



# **School-university partnerships: A case study of a University of Technology and two high schools regarding career guidance**

by

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### **SUPERVISOR'S STATEMENT**

This dissertation has been submitted with my approval.

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Date: 19 January 2026

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my late brother **Ntuthuko “Ntu” Maphumulo**. You were a hero and a very academically driven person. I told myself that I will further my studies and finish this master’s to make you proud as we were striving for excellence together pushing each other with motivation every day. Your death while doing your masters left me with wounds that will never heal. Continue to rest in peace my brother! Ngyakukhumbula mntaka baba, as we usual call each other.

## ABSTRACT

In an era marked by rapid technological advancement and shifting demands, effective career guidance has become essential for preparing learners for higher education institutions. Utilizing a case study methodology, this research pursues two primary objectives: the access and success of learners and the tensions and affordances of school university partnerships. This study explores school-university partnerships in career guidance, focusing on a collaborative initiative between a university of technology and two high schools drawing from transformational leadership theory. The study investigates how the partnership between high schools and universities can enhance access and success of learners post-matric, and the awareness of career opportunities which foster informed decision-making and bridge the gap between high school learning and post-matric learning. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews, conducted in schools and the university of technology through school principals, Life orientation teachers and university staff members, the research highlights key strategies such as teacher empowerment programs, parental support and involvement, universities as inspiration to learners, career expos, curriculum alignment, and master classes through university alumni. Findings reveal that sustained partnerships not only empower learners with relevant career information but also cultivate a sense of purpose and direction leading to success. The study concludes by offering recommendations for policy makers, universities, and schools to strengthen collaboration as a means of promoting equitable access to university, career development and increase the success of learners once they have completed their studies.

**Keywords:** School-University Partnerships; University of Technology, Transformational Leadership; Case Study; Career Guidance; Empowerment

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS / ACRONYMS

|       |                                             |
|-------|---------------------------------------------|
| CGA   | Career Guidance Application                 |
| DOE   | Department of Education                     |
| DBE   | Department of Basic Education               |
| DHET  | Department of Higher Education and Training |
| EC    | Ethical Clearance                           |
| KZN   | KwaZulu-Natal                               |
| LO    | Life Orientation                            |
| NSFAS | National Student Financial Aid Scheme       |
| SA    | South Africa                                |
| UK    | United Kingdom                              |
| UOT   | University of Technology                    |
| USA   | United States of America                    |
|       |                                             |

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

Partnership between high schools and universities plays a crucial role in recruiting quality students who will gain access to the university and be successful in their careers upon completion. The access and success of learners at the university depends more on the career guidance conducted with learners at a high school level. Education expert Anh (2014) views lack of career guidance in high schools as the main factor that causes high rate of failure at the university, high unemployment rate of undergraduates and the desire for students to switch programs at the university. Students switching programs may be because of university high standards in terms of pass rate and expectation, or because of lack of career guidance and exposure at matric level.

Considering the accelerating pace of technological innovation, it is imperative that universities collaborate strategically with secondary schools to deliver robust and forward-looking career guidance. As Casserly (2012) notes, many contemporary professions did not exist a decade ago, underscoring the dynamic nature of the labour market. Consequently, students must be adequately prepared to navigate an increasingly complex and evolving professional landscape. This chapter stands as foundational framework for the study by delineating the principal concerns that underpin the research. It provides both the contextual background and a clear articulation of the problem statement. It further provides the research questions that guide the study. Thereafter, the rationale and the significance of the study are provided to understand the school-university partnership and the key concepts are briefly defined.

#### **1.2 Background to the study**

School-university partnerships are a fundamental link to ensure the access and success of students upon joining the university (Robison et al., 2012). Schools' liaison office is the office responsible for career guidance and matric readiness programs at the university. This office works hand-in-hand with the department of education districts, circuits offices and high schools. University is expected to initiate partnerships with high schools through school leaders and Life orientation educators to guide learners on what are the expectations upon joining the university. School-university partnerships were recognized to have an impact to both the

schools and universities involved in several ways. (Williams, 2017) This meaningful and positive contributing partnership established between stakeholders which are schools and universities lead to a shared understanding of mutual benefit and expected impact. Lang *et.al* (2015) further state that also; being part of partnership may increase opportunities that had not been possible in the past. It is beneficial to universities in addition to the mutual gain for all stakeholders in the partnership, there must be a mutual understanding of the concepts between partners, in that they must have the same vision (Anyon & Fernandez, 2007). This results because basically the successful partnership reaches the consensus early about the objective of collaborating and creating a focal point of the agreement in terms of the university intervention. Once the partnership has been established, the primary beneficiary would be learners because they will be well informed and be able to make informed decisions when they send applications to respective universities (Walsh & Thompson, 2007). The establishment and continuity of this partnership may have positive impact on learners in terms of enhancing the academic performance which may help them gain access at university.

