



Key Success Factors Influencing the Sustainability of University-Industry Partnerships in South Africa

Upaasna Ramraj

Durban University of Technology, South Africa

Abstract

Due to the inability of stakeholders to address local and global challenges independently, there is a rising need for partnerships between academia and industry. Higher education institutions are key role players in developing future employees, necessitating intervention strategies with industry. Conversely, industry is eager to absorb these employees in an effort to identify solutions to their ongoing concerns. As a result, establishing symbiotic relationships with one another becomes critical, since such partnerships have been known to address a wide range of challenges. This study, therefore, investigated factors that influence the sustainability of university-industry partnerships by means of a quantitative survey applied to exit-level higher education students and industry managers. A hybrid questionnaire was used to collect data, incorporating open-ended and closed questions. Some of the survey findings include solidification of contracts, dynamic stakeholder engagement, strategic planning initiatives and fostering commitment, resulting in re-engineered business processes and bespoke education. These findings have significant implications for the long-term viability of university-education partnerships. As a result, it is critical for stakeholders to prioritise investment in these partnerships recognising their significance as catalysts for innovation and drivers of economic progress.

Keywords: partnerships, university-industry partnership, higher education, success factors and sustainability

1. Introduction

The present state of the economy is marked by persistently high levels of unemployment, as indicated by Statistics South Africa, regarding the 23.3 % unemployment rate for the second quarter of 2020 (Statistics South Africa, 2020). A report by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (2019) attempted to address this and other related issues by demonstrating the outcomes of the National Skills Development Plan (NSDP) and 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. Moreover, the critical role that higher education plays in shaping the future workforce is the reason behind the growing need for partnerships between education and industry. As a result of reciprocal intervention measures, industry is eager to hire these future employees. 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 & Kesting, 2017). According to the National Planning Commission (2020), a partnership is important for drawing the capabilities, interests and resources of different stakeholders. Markova, Modliński and Pinto (2020) believe that interaction with the corporate and academic world could be the basis for the sustainable development of a business. To achieve the required improvements for future generations and close the knowledge gaps between students, Armstrong (2020) highlights the importance of partnerships in education as a means of enhancing the effectiveness of educational systems (Gawrycka et al., 2020).

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). 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). 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 exemplified by a partnership whereby the school and community were afforded opportunities to strengthen their relationships with their local surroundings, which enhanced the school's physical infrastructure (Alkaher & Gan 2020). The authors contend that the financial support from one of the businesses was a defining element in contributing to this success.

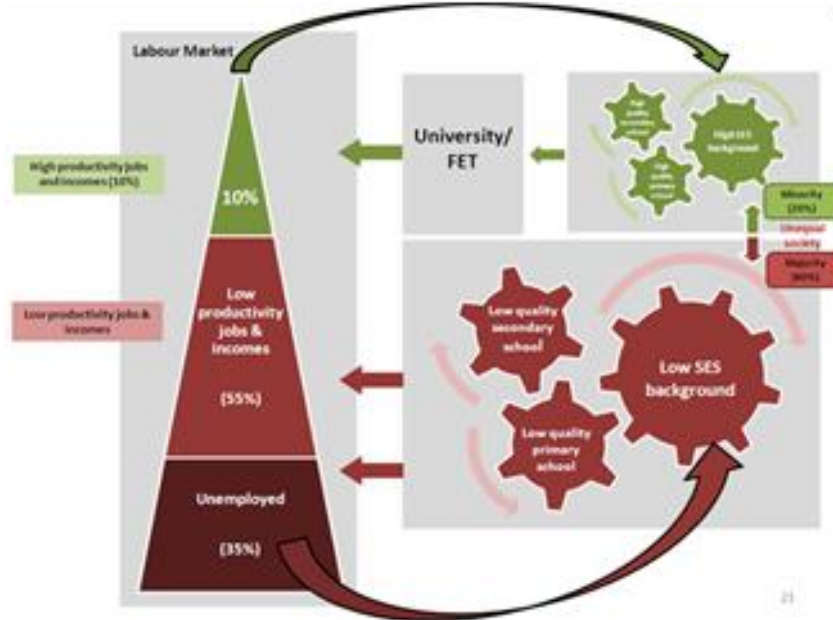
2. Literature

2.1 South African Higher Education

It is imperative 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, 2014), playing one of the most significant roles in the development of human skills. As a result, the 2020 Budget review emphasised the value of education in South Africa, allocating the largest share of the national budget to the education sector (South Africa National Treasury 2020). This implies that the sector is prioritised by the South African government to meet the ever-copious demands of the higher education sector (Buys, 2018). However, according to Moloji et.al., (2014), a significant portion of the total government expenditure goes toward higher education as more money is required to address the backlogs of apartheid. The theoretical framework presented in Figure 1 can potentially address this assertion. It depicts two schooling systems with students from wealthy and poor backgrounds, providing insights into the issue of apartheid. According to Spaul (2012), 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. A significant portion of the economy (35 %) remains unemployed, and the system of inequality perpetuates the patterns of poverty and privilege.

