.8%	6	9.1%	0	0
E6	Partnering enhances the development of new skills.	22	33.3%	39	59.1%	5	7.6%	0	0	0	0
E7	Partnering develops university's ability to address important issues about employment.	28	42.4%	34	51.5%	4	6.1%	0	0	0	0
E8	Partnering allows for the development of valuable relationships between collaborating parties.	18	27.3%	45	68.2%	3	4.5%	0	0	0	0
E9	Partnerships may contribute to bridging gaps between knowledge and expertise.	25	37.9%	37	56.1%	4	6.1%	0	0	0	0
E10	Partnering organisations may have a greater impact working collaboratively, as opposed to operating solely.	21	31.8%	42	63.6%	3	4.5%	0	0	0	0
E11	Partnering facilitates the acquisition of additional financial support.	14	21.2%	42	63.6%	10	15.2%	0	0	0	0

As indicated in Table 5.8, the majority of the respondents (75.8 %) believed that lecturing within the qualification was effective, thus there was a possibility of future collaborative activities. Additionally, it is of concern that 24.2 % of the respondents were either unsure or disagreed that lecturing was effective and perhaps collaborative efforts were not an option. Also, 71.2 % of the respondents believed that students were indeed equipped for the work environment based on university preparedness.

However, 1.5 % and 27.3 % of the respondents were uncertain or did not agree that students were adequately prepared for the world of work.

A significantly high number of respondents (97 %) were of the opinion that structured initiatives between stakeholders in a partnership are important, whereas 3 % of the respondents were unsure if this was a vital factor. This would suggest that stakeholders who work collectively may contribute to a well-run partnership. Hence, partnerships can result in both “intangible and tangible value” when correctly established, managed and governed (Batti 2019: 21). The results in Table 5.8 indicate that 98.5 % of the respondents strongly agree that external organisations partnering with educational institutions may contribute to the advancement of learning. On the other hand, a small percentage (1.5 %) of respondents were not sure if this would be the case.

Respondents were asked if they were aware of existing partnerships. Sixty-two percent of the respondents believed that there were partnerships with locals/retailers. This could be based on the student's interpretation or misinterpretation of the concept of partnerships. In contrast, 28.8 % were uncertain and 9.1 % disagreed that any partnerships existed. The results to the question of whether partnering enhances the development of new skills yielded a considerably high response of 92.4 % and 7.6 % of the respondents decided to remain neutral.

As indicated in Table 5.8, the majority of the respondents (93.9 %) were convinced that if educational institutions partnered with organisations, they would be in a position to address employment-associated issues, as the youth struggle to obtain employment due to the absence of work experience (Zama 2022: 12). A rather small percentage of respondents (6.1 %) were either uncertain or not convinced that this is the case. When respondents were asked if partnering allows for the development of valuable relationships between collaborating parties, it was noted that a large percentage of

respondents (95.5 %) believed that relationships would be developed through partnerships, whereas 4.5 % were unsure of this.

With regards to whether partnerships would contribute to bridging gaps between knowledge and expertise, the results indicate that 94 % of the respondents were convinced that this was the case. Furthermore, it would be a contributing factor to employment opportunities for the future workforce. On the other hand, a small number of the respondents (6.1 %) were uncertain if this association would lead to gaps being addressed. Respondents were asked what their thoughts were on the notion of partnering organisations having a greater impact when working collaboratively as opposed to working alone. The results indicated that an overwhelming 95.4 % of respondents believed that organisations that do decide to partner may indeed make a greater impact if they work together as opposed to working alone. The remaining 4.5 % were uncertain if working together would have a significant impact.

Finally, respondents were asked if they thought that partnering facilitates the acquisition of additional financial support. 84.8 % of the respondents were satisfied that financial support would be provided to the organisations. The remaining 15.2 % of respondents were unsure if this would be the case. To conclude this section, open responses by the students were perceived as negative in terms of financial challenges, technological advancements, destructive people, lack of training, universities' lack of retail knowledge, communication, poor time management, no cooperation, mismanagement of resources, lack of understanding, lack of teamwork and not maintaining the relationship.

5.2.2 Sectional analysis for store responses

This section presents the scoring patterns per variable for the store population. For explanation purposes, the levels of agreement (positive responses) and disagreement (negative responses) were collapsed into a single category of “agree” and “disagree”,

respectively. The research instrument consisted of seven sections as displayed in Appendix H.

5.2.2.1 Response rate

As highlighted in Table 5.9, a response rate of 80 % was achieved for the store manager population. As previously mentioned, a 70 % response rate is adequate (Baruch 2008) to prevent bias based on responses, thus the response rate is acceptable for this study.

Table 5.9: Response rate

Respondents	Projected sample	Actual sample	Response rate
Store managers	128	102	80 %

5.2.2.2 Demographic Profile of respondents

The subsequent sections will provide all the results pertaining to the store manager population for the study, commencing with the demographic analysis.

As presented in Table 5.10, the demographic profile of the store managers as well as the variables for the study comprising age, gender, race, experience, store type and education are shown. Six percent of the respondents were between the ages of 21 and 30, 40.02 % were between 31 and 40, 48.04 % were between the ages of 41 and 50 and 5.88 % were between 51 and 60 years of age.

Seventy-eight percent of the respondents were male and 22.5 % were female, demonstrating that the retail industry is still male-dominated. Thirty-eight percent of the respondents were African, 39.2 % Indian, 17.6 % White and 4.9 % Coloured. The

percentage split is fairly similar for the African and Indian race categories, which constituted over 70 % for this study.

The number of years of experience was 9.8 % for the category of 1–6 years, 26.5 % for 7–12, 40.2 % for 13–18, 11.8 % for 19–24, 6.9 % for 25–30 and 4.9 % over 30 years. A large percentage of respondents had between 13–18 years of experience in the industry, signifying that store managers possess worthy knowledge and skills within the retail industry.

Sixty percent of the respondents worked in corporate stores, 29.4 % in franchise stores, 3.9 % in local stores and 6.9 % in other stores. This could be related to a head or support office with specific retail statuses (for example, store manager or assistant store manager).

Table 5.10: Demographic Profile of respondents (store managers)

Demographics	n=	Percentage	Cumulative Percentage
Age			
21-30	6	5.9	5.9
31-40	41	40.2	46.1
41-50	49	48.0	94.1
51-60	6	5.9	100
Gender			
Male	79	77.5	77.5
Female	23	22.5	100
Race			
African	39	38.2	38.2
Indian	40	39.2	77.4
White	18	17.6	95
Coloured	5	4.9	100
Experience			
1-6 years	10	9.8	9.8
7-12	27	26.5	36.3
13-18	41	40.2	76.5
19-24	12	11.8	88.3
25-30	7	6.9	95.5
Over 30	5	4.9	100
Store type			
Corporate	61	59.8	59.8
Franchise	30	29.4	89.2
Local	4	3.9	93.1
Other	7	6.9	100
Education			
Did not complete	1	1.0	1.0
Matric	58	56.9	57.9
College/university	31	30.4	88.3
Management related qualification (certificate, diploma, or degree)	8	7.8	96.1
National diploma did in service for 6 months	4	3.9	100

The level of education, as reflected in Figure 5.3, is 1 % of respondents did not complete their matric, 56.9 % had matric, 30.4 % had a college or university qualification, 7.8 % had a management-related qualification and 3.9 % had a national

diploma. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents possess only a matriculation qualification. On-the-job training is prevalent in the retail sector.

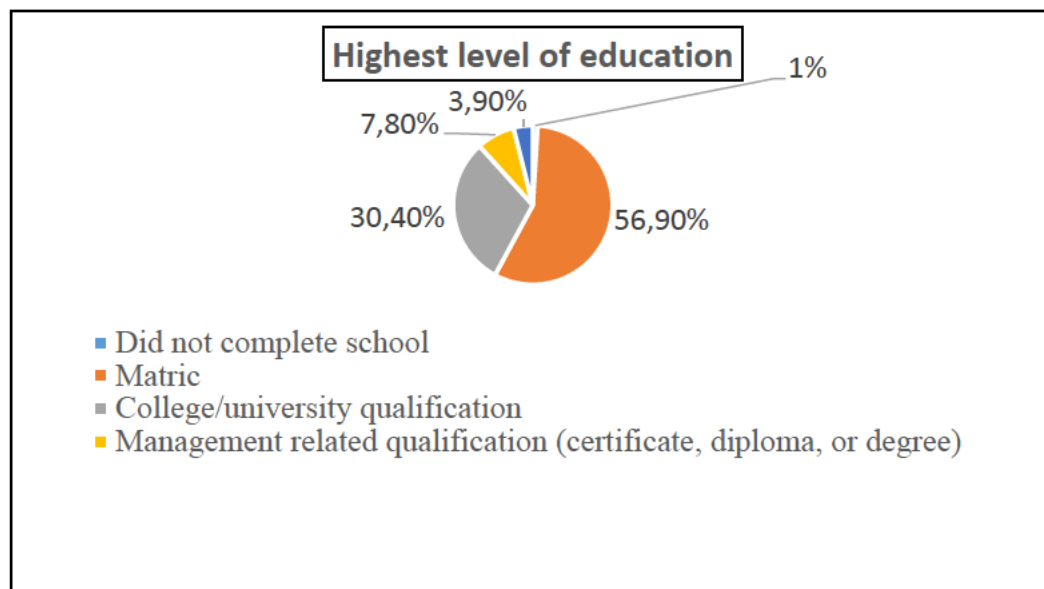


Figure 5.3: Highest level of education

5.2.2.3 Partnership expectations, experiences and knowledge

This section provides results based on the expectations, experiences and knowledge of store managers with regards to building and strengthening partnerships.

Table 5.11: Partnership expectations, experiences and knowledge

No.	Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
		Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %
B1	Staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interacts well with others.	16	15.7%	41	40.2%	15	14.7%	24	23.5%	6	5.9
B2	The store is well-operated, maintained and store protocols are upheld by staff.	41	40.2%	43	42.2%	5	4.9%	12	11.8%	1	1.0%
B3	Students from educational institutions have completed training at the store.	31	30.4%	35	34.3%	16	15.7%	16	15.7%	4	3.9%
B4	Partnerships between retail and educational institutions may lead to an increase of skilled employees in the retail sector.	62	60.8%	29	28.4%	8	7.8%	3	2.9%	0	0
B5	Retail staff are invited by educational institutions to share expertise with students.	19	18.6%	18-	17.6%	27	26.5%	26	25.5%	12	11.8%
B6	Retail industries should develop courses to be incorporated into the university curriculum to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the world of work.	70	68.6%	28	27.5%	4	3.9%	0	0	0	0
B7	The mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary.	62-	60.8%	34	33.3%	5	4.9%	1	1.0%	0	0
B8	The status of university programmes may be enhanced, due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries.	54	52.9	34	33.3	12	11.8	2	2.0	0	0
B9	Regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship.	53	52.0%	35	34.3%	13	12.7%	1	1.0%	0	0
B10	Workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and may contribute positively to any organisation.	72	70.6	24	23.5	6	5.9	0	0	0	0
B11	Current policies create an enabling environment for partnerships.	34	33.3	28	27.5	31	30.4	7	6.9	2	2.0
B12	Employment opportunities can be created as a result of partnerships.	58	56.9	39	38.2	4	3.9	0	0	1	1.0

With regards to “staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interacts well”, 55.9 % indicated that they agree their staff meets the requirements as demonstrated in Table 5.11. However, 29.4 % stated that this is not the case. From a retail perspective, these elements are critical for the normal day-to-day functioning of the business. A small percentage of respondents (14.7 %) were unsure of the above-mentioned staff elements. Additionally, a large percentage of respondents (82.2 %) agreed that the store is well operated, maintained and protocols are upheld, whereas 12.8 % disagree or remained neutral (4.9 %). This statement is closely linked to employees and their knowledge in terms of being able to fulfil their responsibilities.

Sixty-five percent of store managers indicated that students from educational institutions completed some sort of training at their stores. Sixteen percent and 19.6 % of the respondents were unsure or disagreed, respectively, that they did not have students within their store for training purposes.

Respondents were asked if they believed that partnerships between their organisations and educational institutions could lead to more skilled employees. Eighty-nine percent agreed, 2.9 % disagreed and 7.8 % decided to remain neutral in terms of the above-mentioned statement. Moreover, partnerships should be actively managed over the course of a project and formally or informally checking up on one another and maintaining regular communication.

With regards to whether retail staff was invited by educational institutions to share their expertise, 36.2 % agreed, 26.5 % were neutral and 37.3 % disagreed. The question of whether retail industries should be involved in developing courses for universities to ensure that students are better prepared was met with a largely positive response (96.1 %). On the other hand, 3.9 % of respondents remained neutral.

Ninety-four percent of respondents agreed that the mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary, whereas 4.9 % were

uncertain and 1 % disagreed that this was not the case. With reference to whether the status of university programmes may be enhanced due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries, 86.2 % agreed, 11.8 % were unsure and 2 % were not in agreement. This would depend on the outcomes of the programmes in relation to their relevance to the retail sector.

Eighty-six percent of respondents agreed that regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship, whereas 12.7 % disagreed and 1 % remained neutral. Generally, educational institutions concentrate on the theoretical perspective as opposed to industry, which focuses on the hands-on approach. Respondents were asked their thoughts on whether workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and whether it would contribute positively to any organisation. The responses varied, with 94.1 % agreed and 5.9 % remained neutral.

Sixty-eight percent agreed that there are current policies that create an enabling environment for partnerships. However, 2 % disagreed and 30.4 % remained neutral. With regards to whether employment opportunities could be created as a result of partnerships, 95.1 % of respondents believed that this is the case, whereas 3.9 % were uncertain and 1 % disagreed.

With regards to the open responses, respondents believed that time is money and the real challenge would be to convince people to buy-into the notion of partnerships. With proper communication and the participation of all stakeholders, ideas can be shared on how partnerships could provide a return on investment for both sectors and operational efficiencies. This could address the issues of resistance to change from a store point of view, as most retail staff have the necessary experience but lack tertiary education. In terms of partnership expectations, resources, accepting criticism, management skills, following guidelines, fear of the future, trust, willingness to change and common goals are deemed significant. Through partnerships, there would be an

expectation of increased revenue for the retail sector as a result of an expanded customer base as well as an enhanced brand image.

5.2.2.4 *Partnership success factors*

This section of the study presents the results of the success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships.

Table 5.12: Partnership success factors

Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships											
No.	Statements	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree	
		Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %	Frequency	Valid %
C1	Inviting retail experts into the classroom can be beneficial for the organisation, as relevant skills are imparted to students.	68	66.7%	28	27.5%	6	5.9%	0	0	0	0
C2	Industry can engage with educational institutions to promote employability.	53	52.0%	46	45.1%	2	2.0%	1	1.0%	0	0
C3	Combining resources and skills of partners may contribute to partnership success.	53	52.0%	44	43.1%	3	2.9%	1	1.0%	1	1.0%
C4	Communication, fostering respect, trust and openness among stakeholders is key to successful partnerships.	60	58.8%	37	36.3%	5	4.9%	0	0	0	0
C5	Consultations between universities and organisations may lead to synergies being identified.	47	46.1%	41	40.2%	12	11.8%	2	2.0%	0	0
C6	Staff are comfortable about sharing new ideas that might improve the partnering outcomes between educational institutions and industries.	29	28.4%	48	47.1%	20	19.6%	5	4.9%	0	0
C7	There is strong support in our organisation for seeking training partnerships that will be profitable and high profile.	35	34.3%	32	31.4%	27	26.5%	8	7.8%	0	0
C8	Both retail industries and educational institutions may benefit from collaborations.	58	56.9%	35	34.3%	9	8.8%	0	0	0	0

As indicated in Table 5.12, 94.2 % of the respondents believed that inviting retail experts into the classroom can be beneficial for the organisation as relevant skills are imparted to students. A small percentage (5.9 %) were unsure if this would be the case. With regards to the question on industry engagement with educational institutions to promote employability, 97.1 % of respondents were optimistic that this engagement will have a positive impact on employability. On the other hand, a small percentage of respondents (1 %) disagreed and 2 % decided to remain neutral.

Respondents were asked if combining resources and skills would contribute to partnership success. Ninety-five percent agreed that it would certainly impact positively on the partnerships, whereas 2.9 % were undecided and 1 % disagreed. With regards to whether communication, fostering respect, trust and openness among stakeholders is key to successful partnerships, 95.1 % agreed and 4.9 % were undecided. Furthermore, 86.2 % of respondents were positive that consultations between universities and organisations may lead to synergies being identified. In contrast, 11.8 % of respondents decided to remain neutral and 2 % disagreed with the statement.

Respondents were asked if staff are comfortable sharing new ideas that might improve the partnering outcomes between educational institutions and industries. The results indicate that 75.5 % of respondents were content that this was the case. On the other hand, 19.6 % of respondents were undecided and 4.9 % disagreed. A closely linked question concerning whether there is strong support in the organisation for seeking training partnerships that will be profitable and high profile indicated that 65.7 % of the respondents agreed, 26.5 % remained undecided and 7.8 % disagreed. These responses could imply that store managers were not entirely exposed to any type of alliance; however, a large percentage of respondents were optimistic about partnerships. A final question in this section indicates that 91.2 % of respondents were positive that retail and educational institutions may benefit from collaborations, while 8.8 % were unsure if this was the case.

With regard to open responses on partnerships, respondents believed strongly that considering education-industry partnerships will benefit students and/or future employees to understand the retail workplace, resulting in correct career choices. Simultaneously, the industry benefits from having a pool of experienced people join the sector, as retail is a “cut-throat” industry. Partnerships may contribute to knowledge building, getting more people to think outside the box, which may become the norm if implemented properly as the number of skilled labourers is dwindling. Exposing learners to the relevant laws, regulations and standards within the industry is crucial; hence, imparting these and other relevant knowledge would help all stakeholders in some way or another. As an example, identification of the gaps in the real world is a requisite; thus, transferring this to the classroom is the first step in addressing the issues. A partnership is an excellent concept that leads to empowerment, as there is no power without working experience; therefore, an opportunity for a working relationship is created by these partnerships. Collaboration should be based on the reality of what’s taking place in the organisation, thus leading to the presentation of technical skills to improve business. In essence, all stakeholders need to understand the outcomes of the partnership.

To conclude the discussion on partnerships, respondents believed that it would help the business grow as less time would be spent on teaching people the business know-how. Universities and businesses should consult with each other as each has its own focus areas, which make for a workable relationship. Knowledge is power and businesses can be empowered with graduates who can make a significant difference in their industry. One of the primary distinctions between successful and unsuccessful businesses functioning in the same environment is continuous learning. Furthermore, support structures are vital for successful partnerships, which may create additional employment opportunities due to the availability of more experienced people. The concept of partnerships is a powerful initiative that should have been developed some time ago as it is required to drive change in the retail industry due to the many challenges noted.

5.2.2.5 Skills significant to the retail sector

This section provides results relating to the skills that are deemed relevant to the retail industry. In addition, responses from the open section will be summarised.

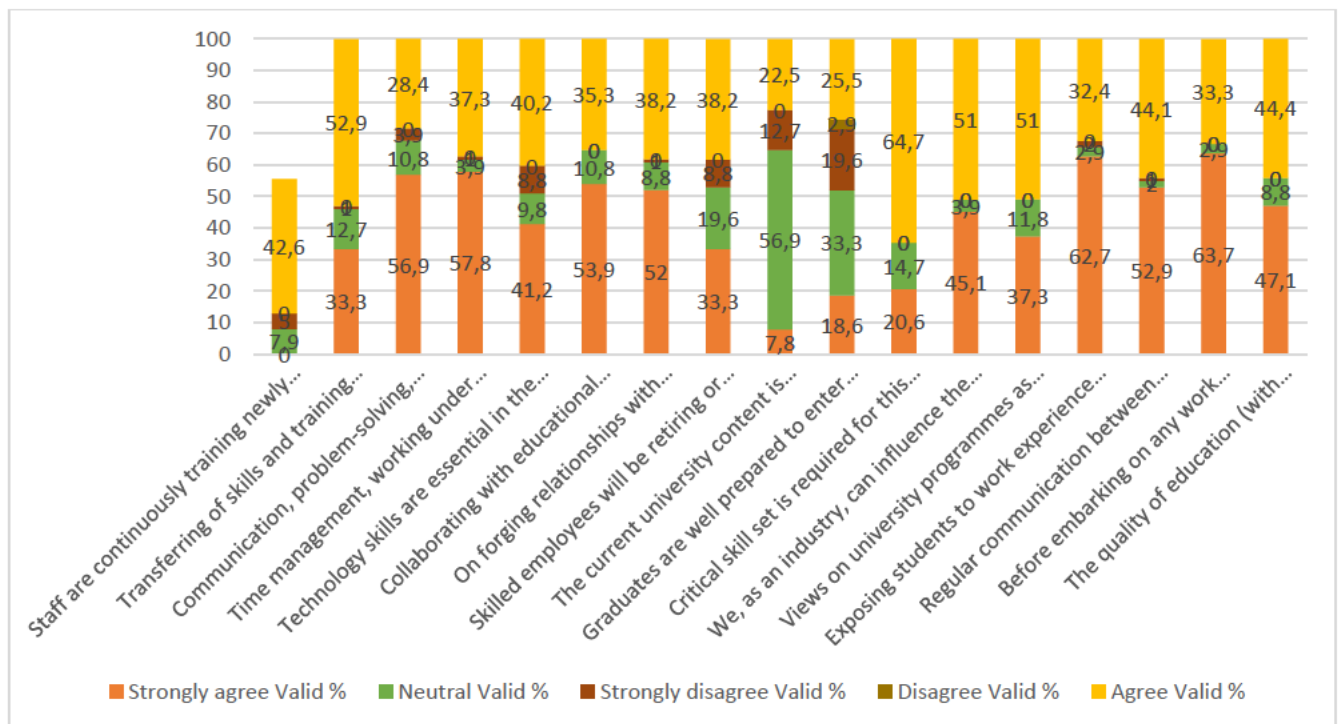


Figure 5.4: Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector

As reflected in Figure 5.4, 87.2 % of respondents are of the opinion that staff within the store are involved in training graduates and/or new staff due to a lack of skills; however, 5.0 % are not in agreement and 7.9 % remain uncertain. Additionally, with regards to the question on whether transferring skills and training from the organisation to students is achievable; 86.2 % of respondents agreed. On the other hand, 1.0 % disagreed and 12.7 % were unsure.

The majority of respondents (85.3 %) agreed that communication, problem-solving, decision-making and customer-service skills may be lacking in retail. However, 3.9 % disagreed and 10.8 % were neutral. In addition, the statement that time management, working under pressure and attention to detail are challenges faced by retail staff, 95.1

% of respondents agreed, 3.9 % were neutral and 1.0 % of the respondents disagreed that this was the case. With regards to technology skills being essential in the retail industry, 81.4 % of respondents were in agreement with the statement, whereas 9.8 % were unsure if technology was important and 8.8 % disagreed. Also, with regards to whether critical skills are required for the retail industry, 85.3 % agreed and 14.7 % were unsure.

As demonstrated in Figure 5.4, 89.2 % of respondents were in agreement that collaborations with educational institutions may address the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce. On the other hand, 10.8 % were uncertain. A related question on whether forging relationships with educational institutions would provide industry with skilled staff demonstrated that 90.2 % of respondents agreed with the statement, 8.8 % were neutral and 1.0 % disagreed. With regards to skilled employees retiring or emigrating in a few years and partnerships with educational institutions addressing these imminent issues, 71.5 % of respondents agreed, 8.8 % disagreed and 19.6 % were unsure.

Respondents were asked if the current university content is relevant to industry needs and the results indicated that 30.3 % agreed, 12.7 % disagreed and 56.9 % were neutral. Also, the results for the question based on exposing students to work experience whilst completing their qualifications may ensure a well-rounded graduate indicated that 95.1 % agreed, 2 % disagreed and 2.9 % were neutral. Based on the above question, 97 % of respondents believed that regular communication between universities and industry concerning curricula is important, whereas 1.0 % disagreed and 2.0 % were neutral. Ninety-seven percent of respondents believed that universities should consult with industry before embarking on any work training programme. However, 2.9 % were unsure.

Additionally, results for the question on the quality of education (with reference to the curriculum) associated with the extent of industry contribution in producing well-

rounded graduates indicated that 91.5 % agreed and 8.8 % were neutral. With regards to the question of whether graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce, 44.1 % agreed, 33.3 % were uncertain and 22.5 % disagreed. Respondents were asked whether they, as an industry, could influence the preparedness of students. Ninety-six of the respondents agreed and 3.9 % were neutral. Lastly, 88.3 % of respondents agreed that university programmes as opposed to expectations of industry are skewed, while 11.8 % were unsure.

With regard to the open responses relating to skills within the retail industry, respondents strongly believed that front-end customer service is vital in the retail sector. This includes basic skills and those that have been instilled in individuals from a young age, including attitude, commitment, dedication, not being rude to customers, treating people with respect and honesty, understanding the different categories of people, dealing with difficult people, thinking outside the box, being proactive, supportive, trustworthy and providing a service to customers in terms of listening more than one would normally do. Due to the changing nature of the retail industry, other skills encompassing business operations in terms of retail processes, finance regarding how to deal with expenses, analytical skills, technology relating to the various sections, product knowledge, target markets, market myopia and entrepreneurial skills are critical. Respondents felt strongly about new graduates or employees, stating that being book-smart does not necessarily make an individual successful as unskilled people are doing skilled work. Knowing how the world works is pertinent for success; hence, practical knowledge in retail is crucial, as merely possessing a degree and not being exposed to real-life situations may be detrimental to individuals.

Suggestions of experts being invited regularly within the educational context are fundamental, as classroom learning differs from on-the-job training. Students enter the workplace with high expectations and then a sense of disappointment is created when they experience the physical work that is expected in retail. Also, ensuring that learners are made fully aware of the expectancy and the crux of business is an added advantage. The reality is that in retail settings, huge gaps are noted due to the lack of

syncing between education and industry, for example, retail is about detail and product knowledge is lacking. Most importantly, the willingness to learn and share, being passionate about one's job, being proactive, and doing things even if it is not your job, as retail involves manual labour irrespective of one's status.

5.2.2.6 A framework for collaboration

This section of the instrument pertains to whether a framework is considered necessary for collaboration within a partnership. Store managers were, in some cases, unsure about the concept of a framework and others responded based on their limited knowledge. With regards to whether a formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary within a partnership, 94.1 % of respondents were in agreement, whereas 5.9 % were uncertain. Respondents were asked if they believed that a framework could guide the partnership process by ensuring consistency with a formal plan of action. The responses were largely positive, with 90.2 % agreeing, 8.81 % remaining uncertain and a small percentage (1 %) disagreeing. Likewise, 90.2 % of respondents were of the opinion that any support system is perceived as a best practice in partnering; however, 1 % were not convinced that this would aid a partnership. On the other hand, 7.8 % were unsure.

As displayed in Figure 5.5, 51 % of the respondents agreed that there are existing frameworks that could be consulted for collaboration, whereas 37.3 % were uncertain or not aware of any available frameworks. A small percentage of respondents (11.7 %) disagreed that this was the case. Furthermore, there was a high positive response rate (86.3 %) in terms of the development of an appropriate framework for collaboration. However, 3.9 % disagreed and 9.8 % decided to remain neutral.