### **1.3 Problem statement**

The Richards Bay University of Technology (pseudonym) is a higher education institution in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. This institution has a relationship with the nearby township high schools wherein they collaborate in several educational activities, such as career guidance. The partnership of both stakeholders should include better understanding of what to expect in higher education and programs offered by the university including admission requirements as a goal to achieve (Graham, 2017). Pre-university programs, aiming to prepare the students for university standards and demands to ensure readiness may form part of the partnership goals.

This partnership may not happen to its full capacity because the department of education lacks financial resources to support such programmes (Susilowati, 2023). Life orientation educators also lack understanding when it comes to university programmes and there are no ongoing workshops that support career guidance initiatives from both universities and schools.

This result in learners failing the first year at the university or feel the desire to switch the program instead of proceeding to the second year. According to Parker et al. (2004) full information on admission requirements to succeed upon joining the university should be provided to students. School-university partnership establishment and continuity of this partnership may have a positive impact on learners in terms of enhancing the academic

performance which may help them gain access at university. This collaboration has been happening over many years, with the focus on enhancing students' results, career guidance and research. The proposed study of school-university partnerships concerning career guidance between high schools and the university of technology aims to connect the gap between high schools and university with a special focus on career guidance because there is a problem post matric; learners seem to have no understanding of their chosen or preferred careers. With the correct information, high school learners should be able to seamlessly transition including necessary skills and knowledge without experiencing difficulties, in order that they will find the studies interesting.

Schroeder (1999) suggests that to establish effective performance support systems and foster a seamless learning environment, universities must strategically identify, integrate, and harmonize resources across educational sectors beyond their institutional boundaries. Schroeder (1999) further explains that cultivation of collaborative partnerships through strategic resource alignment significantly contributes to the advancement of undergraduate education by fostering enriched academic experiences and promoting institutional synergy that reduces dropouts in addition to addressing student attrition. This perspective underscores the pivotal role that higher education institutions play in enhancing the quality and effectiveness of public schooling systems. Therefore, this study aims at exploring the partnership between university of technology and local high schools under the same district to enhance learners' performance through career guidance and maximise university access opportunities. A study aims to improve the partnership between high schools and university to enhance student performance and make it easier for learners to gain access to university and be fully equipped in terms of what is expected and their status of readiness, crossroads of making decisions about their studies from this point until they complete matric.

The study envisages highlighting the extent of the problem of switching students at the university during the first year of study and dropping out students due to lack of information prior to joining the university and choosing the right courses and will seek to provide possible solutions through recommendations by respondents.

## **1.4 Rationale for the study**

There has been an increased concern about significant numbers of learners not being able to access universities due to lack of career guidance in high school. Therefore, the aim of this study below is personal and professional justification for the rationale.

### **1.4.1 Personal rationale**

In the face of evolving societal, technological, and academic demands there is an increasing need to re-evaluate existing framework within higher education. The research has observed that many schools do not cooperate or partner with universities effectively in providing academic and admission information to learners about higher education programs and guidance. Despite growing attention to schools-university partnerships there is limited literature on these partnerships and learners' enrolment and career guidance. This study is therefore justified by its potential to address this gap, offering insights that can inform policy, practice, and future scholarship.

My personal justification for the study stems from my role as a university staff member working as a schools' liaison officer in the Department of Marketing and Communications visiting public high schools conducting career guidance and advising learners on university programs and admission requirements and running pre-university projects to set learners ready for the university. I have observed that many schools do not cooperate or partner with the university effectively in providing information to learners about higher education programs and guidance. The lack of guidance leads to students making unsuitable career choices based on their high school subjects and abilities, which results in their failure or desire to switch programs upon joining the university as a first-year student. I have seen a significant number of students dropping out and some switching programs at the university which is a problem that needs to be addressed. As a university staff member visiting the schools around KwaZulu-Natal and forming partnerships with the districts, i find it very important to assist learners make informed decisions upon joining the university.

### **1.4.2 Theoretical rationale**

Brady (2002) argues and say for many reasons, the topic of career guidance remains largely unstudied, and local literature on the topic remains sparse. Chui, 2003 & Zhang (1998.) State that provision of career guidance to high school learners remains an important issue because it also improves academic performance and may help students gain access at the university. The university statistics on dropouts and switching students indicates a serious problem with the

student's career choices. In a year, you find that two hundred students drop out and one hundred and fifteen students apply to change their programs at university. This demonstrates that the partnership existing is not effective in that it does not provide adequate guidance for the students.

Upon reviewing the literature Martinez & Martinez (2021); Jones & Green (2021); Green, et.al (2021) evident that a notable paucity of empirical inquiry into the effects and implications of inter-institutional partnerships within the educational landscape. between schools and universities, especially in relation to the career progression and guidance of high school students. This lack of research is particularly significant considering the current challenges faced by universities, where many students discontinue their studies in the first year or alter their career paths, leading to a delay in the completion of their academic programs.

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

The findings of this study will offer valuable insights for both universities and local high schools by informing the development and sustainability of effective partnership models. These collaborations are essential for supporting learners in making informed career choices, ultimately enhancing student preparedness, transition into higher education, and long-term academic and professional success.