Figure 1: Education in South Africa: A Tale of two systems



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

It is worthwhile to acknowledge that the higher education system has the potential to function as a social institution that ameliorates historical prejudices and comprehends the ramifications of academic curricula and deeply entrenched knowledge conceptions (Kumalo, 2020). Walker (2020) 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. Hence, effective governance in higher education is crucial for advancing the economic prosperity of nations, and finance can enable the application of good governance in economic development (Asongu, 2020). Governance, in education, pertains to the formal organisation and management of universities (MacGregor, 2016) led by 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, 2020). 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, 2020). Moreover, as philosophised by the country’s Minister of Higher Education the future of South Africa is contingent on the ongoing generation of graduates from the higher education sector to all other sectors (Nzimande, 2020). As a result, 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. Nonetheless, the world is in a state of transformation, presenting universities with challenges influenced by economic, political, and moral factors, yet they must strive to stay relevant (Higgins & Thomas, 2016). In the context of South Africa’s educational landscape, it is essential to demonstrate the pivotal role played by Sector Education and Training Authorities.

2.2 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). These bodies are known as the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) and their key functions are to contribute to skill development and enhancement for those who are employed or seeking employment (South Africa National Skills Authority, 2015). According to Kraak (2019), SETAs are required to encourage employers to prepare workplace skills plans and pay a grant to employers who prepare them. Hence, 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 in their specific industries. SETAs are entitled to 10 percent of their allocated funds for administration (South Africa, White Paper for Post-School Education and Training 2013). Section 10 of the Skills Development Act (1998) 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), the role of the SETAs is to foster skill development in key economic sectors and aid in overcoming issues encountered.

2.3 Challenges facing higher education

Globally, there are a limited number of institutions that function without any challenges (O'Malley, 2017), likewise, Higher Education Institutions in South Africa encounter recurring challenges each year. These universities endure adverse economic times with increased student intakes and insufficient funding (van Staden, 2021). In addition, the development of the HE landscape has been significantly influenced by racial segregation (Cloete, 2014) as well as poor student performance, retention and decreased throughput rates (Govender, 2020). The deficient education system is an obstacle to socio-economic advancement, with unemployment, poverty and inequality cited as concerns (Morris, 2018). Regrettably, violent protest actions, accompanied by property destruction, persist at most universities (Fomunyam, 2017), despite the demands for free education and decolonisation of the curriculum (Moloi, 2016). Tjønneland (2017) 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). Among the numerous challenges that higher education institutions encounter, access to higher education, university funding, drop-out rates, redressing challenges of the past and skills transfer will be addressed. Hence, partnerships can play a pivotal role in addressing these and related issues.

2.4 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 & Jalal, 2018). 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), firstly, striking a balance between cultivating a relationship with industry whilst considering the constraints of academic appointments; secondly, agreeing upon timelines; selecting appropriate outcomes and lastly evaluation metrics. Though an

argument by Nutcache (2018) 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). Providing students with practical content outside of their normal framework greatly improves long-term understanding (Du Preez & Sinha, 2020). According to Healy et al., (2014), 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), thus being considered relevant and necessary considering education is a long-term investment.

2.5 How does higher education in South Africa interpret partnerships?

Despite the many unanswered questions such as why the skills gap persists and how we may foster synergies between universities and other institutions, universities must endeavour to address the link between academia and industry (Kabaji, 2019). Moloi (2016) 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, thus the role of higher education is critical in enabling learners to become educated citizens that society needs (Ali & Jalal, 2018) as well as to articulate the links between skills and attributes valued by employers (Dicker et al., 2019). Hamburg & Vladut's (2019) stance is that cooperation between universities and industries for innovation and education is important, particularly due to uncertainty in economies.

The Council of Higher Education (2018) continues to highlight its pledge to restructure the higher education system to ensure it contributes to social and economic development. Thus, the National Planning Commission (2020) advocates for collaboration among various components 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 Planning Commission, 2020).