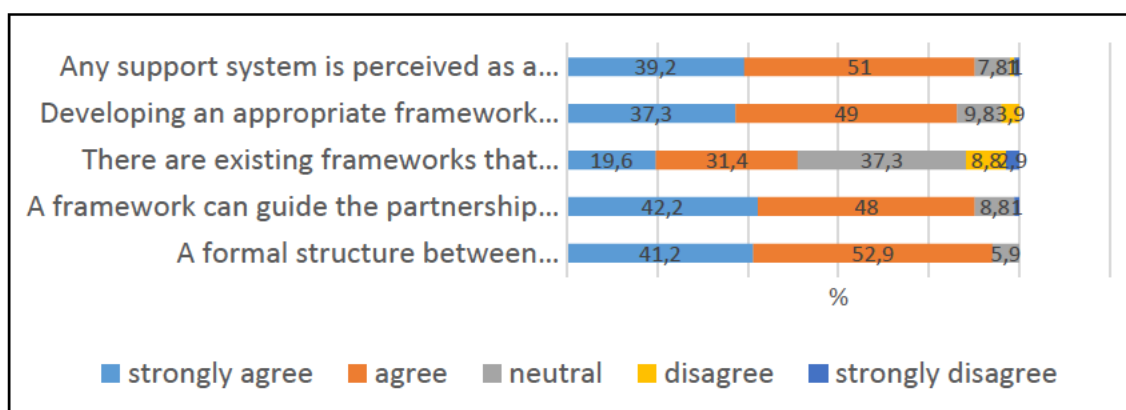


Figure 5.5: A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration

5.2.3 Inferential Statistics

Inferential statistics for the study were performed so that inferences could be drawn from the sample population. Some of the most vital tests are based on reliability and validity, including factor and regression analysis.

5.2.3.1 Reliability

Before proceeding with the discussion of the results, the study's reliability is explained. As demonstrated in Figure 5.6, a 0.70 Cronbach's alpha value indicates an acceptable level of reliability according to George and Mallery (2020: 244) and Hair et al. (2016), which is also the case for this study. The closer Cronbach's alpha coefficient is to 1.0 the greater the internal consistency of the items in the instrument being assessed (George and Mallery 2020: 236).

Alpha Value, (A)	Level
> 0.9	Excellent
> 0.8	Good
> 0.7	Acceptable
> 0.6	Questionable
> 0.5	Poor
< 0.5	Unacceptable

Figure 5.6: Rule of thumb for Cronbach's Alpha Values

Source: George and Mallery (2020: 244)

As illustrated in Appendix A, Cronbach's alpha test was applied to 31 items on the student instrument. As demonstrated in Table 5.13, items relating to success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships were all above 0.771, which indicates an acceptable level of reliability for the study. Similarly, reliability, which describes the skills that are deemed relevant, was above 0.766, as were expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships at 0.764 and over. The results for the reliability test indicate that there was consistent scoring by the respondents, thereby supporting the strength of the items comprised in the student instrument. Thus, the appropriateness of the survey used in the context of the analysis of partnerships for the study. Similarly, Table 5.14 and Appendix B present the Cronbach's alpha test for the store instrument of 0.871, thus indicating a good level of reliability for the study.

Table 5.13: Reliability statistics for the student instrument

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.780	31

Table 5.14: Reliability statistics for the store instrument

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardised Items	N of Items
.871	.903	42

5.2.3.2 Measures of central tendency and dispersion

The mean, median and mode are tests for measures of central tendency used in research to demonstrate average or most commonly indicated responses. "If the

response to each individual item in a scale does not have a good spread (range) and shows very little variability, then the researcher may suspect that the particular question was probably not properly worded” (Sekaran 2016: 278). It gives one a good idea of how the participants in this study reacted to the items in the questionnaire. Also, the standard deviation measures the dispersion of a dataset relative to its mean or the variability in the data (Sekaran 2016: 284).

Table 5.15: Mean and Standard Deviation

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std Deviation
Sustainability of partnership	66	1	5	1.734	0.602
Skills	66	1	5	2.208	0.674
Expectations	66	1	5	1.962	0.599

As demonstrated in Table 5.15, the mean score of 2.208 for skills is below average. It indicates that student perceptions of the discussion pertaining to skills that were deemed relevant to the retail sector was unsatisfactory. It is imperative for all stakeholders, in this case, universities and industry, to continually converse to ensure that relevant skills are being imparted. JP Morgan Chase and Company (2014) echo these sentiments. stating that employers, educators and others must realise the importance of tackling the skills gap. Also, working with similar-minded stakeholders is a way of preparing students for industry (Arthur-Mensah 2020: 100). With regards to the standard deviation, a low standard deviation shows that data are clustered closely around the mean, which is more reliable and is the case for this study.

5.2.4 Cross Tabulation

For this study, a Chi-square test was conducted to determine if there was a significant relationship between the study variables. Hence, it is used to determine if there is a difference between the observed and expected data or if it is due to relationships between variables. It is generally accepted that if the p-value is less than 0.05, then

the result is considered “statistically significant” (George and Mallery 2020: 112). Appendices F and G contain the comprehensive test results, however, emphasis will be on a few that are particularly relevant.

5.2.4.1 *An existing or new framework could assist in guiding the partnership process and sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place*

As reflected in Table 5.16, the cross-tabulation between “sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place” and “an existing or new framework could assist in guiding the partnership process” indicates that there were satisfactory to high levels of agreement (50.0 % and 70.6 %) that partnerships will prosper if a framework is used as a guiding tool. The p-value of 0.003 indicates that there is strong evidence to suggest that the variables are associated.

Table 5.16: An existing or new framework could assist in guiding the partnership process and sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place

Crosstab						
			C1-An existing or new framework (a tool that provides clear guidelines) could assist in guiding the partnership process			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	Strongly agree	Count	13	11	2	26
		% within B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	50.0%	42.3%	7.7%	100.0%
	Agree	Count	6	24	4	34
		% within B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	17.6%	70.6%	11.8%	100.0%
	Neutral	Count	0	3	3	6
		% within B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	0.0%	50.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	19	38	9	66	
	% within B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	28.8%	57.6%	13.6%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	15.949 ^a	4	.003
Likelihood Ratio	14.961	4	.005
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.385	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	66		

5.2.4.2 Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships and the status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together

The results of the cross-tabulation between “value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships” and “status of qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together” are indicated in Table 5.17 below. 73.5 % are in agreement that if partnerships are considered, value-added skills will be taught and thus qualification statuses will improve. The p-value is 0.028, which indicates a statistically significant positive association between the variables.

Table 5.17: Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships and the status of the qualification will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together

			Crosstab			
			D12-Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together	Strongly agree	Count	12	16	2	30
		% within B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together	40.0%	53.3%	6.7%	100.0%
	Agree	Count	8	25	1	34
		% within B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together	23.5%	73.5%	2.9%	100.0%
	Neutral	Count	1	0	1	2
		% within B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	21	41	4	66
		% within B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together	31.8%	62.1%	6.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	10.836 ^a	4	.028
Likelihood Ratio	8.272	4	.082
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.218	1	.270
N of Valid Cases	66		

5.2.4.3 Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning and including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices

The results, as indicated in Table 5.18 for the cross-tabulation between “partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning” and “including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices” shows a high level of agreement (69.7 %). The p-value of 0.015 yielded statistically significant relationships between the variables.

Table 5.18: Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning and including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices

Crosstab

			E4-Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices	Strongly agree	Count	12	15	0	27
		% within D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices	44.4%	55.6%	0.0%	100.0%
	Agree	Count	10	23	0	33
		% within D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices	30.3%	69.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	Neutral	Count	3	2	1	6
		% within D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	100.0%
Total		Count	25	40	1	66
		% within D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices	37.9%	60.6%	1.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.340 ^a	4	.015
Likelihood Ratio	7.262	4	.123
Linear-by-Linear Association	.799	1	.371
N of Valid Cases	66		

5.2.4.4 A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration and a formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary

Table 5.19: A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration and a formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [A formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	2	2	2	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	33.3%	33.3%	33.3%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	40	52	4	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	41.7%	54.2%	4.2%	100.0%
Total	Count		42	54	6	102
	% within Please indicate your age:		41.2%	52.9%	5.9%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.725 ^a	2	.013
Likelihood Ratio	4.811	2	.090
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.273	1	.132
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 3 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,35.

The results of the cross-tabulation between “a partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration and a formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary, are indicated in Table 5.19. 54.2 % agree that if a framework is in place. it creates a structure for the partnering organisations. The p-value is 0.013, which indicates a statistically significant positive association between the variables.

5.2.4.5 Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector and collaborating with universities will assist in addressing the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce

Table 5.20: Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector and collaborating with universities will assist in addressing the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector)
[Collaborating with universities will assist in addressing the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
Please indicate your gender:	Male	Count	44	30	5	79
		% within Please indicate your gender:	55.7%	38.0%	6.3%	100.0%
	Female	Count	11	6	6	23
		% within Please indicate your gender:	47.8%	26.1%	26.1%	100.0%
Total	Count		55	36	11	102
	% within Please indicate your gender:		53.9%	35.3%	10.8%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.366 ^a	2	.025
Likelihood Ratio	6.246	2	.044
Linear-by-Linear Association	2.921	1	.087
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 1 cells (16,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,48.

According to Table 5.20, the cross-tabulation between “skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector” and “collaborating with universities will assist in addressing the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce” revealed that 55.7 % are positive that the identification of relevant retail skills will contribute to addressing those skills

that are lacking in the industry. A significant relationship is noted between the variables with the p-value of 0.025 as indicated in Table 5.20.

5.2.4.6 Correlation Analysis

“A correlation is often called a bivariate correlation to designate a simple correlation between two variables” (George and Mallery 2020: 139) and is frequently known as the Pearson product-moment correlation or the Pearson r . The results of the study are demonstrated in Appendix C. The positive values indicate a direct relationship between the variables; thus, all significant relationships are presented by a * demonstrating that correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed) or a ** demonstrating that correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). The following selected significant correlations for the study are discussed below with reference to Appendix C.

“Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place” and “collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership are correlated with a value of 0.533. Therefore, the indication is that there is a moderately positive correlation between the variables. As a result, with a p-value of 0.001, the Pearson correlation of 0.533 is considered significant. The respondents believe that in order for a partnership to sustain itself, activities within the partnership must be formally structured. It should not be halted at that point; thus, actively managing the partnership is vital.

The correlation value between “partnerships may contribute to bridging the gap between knowledge and expertise” and “partnering develops universities' ability to address important issues about employment” is 0.630, signifying a strong positive correlation between the measured variables. Therefore, a 0.001 p-value in relation to the 0.630 Pearson correlation is considered statistically significant. Respondents are of the opinion that if universities are in partnerships with appropriate organisations, they can contribute towards addressing employment issues by closing the gap

between universities and the working world. Additionally, developing skills that are industry specific may aid in reducing the graduate unemployment rate.

The correlation value between “amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership success” and “commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success” is 0.380 suggesting a weak positive correlation between the variables. Nonetheless, the p-value of 0.002 in relation to the Pearson correlation of 0.380 is still considered significant. Respondents indicated that if stakeholders within the partnership respect and trust each other and attempt to resolve conflict appropriately, the partnership is bound to succeed.

“Structured collaborative activities are important for partnerships” and “partnering organisations may have a greater impact working collaboratively as opposed to working alone” produced a correlation value of 0.378. While this indicates a weak positive correlation between the variables measured considering the p-value of 0.002, it is still significant as respondents are of the opinion that partnerships are still a worthy initiative. Thus, working in isolation is not favourable for partnerships.

A 0.326 value indicates a weak positive correlation between “value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships” and “including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices”. However, the Pearson correlation of 0.326 with regards to the p-value of 0.008 is considered statistically significant. Although a weak correlation is noted, respondents feel that if experts from industry imparted practical and/or current retail knowledge during formal learning programmes they would possess a set of skills that are of immense value.

5.3 Findings of the Qualitative stud

The qualitative findings of the study were based on interviews with senior managers of the two major retailers that participated in the study. Interviews were conducted with two General and/or Regional managers from each retail organisation, as well as focus group interviews. The research instrument (Appendix J) for the store manager population comprised seven sections. For the purposes of confidentiality, the two participating organisations will be referred to as “Retailer 1” and “Retailer 2”.

Each of the retailer's findings is presented separately, with dominant themes being integrated and discussed. In addition, the findings were triangulated by focus group interviews with floor supervisors from retail organisations. Table 5.21 displays the demographics of the participants in this study. The participants are managers who were able to provide a holistic view of the organisation in terms of the study objectives.

Table 5.21: Demographic Profile of Participants

Demographics	Organisation 1	Organisation 2
Age	55	34
Gender	Male	Male
Designation	Regional Manager	KZN: Retail Divisional Manager
Race	White	White
Years of experience	31 years +	12 years +

5.3.1 Interviews with General/Regional/Divisional Managers

The qualitative element of the study was based on interviewing managers who have a holistic view of the organisation. As previously alluded to, the inductive-deductive approach was deemed appropriate and thus used to categorise the themes. Throughout the data analysis process, contextual concepts from the interviews with retail organisations were identified, thus contributing to the analysis. The results for the qualitative component commence with elements being identified and categorised into segments from the participating organisations.

As displayed in Table 5.22, the items were extracted from the open coding process for Retailer 1. Furthermore, broad concepts were extracted and grouped into sub-themes and the process concluded with draft themes. Final integrated themes for both retailers will be presented at a future stage. In addition, relevant quotes from the data will be presented in support of the discussions.

Table 5.22: Open coding: Retailer 1

ITEMS	BROAD CONCEPTS	SUB-THEMES	DRAFT THEMES
Retail sector attractiveness	Ever-changing business, competitive & high risk Retail jobs gaining popularity & growth potential for the young Family-owned businesses and/or franchise opportunities requiring commitment/dedication Succession planning	Changing business environment Retail industry is growing in popularity Entrepreneurship Succession planning	Changing business environment and advancements in the retail landscape Leadership succession planning and strategic expansions
Learner preparedness by universities	Theoretical versus practical learning University-work balance Emotional elements	Workplace/practical experience Psychological preparedness	Reciprocal training, development and life-long learning Skills deficiency and non-alignment to industry
Retail contribution to curriculum development	No direct contribution, perhaps SETA Elimination of gender bias Advancement of women in retail management	Eradicating gender stereotypes: women's advancements	Occupational-directed learning and psychological preparedness
Identification of skills lacking in new graduates	Financial management Soft skills Retail specific	Financial management, soft and retail-specific skills	Collaborative relationship management and support structures
Training and development for new graduates	In-house training programmes/retail training college (retail/management growth & senior leadership development programmes) Supply chain and logistics Family-owned business development	In-house training and employee development Supply chain and logistics	
Concerns with the university to work transition	Unrealistic views from textbook learning Ineffectiveness of online training	Unrealistic views from textbook learning Ineffective online training	
Manager's role within the industry	Past affects current and future role/s Retailer support Rebuilding brands Retail vision and transformation	Past a predictor of the future Brand and vision transformation	
Partnership expectations/ associations & understanding retail-education partnerships	Parameters to be in place (proper reporting channels) Improper expectations lead to failure Funding/finance Societal impact and creating sustainable future & unemployment alleviation	Organisation and structure Relationship management Proper candidate selection Unemployment alleviation	

ITEMS	BROAD CONCEPTS	SUB-THEMES	DRAFT THEMES
	Establishing soft skills of relentless growth People skills, interpersonal or behavioural interactions, mutual understanding, relationship management Within the South African context (giving back) Changing business models and holistic view of the organisation Profitability is ultimately the goal Continuous growth and learning	Continuous learning and development	
University-to-work transition	Practical exposure and experience Understanding workplace demands	Understanding workplace demands	
Partnership management and vision	Continuous communication 5-year plan Involvement of private entities Challenges in education & the education system Eradication of retail stigma Skills and entrepreneurial space in South Africa Life-long & continuous learning Growth and experience On-the-job training Reality versus expectation	Ongoing communication Strategic roadmap Private sector association Education challenges Eradication of retail stigma SA skills base in terms of growth and experience Reality versus expectation	
Support structure	Roles and input of stakeholders Aims of the initiative	Stakeholder roles and input Partnership aims	

Participants were asked for their perspectives on the role of universities in preparing learners for the working world. Thus, draft themes were identified in line with achieving the following objective, namely: to identify skills that are relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between retail and public higher education institutions, which will be succinctly presented and discussed. Draft themes emanating from the analysis that directly relate to the objective/s are integrated and discussed collectively in the next section.

Retailer 1 (Draft Theme 1) – Reciprocal training, development and life-long learning; Skills deficiency and non-alignment to industry; Occupational-directed learning and psychological preparedness

There was a strong response regarding the heavy focus on theoretical elements at universities. Participants felt that the practical aspect of learning to create a balance is critical for the future success of graduates. In their own words:

“Practical knowledge is a lot more understanding, as I think universities are more theoretical and do not necessarily give you an understanding of why we sometimes do things. Understand workplace and demands, which you will only get from practical exposure”.

As a result, it was suggested that the introduction to the working world would expose students to real-life expectations upon graduation. Additionally, psychological preparedness was cited as an important aspect when entering the working environment, as new employees feel overwhelmed if they are not mentally prepared. Moreover, participants were questioned about the contributions made by the retail sector to education in terms of the curriculum. A part of the skills issue is the lack of reciprocal communication between the retail sector and universities to address the skills challenges encountered by the sector.

As indicated, one of the major challenges faced by the retail sector was a lack of basic soft skills, as well as financial and other retail-specific skills, including supply chain and logistics. It was further elaborated that:

“Skills are always a huge benefit, but the attitude from a disciplinary point of view is key!”

With regards to training and development, the organisation suggested that although in-house training programmes are available, both industry and education should work collaboratively to achieve the common goal of preparing future employees. In the words of the manager:

“Learning should be continuous; learning should always grow and grow in many ways (including experience). Experience is not something that can be taught and thus comes from the practical side of it.”

Retailer 1 (Draft Theme 2) – Changing business environment and advancements in the retail landscape

It was agreed that retail is here to stay, as the idea of business is constantly changing. However, it must not be overlooked that profitability is the bottom line, even though business models have changed. Being a sector that has gained popularity, means growth potential for the young in retail. Another mention was that retail is a high-risk business in many senses, involving commitment and dedication.

“As a company, we certainly believe in growth and learning, and that learning should be continuous. In retail, there are no two days that are the same, thus retail has become more attractive”.

Retailer 1 (Draft Theme 3) – Leadership succession planning, strategic expansions and Collaborative relationship management and support structures

In an attempt to address the following objective: to establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships, participants were asked to share their thoughts. As a result, leadership succession planning and strategic expansions, as well as collaborative relationship management and support structures emerged as relevant themes. Growing people in business was frequently

alluded to as a means to ensure that the business continues to develop through suitable strategic planning. Besides, society must always be considered, as mentioned:

“Our term is act outside the box”. As much as we concentrate within our business context, it must also include society”.

According to the participant, with society in mind, working collaboratively means addressing the challenge of unemployment in the country, thus creating a more employable workforce or youth force is refreshing. While universities have the expertise in terms of the learning function, retail has the practical know-how, thus creating a workable relationship to address the many factors impeding the workforce. Moreover, strengthening the relationship through proper support systems in terms of everyone knowing their roles and input signifies encouraging prospects.

In summary, it can be noted that the retail industry has transformed over the years, thus becoming a popular industry and attractive to graduates. The retail industry is almost guaranteed to receive work-ready graduates who will be equipped with the skills required to thrive in industry when collaborating with universities, as well as contributing to minimising the effects of unemployment. Additionally, emphasis was placed on the effects of practical training as a co-activity within the theoretical programme, as well as incorporating industry experts to share real-world insights of the retail industry.

5.3.1.1 Coding for Retailer 2

As concluded for Retailer 1, the open coding process continued for Retailer 2 using researcher-denoted and data-generated codes. As demonstrated in Table 5.23, broad concepts were derived from the raw data through the coding process, with sub-themes and draft themes emanating from them.

Table 5.23: Open coding: Retailer 2

ITEMS	BROAD CONCEPTS	SUB-THEMES	DRAFT THEMES
Retail sector attractiveness	Skills determined by retail trends Educational institutions to liaise with retailers (graduate programmes, on the job-training) Retail sector is gaining popularity; however, retail is not an initial choice Graduates desperate for jobs some expectations are high & when no match then a moral shift occurs	Retail trends and adaptability of graduates Training/formal – on the job Evolving retail sector (unattractive however becoming popular)	Retail: an evolving and volatile industry Educational reform prompted by key stakeholders to grow the human capital base by keeping abreast of changes Develop work experience programmes by cultivating relationships, fostering engagement and producing entrepreneurs Education restructuring to eradicate unfair systems
Universities preparing learners work	University prepares from a theoretical point; however, there must be a flow from theory to practical Basic and retail-specific skills are essential Privileged vs poor students	Integration of theory and practical work Educational inequality	Higher education: a predictor of employment to initiate/promote conversations/engagements with industry for sustainable economic growth Skills deficiency due to the absence of real-world experience
Retail contribution to curriculum development & retail-university communication	No input from the retail sector As a way forward, begin with research for integration purposes Universities to lead this process by extending invitations to industry	Universities, as leaders in knowledge development, must create opportunities to invite retail	Building entrepreneurs through training and development Partnerships create harmony between sectors and opportunities for brand awareness with mutual support
Skills lacking in new graduates	Communication, being polite, treating customers well, good attitude, enthusiasm, work ethics, work commitment, lack of loyalty, being courteous, unadaptable and other soft skills. Inability to retain skills Unable to commit to new learning in terms of practical work.	Soft skills Technology skills, software systems, e-learning, work ethics, work commitment, loyalty lacking,	
Training and development for new graduates	In-house training programmes Software systems training E-learning On-the-job training Trained to include succession purposes Competency assessments for evaluation purposes	In-house and on-the-job training Trained for succession	

ITEMS	BROAD CONCEPTS	SUB-THEMES	DRAFT THEMES
University to work transition &	Gaps noted even though graduates are developed, thus training offered to ensure sustainability Graduates are quick learners and many leave for greener pastures	Skills gap noted between education and industry High employee turnover	
Work-integrated learning or similar	Great initiative to broaden students' knowledge (unsure if currently applicable) Involve SETAs	Practical training necessary for a broader knowledge base Involve training bodies	
Partnership expectations & understanding retail-education partnerships	Excellent concept – organisations are as good as their talent Dedicated team for collaboration to establish commonalities (retailing & content) Rules/governance must be in place Address unemployment issues Training entrepreneurs	Partnership initiative is excellent - positive outlook for all sectors. Specialist project team for partnership establishment and functioning Talent acquisition	
Synergies	More entrepreneurs emerging due to educated people	Creating entrepreneurs.	
Partnership challenge	Retail is volatile and constantly changing Skills demands changing, thus changes must be communicated Quick adaptation processes required Universities to keep abreast of changes	Retail - volatile industry, thus skills change regularly Uncertain if people can adapt rapidly University must keep abreast of changes	
Partnership management & vision	All stakeholders to be aware of all processes Transparency Working towards a mutual goal	Common understanding of expectations	
Support structure	Pivotal to have structures/support systems in place Marketing/brand awareness is possible with successful participating organisations	Mandatory support systems Creates brand awareness for participating organisations	

As demonstrated and discussed for Retailer 1, Table 5.23 presents the analysis for Retailer 2 with a concise discussion of the draft themes being presented. Some themes were merged and presented.

Retailer 2 (Draft Theme 1) – Retail: an evolving and volatile industry; Educational reform prompted by key stakeholders to grow the human capital base by keeping abreast of changes; and Education restructuring to eradicate unfair systems

With regard to how attractive the retail industry is and has become, participants believed that people need skills that are determined by trends in retail. In addition, it was reverberated that people are aware of the long hours and hard work involved with the retail industry. Nevertheless, graduates and prospective employees show interest in retail, indicating that the industry is becoming popular, even though it is deemed volatile. With the industry being volatile, skill demand changes frequently meaning quick adaptation processes are required. As a result, skills revert to the university in terms of being a supplier of human resources to retail. As stated by the participants:

“Students must be equipped to stay abreast of all the changes in the industry. Additionally, those students that complete a qualification that is not linked to industry demands, are no longer required due to the fast-paced changes within retail.”

Essentially, any changes must be communicated between universities, retail and whoever else needs to know in order to eradicate any issues. It was further stated that if people have the same vision, partnerships are conceivable in terms of clearly defined structures.

Retailer 2 (Draft Theme 2) – Higher education: a predictor of employment to initiate/promote conversations/engagements with industry for sustainable economic growth; Skills deficiency due to the absence of real-world experience; and Building entrepreneurs through training and development

Participants were asked about their views on graduate preparedness in terms of skills and experience. The belief is that universities seem to prepare graduates by introducing them to elementary and theoretical aspects; however, there is clearly a lack of practical exposure. The following statement reiterates these sentiments:

“They have a basic understanding in the degree in terms of what a company expects; however, they will pick up the rest on the job.”

A proposition, according to participants, is for educational institutions to approach larger retailers and corporate companies to market their students in terms of employment opportunities and present details of the theoretical content within the qualification. If a gap is noted, stakeholders should attempt to address it, so that when graduates accept job offers, they possess a certain degree of business sense. Moreover, soft skills and communication have been cited as important, as have retail skills that can be learned from practical exposure in the real world. With a host of in-house training and development programmes, graduates would be able to upskill themselves, thus creating entrepreneurial opportunities in the process.

To summarise this section, there is a noted gap in skills between education institutions and industry, with reference to retail for this study. The proposed resolution, according to participants, is to initiate dialogue between these sectors to begin closing the gaps. In turn, industry would be in a better position to accept these graduates as work-ready.

Retailer 2 (Draft Theme 3) – Partnerships create harmony between sectors and opportunities for brand awareness with mutual support; Develop work experience programmes by cultivating relationships and fostering engagement and produce entrepreneurs

The response to the questions on partnerships between education and the retail industry indicated that the concept was well accepted as a means of building the future workforce. Besides, the more educated people are, the better it is for the community. More entrepreneurs are developed, thus contributing holistically to the country. Work-integrated learning was cited as one of the several opportunities that would be created as a result of partnerships; however, the process should be driven by a dedicated team, as mentioned in the comment below:

“I would appoint someone, spend time with a university professor to try and put some sort of curriculum together or have a common understanding of what we do practically and what they are going to teach in theory.”

The participant further stated that businesses may not be sustainable without the correct talent, and in order to succeed, these associations are necessary. The statement from the participant below supports the statement:

“So yes, we must look at this partnership as it would mean only positive things for universities and us. Besides, a lot of businesses are at risk due to the leadership retiring and some companies don’t have a great succession plan.”

To summarise the findings of Retailer 2, the prospect of partnerships seems to be an extremely likely concept. It was stated that if rules can be created in terms of how the partnership will be governed, there ought to be benefits for participating organisations, in this case, retail and education. As experts in the industry know, retail has a lot to offer from a practical point of view. This includes broadening the knowledge of students, as their current exposure at universities is solely theoretical in nature.

There are noted changes in the retail sector; hence, all affected parties should communicate, with education being a feeder sector in terms of future employees. Thus, there is a need for stakeholders from both education and industry to initiate communication in order to eradicate some of the above-mentioned challenges. A key aspect is to address the skills gap between the organisations, hence the prospect of partnerships.

5.3.1.2 Integrated Themes for Retailer 1 and Retailer 2

In terms of the integrated findings for the qualitative component, several themes emerged, which were thus categorised based on the objectives of the study. The

identified themes from both retailers were integrated into the draft themes that were generated through an intense coding process. The process advanced to primary code generation, sub-themes and draft themes for each retailer. The final step involved the transformation of draft themes into final integrated themes for the study. A comprehensive account of the responses, based on the integrated themes from both retail organisations is presented.