### **1.6 Research questions**

The study seeks to address the following research questions:

1. How do school-university partnerships regarding career guidance improve access and success of learners at university?
2. What are the tensions and affordances of developing and sustaining school-university partnerships regarding career guidance?

### **1.7 Definition of key terms**

Three key terms are relevant to this topic: namely, school-university partnership, collaborations, and partnerships. These terms are briefly defined and explained in the following section.

### **1.7.1 School-university partnerships**

Bradly (2002) describes the school-university partnership as a formal agreement and cooperative effort between two educational institutions aimed at enhancing learner performance. Wang and Wong (2017) extend this definition, describing the school-university partnership as an established educational alliance between one or more schools and a specific university, with the objective of equipping learners for university life through the provision of essential information.

As situated within the parameters of this research, school-university partnership stands as a framework for understanding how partnerships between schools and universities can be leveraged to improve student outcomes, enable a structured inquiry into the potential value and impact and challenges of establishing and maintaining these partnerships and informs the development of strategies for enhancing the effectiveness of career guidance within the context of these partnerships.

### **1.7.2 Collaborations**

Collaborations between educational institutions, as described by Ross et al. (2010), involves the unification of two or more distinct institutions, with the aim of enhancing student capabilities through career guidance, research, and other activities. This collaboration provides a platform for knowledge exchange, resource sharing, and exchange programs, benefiting students, educators, collaborative partners, and the institution itself. Slater (2010) expands this concept, defining collaborations as partnerships and cooperative endeavours between individuals, institutions, or organisations with the shared objective of achieving educational goals. These collaborations can take various forms, including research and community outreach initiatives, with the primary aim of utilising combined expertise, resources, and perspectives to improve learner performance and educational outcomes.

The study will use the term collaborations to refer to the establishment of meaningful relationship and collaboration between schools and universities to sustain and enhance knowledge that could potentially enhance student outcomes through university programmes including career guidance.

### 1.7.3 Partnerships

Smenthem (2010) defines a partnership as a business arrangement where multiple parties collaborate to further their shared interests. Coburn et al. (2013) extend this definition, describing a partnership as a cooperative relationship between individuals or groups who embark on a specific task or mission to achieve a shared goal, such as improving teaching and learning outcomes in a school. The literature further elaborates that partnerships necessitate meticulous planning, transparent communication, mutual respect, and regular evaluation to ensure student success at the university (Kopp et al., 2013).

In the context of this study, partnership is used to illustrate how the University of Technology and high schools can form an effective partnership to enhance learner performance and facilitate university access after matriculation, how school leaders need to comprehend their leadership role in forging partnerships between their schools and the universities, maintaining communication to sustain these partnerships by welcoming universities to assist learners in choosing their careers to solve the problem of students joining the university without a clear understanding of their preferred career and dropping out at the first-year level simply because they have joined the wrong programs.

### 1.8 Organisation of the study

This study comprises of five chapters. A brief synopsis of each chapter follows:

**Chapter one** – Outline a general background and overview of the key aspects of this study. This is followed by a section where the problem statement, focus and purpose of the study is presented. Lastly, the study rationale, significance and research questions are clearly stated and defined.

**Chapter two** – This chapter is clustered into two sections: Section A reviews the related literature on school-university partnerships and career guidance, while Section B focuses on theoretical framework underpinning the study, namely transformational leadership theory.

**Chapter three** – This chapter discusses the research methodology employed in this study to gain a deep understanding of school-university partnerships for career guidance. The remaining sections of this chapter analyses the adopted research approach, research methodology, and sample size. Furthermore, it describes the data collection methods, instruments, techniques

adopted for data collection in the study and concludes with trustworthiness and consideration of ethical clearance for the study.

**Chapter four** – This chapter presents the findings and discussion from interviews in the study.

**Chapter five** – This chapter synthesis the key findings of the research, articulates the principal conclusions drawn, and offers informed recommendations based on the study's outcomes.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

In the discussed chapter the aim was to introduce the study titled, school-university partnerships – a case study of a university of technology and two high schools regarding career guidance. The focus of the study has been clearly outlined, and it also discussed the significance of the study. Furthermore, this chapter presented key research questions and the organisation of chapters of the study. In the next chapter I present theoretical frameworks underpinning this study and review related literature.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **2.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter, I outlined the background of the study, identified the research problem, provided the rationale for the research, and formulated the guiding research questions. This chapter is dedicated to presenting an extensive review of pertinent literature, alongside the theoretical framework that forms the foundation of this research inquiry. It is divided into two main sections: Section A provides a review of related literature pertinent to the research questions. Specifically, it addresses Research Question 1: How do school-university partnerships improve learners' access to and success in career guidance? and Research Question 2: What are the tensions and affordances in sustaining school-university partnerships for career guidance? Section B focuses on the theoretical framework, detailing Transformational Leadership Theory, which underpins the study. In section B, I started by discussing the key principles of transformational leadership theory, the relevance of this theoretical framework to the study and conclusion.

#### **SECTION A: LITERATURE REVIEW**

Below I discuss the related literature, that will help to provide an overview of the existing knowledge and highlight gaps in the existing research.