The South African Council of Higher Education Report (2018/2019) identified enhancing and expanding strategic partnerships as a critical strategic objective to collaborate with stakeholders to increase organisational effectiveness. As a result, meaningful partnerships should be established to ensure optimal usage of resources, improved quality, and increased relevance that can be achieved by collective approaches, as outlined in the National Planning Commission Report (2020). The report further stipulates that meaningful workplace experiences for students must be offered, either through practical training and simulation in education and training institutions or through partnerships with employers 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). South African higher education institutions have received several requests from foreign institutions to offer collaborative or partnership qualifications; therefore, universities are viewed as a strategy to bridge the innovation gap between industry and themselves (Hamburg & Vladut, 2019).

2.6 Promoting higher education-industry partnership

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), thus becoming more prevalent today within many sectors. As a result, President Ramaphosa of South Africa, advocates for the establishment of durable partnerships between government, business and other sectors (South African Government, 2019). Furthermore, Patil (2019) proposes that government initiatives be used to close the talent gap through public-private partnerships, which could be beneficial to both higher education and business alike. According to Wallin et al. (2014), 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), believes that students prefer a more authentic experience with hands-on activities 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 & Rodrigues' (2019) 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 than 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). Wedekind and Mutereko (2016) argue that a way of promoting the production of situated knowledge is by tailoring vocational programmes. In this way, stakeholders are aligned with both industry expectations and higher education offerings.

Mobarak (2020) outlines suggestions that employers deem necessary for collaborations, namely: there should be 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. Okolie et al., (2020) believe that due to poor linkages between the sectors and the higher education system lacking support from industry, it is essential to secure cooperation with industry to transform students' mindsets about business development and job creation. In addition, it must not be disregarded that the labour market remains under close scrutiny with persistent joblessness raising concerns (Mncayi and Shuping, 2021).

For decades, numerous fruitful academic partnerships have been established. Martin and Wooff (2020) 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) highlight 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.

2.7 Sustaining partnerships for success

Sustainable partnerships have existed for decades, and their foundation should rest upon fundamental principles such as good governance, transparency, fairness, equity and social justice (Tille et al., 2021). Mwangi (2017) 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) claim that partnerships have fostered 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 strengthen their global position and boost their innovation, as a sustainable world needs highly educated people (Sharma, 2016). Further to this, there have been numerous joint ventures with international universities, such as the University of Nottingham, which have been huge successes. A successful collaboration does not happen by chance; it must be carefully planned and nurtured due to the importance of fully understanding what makes it a success (Rajalo & Vadi, 2017; Mwangi, 2017; Marinho et al., 2020).

3. Method

This study presents its findings through the utilisation of a quantitative survey applied to 80 exit-level higher education students at a university of technology, as well as 128 industry managers. Data gathering was conducted using a blended questionnaire, incorporating open-ended and closed questions. The questionnaire was designed to attain the most pertinent data while accommodating a variety of responses. The five-point Likert scale was used to gauge information from participants on the restrictive component. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), using a Likert scale allows responses over many statements to be analysed item by item. Due to its versatility, it is effectively employed to assess attitudes, opinions and other constructs within the study. To evaluate the study’s validity and reliability, quantitative instruments were piloted prior to the main data collection, comprising a smaller sample. With recommendations varying between 10 to 12 per group (Lewis, 2021), 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 & Beck, 2017). The purpose of the pilot study is to ensure that instruments are valid, reliable, and accurate representations of the study, with no errors, hence reducing bias. Cronbach’s Alpha was applied to all questions on the student and industry manager instruments. The overall reliability score of all items was 0.967 and 0.732 for both instruments respectively. The reliability scores 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 Cronbach’s Alpha is > 0.9 , it indicates an excellent level of reliability, while 0.7 is good and 0.6 is acceptable.

Data for this study was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V27), tool designed for the management and analysis of social science data. 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 the study. Inferential tests were performed so that inferences could be drawn from the sample population (Creswell, 2014) for the study. Results of the instruments in Table 1 indicate that average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than 0,50, thus convergent validity is acceptable. As demonstrated, the value of AVE for skills is (0.63) and expectations are (0.76) thus ranging above the adequate level. As

reiterated by Carlson and Herdman (2010), 0,70 is recommended, whereas those below 0,50 should be avoided.