Table 5.24: Integrated Themes for Retailer 1 and Retailer 2

ORGANISATION	DOMINANT THEMES	INTEGRATED FINAL THEMES
Retailer 1	Changing business environment and advancements in the retail business landscape Leadership succession planning and strategic expansions Reciprocal training, development and life-long learning Skills deficiency and non-alignment to industry Occupational-directed learning and psychological preparedness Collaborative relationship management and support structures	Evolving business environment and advancements in the retail business landscape Collaborative relationship management to create harmony, support as well as to promote psychological preparedness Building leaders and entrepreneurs through succession planning initiatives
Retailer 2	Retail: an evolving and volatile industry Educational reform prompted by key stakeholders to grow the human capital base by keeping abreast of changes Develop work experience programmes by cultivating relationships, fostering engagement and producing entrepreneurs Education restructuring to eradicate unfair systems Higher education: a predictor of employment to initiate/promote conversations/engagements with industry for sustainable economic growth Skills deficiency due to the absence of real-world experience Building entrepreneurs through training and development Partnerships create harmony between sectors and opportunities for brand awareness with mutual support	Developing occupational-directed programmes to address the skills deficiency Higher education reform: a predictor of employment

As demonstrated in Table 5.24, the final integrated themes for Retailer 1 and Retailer 2 are presented and discussed based on the objectives of the study, namely: to identify skills that are relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap; to establish key success factors that influence the sustainability of partnerships; and to establish the

expectations, experiences and knowledge of students and managers with regards to building and strengthening partnerships.

THEME 1 — Evolving business environment and advancements in the retail business landscape

It can be inferred that the retail sector is influenced by market tendencies that dictate the path of the industry. Additionally, preceding organisational experiences affect the current and future state of an organisation. As a result, the type of skills requisite in retail depends on the type of job due to the sector's ever-changing nature. This view is supported by the participant's statement:

“The problem in our business is that you have to have skills that are determined by trends. We train managers and only one of them would make it to the end because it is such a demanding business. There are no two days that are the same ... from price increases to customer disputes and more.”

As a result of the ever-changing business environment, the retail organisation is underpinned by the creation of growth and succession planning. However, due to the competitive nature of this and other businesses alike, the organisation has to persevere to remain triumphant with growth potential for the next generation. The world experienced one of the worst pandemics in history and the retail industry continued to provide front-line service to the community. This authenticates the value of the industry to society as a whole, thus making it the employment industry of choice, as asserted by the managers:

“The sector is definitely an attraction, as an essential service organisation as seen during the pandemic. There is so much of the business that is out of one's control and due to COVID, we have seen the retail industry becoming more popular. As an essential service organisation, we didn't even close during the pandemic.”

Due to the evolving nature of the industry, retail is demanding in every way, namely: long hours, hard physical and mental labour, as well as working with difficult people. Thus, all-inclusive skills are required to be able to aptly function within the industry. Besides, several opportunities present themselves in terms of transitioning from an employee to an entrepreneur in the retail industry. As a result of the advancements within the retail sector, such as technology-based shopping, the industry is set to develop even further, thus attracting more interest. Possessing formal qualifications would make a huge difference in the industry; however, expectations versus reality should be scrutinised. With that being said, and to ensure positive growth within the industry, all stakeholders in the country should network for a common understanding of expectations.

“I’ve heard so much about this company in terms of young people coming into the organisation and potential for growth and business. This company or sector is certainly an attraction. It’s also changed in the youth in terms of what they expect from themselves.”

THEME 2 — Collaborative relationship management to create harmony, support and opportunities, as well as to promote psychological preparedness

The ability to manage relationships in any environment could prove challenging and is a substantial part of whether an initiative is successful or not. Likewise, it is fundamental to recognise that partnerships, in some way, are growing a future pipeline of potential employees. Thus, it must be noted that universities, authoritative training bodies and in-house training initiatives are the backbones of the growth process. In terms of ensuring that partnerships are reinforced, retailer support, the building of brands and a clear vision are of utmost importance in the process. Hence, transformation within participating organisations is crucial. Participants believe that specific parameters must be in place to guide stakeholders within a partnership to create a harmonious and supportive environment. In doing so, improper expectations are minimised. A typical example in the case of graduates, according to the manager, is:

“If one creates an expectation that they will get a job and they don’t, it creates animosity”.

To build and strengthen a partnership, a holistic view within the South African context must be considered. This is strongly supported by the respondent indicating:

“We are very decentralised and there are underprivileged communities consisting of different dynamics and cultures”.

Therefore, considering the effect on society is a requisite. Through this study, it can be demonstrated that the university-to-work transition could be seamless and can be achieved with an understanding of workplace demands and practical exposure. Long-term results should be to create a more employable workforce whereby youth unemployment, which is a substantial problem, is reduced. Additionally, as evidenced by the manager:

“It will ultimately lead to a stronger economy with less crime and poverty”.

The ability to manage within the new constraints of the retail industry involves something that a degree does not prepare one for, namely emotional preparedness. As reinforced by the manager:

“There are certainly the human emotional elements that the university doesn’t really concentrate on, for example, the stresses of deadlines”.

Therefore, creating and/or prioritising work/family harmony may contribute to enhanced job satisfaction as well as mentally stable employees. Additionally, psychological preparation is a priority that every workplace must embrace by equipping employees to deal with everyday stressors. On the other hand, if organisations fail to address the psychological aspects, the risk to them may be far higher in terms of productivity levels, thus impacting revenues.

THEME 3 — Building leaders and entrepreneurs through succession planning initiatives

Participants believed and supported the notion of entrepreneurship development as another valuable element of the retail organisation. The idea of skill building and understanding the need to create and nurture entrepreneurs is reinforced as they would be developing technical and business skills in the process. These skills may set them up to start and operate their own businesses, such as the franchise stores within the sector.

“I have store managers that report to me and some of them are in my thoughts in terms of how I can turn them into potential store owners.”

The participants stressed that retail is not a career choice for everyone, as it requires a lot of sacrifices. Being in the service industry, “steals time away from family and personal lives”, which is proving difficult for the new generation of employees. Therefore, as a retail manager, the questions that need to be answered in terms of succession planning are: *Who would be able to take over? Who are our future leaders? and Do we have the right people to grow the business?*

It was established that within the retail environment, there are a series of in-house training and development programmes that may contribute to the progression from elementary to management roles. Essentially, one would be in a position to lead others with guidance as indicated by the manager:

“A lot of businesses are at risk due to the leadership retiring and unfortunately, companies don’t have a great succession plan. It is difficult to see long-term sustainability of the business”.

It was reiterated that exploring the notion of partnerships would mean only encouragement for universities and retail in the sense that more entrepreneurship would emerge. It was further stated that as retail *“it’s our responsibility to grow employment opportunities”*, especially for those who do not have them, thus building the succession plan. As successful retailers *“we are always looking at the pipeline, but*

the experience is also required". "One of our values is entrepreneurship and how we would develop people into business owners, but funding is always going to be an issue". It was pointed out that staff investment is a requisite within the industry, but at the risk of becoming attractive to other employers. "My argument is that if they stay with you in business and you don't train them, how much are they going to cost you in the long term?"

THEME 4 - Developing occupational-directed programmes to address the skills deficiency

Growing the workforce is one technique for sustaining the retail industry by ensuring that prospective employees are exposed to the industry through experience. Therefore, developing the skills of graduates that will make them more employable should be a priority, as employers prefer graduates who have some sort of work experience. "The common shortfalls within the industry relate directly to financial, retail-specific and soft skills". Most importantly, "an employee with the right attitude will be more beneficial to an organisation than one that does not possess the good attitude". Unrealistic expectations are created from textbook learning only, as emphasised by the participants. Thus, affording one the necessary practical opportunities in terms of skills or competencies, similar to those of serving articles, allows one to gain indispensable expertise to enter the work environment. It was further elaborated that:

"This article component helps prepare you for what happens afterward, especially dealing with people and learning how to interact with them in business. That's where you learn from people who are in the field with first-hand experience; thus, practical knowledge is all about understanding."

Additionally, participants indicated that the idea of partnerships between universities and retail is required for practical experience, of which universities must lead the discussion.

“I think right from the start, universities should decide that besides the theory in the programme, students should have some practicals, whether it is in the second or third year of their studies. I am not saying create a break in the learning programme but a flow of theory and practicals, but again, the university can decide how this works.”

The participants further expounded that there should be transparency, mutual benefits for stakeholders, a common understanding and proper reporting channels within the partnership. As reinforced by the manager:

“I was trying to sell myself before I sold others, thus, trust and relationships are pivotal in a partnership”.

This process includes a vision as universities are specialists in training and development and retail in practical training; thus, the elimination of the stigma associated with retail is promising. South Africa has the skills base; however, emphasis should be placed on continuous learning through the development of sustainable relationships between the sectors. Therefore, the development of appropriate programmes, such as occupational-directed programmes, should be considered to address the current skills challenges.

THEME 5 - Higher education reform: a predictor of employment

With regard to the work preparedness of students, participants indicated the following:

Universities do not necessarily prepare students for some of the realistic elements of a job, as stated: *“Deadlines, late hours and yes there are certain people that are much more diligent than those at university. One is expected to work a lot harder and sacrifice, which I don’t think universities can prepare you for this”.* It can be agreed that universities certainly have deadlines; however, the consequences at universities are not as severe as in the workspace.

There is a lack of practical knowledge, which would provide a better understanding of retail operations if students were afforded this opportunity. This points to a degree of restructuring of qualifications at universities to incorporate imperative elements. If considered, the retail industry would contentedly accept work-ready graduates. On the other hand, the retail industry would need to share trends and knowledge in the restructuring of qualifications. This could be in the form of store managers availing themselves to deliver a presentation to students. In this way, up-to-date, relevant information is incorporated into the syllabi. This links in with updating the curriculum, another vital component in ensuring that universities are churning out work-ready graduates.

Resourceful initiatives from a higher education perspective are critical to creating a smooth transition from university to the workspace, as evident in the manager's statement: *"It is difficult for retail to start the process due to obvious reasons; however, universities are knowledge development experts that can initiate conversations with retail"*.

To summarise, employability is a fundamental concept within the higher education sector; producing employable graduates incorporates the holistic educational spectrum. As a result, there should be a high correlation between one's education level and work performance. The overall transformation of the higher education sector is an essential and perpetual process.

5.3.2 Triangulation

In order to validate the findings of the qualitative element of the study, triangulation was conducted by probing participants in terms of their views regarding the skill gaps and potential partnerships relating to this study. This was conducted in the form of focus group interviews with floor supervisors from both retail organisations. Employing triangulation strategies in a study helps "create a better understanding of a phenomenon under study" (Caillaud and Flick 2017: 155), as well as using evidence

from different approaches to provide robust answers by applying it to the problem to assess the balance of evidence (Shahab *et al.* 2022: 1316). As a result, rich data was acquired through the triangulation process by administering the interview schedule, so conclusions can be drawn from this study. Participants were notified that discussions would be recorded for the purposes of transcription during the analysis process. The data obtained from this process was analysed in the same way as described for interviews. Microsoft Office package was used to organise and code the data.

5.3.2.1 Focus Group Interviews

The findings from the focus group interviews will be summarised and presented, offering insights and perspectives gathered from the discussions. The focus group schedule (Appendix K) comprised eleven questions, divided into four sections, namely skills, partnership expectations, partnership sustainability and partnership framework. The aforementioned sections were grouped and subsequently analysed.

Skills and training/university preparing students – There was strong agreement among the participants who felt that “learning by experience is the best teacher”, as rote learning alone is not considered beneficial. Literature-based education does not expose students to the practical side of retail. Therefore, optimistic, unanimous responses were noted in terms of the views expressed on theory versus practicals, as work readiness is a challenge with the university-to-work transition. Students are unlikely to envision their futures; therefore, emphasis must be placed on training either in the form of in-service, work-integrated learning or on-the-job training. This exposure to the working world will ensure a quicker transition into the role of employment, both locally and globally.

Participants believed that formal education is important; however, skills such as having a passion for people, showing initiative “even if it's not your job”, being proactive, communication, technological skills, customer skills, empathy, common sense and working under pressure were noted as visibly lacking though relevant. In terms of the specific skills within the retail sector, understanding finance, merchandise,

management skills, product knowledge and technology were cited as relevant. The industry is changing business models and, in some cases, specialised people are sought after to fill specific roles within the organisation. Thus, the industry is becoming more attractive, especially after the global pandemic, as stated by the participants. There are renewed and strategic ways of operating business in terms of innovations within the retail sector. With that being said, continuous in-house training is available to current and new employees; however, much of this could be abated due to partnerships with education. Participants remained positive in terms of the training programmes available to employees, including systems training, product introduction and training management programmes.

Partnership expectations – Participants were optimistic about the partnership initiative in addressing the current societal challenges, believing it will provide graduates with countless opportunities for the future. As a result, industry could have improved graduate programmes or full employment opportunities by being able to choose the best candidates. The practical knowledge would demonstrate better skills and better-trained people. With consistent communication and consultations between the sectors, expectations can be established together to identify and address the gaps in the process. As suggested by a participant: *“Practical lessons at universities may not tie up to retail expectations; thus, frequent conversations with education and us (retail) may address this issue”*.

On the other hand, a small number of participants were of the opinion that several stakeholders may demonstrate disinterest in the partnership due to time to organise and resources, particularly those stakeholders that represent the retail sector. It was further stated that this is due to the nature of retail in terms of its core functionality. These thoughts are reiterated by the respondents’ statement: *“Some people may not be interested or are not passionate and may cause problems. Whose responsibility will this become and what about the cost implications? I really wish I could do this, but the reality is where is the time?”*

Participants pointed out that, by invitation, retail experts could visit universities and deliver lectures that are relevant and current to the sector. As an example, presently, when graduates enter the workforce, they are unaware of the unions and the current retail systems. If prior exposure, via partnerships, was enabled, these graduates would be able to commence with duties, resulting in very little retraining. They would possess, at minimum, basic knowledge about policies, procedures and systems within the retail sector. As reiterated by a respondent: *“We will expect to get experienced graduates that will start their careers knowing what to do with very little training”*.

Success factors for the sustainability of partnerships – To ensure success within a partnership, the following were quoted as being relevant: appropriate management strategies, effective communication among the stakeholders, finance and other resources, being open, honest and trustworthy with no ulterior motives, and retaining staff by implementing workable strategies to minimise staff turnover. Additionally, listening, sharing ideas, eradicating negative attitudes, and working towards a common goal were alluded to as factors that could contribute to the success of a partnership. *“Post-mortems should be conducted to improve relationships, whereby criticism should be viewed in a positive light to rectify issues”*, as stated by a respondent.

There were several positive responses, indicating that a partnership is a worthy project. Participants stated that there would be mutual benefits to graduates and the retail sector in the sense that graduates would enter the working environment with a fair amount of experience. Therefore, it translates to minimal training requirements, signifying savings to the retail sector, as well as fresh idea offerings from a tertiary point of view. Additionally, support structures are viewed as critical elements for the effective functioning of partnerships.

On the contrary, graduate expectations may be on the high end in terms of salaries and status. This was cited as one of the reasons that retail has high staff turnover. As stated by a participant, *“We invest in employees and as soon as a counter-offer is*

presented to them in terms of an increase in salary or status, they resign, thus leaving the organisation in a state of disarray”.

Partnership framework – In terms of having a partnership framework as a support structure, one participant indicated *“it is essential to have plans in place and this is one way of making sure that a goal can be achieved”*. Majority of the participants alluded to understanding mutual roles and responsibilities with a framework. Additionally, participants believed that transparency, as an example would contribute to improved communication. *“Everyone will be on the same page in terms of their responsibilities”*, as quoted by a participant indicates the foundation that will be created with a framework in place. Most importantly, *“a framework will help going back to the drawing board to resolve challenges”*. This will aid all stakeholders to continually enhance the partnership.

Participants were confident that a potential success factor would be a reduction in the unemployment rate, as youngsters would be able to secure employment directly after university exposure. To summarise, the findings from the triangulation process echo the findings from the interview data analysis process.

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study. The first section of the chapter focused on the quantitative element, encompassing student and store manager survey analysis through descriptive and inferential statistics. This was followed by the qualitative element, namely, store and focus group interview transcriptions and analysis. Overall, the data obtained revealed that the linkage between education and industry is weak, if not, non-existent.

The quantitative results indicated that, due to the absence of a connection between higher education and industry, several challenges were noted. As a result, a vast gap in skills was realised between education and the working world, including the absence

of retail-relevant content from the university programme. Thus, it was revealed that collaborative curriculum design and delivery are of fundamental importance. In addition, the qualitative results prove that continual skill honing is a requisite in retail, as an evolving sector. Furthermore, understanding workplace demands through practical exposure is imperative for a seamless university-work transition, hence the prospect of partnerships. The next chapter presents a discussion of the findings.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the findings of the study. This chapter offers a discussion of the findings by critically evaluating them in relation to existing literature. Additionally, the chapter provides an overview of partnerships with regard to the wide-spread skills challenges encountered by several industries.

The chapter aims to critically evaluate the implications of this study's findings with regard to the role of partnerships as reflected in the literature review chapters and as underpinned by partnership frameworks. Additionally, the aim is discussed in relation to the objectives outlined in Chapter 1, namely: to outline the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector; to identify skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between the education provided at universities and the skills required by the retail sector; to determine the perceptions of students and retail management with regards to building and strengthening partnerships; and to propose a partnership framework for effective partnership between public higher education institutions and the retail sector.

6.2 Quantitative Findings

The findings of the quantitative element of this study, incorporating feedback from both students and store representatives, indicate that the implications for graduates' transition into the working world are largely influenced by the vast gap in skills. This is primarily attributed to the knowledge imparted at universities in relation to industry expectations. The trends indicate that there is a direct relationship between skills and the labour market. The discussions of the findings generated for objective one, which relate to the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships, will be presented in this section.

The findings pertaining to the sustainability of partnerships presented a positive outlook for imminent partnerships if appropriate structures are available to all stakeholders. It was also discovered that stakeholder roles and input should be clearly stated in terms of the aims of the initiative. This notion is supported by Batti (2019: 22), who argues that “most partnerships lack formal governance structures; therefore, without them, partnerships become informal networks with high reputational and financial risks”. The findings further indicated that the following elements are pertinent to the sustainability of partnerships: availability of clear guidelines or outline of expectations; discussion on resources and resource sharing; constant open communication; amicably resolving conflicts; mobilising and sharing of knowledge. This study also demonstrated that merging resources may contribute with the development challenges being addressed. Sidibeh (2021: 11) notes that mutual learning and trust, communication and relationships have shown manifest improvements over the years through partnerships. Open and frequent communications assist in retaining partner organisation interest by increasing their understanding, and commitment (Batti 2019: 23). The reality is that if these elements are appropriately implemented, they will eventually be favourable for all stakeholders within the partnering process. It can be concluded that respondents felt strongly about the soft skills of partners within a partnership. They further stated that being able to navigate interpersonal relationships is pivotal in partnerships, thus strong emphasis must be placed on soft skills rather than technical expertise only. As reiterated by Batti (2019: 23), “partnerships require a solid commitment to shared goals, shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and the sharing of resources, risks, and rewards”.

Additionally, the findings revealed that cooperative activities involving the application of democratic values yielded greater results, a case in point being financial resources that may potentially lead to long-term relationships. The results indicate that a partnership should be solidified by potential contracts or memorandums of understandings that may define the business by creating structures, as partnerships create value that no single actor could reach alone (Roschier *et al.* 2022: 22). Significantly, due to shared responsibility and resources, formalisation and structure are of utmost importance to

reinforce collaborations. As reiterated by Patel and Rao (2022: 143), sustainable development goals are not achieved by one body, as achieving them requires collaboration across sectors, organisations and individuals committed to improvising the human experience for all. “Sustainability is a new political agenda that is crucial for all institutions to fulfil their responsibilities to promote proactive dynamics between institutions, agents and individuals” (Aleixo, Azeiteiro and Leal 2020: 19). The findings endorse the encouraging concept of partnerships, where the objective of outlining the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships was addressed.

The discussion of findings for objective two, identifying the skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between the education provided at university and the skills required by the retail sector, will be presented in the subsequent section. The results revealed that more practical skills are required to work smarter and to experience the working world. In this way, graduates can offer added expertise in the form of renewed ideas and a fresh knowledge perspective based on retail expectation. It also creates awareness of how theoretical concepts are applied in practice to improve retail operations. Furthermore, exposure to practicals can help students become more competitive in the job market, with additional opportunities becoming available, thus increasing their chances of employment. Therefore, the more practical skills that are incorporated into the regular education programme, the more beneficial it is for graduates to transition into the working world.

It was discovered that there is minimal or no synchronisation between educational institutions and the retail industry, yet this is necessary given that employers value apprenticeship as a model of learning and developing future leaders (Brockmann and Laurie 2020: 50). Tamrat (2022: 205) similarly states that a “significant number of young people face difficulties in finding a job due to the mismatch between their education and/or training” and labour market requirements. The author further states that “specific skills and attributes identified as essential components of employability are widely defined as communication skills, critical and analytical thinking, teamwork, problem-solving, self-

management, business and customer awareness, taking initiative, leadership and managerial abilities, systems thinking, work ethic”, among others.

The issue of training and skills is relevant within the context of South Africa and abroad, where an increased emphasis on work-integrated learning in university education is emerging (Atkinson 2016: 1).

A theory endorsed by Zaheer et al. (2021: 293) claims that one of the many reasons that graduates fail to secure jobs is a lack of industrial experience. The findings imply that realistic skills should be prioritised above rote learning, which is consistent with Atkinson's (2016: 8) notion that work-based and work-integrated learning allow students to build knowledge in the workplace. Furthermore, apprenticeships are economically sensible for employers by offering them an incentive to continue participating in the system as well as “hands-on and applied learning opportunities, giving students real work responsibilities” (Hoffman and Schwartz 2015: 17). According to Fisher and Scott (2011: 1), higher education has a uniquely important role in resolving the persistent skills shortage in South Africa by producing qualified graduates and postgraduates. Even though the primary responsibility is that of educational institutions to upskill graduates, there is a need for mandatory practical training. Ryazanova (2022: 58) recommends that “all interested parties, such as university faculties, employers, professional associations and graduates can contribute to the development of graduate skills and each party must take responsibility and cooperate with others”. “Raising education and skill levels is crucial not only for increasing workforce productivity but also for enhancing the innovative capacity of the economy and facilitating the absorption and diffusion of new technology” (Fisher and Scott 2011: 1).

The findings additionally reveal that skills specific to retail may be necessary as supported by Woods, Doherty and Stephens (2022) that the “skills required to perform in retail now and in the future will be a combination of human, digital and traditional skills”. Shopper behaviour is evolving and keeping up with the pace of modern technology is a challenge (Nilsson: 2022: 349), thus necessitating the provision of new hard skills, but importantly, reinforcing the need for soft skills. The findings reveal that, while skills imparted at

university were easily comprehensible and applicable to retail, there were disparities in opinion regarding their benefits in the working world. This is indicative of retail skills that are mandatory for specific operations within the sector. Moreover, it was found that there were mismatches between the knowledge disseminated at universities and the expectations of industry. Therefore, the study revealed that it would be extremely beneficial for exposure to relevant retail content such as customer service, dealing with difficult people, time management, working under pressure, attention to detail, problem-solving and teamwork. As stated by Ryazanova (2022: 51), the role of universities in training graduates for the labour market is an issue that needs long-term research. However, universities are not solely responsible for developing graduates' skills. Both graduates and employers must contribute to skills development which can only be attained through practice. The above findings resonate with Steynberg *et al.*'s (2020: 28) study, which states that "HEIs can contribute by providing the retail industry with talented people who have the insight and capability to interpret big data, develop appropriate automotive technology, respond appropriately to ecosystem factors, understand the geopolitical circumstances of the local environment, and provide guidelines to model changes in consumer behaviour". Tamrat (2022: 1) believes that "failure to equip graduates with skills can have adverse consequences for all stakeholders since it can pose challenges with regard to unemployment, low wages, job satisfaction, the ability to find suitable work and the overall productivity and competitiveness of a given economy".

It is evident from the findings that ample opportunities exist for industry and education to promote opportunities for students to gain employability skills. These findings are echoed by Lourenço *et al.* (2022: 292), stating that gaps are identified, pedagogical issues are addressed in terms of revising the existing curriculum design, as well as providing valuable lessons to institutions to help improve the existing programme to become more pertinent to the industry. The effect of skills was found to significantly contribute to the employment status of graduates; thus, universities and lecturers should pursue collaborative curriculum design (Atkinson 2016: 9). Educating students with a comprehensive and deep set of in-demand employability skills would be of tremendous importance for the employability of individuals and the country's development (Mahajan

and Suresh 2017: 263). Similarly, one of the key issues discovered in their study was the insufficient readiness of graduates for new, unfamiliar, unexpected or unknown situations, according to Ryazanova (2022: 58). The authors further expound that “vocational training university departments are responsible for preparing graduates for work in a super-complex world and for learning in uncertain situations, for helping them develop knowledge and awareness of the work environment and for helping them form initial expectations from work”. By the same token, the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (2018: para. 11 line 1) states that “where meaningful partnerships exist between business and higher education, the gaps between the supply of graduates and the demand for skills are significantly reduced, and the needs of businesses are more closely associated with the academic curricula”.

One approach to ensuring the employability of students is by building relationships through partnerships. This finding is consistent with Jollands *et al.* (2016: 6), who signify that students should be provided with opportunities to reflect and articulate their skills and experience throughout their undergraduate degree and be seen as life-long learners. Additionally, the partnering process, in its ability to address employment-related issues, can lead to the development of valuable relationships. The finding also suggests that pursuing partnerships has a high probability of bridging the gaps that exist between what is taught at universities and what is expected in industry. The findings concur with the study conducted by Litman (2022: 1), which states that “there is far greater potential for closing the talent gap when both parties work closely together in partnerships”.

From an industry standpoint, there is an expectation of being presented with a pool of experienced people to join the retail industry due to partnerships with the education sector. This statement confirms the conviction by Fisher and Scott (2011: 1) that “raising education and skill levels is crucial for workforce productivity as well as enhancing the innovative capacity of the economy”. Thus, the obligation is on the various stakeholders to optimise the partnership’s lifespan, as the findings showed that it will lead to knowledge-building initiatives, creating opportunities to think outside the box and prospects of empowerment. In the case of employees, these findings are consistent with

a study conducted by Machová *et al.* (2022: 80) indicating that employees believe they are competent and equipped for their work when managers provide all the necessary information for employees. Furthermore, the findings relating to the challenges of skilled retail employees retiring or emigrating may be mitigated by partnership prospects. This finding is consistent with the convictions of the Human Resource Development Council of South Africa (2018: para. 11 line 1), affirming that it is possible to significantly reduce the gap between the supply of graduates and the demand for skills due to the existence of meaningful partnerships. It is imperative to note that “partnerships can bring about both intangible and tangible value when they are well developed, managed and governed” (Batti 2019: 21). As a result, the findings for this section, based on the objective of identifying the skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between education at university and the skills required by retail, were adequately addressed.

Objective three of the study was to determine the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships; thus, the findings will be presented. As previously alluded to, the findings indicated that structured initiatives among stakeholders are requisite for partnerships. Also, the findings showed that although partnerships present a favourable perspective for all, they can likewise fail due to pertinent elements being disregarded. It was echoed that qualities including mutual trust, commitment, communication and others have been identified as fundamental for long-term success. In support, extant literature by Sidibeh (2021: 1) and Patel and Rao (2022: 143) reverberates these findings demonstrating that improvements were observed in partnerships where trust and open communication are regarded as essential factors. Another study that supports the assertion is by Sider, Morvan and Börner (2021), who demonstrate that the organising partners in a partnership spent two years to help strengthen the trust between partners. As a result, flexibility is requisite in sustaining high levels of collaborative partnerships (Burroughs *et al.* 2020). For a partnership to succeed, members must be allowed to express their opinions, resulting in meaningful contributions from stakeholders. In retrospect, it enables relationship development, which is pertinent in the partnership process. This finding is reinforced by

De Man and Luvison (2019: 7), asserting that relationship-building is a key element in the success of alliances.