#### **2.2 Overview of School-University partnership**

I identified several key aspects of the partnership between the two organizations which are the schools and universities. To better understand this collaboration, it's important to define what constitutes a 'partnership.' Various scholars offer nuanced definitions of the term. Day et al. (2021) conceptualise school-university partnerships as collaboratively constructed and sustained enterprises that function within complex environments to advance educational practice, knowledge, and understanding. However, the breadth of this conceptualisation results in partnerships being loosely defined, which in turn contributes to implementation challenges (Farrell, 2021).

In the context of this study, the partnership in question involves a university of technology and high schools collaborating to better student performance and ensure successful transitions to

higher education after completing matric. Hickey et al. (2019) defines a partnership as a relationship or agreement between institutions aimed at developing strategies to improve underperforming institutions and achieve effectiveness. In this study, high school principals are of importance in fostering this partnership by facilitating the involvement of universities in assisting students to make informed career choices. Janis et al. (2019) defines a partnership as a deliberately designed collaborative agreement among organizations or individuals working together towards a shared goal. This definition highlights that partnerships can serve different purposes, such as providing services, solving academic problems, or creating continuous solutions. In this study, the partnership between high schools and universities serves to address the issue of first-year dropouts by giving students the information needed to make informed career decisions about their university life.

According to Lewis & Smith (2022) a partnership can be described as a cooperative relationship, which involves the combined degree of cooperation between two or more entities in pursuit of common objectives, by conferring mutual benefit to both parties through the mutual consolidation of strengths. The dynamic and strategy of partnerships are highlighted in this broad definition. The partnership relationship being examined in this study, is among a university of technology and the high schools. It aims at enhancing the performance of learners and guaranteeing effective transiting into higher education after matric. Adding to this, (Jones et al., 2016) define partnerships as strategic alliances that is deliberate and intended between the institutions that are made to solve issues and enhance the results. They emphasise the significance of integrating objectives and resources to establish successful coalitions. The high school principal is important in this respect because he/she mediates the inclusion of universities to assist students with the choice of careers. Kim et al. (2023) defines such partnerships as a structured agreement that enables the common goals to be reached by the collusion of the relevant parties. Such definition emphasises the significance of deliberate and systematic collaboration to desired results. In this study, high school-university synergy will involve ensuring that the high schools and the universities collaborate to segment the problem of first-year dropout university students by providing the youngsters with the knowledge that they require to make a sound choice when enrolling in university. One note that the authors placed is that effective partnership involves careful planning, clear communication, respecting one another, and frequent evaluation (Billett et al., 2024). These factors play a key role in the effectiveness of the partnership in terms of the support of student success in higher education and achievement of the set objectives.

Over the past decades, educational partnerships have been introduced as formal, strategic engagements aimed at satisfying the educational needs and promoting the success of students (Billett et al., 2024). The development has been necessitated by the realisation that complex issues, related to student achievement gaps and transfer to higher education among others, need to involve stakeholders in coordinated approaches.

The concept of partnerships in education began gaining traction in the latter half of the 20th century as educational institutions have increasingly pursued innovative and evidence-based strategies to confront entrenched systemic challenges and to enhance student achievement and developmental outcomes (Cooper et al., 2021). Previously, partnerships were often informal arrangements focused on resource sharing and occasional collaboration. However, the need for more formal and strategic alliances became apparent as the complexities of educational challenges kept going on. Parker et al. (2009) state that the concept of partnership has long been integral to various fields, evolving significantly over time. Traditionally, partnerships were reflecting as cooperative agreements between stakeholders to achieve mutual benefits. Recent literature has refined and looked more on this understanding, particularly in educational settings.

### **2.2.1 Current State of Partnerships**

Today, educational partnerships are characterized by their strategic focus and intentional design. These partnerships typically involve universities and high schools working together to achieve common goals, such as improving student performance and facilitating smooth transitions to higher education (M. Jones et al., 2016). As an example, a university of technology collaboration with high schools is a way of connecting the bridge between tertiary and secondary studies. This partnership usually involves joint workshops, mentoring and career guidance activities. Mestry (2017) emphasise that the involvement of high school principals is also important, given the fact that they can incorporate such programs, led by universities, into the curriculum of their schools, and guide learners when making decisions regarding their future choice of higher education.

#### **1.1.1 International perspectives on educational partnerships as reflected in different countries**

Below I show how these international countries higher education institutions collaborate with high schools and reflects on how school-university partnerships in South Africa help bridge the gap existing between high schools and higher education institutions.

## **United State and Canada**

In the United States, educational partnerships have become an integral part of the educational landscape. Programs like "Early College High Schools" are examples of successful collaborations between high schools and colleges (Gross et al., 2015). These programs allow high school students to understand college settings while still in secondary school, thus easing their transition to higher education. According to Pechota & Moore (2022) these partnerships aim to increase college completion rates and reduce the time and cost of obtaining a degree.