Table 1: Validity statistics for the student instrument

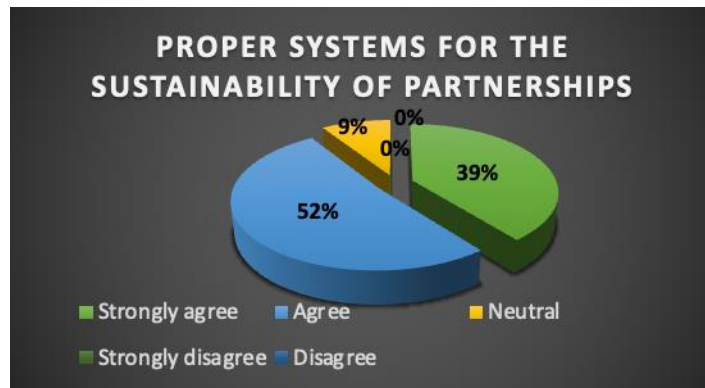
Factor AVE and Correlation Measures												
Factors	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
Skills	0.708	0.715	0.50	0.920	0.674	0.792	0.935	0.719	0.900	852	906	0.631
Expectations	0.829	0.933	0.878	0.836	0.866	0.872	0.933	0.889	0.918	0.800		0.768

Source: Author's construction

4. Results and Discussion

The study yielded a response rate of more than 80 %, indicating an acceptable level of participation. According to Baruch (2008), a response rate of 70 % is adequate to prevent bias based on responses.

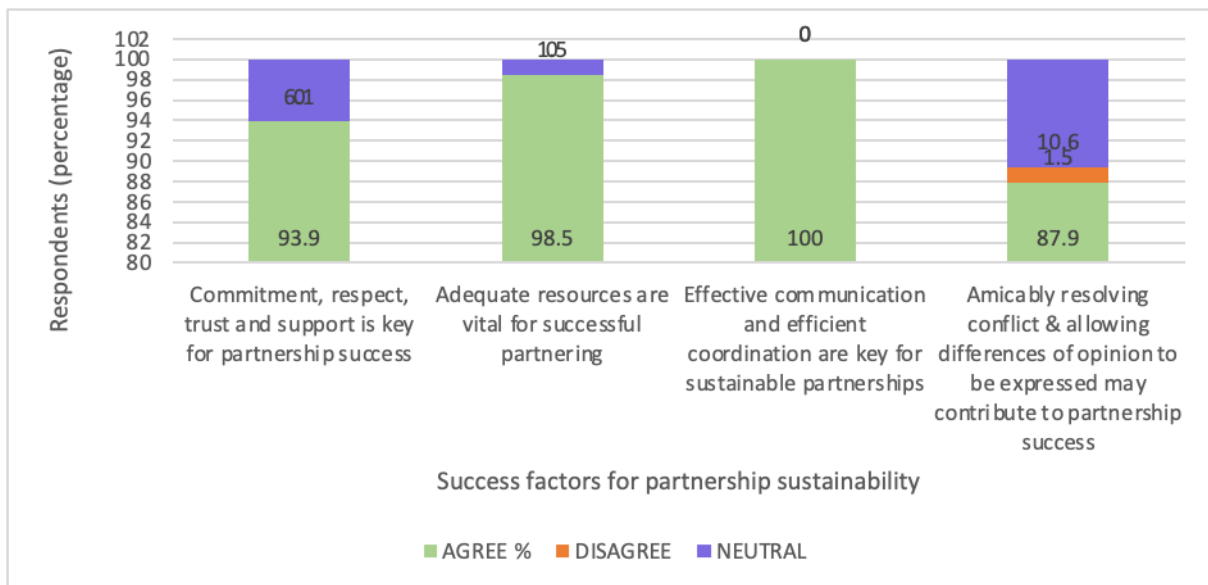
Figure 2: Proper systems for the sustainability of Partnerships



Source: Author's construction

With regards to the respondents' perception of whether proper systems will ensure partnership sustainability, Figure 2 indicates that 90.9 % expressed a strong belief that the sustainability of partnerships can be ensured if systems are in place, whereas 9.1 % expressed uncertainty. This implies a favourable perspective for potential partnerships once appropriate structures are established. Stott (2019), states that the “core rationale for working in partnerships is that by combining resources, skills and competencies, development challenges can be addressed in a more focused, robust and innovative manner than individual approaches”.

Figure 3: Success factors for partnership sustainability



Source: Author's construction

As indicated in Figure 3, 93.9 % and 100 % of respondents, respectively concurred that commitment, respect, trust and support, as well as communication and coordination, were pertinent in a partnership. Similarly, Sidibeh (2021) observes in a similar vein that partnerships have led to observable advancements in relationships, mutual learning, trust, and communication. Thus, effective communication is vital to the success of any partnership. Open and frequent communications assist in retaining partner organisation interest by increasing their understanding, and commitment (Batti, 2019). The strong sentiment among respondents regarding soft skills within a partnership can be inferred. As reiterated by Batti (2019), “partnerships require a solid commitment to shared goals, shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and the sharing of resources, risks, and rewards”.