Furthermore, resource sharing ensures reciprocal benefits, resulting in both concrete and intangible value. This finding is strengthened by Ratten's (2022: 1) observation that partnerships are essential as they allow for the sharing of appropriate resources and information as well as to support the diffusion of knowledge and technology (Orazbayeva and Plewa 2022: 487). It has become apparent that university programmes could be improved as a consequence of enhanced status owing to partnerships, as well as playing a role in addressing some of the challenges. This finding could also imply greater interest to the programme as a result of industry's significant role in advancing learning within it. Thus, it was gathered that partnerships are a necessity for educational improvement, as advocated by Thant Sin (2022: 62), as well as enabling higher education institutions to demonstrate a more attractive return on investment for prospective students (Litman 2022). A study by Gorlach (2017: 24) further supports the benefits of partnerships, stating that university-industry partnerships can "enhance education, drive research and development, strengthen a company's competitiveness, create jobs and improve the wellbeing of communities". Stakeholders engaged in joint activities accomplished more with less, which would not have been possible without a partnership. (Moss, Loor and Parada 2022: 16).

Also, the findings relate to the relationship between education and industry in the sense that, at present, several employees possess poor education levels. This, in turn, is directly related to the educational components of future employee preparedness. Educators must therefore develop curricula that have an impact and provide students with an experience to improve outcomes such as "student learning, skill building, employability and civic engagement" (Willness and Bruni-Bossio 2017: 135). The findings demonstrated that most of the current retail employees have been exposed to on-the-job training as opposed to formal training. This finding may be linked to a study by Grewal, Motyka and Levy (2018: 1), which found that retail is evolving at an "accelerated rate" due to technological advances and evolving customer behaviours and demands. On the other

hand, the Axonify State of Frontline Workplace Training Study (2019) states that 31 % of retail associates still do not receive formal workplace training. Therefore, collaborative curriculum design is necessary to be more effective.

The findings showed that students value learning on a practical basis, implying that industry professionals should be incorporated into the learning process. Therefore, retail presence in the classroom was found to be a beneficial factor in the transition process from universities to the working world. It is significant as it leads to gaps being identified, thus addressing the challenges prior to graduates migrating to the work environment. On the other hand, it was established that being book smart does not guarantee success, as knowledge of how the world operates is pertinent for success. As stated by Atkinson (2016: 8), “universities have traditionally been responsible for delivering education and training to students, but with the massification of higher education and increasing demand for work-integrated learning, employers and industry are potentially taking on some of the roles of teaching students”. The evolving nature of both education and retail could potentially mean a review of the system to ensure reciprocal benefits for both sectors. The notion of experts in the classroom translates to real exposure to industry, as supported by Lourenço *et al.* (2022: 292) demonstrating that pedagogical issues are addressed and gaps identified. Gentelli (2015: 8) expressed a similar sentiment, demonstrating that students appreciated and recognised the “benefits of learning from practising industry professionals”. Thus, the findings support the study’s objective of determining the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.

The findings for the final objective of the study, which was to propose a framework for effective partnering between higher education institutions and the retail sector, will be presented. The findings showed that majority of views expressed by the stakeholders significantly contribute to the success of a partnership by adopting a framework as a template for mapping activities within the partnership as reinforced by Cox *et al.* (2022: 142). Additionally, it is used to guide people through the development and growth of the partnership. In the case of education, the framework can be a guiding tool for curriculum

development and design, as supported by McHenry and Krishnan (2023: 16). The findings derived from the perceptions on frameworks validate Cox et al.'s (2022: 142) view that frameworks could support a partnership, which is justifiable in the context of this study. Almalky and Alqahtani (2021: 2) state that “good partnerships with businesses benefit students directly in fundamental ways by learning about many different careers, trying some of the work involved to identify careers that interest them most, and learning about the natural supports available in real-world job settings”. Although the findings indicate that majority of the respondents felt positively about the framework for collaboration, there was a small number of respondents that were either unsure or not aware of the dynamics of a framework due to the possibility of not being familiar with the tool. This could be addressed by training and awareness programmes to educate stakeholders of a framework for partnerships. The study revealed that a framework is somewhat linked to issues of creating structure within partnerships. The findings, therefore, address the objective of proposing a framework for effective partnering.

6.3 Qualitative Findings

The study revealed that investigating the role of partnerships between public higher education and the retail sector identified a direct link between skills and the labour market. This section of the chapter presents a summary of the qualitative findings of the study. The initial discussion pertains to the interviews with regional managers, followed by the focus group discussions with floor supervisors. The findings of the study in the qualitative component of the study are based on the quantitative findings, which were generated to provide additional coverage.

The findings for this component of the study provide a holistic view of the organisations based on the managers' responses. The findings, particularly those pertaining to the retail sector and its attractiveness, demonstrate that the sector is becoming more popular as a result of the ever-changing business environment. The retail industry is among the business sectors that are rapidly growing (Jaman, 2022: 6). Due to the sector's prominence, it was discovered that there was growth potential for the young, either in the form of progression within the business or the possibility of becoming well-established

entrepreneurs. Despite the issues that impede the sector, such as a high staff turnover, it was found that succession planning within the sector was of pertinent value. Consistent with this finding is a study by Ali and Mehreen (2019) stating that established “succession planning critically reduces the intentions of employees to quit the firm”.

It was found that student preparedness by universities with regard to the workplace or practical experience was a crucial factor necessitating serious intervention. Employers strongly believed that the greatest challenge was a lack of or limited exposure to the working world. They believed that the university-work balance was pertinent, in line with Skiadas *et al.* (2021: 31) who argued that since the modern work environment was constantly evolving, universities were required to develop their learning activities accordingly. The findings point to an integration of theory and practice. Daza, Gudmundsdottir and Lund (2021: 3) consider “integrating theory and practice as two different but equally important sources of knowledge, which is crucial in designing school-university partnerships”. Despite the negative issues being identified, the findings of the study reveal that persistence in pursuing partnerships is critical to addressing these issues. Further to this, the findings indicate that partnerships are conceivable if a common vision is shared.

In addition, the findings highlight the importance of training bodies in ensuring students receive proper training. A concern was raised as to why there was still a skills gap despite the fact that graduates were trained at university. A practical solution is “career interventions among undergraduates over several stages of their higher education studies designed according to individual profiles” (Skiadas *et al.* 2021: 1196). As a way forward, training within the business sector was offered to ensure the long-term viability of a partnership. The findings were based on unrealistic views of textbook learning; thus, practicality is being promoted. The retail industry, as a previously gender-biased industry, is a vital component that can be transformed with the advent of partnerships. If firms are concerned about retention, they could improve outcomes by employing more women (Benson, Li and Shue 2021). Therefore, the eradication of gender stereotypes and advancements for women is potentially attainable.

It was interesting to note that the findings relating to the skills challenge were consistent with the quantitative findings. The skills found to be lacking in new graduates related to financial management, soft skills, supply chain and retail-specific skills. The often-understated skills that were found to be deficient included communication, politeness, treating customers well, good attitude, enthusiasm, work ethics, commitment, loyalty, courtesy and lastly, adaptability. The link to the skills deficiency was due to the absence of real-world experience. Thus, the finding is consistent with Steynberg *et al.*'s (2020: 27) statement that "HEIs will have to assess how to align their traditional supply-driven curriculum offerings with the new demand-driven challenges". Furthermore, the retail laws and regulations enforce mandatory in-house training and development programmes to enhance skills development and growth promotion. This entails standard procedures for the training and development of new employees due to the lack of specific business area skills. The intriguing element from a retail point of view was based on family-owned business development, which is excellent for creating entrepreneurs. Additionally, it leads to succession planning, which, according to Ahmed *et al.* (2022), provides job security and creates a positive career attitude.

The emphasis on people is important, as parts of brand building, retail vision and transformation are all based on the manager's previous and current roles within the organisation. Therefore, resources, especially human resources, are critical components of interpersonal or behavioural interaction, mutual understanding and managing relationships. Hence, in order for partnerships to be successful, parameters within the partnerships must be in place. Elements including improper reporting channels, improper expectations and funding issues were found to be detrimental in a partnership setup. Assenting to this finding is Litman (2022: para. 48 line 1), who believes that higher education-employer partnerships are not quick remedies as "they require commitment to avoid structural and process missteps, a data-supported business plan and a financial arrangement". Therefore, for the sustainability of the partnership, the correct talent or human resources is key.

The findings indicated that when it comes to partnership management and vision, ongoing communication is cited as vital in terms of eradicating the education challenges as well as the retail stigma. Batti (2019: 23) agrees, indicating that open and frequent communication assists in retaining partner organisations. Hence, understanding and preparing for the impending partnership are crucial for both organisations. For a successful partnership, the following factors are pertinent, as demonstrated in the findings: organisation and structure; relationship management; and a focus on unemployment alleviation through continuous learning and development.

The findings also emphasised the importance of eradicating unfair systems, as higher education is a predictor of employment. There was strong consensus on the past being a predictor of the future. As indicated by Keswell (2010: 1), South Africa have the highest level of income equality but the inequality is strongly racial in nature. Moreover, according to the findings, universities should be the leaders in knowledge management and development by creating opportunities for the retail sector to commence engagement. In support of this finding, Steynberg *et al.* (2020: 27) believe that “HEIs will play an increasing role in supporting and preparing the retail sector to participate and contribute to a clean and green economy, safeguarding consumer and employee health, and empowering all stakeholders in the retail chain”.

Every firm, without a doubt, faces difficulties. Likewise, as established in this study, partnerships will encounter challenges since the retail sector is a volatile industry, skill requirements change regularly and the uncertainty rests in people’s ability to adapt. The failure to effectively invest in their workforce is why retailers struggle to provide improved jobs and benefits to employees (Lewis 2019: 90). In order to manage a partnership successfully, transparency is key, followed by working towards mutual goals. Thus, a common understanding of what to expect should be prioritised.

The second section of the qualitative findings focused on findings from the focus group interviews conducted with floor supervisors. The findings based on the issue of skills and university preparedness were similar to the findings from interviews. It was found that

learning by experience was the best option, as literature-based education did not expose students to the practical environment. This exposure will almost certainly result in a quicker transition into a “worker” role. The findings indicated that soft skills were inadequate, despite the fact that they are necessary for the retail environment or any other context. Thus, this finding is supported by Jacobs (2022: 1) who stated that “soft skills, hard skills, explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge” are essential for employees to fulfil their tasks and obligations. With the evolving business model in retail, swift adaptability to new skills is necessary. While much emphasis has been placed on the importance of skills, virtually every organization engages in specialised training for new employees, whether through induction training programs or in-house initiatives.

Participants' optimism that partnerships will give graduates several opportunities to grow was a significant finding. This positive outlook reinforces the assumption that these partnerships will not only provide graduates with numerous prospects for growth, but also highlights the significance of this perception in the study's keys findings. Contrary to the belief that everyone is enthusiastic about partnerships, findings reveal that some are disinterested. This assertion was grounded on the nature of the retail industry, such as considerations related to time management and resource utilisation. This insight broadens the understanding of attitudes towards partnerships within the context of the retail sector. However, as previously indicated, these findings were consistent with the aforementioned findings. Appropriate management strategies, effective communication, honesty with no ulterior motives and implementation of workable strategies are all components of partnership success.

The results of implementing a framework as a support structure within partnerships were significantly positive in terms of goal achievement. These favourable results underscore the potential benefits of incorporating a framework, encouraging stakeholders to revisit their strategies and overcome the challenges. Moreover, this finding provides additional evidence that employing a guiding tool to facilitate collaborations can result in a more significant long-term contribution to society, particularly in addressing issues such as unemployment.

6.4 Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that by investigating the role of partnerships between public higher education and the retail sector, partnerships ought to be considered in resolving some of the challenges that graduates encounter upon exiting university. It does not necessarily mean that a formal partnership should be the norm; however, any association between educational institutions and industry must be the initial point of entry. Mere communication may ensure that crucial dialogues occur.

Overall, the data from the quantitative elements of the study revealed that the skills taught at universities in comparison to industry expectations are not in sync. In turn, it is related to employment being relevant and necessary, thus resulting in the formation of partnerships. Gorlach's (2017: 24) study supports this notion, stating that the success of university-industry partnerships benefits the university, students, industry and the community at large in addressing the skills shortage in the country. The quantitative element of the study conclusively indicated that partnerships must be a primary point of discussion in resolving the skills challenge.

The qualitative element revealed that there is a relationship between what educational institutions deem appropriate theoretical content and the outcome for industry. Also, it was discovered that the retail industry is a fast-paced industry that rarely halts, hence, training and relevant skills are most significant. It was also revealed that staff turnover was rife in the retail sector. Supporting this finding, Lewis (2019: 75) stated that due to the high costs of training and replacing employees, the turnover problem in retail grocery cannot be ignored, thus salient to this study's investigation. The industry is notorious for its high expectations, which range from long hours to in-house training sessions. To summarise, the general consensus proved dissatisfying for managers as a result of the evident skills challenge. Retention of skilled and competent workers is a significant factor in the attainment of firms' success and competitive advantage. Leaders should have effective strategies to increase employee engagement and retention, thereby reducing the risk of employee turnover in the workplace because motivated and engaged employees increase annually (Jaman 2022: 6).

The next chapter provides the conclusions and recommendations drawn from this study. An overview of the study and its limitations will be included.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented a discussion of the study's findings. This chapter will discuss the conclusions and recommendations for the study that relate to the outcomes in the preceding chapter. In addition, the study's contribution to the body of knowledge will be highlighted. This study set out to critically analyse partnerships between public higher education institutions and retail organisations in KwaZulu-Natal Province. It did so by investigating the role of retail in education and vice versa, with the objective of proposing a framework that contributes to the skills challenge. The proposed framework highlights partnerships in terms of the relationship between education and retail. Thus, this chapter offers a holistic review of the answers to the research questions of this study, namely: What key success factors influence the sustainability of partnerships? Which skills are considered relevant to the retail sector? How do students and retail managers perceive the building and strengthening of partnerships? What is the proposed framework for effective partnership between public higher education institutions and the retail sector?

7.2 Overview of the study

A discussion of the outcomes of the study will be presented in relation to how the outcomes of each chapter address the research objectives and questions. Also, the results are briefly presented with regard to each objective of the study. Additionally, the section highlights the contextual background, theoretical framework, literature, methodology and empirical findings of the study. The limitations of the study are discussed, as are the recommendations and/or directions for future studies.

7.2.1 Overview of contextual background

Chapter 1 of the study provided a background to the study, in terms of investigating the role of partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector by outlining

key success factors identifying relevant skills to the retail industry and establishing expectations, experiences and knowledge of stakeholders. Of importance, the gap between employer requirements and graduate skills in the retail sector was discussed, with an emphasis on underprepared graduates entering the workforce. The deliberations in the chapter further highlight business-education partnerships as a consideration that may be deemed necessary in narrowing the gaps that exist by surveying retail employees and exit-level students. In addition, the development of an appropriate framework was proposed as an objective within the study as a support structure for all stakeholders in the partnership process. As a guiding tool, it is anticipated that the framework will help stakeholders achieve the desired outcomes, namely the production of work-ready graduates.

7.2.2 Outline of the Literature reviewed

Chapter 2 of the study provided an overview of the public higher education sector within the South African context. Education in the early years, the evolution of the education systems, as well as governmental policies and structures, were discussed. Furthermore, challenges faced by higher education and a brief introduction to partnerships were deliberated. The skills challenges with regard to their alignment with industry were discussed, as a pivotal component in terms of providing context to the study. The literature section continued in Chapter 3 with a comprehensive discussion of building and strengthening partnerships.

Chapter 3 was the second literature chapter that began with a discussion of the retail landscape in South Africa as a pivotal element of this study. The discussion progressed to a comprehensive explanation of partnerships, including an examination of the types or forms of partnerships. This included building and strengthening university-industry partnerships in terms of sustainability, stakeholder engagement, synergies and success factors. Partnerships between education and industry provide the foundation necessary for the work environment; thus, current retail partnerships as well as the 21st-century workforce were discussed.

7.2.3 Proposed Theoretical Framework

The proposed theoretical framework for effective partnerships between higher education institutions and the retail sector for the study was presented in Chapter 3. This is pivotal for the study in terms of amending non-concrete assumptions into concrete confirmations. As the debate progressed, existing partnership frameworks were identified and due to constraints in these frameworks, a new framework was adapted. As a result, the adapted framework was proposed to offer feasible approaches to the identified skill gaps between education and industry.

For this study, the partnership framework was adapted in terms of synergy identification, commitment, stakeholder expectations and collaborative activities. Furthermore, little or no mention was made of academics, employers and graduates, despite their importance. The framework is expected to aid in the partnering process by offering guidelines to all stakeholders within the partnership. Academics play a significant role with regard to policy development, university protocols and curriculum design, whereas industry can provide appropriate material and knowledge. Thus, the theme incorporating the roles of academics, employers and graduates encompasses key stakeholders who can contribute optimistically to the partnership. Coupled with this is the second theme of collaborative relationship management, encompassing synergies among stakeholders, as well as a cohesive relationship.

The framework was built on the relationship model between institutions and industry and was adapted based on the literature and data collected. Pertinent elements were revealed from the sources, thus leading to supplementary components being incorporated into the framework. The purpose of this is to ultimately address the ongoing skills challenge.

7.2.4 Overview of Research Methodology

The research methodology for the study was comprehensively discussed and presented in Chapter 4 of this study. The exploratory design was employed in the study to attain an

understanding of a particular phenomenon when not much is known. In the case of this study, it attempts to address the role of partnerships and skills relevant to the retail sector. The chapter described how the pragmatist paradigm that orientates itself towards solving practical problems was appropriate for the study by contributing towards addressing the skills issue. The findings of the study are based on a mixed methods approach consisting of surveying and interviewing exit-level students as well as retail store managers, respectively. The study was triangulated by employing focus group interviews with front-line supervisors, thus allowing the researcher to corroborate the results.

7.2.5 Overview of the empirical findings

The empirical findings for both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study will be explored in light of the study's objectives. As indicated in Figure 7.1, a graphical representation of the study objectives is presented. The study's overall findings demonstrated that the link between education and industry is tenuous, if not non-existent. As a result of this, various difficulties were identified, including a significant gap in skills. Key retail-relevant content is explicitly omitted from the university programme; therefore, reviewing the curriculum is crucial for both higher education and industry stakeholders. Due to the evolving nature of retail, skill honing is a requisite as the industry advances.

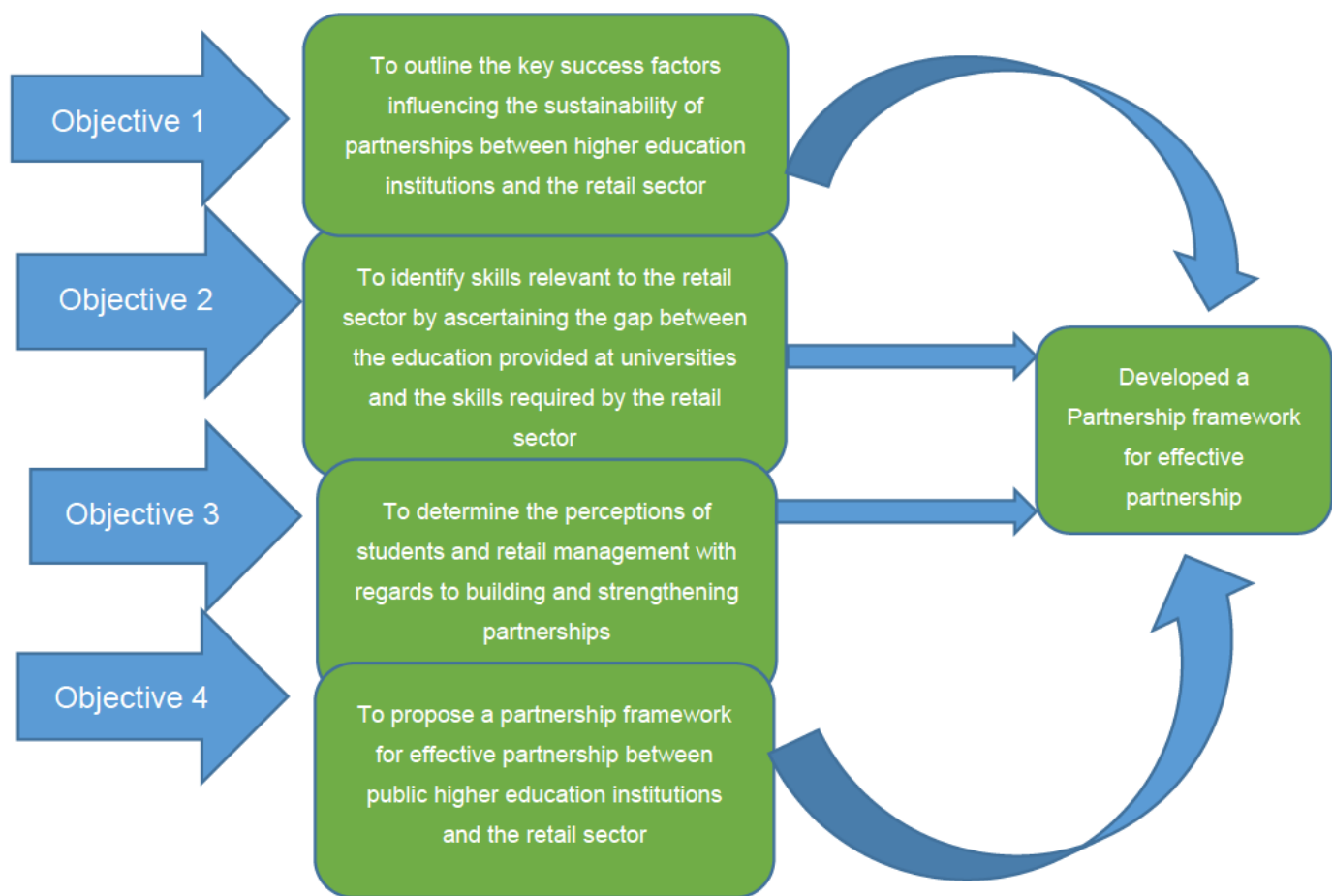


Figure 7.1: Overview of the study objectives

7.2.5.1 Overview of empirical findings for objective one

Objective one of the study, which was to outline the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships, was apt owing, to the scarcity of available research as well as to expand one's understanding of partnerships between education and industry. Moreover, it would provide responses to the relevant stakeholders of this study in determining the factors essential for a triumphant partnership.

The overall quantitative findings generated for the first objective of the study revealed that the following factors are critical for the success and sustainability of partnerships: collaborative activities must be formalised by solidifying contracts or similar to create a structure for all parties; commitment, respect, trust, support, communication and

coordination; adequate resources can create tangible and intangible value; and resolving conflict amicably is a requisite. With regard to resources, adequate allocation is essential for the sustainability of the partnership; hence, both sectors must devote resources to support the partnership. This process comprises budgeting and strategic planning initiatives to ensure effective operations to achieve the partnership's goals.

The results indicate that all stakeholders within the partnership must be in a cohesive relationship, which is central to the success of the partnership. This implies that the active engagement of education and retail stakeholders is crucial for the sustainability of partnerships. Furthermore, ensuring that the partner organisation's interest is retained is largely determined by open communication within a partnership. In addition to regular and open communication, stakeholder feedback may help build trust, thus fostering commitment. Accepting other points of view will also contribute to a successful partnership. Importantly, the alignment of goals between the education and retail sectors determines partnership effectiveness by ensuring that partnership objectives are clearly defined and mutually beneficial to all stakeholders. As a result, a purpose-driven partnership is formed, which establishes a strong foundation for sustainability.

A notable finding was the disparity noted in the skills taught in relation to the skills expected. There was substantial evidence of the absence of retail-relevant content delivered at universities. Based on this finding, it was established that collaborative curriculum design and delivery are of fundamental importance to all stakeholders in this study. Subsequent to this, the recommendation of hosting retail experts at universities to conduct guest lectures from a retail and practical standpoint will be of benefit to all stakeholders. Aside from having the feel of real retail exposure, deficiencies in the curriculum would be immediately identified. It is vital for students to be able to envision the benefits of the skills taught at university in relation to the benefits they may provide in the working world. These innovations in teaching and learning may eventually lead to increased retail sector competitiveness, thereby contributing to the partnership's long-term viability.

The findings generated from the qualitative element of the study revealed that dialogue between education and industry must be initiated to bridge the skill gaps. Due to the changing nature of the retail industry, continuous skill honing is essential, contributing to succession planning. Therefore, potential partnerships should be responsive to changing market conditions, societal tendencies and technological developments. Addressing these factors through change adaptation is critical for long-term sustainability. Several skills were found to be inadequate, which was consistent with the quantitative findings. A vital finding related to understanding workplace demands through initiatives including practical exposure is imperative for a seamless transition from university to the workplace. As previously alluded to, the retail sector is ever-evolving; therefore, all areas of the sector must be updated. It is anticipated that by addressing the need for practical training, graduates will be able to offer employers added value by sharing renewed ideas resulting from the integration of theoretical and practical knowledge.

The finding indicating that communication is key, including parameters within the partnership, is consistent with the quantitative findings. This also pertains to the reciprocal roles of education and retail stakeholders in successfully driving the partnership, with each leading in their respective areas of specialty. Therefore, institutional support from both sectors is vital for the overall sustainability of the partnership. The ultimate goal is to provide the industry with contented employees to enter the workforce. As a result of the partnership initiative, industry avoids re-training graduates due to their overall preparedness. It is therefore recommended that adopting the above-mentioned factors may contribute to partnerships sustaining themselves. Partnerships can benefit from innovative solutions that address challenges and generate value for all stakeholders, while also being adaptable and flexible. Partnerships can thrive when stakeholders from both sectors address challenges mutually, thus benefitting all concerned. Therefore, based on the study's findings, it can be concluded that the objective of outlining the key success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships was met.

7.2.5.2 Overview of empirical findings for objective two

The findings for objective two, identifying the skills relevant to the retail sector by ascertaining the gap between the education provided at the university and the skills required by the retail sector, provided thought-provoking feedback. It was noted that even though skills imparted at universities appeared to be engaging supporting materials, respondents were unsure how these skills would benefit them or the retail organisation. The resulting findings established that there was a noted gap in skills between what the graduates possessed as opposed to what the retail sector required. This is due to the changing nature of retail; thus, possessing skills encompassing business operations, finance, analytical skills, technology product knowledge, target markets, market myopia and entrepreneurial skills is indispensable. It must be noted that while these skills are vital for the retail sector, other skills, including customer service, communication and problem-solving, are equally important. As a result, the aforementioned skills affect the trajectory of the retail sector and enable graduates to build employability skills. It was found that through partnerships, employment-related issues may be addressed while building relationships.

As a result, the recommendation of inviting retail experts into the educational context is fundamental, as classroom learning differs from on-the-job training. This finding is critical for students, as having retail experts in a classroom translates to real exposure to the retail industry. The presence of retail experts translates into the transmission of the most relevant skills for the retail industry. Furthermore, the process of curriculum development may occur, providing students with practical learning opportunities. The process of curriculum development could result in more authentic teaching and learning practices, such as implementing industry-relevant assessments that include retail expert feedback. Respondents believed that additional practical skills were required prior to embarking on work in order to work smarter in the real world. Undoubtedly, this would benefit all parties concerned; therefore, recommending practical exposure to students is a defining feature in the execution of duties in industry.