School-university partnerships are widely recognised as a mechanism for improving career guidance through collaboration. Zheng et al. (2024) discuss how mentorship programs developed through these partnerships have been successful in providing high school students with access to career-focused guidance. Mbatha & Ntuli (2023) explain that such programs assist in not only bridging the gap between secondary and post-secondary schooling, but also gives students sources of hands-on opportunities to careers, including, but not confined to, internships and job shadowing, which enlighten students about careers and careers paths. This has had a significant effect particularly in underserved communities whereby career advice is limited. In Canada, there have been developed efforts of the same nature and universities have been an important part of the equation offering expertise and resources that can be passed on to the schools. Jones (2022) note that the lack of infrastructure that would help run comprehensive career guidance programs in rural schools is what is taken up by university partnerships that ensure students have instruments and facilities they require to complete their career planning. These partnerships have proven specially to succeed in enhancing student outcomes regarding their career preparedness and post-secondary enrolment and hence the positive reflection of cross institutional cooperation.

## **United Kingdom**

The UK has seen significant developments in educational partnerships through initiatives like the "University Technical Colleges" (UTCs). UTCs are secondary schools that offer a specialised curriculum with strong links to local businesses and universities (Uggla & Soneryd, 2023). According to the Department for Education (2023), these partnerships aim to provide students with vocational skills and clear pathways into higher education or employment. UTCs often involve partnerships with universities to ensure that the curriculum meets industry standards and provides relevant skills as expected.

## **Ireland and England**

In Ireland and England, school-university partnerships are used not only for career guidance but also for teacher development programs that incorporate career-related learning. O'Brien and Carter (2021) argues that these partnerships focus on integrating career planning into the educational curriculum, providing students with early exposure to career options and hands-on skills that will benefit them in future. This approach also enhances teacher capacity to deliver career guidance, as they work hand in hand with university experts to establish and implement these programs. These partnerships in the UK insist on the importance of career development as part of a broader educational experience. According to Smith (2020), universities have been used in supporting the schools in creating or coming up with holistic career guidance plans which are in line with the national directives in the education sector. Such cooperation has also resulted in more coordinated career guidance programs which are applied both at the post-secondary and secondary school level thereby making the transition of students entering higher education institutions or entering the labour force much easier.

## **South Africa**

In South Africa, school-university partnerships play a crucial role in addressing disparities in educational resources, particularly regarding career guidance in rural and disadvantaged areas. Ndlovu & Mkhize (2023) stress that universities can be the organisation where mentorship is offered most of the time.

Career guidance seminars to under-staffed schools, where the students do not have access to career guidance information and assistance. These alliances provide some overlap in such aspects as providing learners with the exposure to post-secondary learning opportunities and career planning which further improves their career aspirations and future success. In South Africa, school-university partnerships are most of the time structured around the needs of the immediate community. Govender & Naidoo (2023) emphasise the necessity to promote culture-appropriate career guidance programs as they pay attention to the socio-economic constraints encountered by most students in rural communities. With the collusion of the nearby schools, the universities can come up with programmes that not only concentrate on professional development and grooming, but also deal with the general educational inequalities. These collaborations have done a crucial role in enhancing career success of learners in disadvantaged groups. South Africa also sees partnerships between high schools and universities

as the promising path of enhancing education. Such programmes, like the "University Access Programmes", are geared towards ensuring that the high school students are better prepared to join institutions of higher learning after giving them extra support and resources.

According to the Department of Higher Education and Training (2024), these programs often involve collaborative efforts between educational institutions to offer academic support, career guidance, and enrichment activities. Kopp (2013) States that educational collaborations have become a crucial mechanism for addressing diverse educational challenges across the world. It has been encouraged by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to foster strategic partnerships. These partnerships aim to improve student results, facilitate transitions to higher education, and prepare students for future endeavours. Partnerships require formal planning, clear communication, mutual respect, and constant evaluation to ensure the success of students at the university (Kopp, 2013). The advent of school-university partnerships has marked a transformative shift in career guidance strategies within educational systems. Goldman & Vander Hart (2023) State that these partnerships leverage the strengths of both schools and universities to offer empowering career guidance resources and support. When we merge academic learning with practical career insights, such partnerships aim to improve students' career readiness and success. Brady (2002) highlight that this integration is crucial in offering students a comprehensive understanding of career opportunities and the skills needed for job markets. The following sections will delve into how these collaborations improve learner access to career guidance and bestow to their career success, illustrating the instrumental impact these collaborations can have on students' professional development and prospects.

### **1.1.2 Improving Learner Access to Career Guidance**

Partnerships between schools and universities have been increasingly recognized for their potential to improve students' access to career guidance resources and opportunities. These partnerships often result in a more comprehensive career guidance framework, integrating academic and professional insights that are pivotal for student development (Jones et al., 2016). Schools benefit from higher education institutions specialised resources, such as career guidance initiatives, internship placements, and industry connections, which can significantly broaden the scope of career guidance provided to students.

Delaney et al. (2019) by employing the expertise and resources of higher education institutions, schools can offer students a better order of career exploration tools and support, which are crucial in helping them make informed career decisions about their future.