Ninety-nine percent of respondents believed strongly that resources within a partnership are key to ensuring successful operations, as demonstrated in Figure 3. Moreover, partnerships enable participating organisations to benefit from one another’s resources and competencies. 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). In contrast, 1.5 % of the respondents expressed uncertainty regarding the contribution of resources to successful partnerships. As each affiliation presents unique challenges, resolving conflicts is crucial. Thus, 87.9 % believed that resolving conflicts amicably and allowing for the expression of differing opinions can be contributing factors to the success of a partnership. On the contrary, a small percentage of respondents (1.5 %) were of the perception that these factors do not contribute to partnership success. Relationship building is a key element in the success of alliances (De Man & Luvison, 2019). Furthermore, failing to address or facilitate open communication among stakeholders can be detrimental to partnerships. Eleven percent of the respondents indicated that they were uncertain if conflict resolution or the expressing of opinions would contribute to the sustainability of partnerships.

Regarding the open responses, respondents emphasised that mutual understanding, open communication, supportive partners, trust, commitment and cohesive relationships are vital elements that undoubtedly contribute to the successful sustainability of a partnership. Furthermore, establishing clear guidelines, effective time management and strong leadership

for collaboration efforts will enhance the value of the partnership. By incorporating these elements, graduates can experience a seamless transition from university to the working world, aided by strong stakeholder cohesion. Equipped with a deeper understanding of current trends in the retail industry, students will have a broader knowledge base and sought-after skills leading to better employment opportunities. Collaborative efforts can empower students to forge valuable connections, potentially resulting in job opportunities while fostering an environment of innovation and creativity.

The subsequent findings based on industry managers' views presented in Table 2, reveal that 94.2 % of the respondents expressed their belief that inviting experts into the classroom can be beneficial for the organisation as relevant skills are imparted to students. Similarly, a study by Gentelli (2015) demonstrates that students value the benefits of learning from industry experts. 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 questioned about the potential impact of combining resources and skills on partnership success. The results showed that 96 % agreed that such collaboration would have a positive effect, while 2.9 % were undecided and 1 % disagreed. According to Oliveira-Duarte et al., (2021), “multi-stakeholder partnerships are important for mobilising and sharing knowledge, expertise, technologies and financial resources to support the achievement of sustainable development goals in all countries”.

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. Gentelli (2015) states that “universities worldwide are adapting to a demand for relevant, real-world, industry-based research, training and education”. 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 indecisive while 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 form 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.

Table 2: 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

Source: Author's construction

With regard to open responses on partnerships, respondents strongly believed that considering education-industry partnerships will benefit students and/or future employees in understanding the retail workplace, resulting in appropriate career choices. Simultaneously, the industry benefits from having a pool of experienced individuals join the sector, as retail is a “cut-throat” industry. Partnerships may contribute to knowledge building by encouraging more people to think outside the box, which may become the norm if effectively implemented 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 benefit all stakeholders in some way. 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 founded on the reality of what’s taking place in the organisation, resulting in the presentation of technical skills to improve business. In essence, all stakeholders need to understand the outcomes of the partnership.

5. Conclusion

The study illustrated the factors that contribute to the long-term viability of partnerships hinge on a multifaceted approach, particularly within the intersection of the education and business sectors. These factors include clear communication and shared goals, mutual respect and trust, ongoing collaboration and adaptability, as well as a commitment to lifelong learning and skill development. Additionally, a supportive policy framework and adequate resources play a crucial role in nurturing and maintaining these partnerships over the long term. Prioritizing these elements allows stakeholders from both sectors to forge enduring connections that benefit not only the individuals and organizations engaged, but also contribute to the broader advancement of society through a well-prepared and adaptive workforce. Furthermore, partnerships create opportunities to network, gain exposure to real-world experiences and enhance interpersonal abilities and skills. Looking forward, it is crucial to prioritise investing in these partnerships, acknowledging their roles as catalysts for innovation and driving economic growth.

Acknowledgment

This paper is an output of research conducted for a research study.