Overall, it was discovered that by employing partnerships between education and industry, skills deemed relevant by industry would be addressed. This could help to bridge the gap between what is taught at university and what industry requires. Further enquiries can be conducted by examining the curriculum to understand the current skills that are deemed necessary in retail and determining whether there is a mismatch of skills. This process may include determining whether the curriculum is aligned with industry, thereby detecting mismatches between the education provided at universities and the skills required by retail. Following agreement by both sectors regarding the mismatch of skills, the redesigned curriculum may be implemented and monitored. This process could include monitoring progress perpetually, tracking recent changes and evaluating the effectiveness of the revised curriculum. Therefore, identifying skills that are relevant to retail includes identifying the skills gap, evaluating the current university curriculum, amending the curriculum and continually monitoring the process. As a result of the above-mentioned findings, it can be concluded that the objective of identifying skills relevant to the retail sector has been addressed.

7.2.5.3 Overview of empirical findings for objective three

The aim of objective three was to determine the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships. The findings for this objective demonstrated that opportunities will be generated, improvements will be acknowledged and the skills gap may be narrowed if partnerships are pursued. It was established that structured initiatives between stakeholders were pivotal for a well-run partnership as well as advancing learning. It is therefore recommended that stakeholders working within a partnership contribute collectively to achieving optimum success. Having open, trustworthy relationships among stakeholders is one approach to accomplishing this. Furthermore, working collectively and supporting one another is crucial to guaranteeing the partnership's prolonged existence.

It has been demonstrated that partnering may address employment-associated issues, as working together has a greater impact than operating solely. One of the numerous

benefits of collaborating is resource sharing, as each organisation has something unique to offer. Higher education institutions can take the lead in curriculum development, whereas industry may offer resources to enhance this process. It is a known fact that the youth of today experience numerous challenges in securing employment; consequently, forming partnerships may be the solution to this essential issue. As a result, the partnership may yield many valuable relationships. It is recommended that the partnership be structured so that the probabilities of resource acquisition and additional financial support are simpler. Understanding the processes and expectations is one way to strengthen the partnerships between education and industry. Furthermore, specific goals must be established, as well as evaluation and monitoring to measure the efficacy of the partnership. Areas for improvement can be identified using these strategies to ensure a strong partnership. It can therefore be concluded that the objective of determining the perceptions of students and retail management with regard to building and strengthening partnerships was achieved based on the findings presented. A thriving partnership is dependent on several pertinent factors, including consistent stakeholder engagement, working towards a common goal, and being open and honest.

7.2.5.4 Overview of empirical findings for objective four

The final objective of the study was to propose a framework for effective partnering between public higher education institutions and the retail sector. A critical review of the literature, as well as the study's findings, contributed to the development of the framework. Figure 7.2 presents the proposed framework for the study.

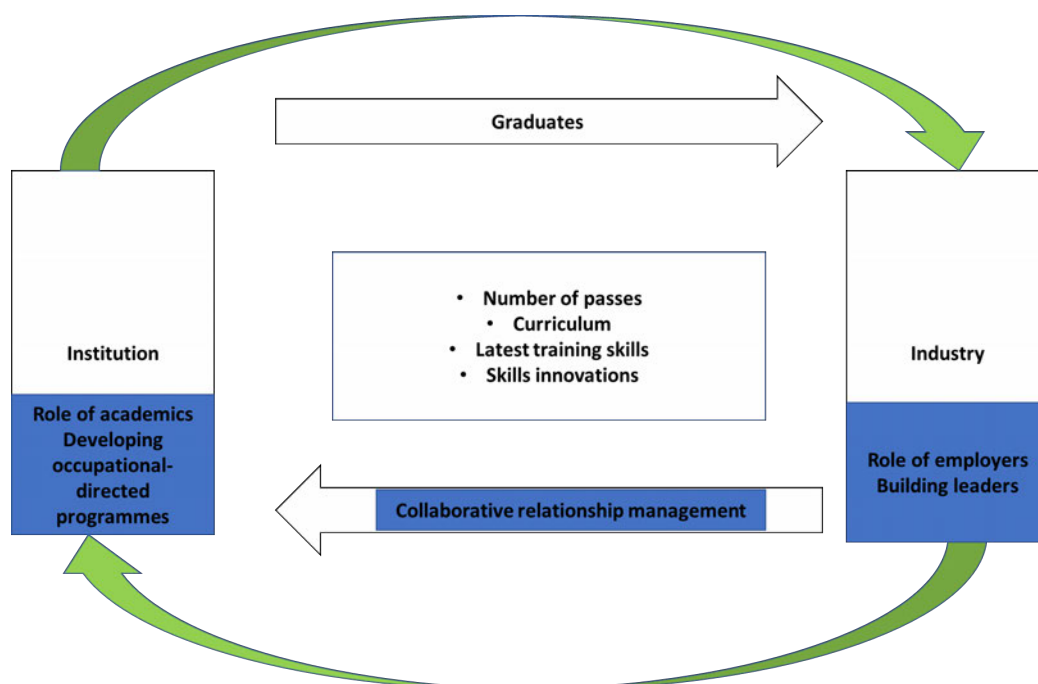


Figure 7.2: Proposed partnering/theoretical framework for the study

The framework, as presented in Figure 7.2, was adapted from the relationship model between institutions and industry (Council of Ontario Universities 1998). It includes the institution, industry and graduates in terms of academic elements. In addition, it exhibits a systematic flow from the institution to industry; however, the framework is lacking in synergy discovery and collaborative activities. As demonstrated in Figure 7.2, the results of this study indicate that the role of academics, graduates and employers can be further accentuated in the framework in terms of collaborative relationship management and are thus recommended. The above-mentioned stakeholders, namely academics, employers and graduates, are pivotal within the partnership process in terms of expectations and common links. The two arrows from the institution to industry and industry to institution demonstrate the mutual relationship and continuous flow between the entities. Synergies are, thus, created when the entities recognise similarities in anticipation of bringing about unified integration of ideas and enhanced communication. Stakeholders working cooperatively in a continuous relationship signifies that each stakeholder will benefit from the process. As a result, graduates are market-ready, employers enjoy a seamless recruitment process that requires no further training or development and higher education institutions are privy to the most updated and relevant content.

Overall, partnerships between higher education institutions and industry are advantageous to all stakeholders as there will be an acceleration of skills, signifying an impact on unemployment statistics, which are directly correlated to industry's inability to fill vacancies. Additionally, the notion of reskilling graduates will be eliminated. Therefore, the framework emphasises the significance of robust partnerships between education and industry in addressing skills challenges, exposing learners to authentic learning, and driving economic growth and innovation. Additionally, academics are the key players who are responsible for new knowledge creation that can be applied to real-world situations. As a result of the relevant training and education provided, a graduate's transition from university to the working world may be a seamless process.

The role of academics, graduates and employers was formulated from the findings of the study as the theme of building leaders and entrepreneurs through succession planning initiatives, collaborative relationship management, creating harmony and support, promoting psychological preparedness, an evolving business environment and advancements in the retail business landscape. Academics in the partnering process play a critical role in this framework with reference to university protocol, policies, teaching and learning methodologies, conducting research and being trained experts in their respective areas; therefore, regulation of curriculum-related activities can be controlled by them.

Employers, in this case, retailers, may contribute to structuring retail content for delivery to students, thus connecting retail and universities. These stakeholders are responsible for identifying industry needs, as well as creating opportunities for others. The key role of employers cannot be emphasised enough, as they are the stakeholders responsible for the recruitment of graduates and are the providers of work-integrated or similar training. Secondly, collaborative relationship management was based on developing occupational-directed programmes to address the skills deficiency as well as the fact that higher education is a predictor of employment, which thus developed into a theme. In terms of skills deficiency, the non-alignment with industry is clearly due to the absence of real-world experience. A recommendation is that prominence be given to this and that it

be driven by both industry and universities alike. The promotion of conversations or engaging with industry provides universities with opportunities to prepare graduates for employment. Universities, authoritative training bodies and in-house training bodies are fundamental participants in the process of training and development. Ultimately, collaborative relationship management is a crucial component of the framework to build and maintain effective partnerships through two-way communication, mutual trust and a shared understanding of the partnership goals. This study proposes the framework as a tool to be employed in addressing the skills challenge. Due to the framework's dynamic nature, which recognises the importance of partnerships in driving growth and innovation, industry may also adopt the tool to guide them accordingly.

7.3 Implications of the study

The findings of this study have significant implications for various stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, academics, business owners, corporates and researchers. These implications will be briefly discussed as a significant element of the study in terms of its impact.

7.3.1 Implications for policy

The findings of the study will impact educational institutions and business organisations as a result of the transition of graduates to employees. Therefore, the findings will be useful to academics who develop university curricula and educational policies, as well as industry stakeholders that interact with education. Both industry stakeholders and academics will find the results beneficial in developing policies and practices to guide the partnership by incorporating shared visions of 21st-century skills requirements. The issue of skills is highly pertinent, impacting the future of graduates and unemployment rates. This study established a direct correlation between skills imparted at universities and those required by industry. This signifies the obligatory link that must be created between educational institutions and industry. As a result, the concept of partnerships for this association in guaranteeing future employees' readiness for the world of work is apt.

This study provides feedback from student respondents suggesting that partnerships are fundamental and could lead to them being adequately equipped to “hit the ground running”. Store managers, on the other hand, were in agreement that partnerships may aid with the issue of staff turnover. Therefore, key stakeholders must consider policy development in order to encourage education-industry engagement through partnerships. This includes using strategic and coordinated techniques, such as establishing specific areas of interest that align with the objectives of the partnerships. The results of this study will be significant for policymakers in developing policies that foster partnerships by strengthening curriculum development and aligning relevant content. Thus, the purpose would be to enhance the quality of education to better meet industry needs and as a result, the policy implications for education and economic development would increase.

7.3.2 Implications for practice and/or employers and academics

The findings of this study may be beneficial for retail managers who are responsible for recruitment within their sector. Specific aspects of this study have the potential to solve broader unemployment challenges. Partnerships can be considered viable initiatives that can effectively create job opportunities for graduates. This suggests that securing the right employee may contribute to labour force improvement and growth. Retail organisations are able to employ the most appropriate graduates with the necessary skills through partnerships. Employers should be included as essential partners in the planning process to better align the subject content from university to industry. As a result, there is a likelihood of a near-seamless transition from university to industry.

Universities, on the other hand, can become established providers of education by training for in-demand skills. It is understood that a lack of proper education or skills can be detrimental to future graduates, potentially resulting in a lack of productivity or exacerbating unemployment rates. Thus, partnerships are necessary to combat youth unemployment by ensuring more youth are experienced and skilled for adaptation to the working world. By connecting with industry, curriculum content congruence can be assured, resulting in congruent expectations. This study could potentially contribute to the academic literature on partnerships, as well as create an understanding of higher

education's role in society. This study highlights the significance of partnerships in addressing real-world challenges. As a result, capacity-building initiatives are required for university and retail stakeholders to broaden their knowledge base, permitting them to co-produce and impart relevant skills. Additionally, the connection between industry and university may result in the empowerment of stakeholders through exposure to cutting-edge technologies and information. Overall, the study has significant ramifications for both industry and academia, as well as any interested stakeholders in education-industry partnerships.

7.3.3 Implications for theory

The outcome of any study is to contribute to the body of knowledge, and this study accomplishes that by analysing partnerships between retail organisations and higher education institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Province. It forces academics to adapt to industry needs by aligning their needs with the skills imparted at university. This means that higher education should focus on the most recent skills demanded by industry. As supported by Ahmed *et al.* (2022: 2), academics should focus on high-level skills, as not everything taught can be found in books or traditional classrooms. Knowledge and skills can be gained through experience. On the other hand, if work-ready graduates are required, it compels the industry to reconsider forging relationships with universities. As a recommendation, industry should reach out initially to foster dialogues about what is required. Most significantly, open and enthusiastic stakeholders are starting points in the partnership process.

Thus, the proposal of a partnership framework for effective partnership between retail and education sectors contributes to the body of knowledge. Reference to the partnership framework may enable other business and higher education sectors to apply the theory within their specific context. Furthermore, the development of supplementary theories concerning partnerships with regard to sustainability and evolution may be feasible. Additionally, educational institutions may use the framework as a support structure when collaborating with industry to align the programme. Therefore, all stakeholders need to be more proactive in positively contributing to the transition of graduates into workers.

This study could be relevant as it could contribute to the development of alternative theoretical frameworks that could drive partnerships. Additionally, integrating this study's framework with other business, education or comparable sectors could contribute to the development of interdisciplinary frameworks for analysing partnerships. As a result, varying theoretical perspectives and disciplines may lead to a comprehensive understanding of complex relations and the dynamics of partnerships.

7.4 Recommendations

The research findings of the study provide feasible recommendations for all stakeholders within the education and retail sectors on prospective partnerships. This study's recommendations could, likewise, be valuable to other business sectors in terms of partnerships with educational institutions. The findings of the study demonstrated the crucial need for stakeholders from education and retail to strengthen their relationships so as to contribute to overcoming the present skills challenges. In addition, effective strategies should be in place to facilitate this process.

The suggestions for this study are presented below:

- According to the findings, for partnerships to be successful, activities within them should be formally structured and adequate processes should be in place. Higher education institutions, as the generally accepted bodies for upskilling, can lead this initiative by proposing policies that include elements such as a shared understanding of responsibilities and protocols within a partnership. In addition, it is suggested that industry familiarises itself with these policies in terms of higher education processes and services due to their limited knowledge of university curricula, as per the findings. However, policies must be well-composed in order to benefit each sector equitably, thereby preventing underperforming sectors from reaping the benefits. As a result, measures for accountability and monitoring must be established.

- Aside from establishing clear criteria to guide stakeholders, creating a harmonious environment is also imperative. Hence, alignment of objectives is key to building and sustaining partnerships. It is therefore suggested that active partners within the partnership adopt and endorse approaches suitable for all parties. It was also discovered that working collaboratively may have a greater impact than working single-handedly. Thus, it is proposed that prospective partnering organisations give serious thought to the notion of partnerships for prompt resolutions to the skills challenge. Due to the production of economic growth, these partnerships must embrace attributes such as sustainability, resilience and strength. Due to the lack of specific resources, this may be beneficial to both education and industry; therefore, establishing clear roles and responsibilities is essential. Improving employability, providing access to real-world challenges, enhancing the curriculum, developing skills, exposure to industry practices and driving economic growth are some of the common objectives identified that may denote mutual benefits for stakeholders in this study.
- The findings of the study showed that allowing parties to freely express their opinions by providing an environment conducive to this can help strengthen the partnership's success. As a result, if detachments exist, engagement with stakeholders at a managerial level is required. Additionally, a deeper mutual understanding of expectations is key to success through regular meetings, dialogue and/or collaborative discussions. It is therefore suggested that stakeholders display respect for one another and attempt to resolve conflicts amicably, as conflict is inevitable, thus contributing to thriving partnerships. Stakeholders should, moreover, set clear, realistic expectations and be transparent and ethical in their decision-making. It is therefore suggested that stakeholders devise strategies for effective and efficient conflict negotiation and resolutions.
- The results of the study demonstrate that there are significant challenges associated with skills in the transition process from universities to the labour

market. This, in turn, suggests that discrepancies exist between what is taught at universities and what is required in industry. Based on this, it is suggested that retailers consider contributing retail-relevant content for bespoke qualifications to ensure suitable alignment. In addition, it is suggested that universities consider reviewing and restructuring qualifications to incorporate skills development within the educational context by inviting experts during the process. Hence, assurance of integrated skills development throughout the process. This is anticipated to alleviate some of the challenges that graduates experience after completing their qualifications and transitioning to the work environment. As a result, it is suggested that all affected stakeholders invest in education in order to meet market criteria, paving the way for a smoother transition. This notion of collaborative initiative should be converted to regular practice, thus guaranteeing the attainment of momentum. Therefore, it is critical to establish long-term sustainability plans to aid mitigate the aforementioned challenges, thus contributing to the longevity of partnerships.

- It was discovered that reducing the skills gap should be prioritised, as it could have long-term consequences in addressing unemployment issues. Similarly, the misalignment between graduate expectations and the employment opportunities available may be rectified. Thus, as an initial point of entry, it is suggested that educational institutions seek memorandums of association with industry in an effort to bridge the gap between academia and industry. This may contribute to alleviating some of the sector's existing challenges while also lowering graduate unemployment rates. The findings also show that engaging retail experts, as aforementioned, during academic activities has the potential to improve education quality due to the current retail content being imparted. This translates into graduates possessing a set of mandatory skills that are of immense value to the retail industry. The onus is on stakeholders in both the retail industry and universities to bridge the existing gaps by embracing the notion of partnerships as a preliminary point of entry.

- If the current training obtained by graduates has no significant impact on employment, as the findings of this study suggest, both university management and the retail industry may need to develop further techniques to improve the transition from university to the working world. This was clearly evident from the findings of the study, which revealed that retailers had to implement additional training and development for new employees. Moreover, the strategy must incorporate approaches for improving employee retention in the retail industry. Continuous feedback from stakeholders through monitoring and evaluation is required for optimal partnership enhancement. This leads to the identification of problem areas that require improvement; therefore, adopting workable strategies is pertinent in partnerships.
- It was discovered that retail organisations were dissatisfied with the substantial emphasis on theoretical elements imparted at universities. Both industry and educational institutions must urgently engage in dialogue to guarantee the preparedness of work-ready graduates who can articulate relevant skills gained through the learning process. It is therefore suggested that educational institutions and industry collaborate through industry advisory committees, which would be able to advise on aspects such as the effectiveness and relevance of current qualifications, industry expectations in terms of graduate recruitment, and input on maintaining an updated and relevant curriculum. Hence, it is also suggested that the qualification contain a mandatory practical component as a co-activity within the academic programme. While educational institutions reflect upon this activity, it is further suggested that this component be formally structured for real-life working experience. Therefore, retail organisations should establish possibilities for students to be accommodated in real-world settings, as learning should be continuous and allow for improvement. In light of the employability skills obtained during the process, the retail industry is almost guaranteed to receive work-ready graduates as a result of these programmes.

- The results demonstrated the importance of continuously engaging and maintaining a dedicated working relationship within partnerships. Aside from resulting in a long-term partnership, it may also result in the birth of entrepreneurs, as businesses may not be viable without the right talent. Companies must establish possibilities for growth as well as succession planning initiatives. It is suggested that relationships should be characterised by nurturing partners, and as relationships evolve, partners should be able to adapt accordingly. Therefore, it is imperative for all stakeholders to openly communicate in order to avoid or minimise misconceptions.
- Arising from the discussions, a framework for effective partnerships was proposed. It is highly suggested that the framework be adopted to provide a support structure for linking education and the business environment. The framework will foster a culture of mandatory engagement for stakeholders interested in pursuing partnerships. It is strongly suggested that the framework be incorporated into the organisation's and university's strategies. In this way, it becomes mandatory to address pertinent elements.

In summary, there appears to be a misalignment between what is taught at universities and what skills are relevant and necessary in industry. Therefore, it is suggested that stakeholders from the higher education sector, as well as those from industry embrace the concept of partnerships to address the aforementioned challenges. The obligation is on these stakeholders to contribute towards minimising existing gaps between education and industry by fostering relations and supporting collaborations. This call for collaboration and the commitment of stakeholders to participate and engage in the process is deemed critical. Partnerships have the potential to provide industry with the right talent while also benefitting both sectors in terms of financial and other benefits. Furthermore, both educational institutions and industry gain recognition for their high-quality programme offerings and innovative concepts.

With education being the key element of human resource development and industry being the employer, consistent communication is fundamental throughout this process. These factors may affect staff turnover rates and industry expenses. It is worth noting that partnerships can create a future pipeline of potential employees. Given that the link between education and industry is not a novel concept, efforts to establish partnerships should be prioritised. It is pivotal that key stakeholders prioritise and support educational reform in order to grow the human capital base and ensure a sustainable future for all.

7.5 Limitations of the study

In order to investigate the role of relationships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector, the quantitative component of this study included exit-level students as well as store managers. For the store manager population, a sample of two of the largest retailers in KwaZulu-Natal Province was utilised. The findings, in general, for both the quantitative and qualitative elements of the study cannot be generalised to other educational institutions and retail businesses. Further groups of management teams, as well as academic teams, can be surveyed to widen the scope of this study. This recommendation was also motivated by the limited access to stores and managers, which lengthened the data collection process. Despite the lengthy data collection process, data was eventually collected, analysed and conclusions drawn. Generally, including a limited sample may only reflect such perspectives, omitting the diversity and complexities of education-retail partnerships.

The findings for the qualitative component of the study included general managers and/or regional managers; thus, they may not be generalised to other managers with regards to reproducing this research agenda. One limitation, particularly given these managers' high-profile roles, is the possibility of limited availability and uncertainty about the disclosure of important information. Nonetheless, the results of the study were unaffected due to a sufficient information supply. Hence, a direction for future studies would be to host a group of high-profile managers in a focus group session. As a result, specialists from all areas within the organisation would be able to favourably contribute to the study.

One of the study's research objectives is the identification of a skills gap that is relevant and distinctive to the retail sector, and hence cannot be generalised to other sectors due to this specification. However, depending on the need, different sectors or groups other than retail can be explored to further the study. Additionally, other sectors may experience a similar skills gap; therefore, investigating this issue may have a positive impact on the industry.

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed additional limitations on the data collection approach for this study. Due to the lockdown restrictions in South Africa, the researcher had to explore alternate methods to ensure data was collected timeously. This involved adapting data-gathering instruments into appropriate formats for the varied respondents' needs. Additionally, the researcher adapted to the respondents' schedules due to unanticipated circumstances posed by the pandemic. It should be emphasised that the aforementioned alternate processes did not affect the study's outcomes. As a result, in times of uncertainty, contingency plans, such as alternate data collection methods, must be accessible. To summarise, as previously stated, this study revealed data based on a certain point in time, which may or may not apply to future improvements in the field. Since retail is an evolving industry, these findings may become obsolete over time, and capturing the essence of partnerships may be complicated due to its multifaceted structure.

7.6 Directions for Future studies

The findings of this study were based on responses from two of KwaZulu-Natal Province's well-established retailers, as well as future employees represented by students. Based on the findings of this study, future research opportunities are created to further expand our understanding of partnerships and their repercussions. This could include other retail organisations to test the proposition of partnerships, as this area of study is evolving, thus creating additional opportunities. Additionally, longitudinal studies could be conducted to gain insights into partnerships in terms of the trends that emerge to aid in the sustainability of partnerships. Thus, the study proved that it is pivotal for universities and industries to effectively interact to prepare the future workforce. Additionally, all stakeholders,

including employers, academics and students, play a pivotal role in this process, resulting in the proposition and/or analysis of partnerships. Further research opportunities also present themselves in the form of expanding the data collection process to include sectional retail managers, as well as academics, to provide rich data to enhance graduates' positions.

It is recommended that future studies be conducted in a larger business environment so that benchmarking exercises presented in the form of comparative studies can be concluded against this study. Conducting comparative studies may provide critical information relating to challenges, benefits, good practices and viable models, leading to the identification of factors that contribute to effective partnerships. There are also several opportunities for future research by including other retail divisions such as clothing and liquor as opposed to supermarket chains, as indicated in this study. This will provide a realistic benchmark against this study as well as offer a broader perspective on partnerships. Aside from the retail sector, there are numerous other sectors in which to conduct research to test the proposition of partnerships with comparable goals, as demonstrated in this study. Future studies could be conducted in other provinces within South Africa or abroad to include similar or different sectors.

For the student community to be accommodated in the world of work as a core function of the university, further research is suggested to interrogate how universities can contribute more to alleviating the unemployment issues for graduates. It is recommended that future research incorporate other areas/qualifications to assess the association with the retail component. Additionally, it is recommended that future studies be conducted at a national level to expand the research to include all potential partners.

It is therefore recommended that follow-up studies be conducted to analyse the post-partnering status to track stakeholder behaviour and its impact on the partnership. Furthermore, the partnership trajectory would be useful for other organisations to establish whether the process is feasible, to begin with. Lastly, tracking the graduate-to-

worker transition is suggested as an alternate study for the benefit of both higher education institutions and industries. Overall, comparable studies would benefit both South African retail businesses and universities by allowing all stakeholders to learn from one another and exchange best practices. Future studies, similar to this one will have key ramifications and/or visions for HEI-industry partnerships. To conclude, this study presents further study opportunities in the form of comparative studies, longitudinal studies, impact assessments and stakeholder analyses to broaden one's understanding of education-industry partnerships.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter provided details pertaining to the overview of the study, including context, literature, methodology and empirical evidence. Implications for the study were also discussed. This study is crucial in terms of imparting knowledge to enhance employability, while multi-stakeholder commitment is a vital component with regard to the dynamics within a system. According to the findings of this study, the relationship between stakeholders from industry and higher education can be influential in enhancing partnerships. Furthermore, this study has discovered that communicating, engaging, mutual understanding and sharing are significant within partnerships, with stakeholders playing a pivotal role in shaping and influencing the outcomes of these partnerships. The study can be viewed as a contribution to the broader education philosophy by providing fresh and enhanced insights into partnership propositions. As a result, the study sought to critically analyse partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector, yielding authentic findings and recommendations. The study has further illustrated, among others, prospective benefits and challenges between the education and retail sectors by reviewing literature and conducting empirical research with multi-stakeholder perspectives, resulting in key findings.

It was revealed that there is a significant skills gap that negatively impacts both prospective employees and industry overall. Consequently, the aim of investigating the role of partnerships aligns with this findings. Through this study, it is evident that the phlegmatic stance of all stakeholders contributed to the previously mentioned challenges. For that reason, it can be concluded that the obligation to address these challenges rests

with the primary stakeholders to ensure overall transformation. Addressing these challenges is expected to contribute to curriculum enhancement, authentic student learning and knowledge exchange, resulting in work-ready graduates.

Regarding the theoretical framework, through critical pedagogy, participants became cognizant of the significance of frameworks within partnerships. Participants recognised that the study revealed pivotal issues concerning graduates' upward mobility. Also, the industry was elated that issues were finally being addressed through an investigative study of this nature. As a support tool, the likelihood of the proposed framework becoming a standard structure in education and industry contexts is favourable. To promote mutual objectives and result in progressive partnerships, the framework should be supported by all essential stakeholders.