These collaborations may ease the provision of career advice in form of structured programs and events like career fairs, workshops, and mentoring programs. It usually includes the faculty of the universities and other people working in industries as well, who can offer useful information and networking unseen in the school itself (Wang & Zhao, 2021). Indicatively, campus guest lectures and industry panels could be established to orient the students to different professions and their professional demands, improving their awareness of any career possibilities in the future (Delaney et al., 2019). The coordination of such practices will not only make students know about various career choices but also have practical information and skills to utilise them.

Introducing school-university partnerships as a practice in career guidance can be one of the solutions to this divide between academic and career readiness. According to Billett et al. (2024) the common outcomes of such partnerships are career guidance curriculum that are based on the prevailing industry standards and what is expected. The alignment will guarantee that the students get up-to-date and relevant career advice and thus enhance their job market readiness. In incorporating universities in designing and providing career guidance programs, schools can be able to give their students the advantage of using the latest industry trends and professional practices until their students improve their careers.

### **1.1.3 Enhancing Success in Career Guidance**

The effectiveness of school-university partnerships in enhancing career success for learners is well-documented in recent literature. These partnerships can provide improved career outcomes by providing students with designed guidance that aligns with their individual interests and career aspirations (O'Connor & Doyle, 2019). Collaborative programs between schools and universities often include customised career coaching, academic advising, and skill development workshops that are created to meet students' specific needs (Harris & Fitzgerald, 2021). Such targeted support can assist students navigate their career aspirations more effectively, leading to better alignment between their academic choices and career paths.

In addition, these collaborations can play a crucial role in improving students' career success by furnishing them with internships, apprenticeships, and job placements. Universities, with their extensive industry network, can provide students with opportunities for practical experience that significantly improve their employability (Martin et al., 2020). Research indicates that students who participate in these experiential learning opportunities are more likely to be employed in their chosen fields and achieve career advancement (Smith & Walker, 2023). By offering access to practical experiences and professional networks, school-university partnerships can effectively bridge the gap between education and employment, leading to more successful career outcomes for students.

The school-university collaboration can also help in career success in the sense that it provides a favourable environment, which promotes the continued career development. The students constantly obtain mentorship through specially designed programs in the form of mentors and through career guidance seminars (Brown et al., 2022). The continued interaction enables the students to remain motivated and aware of their career choices and results in an increase in the level of job satisfaction and career success. According to Turner (2023), it is necessary to provide this kind of uninterrupted help in understanding the specifics of the modern labour market and succeeding in careers in long-term perspectives.

### **1.1.3 Initiating partnerships**

As Lawson (2013) observes, there is considerable diversity in how schools and universities initiate collaborative partnerships. These partnerships vary in structure and purpose, ranging from formalized research-practice collaborations to initiatives focused on career guidance and other educational programs (Penuel et al., 2020). In some cases, partnerships emerge through the proactive efforts of individual stakeholders such as school principals or university liaison officers who engage potential collaborators (Walsh, 2006). Such partnerships are often driven by a specific institutional need, such as career counselling or teacher development, and tend to be narrowly focused, project-based, and of limited duration, concluding once the identified need is addressed or stakeholder commitment wanes (Walsh, 2000).

However, this study argues for the sustained continuation of these partnerships, particularly given the annual intake of new students in schools. Ongoing collaboration offers a responsive mechanism to address persistent challenges, such as the lack of adequate information among high school learners regarding university programs a concern that has contributed to misguided

career decisions (Montes & Gavin, 2000). Alternatively, some school–university partnerships are initiated through formal requests from institutional representatives to address broader systemic issues (Walsh, DePaul & Taylor, 2009). These tend to be more narrowly focused on resolving specific structural concerns.

### **Stages of partnership development**

Understanding the developmental stages of partnerships is pivotal for crafting effective partnerships that benefit both schools and students. As Patton et al. (2023) outline partnerships typically evolve through eight stages: beginning with initial hostility where partners may clash, moving through a phase of building trust and creating mutual confidence. This is followed by a period of truce, where participation levels become more balanced, and short-term successes start to be recognized. Over time, stakeholders reach mutual acceptance as they recognize the benefits of their partnership. However, partnerships can face regression due to tensions such as attrition or funding issues. New members often bring fresh perspectives, leading to a phase of renewal, and ideally, the partnership continues with sustained collaborative efforts.

When creating and ensuring well-functioning partnerships, there are numerous aspects that are to be covered. Communication is essential, and it should be open and effective, so that the partners can exchange updates in real time and solve the problems as they emerge (Bryson, 2018). As Patton et al. (2023) point out, shared responsibility presupposes a long-term collaboration of schools and universities that facilitates the constant enhancement of the partnership with the help of debriefing sessions. The provision of clear shared purposes can be used to direct the path of the partnership and here written agreements assist in coordinating the efforts (Rossi et al., 2018). The importance of transparency at the early stages of the partnership, is the possibility of a trustful relationship and the ability to air out the possible

benefits and problems of the partnership (Brown et al., 2018). To maintain such relationships, the important aspects to consider are communication, commitment, and management of the resources, with regular review and continuous training being a key (Schmitz, 2014). To continue its successful performance, it is required to constantly pursue common objectives and be well-managed to meet and break through obstacles and produce fruitful educational results as emphasized by Wash and Backe (2009). This paper seeks to explore these dynamics especially regarding how school-university collaborations can be used to advance career counselling and achieve better student success.