References

- Ahmad, T. (2020). Universities preparing students for future challenges of family business enterprises. *World Journal of Entrepreneurship, Management and Sustainable Development*, 16(2), pp.57-69.
- Ali, M. S. and Jalal, H. (2018). Higher Education as a Predictor of Employment: The World of Work Perspective, *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 40 (2): 79-90.
- Alkahr, I. and Gan, D. (2020). The role of school partnerships in promoting education for sustainability and social capital. *The Journal of Environmental Education*: 1-18.
- Armstrong, D. (2020). *Power and partnership in education: Parents, children and special educational needs*. New York. Routledge.
- Asongu, S. A. and Odhiambo, N. M. (2020). “Financial Access, Governance and Insurance Sector Development in SubSaharan Africa”, *Journal of Economic Studies*. DOI: 10.1108/JES-01-2019-0025.
- Baruch, Y. and Holtom, B. C. (2008). Survey response rate levels and trends in organizational research. *Human Relations*, 61(8), 1139–1160. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726708094863>
- Batti, R. (2019). Understanding the Drivers of Partnership Success. *Humanities and Social Sciences*, 7 (1): 21. doi: 10.11648/j.hss.20190701.13.
- Bothma, F. (2015). A juridical foundation for accountability to enhance the security of the higher education lecturer in South Africa. Unpublished doctoral thesis, North West University.
- Buys, T. (2018). The National Development Plan of South Africa on higher education: a progress review. University of Pretoria.
- Carlson, K. D. and Herdman, A. O. (2012). Understanding the impact of convergent validity on research results. *Organizational Research Methods*, 15(1), 17-32.

- Clauss, T. and Kesting, T. (2017). How businesses should govern knowledge-intensive collaborations with universities: An empirical investigation of university professors. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 62: 185-198.
- Cloete, N. (2014). "The South African higher education system: Performance and policy," *Studies in Higher Education* 39(8): 1355-1368.
- Creswell, J. and Creswell, J., (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and a Mixed methods approaches*: Sagepublications, Inc. Recuperado de <https://campusvirtual.ull.es/1617> .
- Dicker, R., Garcia, M., Kelly, A. and Mulrooney, H. (2019). What does 'quality' in higher education mean? Perceptions of staff, students and employers. *Studies in Higher Education*, 44 (8): 1425-1441.
- Diver, G. (2020). Emotional challenges and pre-placement preparations: a cross-disciplinary, longitudinal study of "learner-worker" undergraduates (in an Irish HEI). *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 11(2), pp.386-405.
- De Man, A.P. and Luvison, D. (2019). Collaborative business models: Aligning and operationalizing alliances. *Business Horizons*, 62 (4): 473-482.
- Du Preez, J. and Sinha, S. (2020). Higher Education Leadership in the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. *The Thinker*, 83: 15.
- Fomunyam, K. G. (2017). Student protest and the culture of violence at African universities: An inherited ideological trait. *Yesterday and Today*, (17): 38-6.
- Franco, M., Silva, R. and Rodrigues, M. (2019). Partnerships between higher education institutions and firms: The role of students' curricular internships. *Industry and Higher Education*, 33 (3): 172-185.
- Gawrycka, M., Kujawska, J. and Tomczak, M. (2020). Competencies of graduates as future labour market participants—preliminary study. *Economic research-Ekonomska istraživanja*, 33 (1): 0-0.
- Gentelli, L. (2015). Using industry professionals in undergraduate teaching: Effects on student learning. *Journal of University Teaching & Learning Practice*, 12 (4): 4.
- George, D. and Mallery, P. (2003). *SPSS for windows step-by step: A simple guide and reference*, 14.0 update (7th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Gorlach, I. (2017). A Success of University–Industry Partnership. *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4 (6): 17-25.
- Govender, C. M. (2020). "Hopes, Challenges and Goals—Voices of First-Year At-Risk Higher Education Students in South Africa." *South African Review of Sociology* 51(1): 55-69.
- Habib, A. (2016). Transcending the past and reimagining the future of the South African university. *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 42 (1): 35-48.
- Hair, J. F., Celsi, M., Money, M., Samouel, P. and Page, M. (2016). *The essentials of business research methods* (3rd ed.). Routledge.