It is imperative to note that the recommendations of this study are not prescriptive but could serve as a reflective tool for design, restructuring and improvement of overall performance. The ultimate goal should be to ensure that work-ready graduates enter the world of work by assessing current practices and effecting necessary improvements. Thus, academic and industry stakeholders have an obligatory role in attaining this goal. This study has shed light on the simplicities and complexities of partnerships as a potential approach to bridging the skill gaps that exist, as well as creating an overall understanding of the research problem for all stakeholders. Through this study, valuable contributions are made to existing literature, thus providing insights for all stakeholders in the education and retail sectors. In conclusion, this study titled "A critical analysis of partnerships between public higher education institutions and the retail sector" has presented a fresh perspective for stakeholders such as policymakers, employers and academics, resulting in the advancement of the higher education and retail sectors.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: CRONBACH'S ALPHA (STUDENT INSTRUMENT)

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	60.2769	49.328	.212	.777
B2-Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership	60.3077	47.091	.541	.763
B3-Commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success	60.2923	47.898	.414	.768
B4-Adequate resources are vital for successful partnering	60.3385	50.071	.175	.778
B5-Effective communication and efficient coordination are key for the sustainability of partnerships	60.3846	49.084	.330	.772
B6-Amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership success	60.1077	48.066	.342	.771
B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together	60.4000	49.806	.191	.778
B8-Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements	59.7385	50.446	.046	.788
D1-The current structure of the qualification in terms of industry requirement is adequate	59.4923	48.816	.205	.778
D2-Practical work-based training is a compulsory requirement of the qualification	59.0923	51.804	-.073	.795
D3-Skills imparted at university are relevant and adequate, hence graduates are prepared to enter the workforce	59.1077	48.004	.265	.775
D4-Skills imparted are easy to comprehend and interesting	59.5231	48.941	.255	.775
D5-Materials provided helps create a better understanding of the retail sector	59.9077	48.366	.382	.770
D6-Skills accumulated prepares one to undertake virtually any retail position	59.3538	46.857	.400	.767
D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices	60.2769	49.110	.237	.776
D8-Retail graduates face difficulties transitioning from university to the labour market due to certain gaps in skills	60.3077	49.966	.167	.779

D9-Customer service, communication and problem-solving are pertinent in the retail sector	60.2615	48.134	.417	.768
D10-Educational institutions and industry should liaise to create and maintain a relationship to promote employability	60.3538	47.951	.471	.767
D11-Retail graduates will have promising career opportunities	59.2154	50.578	.021	.791
D12-Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships	60.2308	47.805	.446	.767
E1-Lecturing is effective and collaborative efforts are possible	59.7538	49.282	.211	.777
E2-Students are prepared for the world of work	58.9231	49.728	.123	.783
E3-Structured collaborative initiatives are important for partnerships	60.2154	47.890	.502	.766
E4-Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning	60.3231	49.128	.310	.773
E5-There are existing partnerships with local or other retailers	59.5538	47.813	.327	.772
E6-Partnering enhances the development of new skills	60.2308	48.087	.387	.769
E7-Partnering develops universities ability to address important issues about employment	60.3385	47.415	.465	.766
E8-Partnering allows for the development of valuable relationships between collaborating parties	60.2000	49.038	.315	.773
E9-Partnerships may contribute to bridging gaps between knowledge and expertise	60.2923	47.679	.442	.767
E10-Partnering organisations may have a greater impact working collaboratively as opposed to operating solely	60.2462	48.470	.376	.770
E11-Partnering facilitates the acquisition of additional financial support	60.0308	47.124	.494	.764

APPENDIX B: CRONBACH'S ALPHA (STORE INSTRUMENT)

Item-Total Statistics				
	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interacts well with 4s.]	74.1188	215.026	.015	.879
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The store is well-operated, maintained and store protocols upheld by staff.]	74.9208	214.894	.032	.877
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Students from educational institutions have completed training at the store.]	74.5347	213.271	.062	.877
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Partnerships between retail and educational institutions will lead to more skilled students in the retail sector.]	75.4257	206.127	.469	.866
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail staff are invited by educational institutions to share expertise with students.]	73.8515	206.028	.233	.873
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail industries should develop courses to be incorporated into the university curriculum to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the world of work.]	75.5941	209.724	.471	.867
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]	75.4752	209.252	.399	.867
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The status of university programmes may be enhanced due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries.]	75.2970	206.551	.429	.866
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship.]	75.3069	208.435	.381	.867
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and may contribute positively to any organisation.]	75.5941	211.144	.357	.868
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Current policies create an enabling environment for partnerships.]	74.7228	205.902	.320	.869
(Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Employment opportunities can be created as a result of partnerships.]	75.4554	211.190	.333	.868
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Inviting retail experts into the classroom can be beneficial for the organisation, as relevant skills are imparted to students]	75.5545	211.270	.344	.868
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Industry can engage with universities to promote employability]	75.4158	208.465	.474	.866

(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Combining resources and skills of partners may contribute to partnership success.]	75.3861	207.439	.483	.866
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Communication, fostering respect, trust and openness among stakeholders is key to successful partnerships.]	75.4851	207.332	.584	.865
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Consultations between universities and organisations may lead to synergies being identified.]	75.2277	204.258	.538	.864
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Staff are comfortable about sharing new ideas that might improve the partnering outcomes.]	74.8812	208.966	.279	.869
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [There is strong support in our organisation for seeking training partnerships that will be profitable and high profile.]	74.7822	199.432	.525	.864
(Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Both retail industries and universities may benefit from collaborations.]	75.4257	207.087	.536	.865
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Staff are continuously training newly appointed graduates, as they lack basic skills.]	75.1683	206.441	.370	.867
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Transferring of skills and training students is achievable from within our organisation.]	75.1287	205.633	.551	.865
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Communication, problem-solving, decision-making and customer service skills are lacking in retail.]	75.2871	207.207	.344	.868
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Time management, working under pressure and attention to detail are challenges faced by retail staff.]	75.4554	209.210	.410	.867
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Technology skills are essential in the retail industry.]	74.9901	212.830	.104	.874
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Collaborating with universities will assist in addressing the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce.]	75.3762	207.137	.511	.866
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [On forging relationships with educational institutions, industry may be provided with skilled staff.]	75.3465	205.729	.539	.865
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Skilled employees will be retiring or emigrating in a few years and partnerships with educational institutions may address these imminent issues.]	74.8119	198.854	.539	.863
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [The current university content is relevant to industry needs.]	74.0990	212.070	.156	.872
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce.]	74.1782	207.428	.222	.872
Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Critical skills set is required for this industry.]	75.0099	211.130	.355	.868
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [We, as an industry, can influence the preparedness of students]	75.3663	209.454	.477	.867
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Views on university programmes vs expectations of industry are skewed.]	75.2079	206.806	.550	.865

(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Exposing students to work experience whilst completing their qualifications, may ensure a well-rounded graduate.]	75.4851	203.912	.622	.863
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Regular communication between universities, students and industry concerning curricula is important.]	75.4257	207.687	.516	.866
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Before embarking on any work training programme, it is advisable for universities to consult with industry.]	75.5545	208.890	.533	.866
(Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [The quality of education (with reference to the curriculum) is associated with the extent of industry contribution in producing well-rounded graduates.]	75.3267	205.662	.625	.864
(A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [A formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]	75.2970	211.991	.309	.869
(A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [A framework can guide the partnership process by ensuring consistency with a formal plan of action.]	75.2574	208.953	.423	.867
(A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [There are existing frameworks that could be consulted for collaboration.]	74.4356	205.748	.335	.868
(A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [Developing an appropriate framework would be ideal for collaboration]	75.0990	205.550	.438	.866
(A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [Any support system is perceived as a best practice in partnering.]	75.2079	208.466	.410	.867

[illegible]

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies.	Pearson Correlation	-0,019	1	-0,149	-0,009	0,000	-0,053	-0,253	0,096	-0,192	-0,249	0,083	0,189	0,115	0,265	0,042	0,003	0,219	-0,175	-0,055	-0,044	-0,073	0,002	0,058	0,179	-0,015	-0,096	-0,110	-0,066	-0,156	0,113	-0,128	-0,190	-0,250	-0,053
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,882		0,232	0,943	1,000	0,675	0,041	0,441	0,123	0,044	0,508	0,128	0,356	0,031	0,737	0,984	0,078	0,159	0,661	0,727	0,558	0,990	0,646	0,149	0,906	0,441	0,381	0,597	0,212	0,365	0,308	0,126	0,043	0,674
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
I intend on furthering my studies.	Pearson Correlation	-0,110	-0,149	1	0,060	0,296	0,282	0,091	0,106	0,217	-0,129	0,277	0,086	0,164	0,178	-0,086	0,427	0,229	0,062	0,074	0,066	0,091	-0,105	0,057	0,153	-0,010	0,061	0,088	0,099	0,055	0,285	0,055	0,068	0,063	0,015
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,378	0,232		0,633	0,016	0,022	0,467	0,395	0,080	0,301	0,024	0,491	0,189	0,153	0,490	0,000	0,065	0,618	0,555	0,601	0,467	0,401	0,649	0,221	0,937	0,627	0,481	0,428	0,663	0,020	0,663	0,588	0,616	0,902
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
B1- Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place	Pearson Correlation	0,178	-0,009	0,060	1	0,533	0,179	-0,027	0,172	0,183	0,241	0,047	0,044	-0,292	-0,152	-0,085	-0,064	0,132	0,139	-0,072	0,100	0,161	-0,059	0,253	0,047	0,230	0,105	-0,013	0,252	0,076	0,111	0,021	0,110	0,204	0,019
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,153	0,943	0,633		0,000	0,151	0,830	0,168	0,142	0,051	0,708	0,725	0,017	0,225	0,499	0,609	0,292	0,265	0,566	0,426	0,198	0,636	0,041	0,708	0,063	0,400	0,918	0,042	0,543	0,375	0,865	0,381	0,100	0,878
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
B2- Collaborative activities must	Pearson Correlation	-0,009	0,000	0,296	0,533	1	0,354	0,088	0,310	0,192	0,278	0,239	0,083	-0,108	0,022	-0,014	0,226	0,263	0,129	0,129	0,282	0,298	-0,021	0,404	0,197	0,191	0,310	0,212	0,238	0,154	0,228	0,105	0,233	0,302	0,281

formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,946	1,000	0,016	0,000		0,004	0,484	0,011	0,122	0,024	0,054	0,509	0,389	0,858	0,909	0,068	0,033	0,303	0,302	0,022	0,015	0,870	0,001	0,112	0,125	0,011	0,088	0,054	0,216	0,066	0,402	0,060	0,014	0,022
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
B3- Commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success	Pearson Correlation	-0,155	-0,053	.282	0,179	.354**	1	.284	.401**	.380**	.265*	0,195	0,079	-0,134	-0,043	0,027	0,077	0,182	0,041	0,123	0,079	0,234	0,010	0,108	0,067	0,011	.244*	0,101	0,192	0,103	.305*	.250*	0,222	0,192	.310*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,214	0,675	0,022	0,151	0,004		0,021	0,001	0,002	0,031	0,116	0,528	0,284	0,732	0,828	0,538	0,143	0,744	0,324	0,527	0,058	0,937	0,388	0,591	0,928	0,048	0,419	0,123	0,410	0,013	0,043	0,073	0,122	0,011
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
B4- Adequate resources are vital for successful partnering	Pearson Correlation	-0,181	-0,253	0,091	-0,027	0,088	.284*	1	0,142	.323**	0,181	-0,123	0,144	-0,093	-0,029	0,093	-0,111	0,084	0,049	0,140	0,043	-0,027	0,019	-0,023	-0,032	0,020	0,115	0,052	.311*	0,078	0,045	-0,153	0,053	0,174	0,198
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,145	0,041	0,467	0,830	0,484	0,021		0,254	0,008	0,146	0,326	0,248	0,457	0,818	0,460	0,376	0,504	0,698	0,262	0,729	0,831	0,881	0,854	0,799	0,873	0,356	0,677	0,011	0,532	0,720	0,221	0,673	0,163	0,112
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
B5- Effective communication and	Pearson Correlation	-0,136	0,096	0,106	0,172	.310*	.401**	0,142	1	0,175	0,062	-0,025	0,046	0,038	0,144	0,209	0,171	.282*	-0,141	0,146	0,109	0,142	-0,042	.263*	0,093	-0,053	0,137	0,169	0,165	0,146	0,145	-0,022	-0,048	0,135	.295*

efficacy of coordination are key for the sustainability of partnerships	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,275	0,441	0,395	0,168	0,011	0,001	0,254		0,159	0,619	0,845	0,712	0,764	0,250	0,092	0,169	0,022	0,258	0,242	0,382	0,254	0,735	0,033	0,458	0,674	0,272	0,175	0,184	0,242	0,244	0,863	0,702	0,281	0,016
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	
B6- Amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership successes	Pearson Correlation	-0,057	-0,192	0,217	0,183	0,192	.380**	.323**	0,175	1	0,032	0,066	0,082	-0,167	-0,015	-0,022	0,073	0,063	.286*	-0,055	.260*	.278*	-0,147	0,183	0,076	-0,012	0,167	0,061	0,200	0,214	.286*	.301*	.389**	0,140	0,160
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,650	0,123	0,080	0,142	0,122	0,002	0,008	0,159		0,801	0,598	0,515	0,180	0,906	0,860	0,563	0,616	0,020	0,661	0,035	0,024	0,239	0,142	0,542	0,924	0,181	0,624	0,107	0,085	0,020	0,014	0,001	0,261	0,199
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
B7- Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work	Pearson Correlation	0,190	-0,249*	-0,129	0,241	.278*	.265*	0,181	0,062	0,032	1	.289*	0,041	-0,228	-0,214	-0,117	-0,092	-0,037	0,091	-0,016	-0,104	0,234	-0,069	0,137	.298*	0,134	0,234	0,205	0,186	0,037	-0,101	0,087	0,051	0,223	0,039
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,127	0,044	0,301	0,051	0,024	0,031	0,146	0,619	0,801		0,019	0,741	0,065	0,085	0,348	0,461	0,766	0,468	0,896	0,406	0,059	0,580	0,273	0,015	0,283	0,059	0,099	0,134	0,768	0,421	0,487	0,681	0,072	0,753
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66

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D1- The current structu re of the qualific ation in terms of industr y require ment is adequ ate	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 09 6	0, 18 9	0, 08 6	0, 04 4	0, 08 3	0, 07 9	0, 14 4	0, 04 6	0, 08 2	0, 04 1	0, 02 4	1	- 0, 04 1	0, 21 5	0, 20 1	0, 05 9	0, 08 4	- 0, 06 7	0, 11 8	- 0, 00 3	0, 18 3	- 0, 04 6	0, 10 6	.3 54 "	0, 23 9	0, 10 1	0, 08 8	- 0, 03 2	0, 06 7	0, 10 9	- 0, 03 7	0, 02 9	- 0, 02 0	0, 04 4
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 44 2	0, 12 8	0, 49 1	0, 72 5	0, 50 9	0, 52 8	0, 24 8	0, 71 2	0, 51 5	0, 74 1	0, 84 9		0, 74 6	0, 08 3	0, 10 6	0, 64 0	0, 50 1	0, 59 2	0, 34 4	0, 98 2	0, 14 2	0, 71 6	0, 39 7	0, 00 4	0, 05 3	0, 42 0	0, 48 1	0, 80 0	0, 59 1	0, 38 2	0, 77 0	0, 81 4	0, 87 3	0, 72 7
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
D2- Practic al work- based trainin g is a compul sory require ment of the qualific ation	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 19 6	0, 11 5	0, 16 4	- .2 92 "	- 0, 10 8	- 0, 13 4	- 0, 09 3	0, 03 8	- 0, 16 7	- 0, 22 8	0, 03 6	- 0, 04 1	1	.3 14 "	0, 06 0	.2 76 "	0, 22 1	- .2 93 "	0, 05 4	- 0, 00 1	0, 01 2	.3 35 "	- .2 53 "	- 0, 09 9	0, 03 4	0, 01 1	- 0, 12 5	- 0, 12 7	- 0, 14 8	- 0, 04 7	- 0, 16 1	- 0, 10 0	- 0, 23 2	- 0, 01 6
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 11 6	0, 35 6	0, 18 9	0, 01 7	0, 38 9	0, 28 4	0, 45 7	0, 76 4	0, 18 0	0, 06 5	0, 77 2	0, 74 6		0, 01 0	0, 63 5	0, 02 5	0, 07 4	0, 01 7	0, 66 7	0, 99 7	0, 92 2	0, 00 6	0, 04 1	0, 42 7	0, 78 6	0, 93 0	0, 31 6	0, 31 1	0, 23 4	0, 70 7	0, 19 7	0, 42 2	0, 06 0	0, 90 0
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
D3- Skills impart	Pear son Corr	- 0, 06 5	.2 65 "	0, 17 8	- 0, 02 2	0, 07 0	- 0, 07 0	- 0, 14 4	0, 07 0	- 0, 07 0	- 0, 07 0	0, 21 5	.3 14 "	1	.5 21 "	.3 63 "	.4 76 "	- 0, 02 2	0, 02 4	0, 07 4	0, 04 4	.2 68 "	0, 21 7	- 0, 11 5	0, 11 5	- 0, 01 3	0, 08 5	0, 07 8	0, 07 5	- 0, 07 5	- 0, 07 5	- 0, 07 5	- 0, 07 5	.4 71 "	

ed at univers ity are releva nt and adequ ate, hence gradua tes are prepar ed to enter the workfo rce	elati on	08 2			15 2		04 3	02 9		01 5	21 4	06 5					18 5							05 5		01 6					08 3	07 1	02 6		
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 51 1	0, 03 1	0, 15 3	0, 22 5	0, 85 8	0, 73 2	0, 81 8	0, 25 0	0, 90 6	0, 08 5	0, 08 3	0, 01 0		0, 00 0	0, 00 3	0, 00 0	0, 13 7	0, 85 8	0, 55 7	0, 72 3	0, 03 0	0, 08 0	0, 65 8	0, 35 8	0, 89 7	0, 91 5	0, 49 7	0, 53 3	0, 54 9	0, 50 7	0, 57 2	0, 83 9	0, 00 0	
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	
D4- Skills impart ed are easy to compr ehend and interes ting	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 07 4	0, 04 2	- 0, 08 6	- 0, 08 5	- 0, 01 4	0, 02 7	0, 09 3	0, 20 9	- 0, 02 2	- 0, 11 7	- 0, 19 9	0, 20 1	0, 06 0	.5 21 "	1 "	0, 20 6	.4 26 "	- 0, 06 7	- 0, 01 4	0, 06 0	- 0, 09 4	0, 23 2	.2 78 "	- 0, 15 6	0, 03 9	- 0, 14 4	0, 02 6	0, 19 0	.3 48 "	- 0, 01 8	0, 02 7	0, 00 9	0, 04 1	.4 80 "
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 55 7	0, 73 7	0, 49 0	0, 49 9	0, 90 9	0, 82 8	0, 46 0	0, 09 2	0, 86 0	0, 34 8	0, 10 8	0, 10 6	0, 63 5	0, 00 0		0, 09 6	0, 00 0	0, 59 1	0, 90 9	0, 63 5	0, 45 3	0, 06 1	0, 02 4	0, 21 2	0, 75 3	0, 24 8	0, 83 8	0, 12 6	0, 00 4	0, 88 3	0, 82 7	0, 94 0	0, 74 6	0, 00 0
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
D5- Materi als provid ed	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 14 6	0, 00 3	.4 27 "	- 0, 06 4	0, 22 6	0, 07 7	- 0, 11 1	0, 17 1	0, 07 3	- 0, 09 2	0, 09 8	0, 05 9	.2 76 "	.3 63 "	0, 20 6	1 "	.3 21 "	- 0, 10 3	0, 17 8	.2 71 "	.2 57 "	0, 16 4	0, 11 1	0, 20 9	0, 09 7	0, 23 1	.2 55 "	0, 07 1	0, 15 2	0, 17 4	0, 06 0	0, 07 4	- 0, 03 2	0, 10 6

helps create a better understanding of the retail sector	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,242	0,984	0,000	0,609	0,068	0,538	0,376	0,169	0,563	0,461	0,435	0,640	0,025	0,003	0,096		0,008	0,409	0,154	0,028	0,037	0,189	0,375	0,092	0,440	0,062	0,039	0,572	0,222	0,162	0,634	0,554	0,798	0,399
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
D6-Skills accumulated prepares one to undertake virtually any retail position	Pearson Correlation	0,027	0,219	0,229	0,132	.263	0,182	0,084	.282	0,063	-0,037	-0,002	0,084	0,221	.476	.426	.321	1	-0,040	0,012	0,166	0,084	0,167	0,226	0,110	0,015	-0,053	-0,174	0,196	0,010	.255	0,042	0,128	0,071	.460
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,830	0,078	0,065	0,292	0,033	0,143	0,504	0,022	0,616	0,766	0,985	0,501	0,074	0,000	0,000	0,008		0,748	0,924	0,182	0,504	0,180	0,068	0,379	0,903	0,674	0,161	0,115	0,934	0,039	0,736	0,304	0,570	0,000
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of	Pearson Correlation	-0,074	-0,017	0,062	0,139	0,129	0,041	0,049	-0,086	0,091	-0,037	-0,007	-0,067	-0,293	0,185	0,067	0,103	-1	0,086	.483	.281	-0,093	.326	0,092	-0,087	.287	0,111	0,231	.270	.257	.336	.426	.414	-0,023	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,553	0,159	0,618	0,265	0,303	0,744	0,698	0,258	0,020	0,468	0,767	0,592	0,017	0,137	0,591	0,409	0,748		0,494	0,000	0,022	0,456	0,008	0,462	0,490	0,020	0,376	0,063	0,028	0,037	0,006	0,000	0,001	0,853
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66

[illegible]

D11- Retail gradua tes will have promisi ng career opportu nities	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 14 8	0, 00 2	- 0, 10 5	- 0, 05 9	- 0, 02 1	0, 01 0	0, 01 9	- 0, 04 2	- 0, 14 7	- 0, 06 9	- 0, 04 7	- 0, 04 6	.3 35 "	.2 68 "	0, 23 2	0, 16 4	0, 16 7	- 0, 09 3	- 0, 08 2	- 0, 12 4	- 0, 18 3	1	0, 05 0	- 0, 20 0	.2 52 "	- 0, 10 9	- 0, 10 8	- 0, 09 1	- 0, 07 0	- 0, 00 5	- 0, 09 6	- 0, 07 2	- 0, 21 3	.2 47 "
	Sig. (2- taille d)	0, 23 6	0, 99 0	0, 40 1	0, 63 6	0, 87 0	0, 93 7	0, 88 1	0, 73 5	0, 23 9	0, 58 0	0, 71 0	0, 71 6	0, 00 6	0, 03 0	0, 06 1	0, 18 9	0, 18 0	0, 45 6	0, 51 0	0, 32 2	0, 14 2		0, 68 9	0, 10 8	0, 04 1	0, 38 3	0, 39 0	0, 46 7	0, 57 5	0, 96 6	0, 44 3	0, 56 7	0, 08 5	0, 04 6
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
D12- Value- added skills are impart ed due to partner ships	Pear son Corr elati on	0, 02 5	0, 05 8	0, 05 7	.2 53 "	.4 04 "	0, 10 8	- 0, 02 3	.2 63 "	0, 18 3	0, 13 7	- 0, 03 9	0, 10 6	- 0, 2 53 "	0, 21 7	.2 78 "	0, 11 1	0, 22 6	.3 26 "	- 0, 03 2	0, 10 5	0, 13 5	0, 05 0	1	0, 02 6	0, 00 1	0, 15 8	.3 08 "	0, 12 1	.3 53 "	.3 57 "	.2 70 "	0, 21 4	.3 71 "	.4 31 "
	Sig. (2- taille d)	0, 84 3	0, 64 6	0, 64 9	0, 04 1	0, 00 1	0, 38 8	0, 85 4	0, 03 3	0, 14 2	0, 27 3	0, 75 7	0, 39 7	0, 04 1	0, 08 0	0, 02 4	0, 37 5	0, 06 8	0, 00 8	0, 79 7	0, 40 2	0, 28 1	0, 68 9		0, 83 8	0, 99 3	0, 20 5	0, 01 2	0, 33 3	0, 00 4	0, 00 3	0, 02 9	0, 08 4	0, 00 2	0, 00 0
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
E1- Lecturi ng is effectiv e and collabo rative efforts are	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 00 3	0, 17 9	0, 15 3	0, 04 7	0, 19 7	0, 06 7	- 0, 03 2	0, 09 3	0, 07 6	.2 98 "	.2 63 "	.3 54 "	- 0, 09 9	- 0, 05 5	- 0, 15 6	0, 20 9	0, 11 0	0, 09 2	0, 15 5	.2 62 "	.3 35 "	- 0, 20 0	0, 02 6	1	0, 19 3	.2 58 "	0, 14 3	0, 06 8	- 0, 01 6	0, 08 3	- 0, 08 3	0, 05 9	- 0, 14 0	- 0, 11 4
	Sig. (2- taille d)	0, 97 8	0, 14 9	0, 22 1	0, 70 8	0, 11 2	0, 59 1	0, 79 9	0, 45 8	0, 54 2	0, 01 5	0, 03 3	0, 00 4	0, 04 7	0, 65 8	0, 21 2	0, 09 2	0, 37 9	0, 46 2	0, 21 4	0, 03 3	0, 00 6	0, 10 8	0, 83 8		0, 12 1	0, 03 6	0, 25 2	0, 58 8	0, 89 9	0, 50 6	0, 50 6	0, 63 7	0, 26 2	0, 36 2

possible	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66		
E2- Students are prepared for the world of work	Pearson Correlation	-0.071	-0.015	-0.010	0.230	0.191	0.011	0.020	-0.003	-0.012	0.134	-0.012	0.239	0.034	0.015	0.039	0.097	-0.008	-0.005	0.042	0.059	.252	0.001	0.193	1	-0.042	-0.061	-0.019	-0.067	-0.012	-0.042	-0.060	0.041	0.207	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.570	0.906	0.937	0.063	0.125	0.928	0.873	0.674	0.924	0.283	0.322	0.053	0.078	0.358	0.753	0.440	0.903	0.490	0.446	0.735	0.061	0.993	0.121	0.739	0.629	0.877	0.591	0.339	0.736	0.635	0.746	0.096		
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66		
E3- Structured collaborative initiatives are important for partnerships	Pearson Correlation	-0.144	-0.096	0.061	0.105	.310	.244	0.115	0.013	0.016	0.234	0.102	0.011	0.016	-0.001	-0.014	0.231	-0.005	.287	.365	.417	.472	-0.109	0.158	.258	-0.042	1	.610	.247	.308	.422	.259	.364	.378	0.090
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.248	0.441	0.627	0.400	0.011	0.048	0.356	0.927	0.181	0.059	0.416	0.420	0.930	0.897	0.248	0.062	0.674	0.020	0.003	0.001	0.030	0.383	0.205	0.036	0.739	0.000	0.046	0.012	0.000	0.036	0.003	0.002	0.474	
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	
E4- Partnerships with education	Pearson Correlation	-0.041	-0.010	0.088	-0.013	0.212	0.101	0.052	0.019	0.061	0.205	0.166	0.088	-0.012	0.013	0.026	.255	-0.017	0.111	0.019	0.114	.282	-0.108	0.143	-0.061	.610	1	0.049	.294	0.163	0.203	0.120	.300	0.203	

onal instituti ons and industr y may advanc e leamin g	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 74 5	0, 38 1	0, 48 1	0, 91 8	0, 08 8	0, 41 9	0, 67 7	0, 17 5	0, 62 4	0, 09 9	0, 18 2	0, 48 1	0, 31 6	0, 91 5	0, 83 8	0, 03 9	0, 16 1	0, 37 6	0, 20 3	0, 36 3	0, 02 2	0, 39 0	0, 01 2	0, 25 2	0, 62 9	0, 00 0		0, 69 8	0, 01 6	0, 19 0	0, 10 1	0, 33 6	0, 01 4	0, 10 2
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
E5- There are existin g partner ships with local or other retailer s	Pear son Corr elati on	0, 01 4	- 0, 06 6	0, 09 9	.2 52 -	0, 23 8	0, 19 2	.3 11 -	0, 16 5	0, 20 0	0, 18 6	- 0, 01 0	- 0, 03 2	- 0, 12 7	0, 08 5	0, 19 0	0, 07 1	0, 19 6	0, 23 1	0, 20 1	0, 23 5	0, 10 7	- 0, 09 1	0, 12 1	0, 06 8	- 0, 01 9	.2 47 -	0, 04 9	1	.3 68 "	0, 18 4	- 0, 06 7	0, 17 8	0, 10 3	0, 03 9
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 91 2	0, 59 7	0, 42 8	0, 04 2	0, 05 4	0, 12 3	0, 01 1	0, 18 4	0, 10 7	0, 13 4	0, 93 9	0, 80 0	0, 31 1	0, 49 7	0, 12 6	0, 57 2	0, 11 5	0, 06 3	0, 10 6	0, 05 8	0, 39 4	0, 46 7	0, 33 3	0, 58 8	0, 87 7	0, 04 6	0, 69 8		0, 00 2	0, 13 9	0, 59 4	0, 15 3	0, 40 9	0, 75 8
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66
E6- Partne ring enhanc es the develo pment of new skills	Pear son Corr elati on	- 0, 17 2	- 0, 15 6	0, 05 5	0, 07 6	0, 15 4	0, 10 3	0, 07 8	0, 14 6	0, 21 4	0, 03 7	- 0, 07 0	0, 06 7	- 0, 14 8	0, 07 8	.3 48 "	0, 15 2	0, 01 0	.2 70 -	0, 01 5	.3 38 "	0, 22 9	- 0, 07 0	.3 53 "	- 0, 01 6	- 0, 06 7	.3 08 -	.2 94 -	.3 68 "	1	.3 41 "	.3 58 "	.3 38 "	0, 16 2	0, 20 0
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 16 7	0, 21 2	0, 66 3	0, 54 3	0, 21 6	0, 41 0	0, 53 2	0, 24 2	0, 08 5	0, 76 8	0, 57 8	0, 59 1	0, 23 4	0, 53 3	0, 00 4	0, 22 2	0, 93 4	0, 02 8	0, 90 2	0, 00 5	0, 06 4	0, 57 5	0, 00 4	0, 89 9	0, 59 1	0, 01 2	0, 01 6	0, 00 2		0, 00 5	0, 00 3	0, 00 6	0, 19 4	0, 10 8
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66