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### **2.3.5 Leadership in School-university partnership**

According to Handscomb (2019) leadership is crucial in these partnerships. It's the leaders' responsibility to build capacity, commitment, and ensure continuity and sustained impact over time. (Leithwood et al., 2004) further states that school leaders prioritise these partnerships, they can use them as external sources of support and create sustainable communities. The establishment of effective partnerships is fundamentally predicated on mutual trust, which serves as a catalyst for fostering transparency and openness, key elements in navigating and reconciling the cultural distinctions between schools and universities (McKinsey, 2023). Such intercultural engagement is inherently dependent on trust as its sustaining force. As Carter-Sherlock and Sears (2024) assert, leadership plays a critical role in the success of school-university collaborations. The enduring challenge lies in cultivating institutional capacity, sustained commitment, and strategic leadership to ensure continuity and long-term impact. Leadership is thus indispensable in maintaining coherence and driving success within the dynamic and often unpredictable landscape of educational partnerships. Only when school leaders prioritise collaborative engagement can these partnerships function as meaningful external support systems and evolve into enduring, research-driven communities.

Leadership vision is present in effective union coupled with distributed leadership. The partnerships must be visionary to be provided with some sustainability with time. Leadership tends to erupt in practical roles of partnering, doing it where necessary (Handscomb, 2019). Leadership is a significant contribution across organisational boundaries. The other essential aspect in the leadership dimension of partnership is the way this works between the partners across the frontiers that form them and the central role that is performed by the main positions. This underlines the position of the so-called blended professionals that cross institutional

boundaries. The solution is the school principals who are therefore the key in terms of establishing and maintaining partnership with universities and collaborate in terms of success of matric learners.

Yalcin and Coban (2023) state that the second crucial factor that predetermines whether an educational partnership will be successful is leadership. Leadership has been an issue in most PDS models since most of them have had a stable leadership. Edens et al. (2001) argue that when school leaders and faculty in school leave or move by resignation or transfer, partners may lose the support that they provide to the partnership because their replacements may not match the level of commitment toward the PDS vision and mission of the collaboration. On a given instance, Bullough & Kauchak (1997, p 40) show that the exit of a principal of a school was very disruptive to the partnership since the departure was followed by the assumption of control of the university in the partnership. One teacher said, we are affiliated by the school at some level, but people tend to think that it is a university program. In this instance deficiency of leadership ruled out the establishment of clear objectives, open channels of communication, and responsibility. To ensure educational partnerships are more successful in future, there must be actual empowerment, shared leadership and a working environment that is oriented to building a common vision.

### **2.3.6 Empowerment in School-University Partnerships for Career Guidance**

Empowerment, as conceptualized by Short & Rinehart (1992) refers to a process through which individuals develop the skills and confidence necessary to manage their own growth and address their own challenges. Sarmiento-Marquez et al. (2023) argue, that when universities relinquish their consulting role, schools can play a more active part in research related initiatives, such as teacher inquiry, a role schools can embrace and conduct a meaningful career guidance. By fostering an environment where educators feel competent and supported, empowerment can significantly improve their contribution to career guidance projects. The role played by school leaders in this instance is vital. Principals, as leaders, have the capacity to influence the empowerment of educators by strengthening the partnership between the school and external partners, including universities (Ferlazzo, 2022). Effective leadership from principals ensures that the goals of the partnership are clearly understood and actively pursued by career guidance teachers. Empowering teachers involves not only improving their involvement but also improving their effectiveness in delivering career guidance. According to Garcia et al., (2022) empowerment can be facilitated through university-led programs that equip teachers with essential information to share with students.

Thus, principals play an important role in enabling teachers to better collaborate with universities and other external stakeholders. This alignment of goals and empowerment strategies is central to maintaining a robust and productive partnership. Short & Rinehart (1992) emphasises that empowerment is fundamental to sustaining long-term partnerships between schools and universities, highlighting its importance in supporting teachers and improving student outcomes in career guidance.

### **2.3.7 Collaborations between Schools and Universities**

Meaningful collaboration between schools and universities can significantly enhance student outcomes through effective career guidance. Brookhart & Loadman, (1992) argue that the combined energy, creativity, and ideas of both institutions can be far more impactful than their individual efforts. This statement fosters a positive culture and collaborative environment that help both institutions. Smit et al. (2007) supports this view, suggesting that partnerships between universities and high schools can improve student results by integrating valuable information gained through university-led career guidance programs. The literature highlights that successful partnerships involve both effective and ineffective practices, which can influence their overall performance. An effective school-university partnership can be described as a synergistic environment in which both schools and the university collaborate to assist in decision-making and ensuring that it affects the learning of students positively. According to Zetlan & Harris (1992), the preliminary phase entails the acceptance by the two parties, basing on the perceived mutual gains. The result of this acceptance ought to be continuous collaborative work, characterised by equal involvement and healthy communication. At the stage of initiation, it is important that both universities and schools should possess a well-developed program design and implementation plan, which determines goals and objectives of the partnership. The result of this acceptance ought to be continuous collaborative work, characterised by equal involvement and healthy communication. At the stage of initiation, it is important that both universities and schools should possess a well-developed program design and implementation plan, which determines goals and objectives of the partnership.