- Hamburg, I., & Vladut, G. (2019). Developing workplace research skills to bridge the innovation gap between university and industry. *Advances in social sciences research journal*, 6(1).
- Healy, A., Perkman, M., Goddard, J. and Kempton, L. (2014). *Measuring the impact of university-business cooperation*.
- Higgins, B. and Thomas, I. (2016). Education for sustainability in universities: Challenges and opportunities for change. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, 32 (1): 91.
- Hingle, M., Patrick, H., Sacher, P. M. and Sweet, C. C. (2019). The intersection of behavioral science and digital health: The case for academic–industry partnerships. *Health Education & Behavior*, 46 (1): 5-9.
- Hitron, L. (2019). People to know education: Lauren Hitron *The Business Journals*.
- Jonbekova, D., Sparks, J., Hartley, M. and Kuchumova, G. (2020). Development of university–industry partnerships in Kazakhstan: Innovation under constraint. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 79: 102291.
- Kabaji, E. (2019). Universities must brace themselves for major reforms. Available: <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Universities+must+brace+themselves+for+major+reforms-a0586782792>
- Kraak, A. (2019). The role of ‘intermediaries’ in brokering training and building social compacts: Can sector skills authorities perform these roles? *Journal of Vocational, Adult and Continuing Education and Training*, 2 (2): 61-81.
- Kumalo, S. H. (2020). Justice through higher education: Revisiting White Paper 3 of 1997. *Higher Education Quarterly*, 75(1), pp.175-188
- Lewis, S. (2019). A quantitative explanatory examination of job training, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions among US retail grocery employees. Article IDCapella University
- MacGregor, K., (2016). Governance models and leadership quality in Universities. *University World News*.
- Marinho, A., Silva, R. G. and Santos, G. (2020). Why Most University-Industry Partnerships Fail to Endure and How to Create Value and Gain Competitive Advantage through Collaboration—A Systematic Review. *Quality Innovation Prosperity*, 24 (2): 34-50.
- Markova, M., Modliński, A. and Pinto, L. M. (2020). Creative or analytical way for career development? Relationship marketing in the field of international business education. *Creativity Studies*, 13 (1): 99-113
- Martin, D. and Wooff, A. (2020). Treading the Front-Line: Tartanization and Police–Academic Partnerships. *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*, 14 (2): 325-336.
- Moloi, K., Mkwanazi, T. and Bojobotseha, T. (2014). Higher education in South Africa at the crossroads. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5 (2): 469.
- Moloi, T. (2016). Exploring risks identified, managed and disclosed by South Africa’s Public Higher Education Institutions (HEIS). *Journal of Accounting and Management*, 6 (2): 55-70.

- Mobarak, K. (2020). Exploring the contribution of universities to labour market requirements in South Africa: An employer's perspective. *Industry and Higher Education*: 0950422220935784.
- Mncayi, P. and Shuping, K. (2021). Factors affecting labour absorption in South Africa. *Journal of Economic and Financial Sciences*, 14 (1): 10.
- Morris, M. (2018). South Africa's deficient education system. *News 24*. Available: <https://www.news24.com/news24/opinions/analysis/south-africas-deficient-education-system-20180507>
- Mwangi, C.A.G., (2017). Partner positioning: Examining international higher education partnerships through a mutuality lens. *The Review of Higher Education*, 41(1), pp.33-60.
- Nutcache. (2018). The Importance of Collaboration in the Workplace. Available: <https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/WIL-in-universities-final-report-April-2019.pdf>
- Nzimande, B. (2020). *Government working on new plan to rescue the academic year for South African universities* (online). a. Available: <https://businesstech.co.za/news/government/390551/government-working-on-new-plan-to-rescue-the-academic-year-for-south-african-universities/>
- Okolie, U. C., Nwajiuba, C. A., Eneje, B., Binuomote, M. O., Ehiobuche, C. and Hack-Polay, D. (2020). A critical perspective on industry involvement in higher education learning: Enhancing graduates' knowledge and skills for job creation in Nigeria. *Industry and Higher Education*: 0950422220919655.
- Oliveira-Duarte, L., Reis, D. A., Fleury, A. L., Vasques, R. A., Fonseca Filho, H., Koria, M. and Baruque-Ramos, J. (2021). Innovation Ecosystem framework directed to Sustainable Development Goal# 17 partnerships implementation. *sustainable development*, 29 (5): 1018-1036.
- O'Malley. (2017). Universities must address local and global challenges. *University World News*. Available: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20170317233121374>
- Patil, M. (2019). Skill Development for Employability in Global Business through Higher Education in India. Available at SSRN 3475395.
- Polit, D.F., and Beck, C.T. (2017). *Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice* (10th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer/Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Rajalo, S., & Vadi, M. (2017). University-industry innovation collaboration: Reconceptualization. *Technovation*, 62, 42-54.
- Sekaran, U. and Bougie, R. (2016). *Research Methods for Business*. United Kingdom: John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
- Sharma, Y. (2016). University partnerships are vital to China's ambitions. Available: <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20160303231850597>
- Sidibeh, L. (2021). The positive effects of global partnership for mutual learning: the Gambia–UK partnership.