E7-Partnership development universities ability to address important issues about employment	Pearson Correlation	-0,132	0,113	.285	0,111	0,0228	.305	0,045	0,0145	.286	-0,0101	-0,0018	0,0109	-0,0047	0,0075	-0,0018	0,0174	.255	.257	0,0046	.333	0,0144	-0,0005	.357	0,0083	-0,0120	.422	0,0163	0,0184	.341	1	.472	.630	.354	0,0216
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,292	0,365	0,020	0,375	0,0066	0,0013	0,0720	0,244	0,020	0,421	0,889	0,382	0,707	0,549	0,883	0,162	0,0039	0,0037	0,0716	0,0066	0,0249	0,966	0,003	0,0506	0,339	0,000	0,190	0,139	0,005		0,000	0,000	0,004	0,081
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	
E8-Partnership allows for the development of valuable relationships between collaborating parties	Pearson Correlation	0,114	-0,0128	0,005	0,0021	0,0105	.250	-0,0153	-0,002	.301	0,0087	-0,0039	-0,001	-0,0083	0,0027	0,0060	0,0042	.336	-0,0157	0,0145	.360	-0,0096	.270	-0,0083	-0,0042	.259	0,0203	-0,0067	.358	.472	1	.668	.432	.330	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0,364	0,308	0,0663	0,0865	0,0402	0,0043	0,221	0,863	0,014	0,487	0,477	0,190	0,507	0,827	0,634	0,736	0,006	0,207	0,0246	0,003	0,0443	0,029	0,0506	0,736	0,036	0,101	0,594	0,003	0,000		0,000	0,000	0,007	
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	

E9-Partnerships may contribute to bridging gaps between knowledge and expertise	Pearson Correlation	-.056	-.019	.068	.011	.023	.022	.053	-.048	.389**	.051	-.073	.029	-.010	-.071	.009	.074	.012	.426**	.000	.381**	.407**	-.072	.021	.059	-.060	.364**	.012	.017	.338**	.630**	.668**	1	.401**	.273*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.655	.126	.058	.038	.060	.073	.067	.072	.001	.068	.056	.081	.042	.057	.094	.055	.030	.000	.002	.001	.056	.084	.063	.063	.003	.033	.015	.000	.000	.000		.001	.026	
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	

E10-Partnering organizations may have a greater impact working collaboratively as opposed to operating solely	Pearson Correlation	-.029	-.250*	.063	.020	.302*	.019	.017	.013	.014	.022	-.068	-.020	-.023	.026	.041	-.032	.071	.414**	.011	.301*	.338**	-.021	.371**	-.014	.041	.378**	.300*	.010	.016	.354**	.432**	.401**	1	.352**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.817	.043	.061	.100	.014	.122	.163	.028	.026	.072	.058	.087	.060	.083	.074	.079	.057	.001	.042	.014	.006	.085	.002	.026	.074	.002	.014	.040	.019	.004	.000	.001		.004
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66

E11-Partne ring facilitat es the acquisi tion of additio nal financi al support	Pear son Corr elati on	0, 04 0	- 0, 05 3	0, 01 5	0, 01 9	.2 81 *	.3 10 *	0, 19 8	.2 95 *	0, 16 0	0, 03 9	- 0, 08 9	0, 04 4	- 0, 01 6	.4 71 **	.4 80 **	0, 10 6	.4 60 **	- 0, 02 3	- 0, 03 0	0, 07 1	0, 05 3	.2 47 *	.4 31 **	- 0, 11 4	0, 20 7	0, 09 0	0, 20 3	0, 03 9	0, 20 0	0, 21 6	.3 30 **	.2 73 *	.3 52 **	1
	Sig. (2- taile d)	0, 75 1	0, 67 4	0, 90 2	0, 87 8	0, 02 2	0, 01 1	0, 11 2	0, 01 6	0, 19 9	0, 75 3	0, 47 5	0, 72 7	0, 90 0	0, 00 0	0, 00 0	0, 39 9	0, 00 0	0, 85 3	0, 81 4	0, 57 0	0, 67 1	0, 04 6	0, 00 0	0, 36 2	0, 09 6	0, 47 4	0, 10 2	0, 75 8	0, 10 8	0, 08 1	0, 00 7	0, 02 6	0, 00 4	
	N	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66	66

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

APPENDIX C: CORRELATION ANALYSIS: STUDENTS

APPENDIX D: FREQUENCY TABLE - STORES

Frequency Table STORES

		Please indicate your age:			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	21-30	6	5.9	5.9	5.9
	31-40	96	94.1	94.1	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

		Please indicate your gender:			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	79	77.5	77.5	77.5
	Female	23	22.5	22.5	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

		Please indicate your race:			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African	39	38.2	38.2	38.2
	White	18	17.6	17.6	55.9
	Indian	40	39.2	39.2	95.1
	Coloured	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

		Please indicate the number of years work experience you have:			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1-6 Yeras	10	9.8	9.8	9.8
	7-12 Yeras	27	26.5	26.5	36.3
	13-18 Years	41	40.2	40.2	76.5
	19-24 Years	12	11.8	11.8	88.2
	25-30 Years	7	6.9	6.9	95.1
	Over 30 Yeras	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

		Please indicate the type of store you are currently employed in:			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Corporate store	61	59.8	59.8	59.8
	Franchise store	30	29.4	29.4	89.2
	Local store	4	3.9	3.9	93.1
	Other	7	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

		Please indicate your highest level of education:			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Matric	58	56.9	56.9	56.9
	College/university	31	30.4	30.4	87.3
	Management related	8	7.8	7.8	95.1
	National Diploma: did in service for 6 months	4	3.9	3.9	99.0
	Did not complete school	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interact well with 4s.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strontgly agree	16	15.7	15.7	15.7
	Agree	41	40.2	40.2	55.9
	Neutral	15	14.7	14.7	70.6
	Strontgly disagree	6	5.9	5.9	76.5
	Disagree	24	23.5	23.5	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The store is well-operated, maintained and store protocols upheld by staff.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strontgly agree	41	40.2	40.2	40.2
	Agree	43	42.2	42.2	82.4
	Neutral	5	4.9	4.9	87.3
	Strontgly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	88.2
	Disagree	12	11.8	11.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Students from educational institutions have completed training at the store.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strontgly agree	31	30.4	30.4	30.4
	Agree	35	34.3	34.3	64.7
	Neutral	16	15.7	15.7	80.4

	Strongtly disagree	4	3.9	3.9	84.3
	Disagree	16	15.7	15.7	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Partnerships between retail and educational institutions will lead to more skilled students in the retail sector.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	62	60.8	60.8	60.8
	Agree	29	28.4	28.4	89.2
	Neutral	8	7.8	7.8	97.1
	Disagree	3	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail staff are invited by educational institutions to share expertise with students.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	19	18.6	18.6	18.6
	Agree	18	17.6	17.6	36.3
	Neutral	27	26.5	26.5	62.7
	Strongtly disagree	12	11.8	11.8	74.5
	Disagree	26	25.5	25.5	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail industries should develop courses to be incorporated into the university curriculum to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the world of work.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	70	68.6	68.6	68.6
	Agree	28	27.5	27.5	96.1
	Neutral	4	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	62	60.8	60.8	60.8
	Agree	34	33.3	33.3	94.1
	Neutral	5	4.9	4.9	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The status of university programmes may be enhanced due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	54	52.9	52.9	52.9
	Agree	34	33.3	33.3	86.3
	Neutral	12	11.8	11.8	98.0
	Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	53	52.0	52.0	52.0
	Agree	35	34.3	34.3	86.3
	Neutral	13	12.7	12.7	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and may contribute positively to any organisation.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	72	70.6	70.6	70.6
	Agree	24	23.5	23.5	94.1
	Neutral	6	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Current policies create an enabling environment for partnerships.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	34	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Agree	28	27.5	27.5	60.8
	Neutral	31	30.4	30.4	91.2
	Strongtly disagree	2	2.0	2.0	93.1
	Disagree	7	6.9	6.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Employment opportunities can be created as a result of partnerships.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	58	56.9	56.9	56.9

Agree	39	38.2	38.2	95.1
Neutral	4	3.9	3.9	99.0
Strongtly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Inviting retail experts into the classroom can be beneficial for the organisation, as relevant skills are imparted to students]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	68	66.7	66.7	66.7
Agree	28	27.5	27.5	94.1
Neutral	6	5.9	5.9	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Industry can engage with universities to promote employability]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	53	52.0	52.0	52.0
Agree	46	45.1	45.1	97.1
Neutral	2	2.0	2.0	99.0
Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Combining resources and skills of partners may contribute to partnership success.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	53	52.0	52.0	52.0
Agree	44	43.1	43.1	95.1
Neutral	3	2.9	2.9	98.0
Strongtly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	99.0
Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Communication, fostering respect, trust and openness amongst stakeholders is key to successful partnerships.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	60	58.8	58.8	58.8
Agree	37	36.3	36.3	95.1
Neutral	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Consultations between universities and organizations may lead to synergies being identified.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	47	46.1	46.1	46.1
Agree	41	40.2	40.2	86.3
Neutral	12	11.8	11.8	98.0
Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Staff are comfortable about sharing new ideas that might improve the partnering outcomes.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	29	28.4	28.4	28.4
Agree	48	47.1	47.1	75.5
Neutral	20	19.6	19.6	95.1
Disagree	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [There is strong support in our organisation for seeking training partnerships that will be profitable and high profile.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	35	34.3	34.3	34.3
Agree	32	31.4	31.4	65.7
Neutral	27	26.5	26.5	92.2
Disagree	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships) [Both retail industries and universities may benefit from collaborations.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	58	56.9	56.9	56.9
Agree	35	34.3	34.3	91.2
Neutral	9	8.8	8.8	100.0
Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Staff are continuously training newly appointed graduates, as they lack basic skills.]

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Strongtly agree	45	44.1	44.6	44.6
Agree	43	42.2	42.6	87.1

	Neutral	8	7.8	7.9	95.0
	Disagree	5	4.9	5.0	100.0
	Total	101	99.0	100.0	
Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		102	100.0		

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Transferring of skills and training students is achievable from within our organisation.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	34	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Agree	54	52.9	52.9	86.3
	Neutral	13	12.7	12.7	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Communication, problem-solving, decision-making and customer service skills are lacking in retail.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	58	56.9	56.9	56.9
	Agree	29	28.4	28.4	85.3
	Neutral	11	10.8	10.8	96.1
	Disagree	4	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Time management, working under pressure and attention to detail are challenges faced by retail staff.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	59	57.8	57.8	57.8
	Agree	38	37.3	37.3	95.1
	Neutral	4	3.9	3.9	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Technology skills are essential in the retail industry.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	42	41.2	41.2	41.2
	Agree	41	40.2	40.2	81.4
	Neutral	10	9.8	9.8	91.2
	Disagree	9	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Collaborating with universities will assist in addressing the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	55	53.9	53.9	53.9
	Agree	36	35.3	35.3	89.2
	Neutral	11	10.8	10.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [On forging relationships with educational institutions, industry may be provided with skilled staff.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	53	52.0	52.0	52.0
	Agree	39	38.2	38.2	90.2
	Neutral	9	8.8	8.8	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Skilled employees will be retiring or emigrating in a few years and partnerships with educational institutions may address these imminent issues.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	34	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Agree	39	38.2	38.2	71.6
	Neutral	20	19.6	19.6	91.2
	Disagree	9	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [The current university content is relevant to industry needs.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	8	7.8	7.8	7.8
	Agree	23	22.5	22.5	30.4
	Neutral	58	56.9	56.9	87.3
	Disagree	13	12.7	12.7	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtgly agree	19	18.6	18.6	18.6
	Agree	26	25.5	25.5	44.1
	Neutral	34	33.3	33.3	77.5
	Strongtgly disagree	3	2.9	2.9	80.4

	Disagree	20	19.6	19.6	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Critical skills set is required for this industry.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	20.6	20.6	20.6
	Agree	66	64.7	64.7	85.3
	Neutral	15	14.7	14.7	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [We, as an industry, can influence the preparedness of students]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	46	45.1	45.1	45.1
	Agree	52	51.0	51.0	96.1
	Neutral	4	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Views on university programmes vs expectations of industry are skewed.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	38	37.3	37.3	37.3
	Agree	52	51.0	51.0	88.2
	Neutral	12	11.8	11.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Exposing students to work experience whilst completing their qualifications, may ensure a well-rounded graduate.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	64	62.7	62.7	62.7
	Agree	33	32.4	32.4	95.1
	Neutral	3	2.9	2.9	98.0
	Disagree	2	2.0	2.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Regular communication between universities, students and industry concerning curricula is important.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	54	52.9	52.9	52.9
	Agree	45	44.1	44.1	97.1
	Neutral	2	2.0	2.0	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [Before embarking on any work training program, it is advisable for universities to consult with industry.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	65	63.7	63.7	63.7
	Agree	34	33.3	33.3	97.1
	Neutral	3	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector) [The quality of education (with reference to the curriculum) is associated with the extent of industry contribution in producing well-rounded graduates.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	48	47.1	47.1	47.1
	Agree	45	44.1	44.1	91.2
	Neutral	9	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Barriers/challenges to partnerships [Partnerships contribute to sustainable development by creating networks, however, risks exist.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	54	52.9	52.9	52.9
	Agree	47	46.1	46.1	99.0
	Neutral	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Barriers/challenges to partnerships [Lack of digitalisation skills is a challenge to industry.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	30	29.4	29.4	29.4
	Agree	55	53.9	53.9	83.3
	Neutral	11	10.8	10.8	94.1
	Strongly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	95.1
	Disagree	5	4.9	4.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Barriers/challenges to partnerships [Absence of efficient communication, exerting unnecessary power and lack of leadership impact on collaboration.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	41	40.2	40.6	40.6
	Agree	57	55.9	56.4	97.0
	Neutral	3	2.9	3.0	100.0
	Total	101	99.0	100.0	

Missing	System	1	1.0		
Total		102	100.0		

Barriers/challenges to partnerships [Failure to address expected outcomes in a partnership may cause relationship deterioration.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	45	44.1	44.1	44.1
	Agree	52	51.0	51.0	95.1
	Neutral	4	3.9	3.9	99.0
	Strongtly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Barriers/challenges to partnerships [Limited access to information and lack of transparency are impeding factors in partnerships.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	41	40.2	40.2	40.2
	Agree	53	52.0	52.0	92.2
	Neutral	8	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [A formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	42	41.2	41.2	41.2
	Agree	54	52.9	52.9	94.1
	Neutral	6	5.9	5.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [A framework can guide the partnership process by ensuring consistency with a formal plan of action.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	43	42.2	42.2	42.2
	Agree	49	48.0	48.0	90.2
	Neutral	9	8.8	8.8	99.0
	Strongtly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [There are existing frameworks that could be consulted for collaboration.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	20	19.6	19.6	19.6
	Agree	32	31.4	31.4	51.0
	Neutral	38	37.3	37.3	88.2
	Strongtly disagree	3	2.9	2.9	91.2
	Disagree	9	8.8	8.8	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [Developing an appropriate framework would be ideal for collaboration]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	38	37.3	37.3	37.3
	Agree	50	49.0	49.0	86.3
	Neutral	10	9.8	9.8	96.1
	Disagree	4	3.9	3.9	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

Please indicate your responses (A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration) [Any support system is perceived as a best practice in partnering.]

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongtly agree	40	39.2	39.2	39.2
	Agree	52	51.0	51.0	90.2
	Neutral	8	7.8	7.8	98.0
	Strongtly disagree	1	1.0	1.0	99.0
	Disagree	1	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	102	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX E : FREQUENCY TABLE (STUDENTS)

		Frequency	Age Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-22	40	60.6	60.6	60.6
	23-27	22	33.3	33.3	93.9
	28-32	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

		Frequency	Gender Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	31	47.0	47.0	47.0
	Female	35	53.0	53.0	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

		Frequency	Race Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	African	64	97.0	97.0	97.0
	White	1	1.5	1.5	98.5
	Indian	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

		Frequency	Current residence Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	University residence (within campus)	35	53.0	53.0	53.0
	University residence (outside campus)	4	6.1	6.1	59.1
	Personal (home)	23	34.8	34.8	93.9
	Boarding (private accommodation)	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	27	40.9	40.9	40.9
	No	39	59.1	59.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

I intend on furthering my studies.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	65	98.5	98.5	98.5
	No	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	26	39.4	39.4	39.4
	Agree	34	51.5	51.5	90.9
	Neutral	6	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B2-Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	25	37.9	37.9	37.9
	Agree	38	57.6	57.6	95.5
	Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B3-Commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	26	39.4	39.4	39.4
	Agree	36	54.5	54.5	93.9
	Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B4-Adequate resources are vital for successful partnering

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	26	39.4	39.4	39.4
	Agree	39	59.1	59.1	98.5
	Neutral	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B5-Effective communication and efficient coordination are key for the sustainability of partnerships

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	28	42.4	42.4	42.4
	Agree	38	57.6	57.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B6-Amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership success

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	19	28.8	28.8	28.8
	Agree	39	59.1	59.1	87.9
	Neutral	7	10.6	10.6	98.5
	Disagree	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	30	45.5	45.5	45.5
	Agree	34	51.5	51.5	97.0
	Neutral	2	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

B8-Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	11	16.7	16.7	16.7
	Agree	33	50.0	50.0	66.7
	Neutral	18	27.3	27.3	93.9
	Disagree	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

C1-An existing or new framework (a tool that provides clear guidelines) could assist in guiding the partnership process

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	19	28.8	28.8	28.8
	Agree	38	57.6	57.6	86.4
	Neutral	9	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

C2-The skills gap between employer requirements and the university curriculum may be narrowed once a proper structure is determined

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	31.8	31.8	31.8
	Agree	40	60.6	60.6	92.4
	Neutral	5	7.6	7.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

C3-A framework may improve the university to work transition

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	16	24.2	24.2	24.2
	Agree	46	69.7	69.7	93.9
	Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

C4-Any type of partnership requires a support structure

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	15	22.7	22.7	22.7
	Agree	45	68.2	68.2	90.9
	Neutral	6	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D1-The current structure of the qualification in terms of industry requirement is adequate

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	4	6.1	6.1	6.1
	Agree	34	51.5	51.5	57.6
	Neutral	21	31.8	31.8	89.4
	Disagree	7	10.6	10.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D2-Practical work-based training is a compulsory requirement of the qualification

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Agree	23	34.8	34.8	36.4
	Neutral	25	37.9	37.9	74.2
	Disagree	16	24.2	24.2	98.5
	Strongly disagree	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D3-Skills imparted at university are relevant and adequate, hence graduates are prepared to enter the workforce

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	27	40.9	40.9	40.9
	Neutral	22	33.3	33.3	74.2
	Disagree	17	25.8	25.8	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D4-Skills imparted are easy to comprehend and interesting

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	42	63.6	63.6	63.6
	Neutral	19	28.8	28.8	92.4
	Disagree	5	7.6	7.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D5-Materials provided helps create a better understanding of the retail sector

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Agree	54	81.8	81.8	89.4
	Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	95.5
	Disagree	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D6-Skills accumulated prepares one to undertake virtually any retail position

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	2	3.0	3.0	3.0
	Agree	31	47.0	47.0	50.0
	Neutral	24	36.4	36.4	86.4
	Disagree	9	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D7-Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	27	40.9	40.9	40.9
	Agree	33	50.0	50.0	90.9
	Neutral	6	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D8-Retail graduates face difficulties transitioning from university to the labour market due to certain gaps in skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	25	37.9	37.9	37.9
	Agree	38	57.6	57.6	95.5
	Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D9-Customer service, communication and problem-solving are pertinent in the retail sector

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	22	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Agree	41	62.1	62.1	95.5
	Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D10-Educational institutions and industry should liaise to create and maintain a relationship to promote employability

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	26	39.4	39.4	39.4
	Agree	39	59.1	59.1	98.5
	Neutral	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D11-Retail graduates will have promising career opportunities

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
	Agree	32	48.5	48.5	50.0
	Neutral	17	25.8	25.8	75.8
	Disagree	15	22.7	22.7	98.5
	Strongly disagree	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

D12-Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	31.8	31.8	31.8
	Agree	41	62.1	62.1	93.9
	Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E1-Lecturing is effective and collaborative efforts are possible

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	5	7.6	7.6	7.6
	Agree	45	68.2	68.2	75.8
	Neutral	13	19.7	19.7	95.5
	Disagree	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E2-Students are prepared for the world of work

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent

Valid	Agree	16	24.2	24.2	24.2
	Neutral	31	47.0	47.0	71.2
	Disagree	18	27.3	27.3	98.5
	Strongly disagree	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E3-Structured collaborative initiatives are important for partnerships

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	18	27.3	27.3	27.3
	Agree	46	69.7	69.7	97.0
	Neutral	2	3.0	3.0	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E4-Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	25	37.9	37.9	37.9
	Agree	40	60.6	60.6	98.5
	Neutral	1	1.5	1.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E5-There are existing partnerships with local or other retailers

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	3	4.5	4.5	4.5
	Agree	38	57.6	57.6	62.1
	Neutral	19	28.8	28.8	90.9
	Disagree	6	9.1	9.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E6-Partnering enhances the development of new skills

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	22	33.3	33.3	33.3
	Agree	39	59.1	59.1	92.4
	Neutral	5	7.6	7.6	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E7-Partnering develops universities ability to address important issues about employment

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	28	42.4	42.4	42.4
	Agree	34	51.5	51.5	93.9
	Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E8-Partnering allows for the development of valuable relationships between collaborating parties

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	18	27.3	27.3	27.3
	Agree	45	68.2	68.2	95.5
	Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E9-Partnerships may contribute to bridging gaps between knowledge and expertise

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	25	37.9	37.9	37.9
	Agree	37	56.1	56.1	93.9
	Neutral	4	6.1	6.1	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E10-Partnering organisations may have a greater impact working collaboratively as opposed to operating solely

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	21	31.8	31.8	31.8
	Agree	42	63.6	63.6	95.5
	Neutral	3	4.5	4.5	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

E11-Partnering facilitates the acquisition of additional financial support

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	14	21.2	21.2	21.2
	Agree	42	63.6	63.6	84.8
	Neutral	10	15.2	15.2	100.0
	Total	66	100.0	100.0	

APPENDIX F: CROSS TABS AND CHISQUARE (STUDENTS)

proper systems are in placeCrosstab

			B1-Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	9	17	1	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	33.3%	63.0%	3.7%	100.0%
	No	Count	17	17	5	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	43.6%	43.6%	12.8%	100.0%
Total	Count		26	34	6	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:		39.4%	51.5%	9.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.047 ^a	2	.218
Likelihood Ratio	3.219	2	.200
Linear-by-Linear Association	.005	1	.943
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,45.

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B2-Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnershipCrosstab

			B2-Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	10	16	1	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	37.0%	59.3%	3.7%	100.0%
	No	Count	15	22	2	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	38.5%	56.4%	5.1%	100.0%
Total	Count		25	38	3	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:		37.9%	57.6%	4.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.102 ^a	2	.950
Likelihood Ratio	.104	2	.949
Linear-by-Linear Association	.000	1	1.000
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,23.

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B3-Commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success

Crosstab

			B3-Commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
I received academic advice while at high school	Yes	Count	10	15	2	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	37.0%	55.6%	7.4%	100.0%

pertaining to my university studies:	No	Count	16	21	2	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	41.0%	53.8%	5.1%	100.0%
Total		Count	26	36	4	66
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	39.4%	54.5%	6.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.210 ^a	2	.900
Likelihood Ratio	.208	2	.901
Linear-by-Linear Association	.180	1	.672
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,64.

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B4-Adequate resources are vital for successful partnering

Crosstab						
					B4-Adequate resources are vital for successful partnering	
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	6	21	0	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	22.2%	77.8%	0.0%	100.0%
	No	Count	20	18	1	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	51.3%	46.2%	2.6%	100.0%
Total		Count	26	39	1	66
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	39.4%	59.1%	1.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.813 ^a	2	.033
Likelihood Ratio	7.376	2	.025
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.153	1	.042
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,41.

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B5-Effective communication and efficient coordination are key for the sustainability of partnerships

Crosstab					
			B5-Effective communication and efficient coordination are key for the sustainability of partnerships		
			Strongly agree	Agree	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	13	14	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	48.1%	51.9%	100.0%
	No	Count	15	24	39

	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	38.5%	61.5%	100.0%
Total	Count	28	38	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	42.4%	57.6%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests					
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (2-sided)	Exact Sig. (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.613 ^a	1	.434		
Continuity Correction ^b	.280	1	.596		
Likelihood Ratio	.612	1	.434		
Fisher's Exact Test				.459	.298
Linear-by-Linear Association	.604	1	.437		
N of Valid Cases	66				

a. 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 11.45.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B6-Amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership success

Rosstab							
B6-Amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership success							
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	6	15	6	0	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	22.2%	55.6%	22.2%	0.0%	100.0%
	No	Count	13	24	1	1	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	33.3%	61.5%	2.6%	2.6%	100.0%
Total	Count		19	39	7	1	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:		28.8%	59.1%	10.6%	1.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.286 ^a	3	.063
Likelihood Ratio	7.891	3	.048

Linear-by-Linear Association	2.394	1	.122
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 4 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,41.

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work togetherCrosstab

			B7-Status of the qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work together			
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	8	18	1	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	29.6%	66.7%	3.7%	100.0%
	No	Count	22	16	1	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	56.4%	41.0%	2.6%	100.0%
Total	Count		30	34	2	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:		45.5%	51.5%	3.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.622 ^a	2	.099
Likelihood Ratio	4.718	2	.095
Linear-by-Linear Association	4.018	1	.045
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 2 cells (33,3%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,82.

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * B8-Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements

Crosstab

			B8-Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements				
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	5	15	5	2	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	18.5%	55.6%	18.5%	7.4%	100.0%
	No	Count	6	18	13	2	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	15.4%	46.2%	33.3%	5.1%	100.0%
Total	Count		11	33	18	4	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:		16.7%	50.0%	27.3%	6.1%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.797 ^a	3	.616
Likelihood Ratio	1.853	3	.603
Linear-by-Linear Association	.447	1	.504
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 3 cells (37,5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1,64

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies: * C1-An existing or new framework (a tool that provides clear guidelines) could assist in guiding the partnership processCrosstab

C1-An existing or new framework (a tool that provides clear guidelines) could assist in guiding the partnership process			
Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total

I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	Yes	Count	6	17	4	27
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	22.2%	63.0%	14.8%	100.0%
	No	Count	13	21	5	39
		% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:	33.3%	53.8%	12.8%	100.0%
Total	Count		19	38	9	66
	% within I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies:		28.8%	57.6%	13.6%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.961 ^a	2	.618
Likelihood Ratio	.980	2	.613
Linear-by-Linear Association	.673	1	.412
N of Valid Cases	66		

a. 1 cells (16,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3,68.

APPENDIX G: CROSS TABS AND CHISQUARE (STORES)

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interact well with 4s.]

Crosstab								
Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interact well with 4s.]								
			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	1	4	0	1	0	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	16.7%	66.7%	0.0%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	15	37	15	5	24	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	15.6%	38.5%	15.6%	5.2%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		16	41	15	6	24	102
	% within Please indicate your age:		15.7%	40.2%	14.7%	5.9%	23.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.813 ^a	4	.307
Likelihood Ratio	6.536	4	.163
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.325	1	.250
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 5 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .35.

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	.115	.068	1.153	.252 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	.114	.074	1.147	.254 ^c
N of Valid Cases		102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The store is well-operated, maintained and store protocols upheld by staff.]

Symmetric Measures					
		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.030	.106	-.296	.768 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.028	.097	-.283	.778 ^c

N of Valid Cases	102			

- a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.
- b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.
- c. Based on normal approximation.

Crosstab

			Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The store is well-operated, maintained and store protocols upheld by staff.]					
			Strongtly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongtly disagree	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	2	3	0	0	1	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	33.3%	50.0%	0.0%	0.0%	16.7%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	39	40	5	1	11	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	40.6%	41.7%	5.2%	1.0%	11.5%	100.0%
Total	Count		41	43	5	1	12	102
	% within Please indicate your age:		40.2%	42.2%	4.9%	1.0%	11.8%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.673 ^a	4	.955
Likelihood Ratio	1.011	4	.908
Linear-by-Linear Association	.088	1	.767
N of Valid Cases	102		

- a. 7 cells (70,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .06.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Students from educational institutions have completed training at the store.]

Crosstab

			Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Students from educational institutions have completed training at the store.]					
			Strongtly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongtly disagree	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	1	2	1	0	2	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	33.3%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	30	33	15	4	14	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	31.3%	34.4%	15.6%	4.2%	14.6%	100.0%
Total	Count		31	35	16	4	16	102
	% within Please indicate your age:		30.4%	34.3%	15.7%	3.9%	15.7%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	1.916 ^a	4	.751
Likelihood Ratio	1.933	4	.748
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.209	1	.272
N of Valid Cases	102		

- a. 6 cells (60,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.109	.111	-1.101	.274 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.101	.100	-1.014	.313 ^c
N of Valid Cases		102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Partnerships between retail and educational institutions will lead to more skilled students in the retail sector.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships)
[Partnerships between retail and educational institutions will lead to more skilled students in the retail sector.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	3	2	0	1	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	50.0%	33.3%	0.0%	16.7%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	59	27	8	2	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	61.5%	28.1%	8.3%	2.1%	100.0%
Total	Count		62	29	8	3	102
	% within Please indicate your age:		60.8%	28.4%	7.8%	2.9%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.750 ^a	3	.190
Likelihood Ratio	3.240	3	.358
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.824	1	.202
N of Valid Cases		102	

a. 5 cells (62.5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .18.

Symmetric Measures

		Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval	Pearson's R	-.127	.153	-1.279	.204 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal	Spearman Correlation	-.066	.108	-.662	.509 ^c
N of Valid Cases		102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail staff are invited by educational institutions to share expertise with students.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships)
[Retail staff are invited by educational institutions to share expertise with students.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	0	3	0	1	2	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	0.0%	50.0%	0.0%	16.7%	33.3%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	19	15	27	11	24	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	19.8%	15.6%	28.1%	11.5%	25.0%	100.0%
Total	Count		19	18	27	12	26	102
	% within Please indicate your age:		18.6%	17.6%	26.5%	11.8%	25.5%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	6.940 ^a	4	.139
Likelihood Ratio	8.432	4	.077
Linear-by-Linear Association	.200	1	.655
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 5 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .71.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	-.044	.095	-.445	.657 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	-.038	.098	-.377	.707 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail industries should develop courses to be incorporated into the university curriculum to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the world of work.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Retail industries should develop courses to be incorporated into the university curriculum to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the world of work.]

			work.]			
			Strongtly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	5	0	1	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	83.3%	0.0%	16.7%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	65	28	3	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	67.7%	29.2%	3.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	70	28	4	102	
	% within Please indicate your age:	68.6%	27.5%	3.9%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.592 ^a	2	.101
Likelihood Ratio	5.115	2	.077
Linear-by-Linear Association	.008	1	.929
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 4 cells (66,7%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is .24.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	.009	.132	.089	.930 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	.054	.102	.542	.589 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	4	1	1	0	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	66.7%	16.7%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	58	33	4	1	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	60.4%	34.4%	4.2%	1.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	62	34	5	1	102	
	% within Please indicate your age:	60.8%	33.3%	4.9%	1.0%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	2.430 ^a	3	.488
Likelihood Ratio	1.949	3	.583
Linear-by-Linear Association	.012	1	.914
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 6 cells (75,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,06.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	-.011	.110	-.108	.914 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	.007	.108	.074	.941 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The status of university programmes may be enhanced due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [The status of university programmes may be enhanced due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries.]

			Strontgly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	3	2	1	0	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	50.0%	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	51	32	11	2	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	53.1%	33.3%	11.5%	2.1%	100.0%
Total	Count	54	34	12	2	102	
		% within Please indicate your age:	52.9%	33.3%	11.8%	2.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.266 ^a	3	.966
Likelihood Ratio	.369	3	.947
Linear-by-Linear Association	.003	1	.953
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 5 cells (62,5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,12.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	-.006	.089	-.059	.953 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	-.017	.100	-.173	.863 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship.]

			Strontgly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	1	2	2	1	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	16.7%	33.3%	33.3%	16.7%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	52	33	11	0	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	54.2%	34.4%	11.5%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	53	35	13	1	102	
		% within Please indicate your age:	52.0%	34.3%	12.7%	1.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	19.850 ^a	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	9.222	3	.026
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.080	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 5 cells (82,5%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,08.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	-.331	.143	-3.510	.001 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	-.238	.102	-2.460	.016 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and may contribute positively to any organisation.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships)
[Workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and may contribute positively to any organisation.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	5	1	0	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	67	23	6	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	69.8%	24.0%	6.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	72	24	6	102	
		% within Please indicate your age:	70.6%	23.5%	5.9%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.649 ^a	2	.723
Likelihood Ratio	1.008	2	.604
Linear-by-Linear Association	.833	1	.426
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 3 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,35.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	.079	.066	.794	.429 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	.075	.078	.748	.456 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Current policies create an enabling environment for partnerships.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships)
[Current policies create an enabling environment for partnerships.]

			Strongtly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongtly disagree	Disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	2	1	2	1	0	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	33.3%	16.7%	33.3%	16.7%	0.0%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	32	27	29	1	7	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	33.3%	28.1%	30.2%	1.0%	7.3%	100.0%
Total	Count	34	28	31	2	7	102	
	% within Please indicate your age:	33.3%	27.5%	30.4%	2.0%	6.9%	100.0%	

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	7.757 ^a	4	.101
Likelihood Ratio	4.193	4	.380
Linear-by-Linear Association	.068	1	.794
N of Valid Cases	102		

a. 6 cells (60,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is ,12.

Symmetric Measures

	Value	Asymptotic Standard Error ^a	Approximate T ^b	Approximate Significance
Interval by Interval Pearson's R	-.026	.097	-.269	.796 ^c
Ordinal by Ordinal Spearman Correlation	-.037	.106	-.370	.712 ^c
N of Valid Cases	102			

a. Not assuming the null hypothesis.

b. Using the asymptotic standard error assuming the null hypothesis.

c. Based on normal approximation.

Please indicate your age: * Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships) [Employment opportunities can be created as a result of partnerships.]

Crosstab

Please indicate your responses (Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships)
[Employment opportunities can be created as a result of partnerships.]

			Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Strongly disagree	Total
Please indicate your age:	21-30	Count	5	1	0	0	6
		% within Please indicate your age:	83.3%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
	31-40	Count	53	38	4	1	96
		% within Please indicate your age:	55.2%	39.6%	4.2%	1.0%	100.0%
Total		Count	58	39	4	1	102

APPENDIX H: STORE INSTRUMENT



Reference no.

QUESTIONNAIRE (STORE MANAGERS) – KINDLY TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SURVEY. PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

You are required to answer all questions. PLEASE TICK (✓) THE CORRECT BOX.

SECTION A – Biographical Information

A1. Please indicate your age:

Under 21	
21 - 30	
31 - 40	
41 - 50	
51 - 60	
Over 60	

A2. Please indicate your gender:

Male	
Female	
Other	

A3. Please indicate your race:

African	
White	
Indian	
Coloured	
Other	

A4. Please indicate the years of work experience you have:

Under 1 year	
1 – 6 years	
7 – 12 years	
13 – 18 years	
19 – 24 years	
25 – 30 years	
Over 30 years	

A5. Please indicate the type of store you are currently employed in:

Corporate store	
Franchise store	
Local store	
Other (please state the type below): _____	

A6. Please indicate your highest level of education:

Did not complete school	
Matric	
College/university qualification	
Management related qualification (certificate, diploma or degree)	
Other qualification/s (please state the qualification below): _____	

SECTION B – Establish expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
B1	Staff in my store is knowledgeable, respectful, empowered and interacts well with others.					
B2	The store is well-operated, maintained and store protocols are upheld by staff.					
B3	Students from educational institutions have completed training at the store.					
B4	Partnerships between retail and educational institutions may lead to an increase of skilled employees in the retail sector.					
B5	Retail staff are invited by educational institutions to share expertise with students.					
B6	Retail industries should develop courses to be incorporated into the university curriculum to ensure that students are adequately prepared for the world of work.					
B7	The mutual transfer of knowledge between educational institutions and industry is necessary.					
B8	The status of university programmes may be enhanced, due to the transfer of expert knowledge from retail industries.					
B9	Regular and mutual interactions between educational institutions and industry can contribute towards building a long-term relationship.					
B10	Workplace-based learning is an excellent concept and may contribute positively to any organisation.					

B11	Current policies create an enabling environment for partnerships.					
B12	Employment opportunities can be created as a result of partnerships.					

SECTION C – Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C1	Inviting retail experts into the classroom can be beneficial for the organisation, as relevant skills are imparted to students.					
C2	Industry can engage with educational institutions to promote employability.					
C3	Combining resources and skills of partners may contribute to partnership success.					
C4	Communication, fostering respect, trust and openness among stakeholders is key to successful partnerships.					
C5	Consultations between universities and organisations may lead to synergies being identified.					
C6	Staff are comfortable about sharing new ideas that might improve the partnering outcomes between educational institutions and industries.					
C7	There is strong support in our organisation for seeking training partnerships that will be profitable and high profile.					
C8	Both retail industries and educational institutions may benefit from collaborations.					

SECTION D – Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
D1	Staff are continuously training newly appointed graduates, as they lack basic skills.					
D2	Transferring of skills and training students is achievable from within our organisation.					
D3	Communication, problem-solving, decision-making and customer service skills are lacking in retail.					

D4	Time management, working under pressure and attention to detail are challenges faced by retail staff.					
D5	Technology skills are essential in the retail industry.					
D6	Collaborating with educational institutions may address the scarce and critical skills required in the workforce.					
D7	On forging relationships with educational institutions, industry may be provided with skilled staff.					
D8	Skilled employees will be retiring or emigrating in a few years and partnerships with educational institutions may address these imminent issues.					
D9	The current university content is relevant to industry needs.					
D10	Graduates are well prepared to enter the workforce.					
D11	Critical skill set is required for this industry.					
D12	We, as an industry, can influence the preparedness of students					
D13	Views on university programmes as opposed to expectations of industry are skewed.					
D14	Exposing students to work experience whilst completing their qualifications, may ensure a well-rounded graduate.					
D15	Regular communication between universities, students and industry concerning curricula is important.					
D16	Before embarking on any work training programme, universities should consult with industry.					
D17	The quality of education (with reference to the curriculum) is associated with the extent of industry contribution in producing well-rounded graduates.					

SECTION E – Barriers/challenges to partnerships

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
E1	Partnerships contribute to sustainable development by creating networks; however, risks exist.					
E2	Lack of digitalisation skills is a challenge to industry.					
E3	Absence of efficient communication, exerting unnecessary power and					

	lack of leadership impact on collaboration.					
E4	Failure to address expected outcomes in a partnership may cause relationship deterioration.					
E5	Limited access to information and lack of transparency are impeding factors in partnerships.					

SECTION F – A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration

No.	Statements	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
F1	A formal structure between educational institutions and industry is necessary.					
F2	A framework can guide the partnership process by ensuring consistency with a formal plan of action.					
F3	There are existing frameworks that could be consulted for collaboration.					
F4	Developing an appropriate framework would be ideal for collaboration.					
F5	Any support system is perceived as a best practice in partnering.					

SECTION G

G1 How best do you see the relationship between educational institutions and retail organisations working? What do you regard as the main strategies for maximising partnerships?

G2 Are there suggestions of skills that could be included in the curricula to address the current challenges faced by the retail industry?

G3 Please add any other negative or positive comments relating to the role of partnerships between educational institutions and the retail sector that you consider significant for this study.

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX I: STUDENT INSTRUMENT



QUESTIONNAIRE (STUDENTS) – KINDLY TAKE A FEW MINUTES TO COMPLETE THE FOLLOWING SURVEY. PLEASE NOTE THAT ALL RESPONSES WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

You are required to answer all questions. PLEASE TICK (✓) THE CORRECT BOX.

SECTION A – Biographical Information

A1. Please indicate your age:

Below 18	
18 - 22	
23 - 27	
28 - 32	
33 - 37	
38 - 42	
Over 42	

A2. Please indicate your gender:

Male	
Female	
Other	

A3. Please indicate your race:

University residence (within campus)	
University residence (outside campus)	
Personal (home)	
Boarding (private accommodation)	
Other	

A4. Current residence:

African	
White	
Indian	
Coloured	
Other	

A5. I received academic advice while at high school pertaining to my university studies.

Yes	
No	

A6. I intend on furthering my studies.

Yes	
No	

SECTION B: Success factors influencing the sustainability of partnerships

No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
B1	Sustainability of partnerships is assured if proper systems are in place.					
B2	Collaborative activities must be formalised and structured to ensure the success of a partnership.					
B3	Commitment, respect, trust and support of/between all stakeholders is key for partnership success.					
B4	Adequate resources are vital for successful partnering.					
B5	Effective communication and efficient coordination are key for the sustainability of partnerships.					
B6	Amicably resolving conflict, as well as creating an environment where differences of opinion can be expressed may contribute to partnership success.					
B7	Status of qualifications will be enhanced if industry and educational institutions work collectively.					
B8	Students are currently not exposed to industry and its requirements.					

SECTION C: A partnership framework is necessary for effective collaboration

No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
C1	An existing or new framework (a tool that provides clear guidelines)					

	could assist in guiding the partnership process.					
C2	The skills gap between employer requirements and the university curriculum may be narrowed if a proper structure is determined.					
C3	A framework may improve the university to work transition.					
C4	Any type of partnership requires a support structure.					

SECTION D: Skills that are deemed relevant to the retail sector

No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
D1	The current structure of the qualification in terms of industry requirements is adequate.					
D2	Practical work-based training is a compulsory requirement of the qualification.					
D3	Skills imparted at university are relevant and adequate, hence graduates are prepared to enter the workforce.					
D4	Skills imparted are easy to comprehend and interesting.					
D5	Materials provided helps create a better understanding of the retail sector.					
D6	Skills accumulated prepare one to undertake virtually any retail position.					
D7	Including retail experts during lectures may promote the production of quality education, as well as aid in being exposed to current industry practices.					
D8	Retail graduates face difficulties transitioning from university to the labour market due to certain gaps in skills.					
D9	Customer service, communication and					

	problem-solving are pertinent in the retail sector.					
D10	Educational institutions and industries should liaise to create and maintain a relationship to promote employability.					
D11	Retail graduates will have promising career opportunities.					
D12	Value-added skills are imparted due to partnerships.					

SECTION E: Expectations, experiences and knowledge with regard to building and strengthening partnerships.

No.	Questions	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
E1	Lecturing is effective and collaborative efforts are possible.					
E2	Students are prepared for the world of work.					
E3	Structured collaborative initiatives are important for partnerships					
E4	Partnerships with educational institutions and industry may advance learning.					
E5	There are existing partnerships with local or other retailers.					
E6	Partnering enhances the development of new skills.					
E7	Partnering develops universities ability to address important issues about employment.					
E8	Partnering allows for the development of valuable relationships between collaborating parties.					
E9	Partnerships may contribute to bridging gaps between knowledge and expertise.					
E10	Partnering organisations may have a greater impact working collaboratively, as opposed to operating solely.					
E11	Partnering facilitates the acquisition of additional financial support.					

SECTION F

F1. In your opinion, how best do you see the entire partnership process working?

F2. What factors do you believe will affect the entire partnership process negatively?

F3. What are your expectations of the partnership between educational institutions and industry?

F4. How are you best prepared to enter the workforce? Least prepared?

F5. What do you think are the principles that make a successful partnership?

Thank you for your time!

APPENDIX J: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (GENERAL MANAGERS)

Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed on behalf of the Durban University of Technology and myself. The purpose of the interview is to gather data for my PhD study, which is titled: A critical analysis of Partnerships between Public Higher Education institutions and the Retail sector in Kwa Zulu-Natal. Your assistance in responding to the questions and statements to the best of your ability would be highly appreciated. The interview will take approximately 30-45 minutes. I will ask questions, repeat them if necessary, and record responses. Furthermore, your responses may be recorded using an electronic device (with your permission). Please be advised that you will not be directly quoted nor your identity revealed, as keys/references will be used.

Researcher
U Ramraj

Respondent

SECTION A - Description of the sample

- A1 Age: _____
- A2 Gender: _____
- A3 Designation: _____
- A4 Years of experience _____

SECTION B – SKILLS THAT ARE RELEVANT TO THE RETAIL SECTOR

- B1 To what extent is your organisation or the retail sector (as a whole) viewed as attractive to fresh graduates?

B2 Can you describe your perspective of universities in preparing learners for the working world?

B3 What contributions are presently made by your organisation to retail education? For example, is there any input to the curriculum? If yes, describe the form/s of input. If no, state the reasons why?

B4 How can the retail sector contribute towards curriculum development to ensure industry-relevant skills are incorporated into the formal learning programme?

B5 What skills are visibly lacking with newly appointed graduates?

B6 Describe what training and development plans are available for fresh retail graduates at your organisation?

- B7 What are the concerns from your organisation's perspectives with regards to graduates university to work transition in general, and retail graduates in particular?

SECTION C – EXPECTATIONS, EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE WITH REGARDS TO BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS

- C1 Describe your role within the organisation.

- C2 Do you have any communication channels with universities? Explain further.

- C3 How can exposure to the working world, whilst completing formal education (exit level learners) contribute to employment prospects?

C4 What are your expectations regarding a partnership between your organisation and an educational institution?

C5 What would you recommend to ensure a smoother and more effective transition process for graduates?

SECTION D – KEY SUCCESS FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SUSTAINABILITY OF PARTNERSHIPS

D1 What is your understanding of partnerships with educational institutions?

D2 Has your organisation been previously associated with an educational institution (in-service training, work-integrated learning, work-place based learning or advisory board)? If yes, provide details on the type of association. If not, is there a reason/s why your organisation has not been linked to an educational institution?

D3 What are your views of an alliance with an educational institution and your organisation in contributing to the retail skills base?

D4 What synergies (common elements) can be identified between your organisation and an educational institution? Explain.

D5 As one of the largest retailers in South Africa, what challenges do you foresee with educational partnerships?

D6 How should partnerships be managed to ensure success, strength and sustainability?

- D7 As part of senior management, where do you envision a partnership between education and retail in the next 5 years? Provide reasons for your answer.

SECTION E – PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK

- E1 What are your views on the functioning of a partnership (between your organisation and an educational institution) if a partnership framework (support structure) is developed?

- E2 Any final comments.

On behalf of the university, I would like to thank you for your patience and time in completing the interview.

APPENDIX K: FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE



FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE (FRONT-LINE SUPERVISORS)

Good day. I am Upaasna Ramraj, a PhD candidate from the Durban University of Technology. I would like to convey my thanks to each one of you for agreeing to participate in my study. The purpose of today's meeting is to gather your thoughts and opinions about the role of partnerships between Public higher education institutions and the retail sector in KZN.

I will lead and moderate the discussion by presenting questions to prompt and encourage your responses. Please be reassured that your identities will remain anonymous and all responses will be confidential. Kindly be informed that today's proceedings will be recorded, strictly for accurate documentation and data analysis.

The approximate time for the session will be a maximum of 45 minutes. To simplify the process, it is essential to keep the following ground rules in mind: when providing your initial response, please commence by greeting the group and then proceed with your response clearly and audibly; everyone is not obligated to answer every question, however, your input is encouraged; to ensure accurate capture of responses, it is imperative that only one participant responds at a time; most important feel free to respond without hesitation as there are no right or wrong answers.

Thank you, once again and please don't hesitate to ask any questions if there's any uncertainty.

Researcher
U Ramraj

Respondent

SECTION A (SKILLS)

- A1. What is your view on how universities prepare learners for the working world, and what is your organization's current involvement in retail education, such as potential contributions to the curriculum? If contributions exist, kindly describe their forms.
 - A2. How can the retail sector actively contribute to curriculum development to integrate industry-relevant skills into formal learning programs, and what noticeable skill gaps do you observe in recently appointed graduates?
 - A3. What training plans are available for new retail graduates in your organization and what concerns do you have regarding the university-to-work transition?
-

SECTION B (PARTNERSHIP EXPECTATIONS)

- B1. Do you maintain communication channels with universities, and how might exposure to the working world during formal education, particularly for exit-level learners, enhance their employment prospects?
 - B2. What are your expectations regarding a partnership between your organisation and an educational institution?
-

SECTION C (PARTNERSHIP SUSTAINABILITY)

- C1. What is your perspective on partnering with educational institutions to enhance retail skills?
 - C2. Has your organization collaborated with educational institutions for in-service training, work-integrated learning, workplace-based learning, or advisory boards? If so, please share details. If not, are there specific reasons why such collaboration has not occurred?
 - C3. What synergies or challenges do you think would arise in forming educational partnerships?
 - C4. How should partnerships be managed to ensure sustainability and do you envision a partnership between education and retail in the next 5 years?
-

SECTION D (PARTNERSHIP FRAMEWORK)

- D1. What are your views of partnerships between your organization and an educational institution in the context of establishing a partnership framework or support structure?
- D2. Are there any other comments or questions?

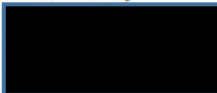
On behalf of the university, I would like to thank you for your patience and time!

APPENDIX L: ETHICS APPROVAL (INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE)



13 March 2020

Mrs U Ramraj



Dear Mrs Ramraj

A critical analysis of partnerships between Public Higher Education institutions and Retail supermarket chains in Kwa-Zulu-Natal
Ethical Clearance number IREC 059/19

The Institutional Research Ethics Committee acknowledges receipt of your final data collection tools for review.

We are pleased to inform you that the data collection tools have been approved. Kindly ensure that participants used for the pilot study are not part of the main study.

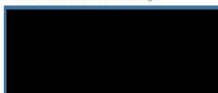
In addition, the IREC acknowledges receipt of your gatekeeper permission letters.

Please note that FULL APPROVAL is granted to your research proposal. You may proceed with data collection.

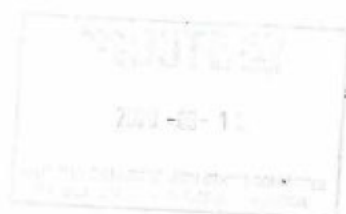
Any adverse events [serious or minor] which occur in connection with this study and/or which may alter its ethical consideration must be reported to the IREC according to the IREC Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's).

Please note that any deviations from the approved proposal require the approval of the IREC as outlined in the IREC SOP's.

Yours Sincerely,



Professor J K Adam
Chairperson: IREC



APPENDIX M: ETHICS APPROVAL (DIRECTORATE FOR RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT)



*Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
Tromso Annex, Steve Biko Campus
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946*

20th November 2019

Mrs Upaasna Ramraj
c/o Department of Entrepreneurial studies and Management
Faculty of Management Sciences
Durban University of Technology

Dear Mrs Upaasna Ramraj

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted Full Permission for you to conduct your research "A critical analysis of partnerships between Public Higher Education institutions and Retail supermarket chains in Kwa-Zulu-Natal" at the Durban University of Technology.

The DUT may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

We would be grateful if a summary of your key research findings can be submitted to the IRIC on completion of your studies.

Kindest regards,
Yours sincerely



PROF KEVIN DUFFY
ACTING DIRECTOR: RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT DIRECTORATE

APPENDIX N: ETHICS APPROVAL (DEPARTMENT OF MARKETING AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT)



Department of Marketing and
Retail Management

Durban University of Technology

7th December 2019

Re: Permission to collect data from exit level Retail Business Management students

I hereby give permission for Ms Upaasna Ramraj to collect data for her PhD study titled "A critical analysis of partnerships between Public Education institutions and Retail supermarket chains in KwaZulu Natal". This permission is granted subject to all the institutional requirements being met with regard to IREC.

Yours faithfully



Dr KM Corbishley

Acting Head of Department

karenc@dut.ac.za

APPENDIX O: ETHICS APPROVAL (RETAILER 1)

03 March 2020

To whom it may concern

Dear Manager

Permission to gather data from stores in the KZN region

I hereby permit Ms Upasna Ramraj to gather data from stores in the KZN region, for her PhD study: A critical analysis of partnerships between Public Education institutions and Retail supermarket chains in KwaZulu Natal.

Wishing her success in her research journey. Please do not hesitate to contact me for further information.

Yours faithfully

Ravi Naidoo
General Manager
Value Region KZN

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Registered Office: Pick n Pay Office Park, 101 Rosemead Avenue, Norwood 7708, Cape Town | PO Box 230 87, Claremont 7735, South Africa
Tel +27 (0)21 858 1000 | Fax +27 (0)21 757 0314 | www.picknpay.co.za

Kensington Office: Pick n Pay Office Park, 2 Allum Road, Kensington 2094, Gauteng | PO Box 908, Bedfordview 2008, South Africa

Directors: GM Ackerman*, RWP Brasher (CEO), L. Olivier (CFO), RSJ van Rensburg (CSO), JG Ackerman, SD Ackerman-Barnan

APPENDIX P: ETHICS APPROVAL (RETAILER 2)

From: Nompendulo Mthembu [<mailto:Nompendulo.Mt>]

Sent: Wednesday, 06 May 2020 3:35 PM

To: Upaasna Ramraj <upaasnar@dut.ac.za>

Subject: RE: Request for Permission to collect data

Good day,

As per our telephone conversation please email me the questionnaire I will pass to Store Managers.

Once the questionnaires have been completed, I will forward to you. I will arrange with the Senior ROM to have 30 minutes chat with you over the phone.

Regards,

Nompendulo Mthembu (Nomps)

Human Resources Manager – Corporate Stores

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