- South Africa, Council on Higher Education. (2014). *Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework*. Waterkloof: The South African Qualifications Authority. Available: www.dhet.gov.za
- South Africa, Council of Higher Education. (2018). The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) targets: Have they been met? Available: www.che.ac.za
- South Africa, Council of Higher Education. (2018). 2018/2019 Annual Report. Available: https://static.pmg.org.za/CHE_Annual_Report_Annual_Report_2018_2019_Hi_Res.pdf
- South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training. (2020). Strategic Plan 2015/16 – 2019/2020. Available: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/Strategic%20Plans/Strategic%20Plans/Department%20of%20Higher%20Education%20and%20Training%20Strategic%20Plan%202015-16%20-%202019-20.pdf>
- South Africa, Department of Higher Education and Training. (2013). *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training*. Available: www.dhet.gov.za
- South Africa, National Planning Commission (2020). *National Planning Commission Reports*. Available: https://www.nationalplanningcommission.org.za/Publications_Reports
- South Africa, National Planning Commission. (2020). Chapter 9: Improving education, training and innovation. *National development plan, 2030*.
- South Africa, National Skills Authority. (2015). Sector education Training Authority. Available: <https://www.nationalskillsauthority.org.za/roles-and-functions/setas/>
- South Africa. National Treasury. (2020). Budget Review 2020. Available: <https://www.treasury.gov.za/documents/national%20budget/2020/review/fullbr.pdf>
- South Africa, Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa. (2017). Available: <https://www.dhet.gov.za/Policy%20and%20Development%20Support/Policy%20Framework%20for%20Internationalisation%20of%20Higher%20Education%20in%20South%20Africa.pdf>
- South African Government. (2019). State of the Nation Address. Available: <https://www.gov.za/news/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-2019-state-nation-address-07-feb-2019>
- South African Government. (2024). Skills Development Act. Available: <https://www.gov.za/documents/skills-development-act>
- Stott, L. (2019). Partnerships for sustainable development: the monitoring and evaluation challenge. Available: <https://ecdpm.org/work/civil-society-business-pulling-in-the-same-direction-volume-8-issue-1-winter-2018-2019/partnerships-for-sustainable-development-the-monitoring-and-evaluation-challenge>
- Sustenuto. (2023). Stakeholder engagement: An essential part of sustainable development Available: <https://sustenuto.com/insights/stakeholder-engagement-an-essential-part-of-sustainable-development/>
- Spaull, N. (2012). *Education in SA: A tale of two systems*. Available: <https://www.politicsweb.co.za/news-and-analysis/education-in-sa-a-tale-of-two-systems>

Statistics South Africa. (2020). Available: www.statssa.gov.za

Talib, Z. M., Kiguli-Malwadde, E., Wohltjen, H., Derbew, M., Mulla, Y., Olaleye, D. and Sewankambo, N. (2015). Transforming health professions' education through in-country collaboration: examining the consortia among African medical schools catalyzed by the Medical Education Partnership Initiative. *Human resources for health*, 13 (1): pp.1-8.

Tille, F., Panteli, D., Fahy, N., Waitzberg, R., Davidovitch, N., & Degelsegger-Márquez, A. (2021). Governing the public-private-partnerships of the future: learnings from the experiences in pandemic times. *Eurohealth*, 27(1), 49-53.

Tjønneland, E. N. (2017). Crisis at South Africa's universities—what are the implications for future cooperation with Norway? *CMI Brief*.

Universities South Africa. (2012). *Promoting Higher Education – Industry Partnerships and Collaborations*. Available: <https://www.usaf.ac.za/promoting-higher-education-industry-partnerships-and-collaborations/>

Van Staden, D. (2021). Investing in health professions education: A national development imperative for South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education*, 35 (1): 231-245.

Walker, M. (2020). The well-being of South African university students from low-income households. *Oxford Development Studies*, 48 (1): 56-69.

Wallin, J., Isaksson, O., Larsson, A. and Elfström, B.-O. (2014). Bridging the gap between university and industry: three mechanisms for innovation efficiency. *International Journal of Innovation and Technology Management*, 11 (01): 1440005.

Wedekind, V. and Mutereko, S. (2016). Higher education responsiveness through partnerships with industry: The case of a university of technology programme. *Development Southern Africa*, 33 (3): 376-389.