## **Necessity of Collaborations**

Despite the potential benefits, some partnerships falter due to inadequate collaboration in goal setting, often stemming from entrenched perceptions between public school and university leaders. Rakow & Robinson (1997) note that the historical difference between the "ivory tower" of academia and the "trenches" of public schools has influenced professional development practices. To overcome this divide, it is important for university and public-school personnel to engage in side-by-side professional development and empowerment opportunities (Rakow & Robinson, 1997). When establishing effective partnership in the context of career guidance, the idea of setting realistic goals, giving time to establish the relationships and continual evaluation of effectiveness is important. According to Chan (2016), it is no longer tropical to only refer to universities as training centres but participants in life-long learning. This school of thought points out the importance of working out partnership approaches between schools, principals, and universities to improve student performances and success of career guidance programs.

### **2.3.6 Career guidance models**

Below are career guidance models that universities may employ to enhance career guidance in high schools for learners to make informed career choices.

- **Digital approach to career guidance**

Shiba et al. (2022) discovered the most influential model of conducting career guidance in high schools for learners' success. The increasing diversity of educational pathways and employment prospects has rendered career planning a complex and often uncertain endeavour. In response to this challenge, Shiba et al. (2022) introduce the Career Guidance Application (CGA), a digital tool specifically designed to assist secondary school learners (Grades 9–12) in making informed decisions regarding their academic and professional trajectories. CGA facilitates access to structured information on subject choices aligned with career paths, recommended institutions of higher learning, requisite entrance examinations, and available aptitude assessments, including guidance on how to access these resources. Furthermore, Shiba et al. emphasise that CGA adopts a holistic approach to career guidance by incorporating social, financial, and personal dimensions into the advisory process.

While this model has been widely implemented within university settings, it is argued here that similar frameworks should be considered for integration into high school environments to enhance early career preparedness. The implementation of CGA is expected to decrease school and university dropout rates. The scholar emphasises the importance of career guidance, access to information, and partnerships between schools and universities in improving the access and success of learners upon joining university.

As the current research focuses on how to implement CGA in high schools, the research will have the opportunity to study how such collaboration in career guidance activities could promote career guidance practices and can explore whether the implementation of CGA or any other similar tool in high schools promotes access and achievement to students who have transferred to universities. May also take into consideration the effect of CGA on decreasing the school and university dropout rates guiding more on the importance of career counselling and provision of information.

#### **2.3.7.1. Career guidance of social networks**

The present research attempts to demonstrate the role played by social media and networks as one of the contemporary tools of career guidance work in higher educational establishments that enables to introduce applicants properly to the opportunities given by careers, providing them with all significant and topical information since high school level. The author pointed out that the work of social networks in career guidance is very attractive component of new information space, a quality instrument in creating the connection between schools, universities, and future applicant and in the place of the common activity with the aim of consulting, searching, and informing. The social networks use has been determined to enable a substantial enhancement of the learner's career information even before they join universities to undergo activities. The prospects of social networks are, to our mind, the foundation of the practical approach to the development of the contemporary instructional system in general, the enhancement of the career orientation of school children by the means of they being advised by the life orientation teachers and the inclusion in contact with the education establishments on the part of the school principal will have to dwell upon the use of the social media. The literature is a pull to my study as the author states: School-University Partnership: how to use social networks to build a connection between schools and universities and future applicants. It is school-university partnership, the subject of my research. Career Guidance: The scholar in this present study emphasises on career guidance. The author emphasises the significance of

social networks in work of career guidance where the applicants could be acquainted with the opportunities of majors as well as all significant and interesting facts starting with the high school level.

#### **2.3.7.2. Internet Resources in Career Guidance**

Ostroha et al. (2021) emphasise the critical role of professional orientation, which involves interactions between individuals and educators to meet the needs of professional self-determination. Their content analysis of Internet resources identifies various tools that support career guidance. These resources are divided into diagnostic (e.g., online testing), agitation (e.g., university and institutional websites), advisory (e.g., career guidance sites and network services), informational and orientation (e.g., profession directories and job sites), accompanying (e.g., support development software), and organizational (e.g., communication platforms). Additionally, career guidance activities are categorised by type: meeting sites (network services), immersion (specialized software), consulting (online tests and career guidance sites), excursions (institution sites), and projects (educational resources). Ostroha et al. (2021) highlight the increasing significance of social networks in career guidance due to their broad user base and interactive nature. Despite the widespread use of these platforms among teachers, the study reveals that their readiness to leverage social networks for career guidance remains limited. Quality Assurance in Career Guidance

Westerman et al. (2014) investigates methods to ensure the quality of career guidance for students both in schools and universities. They assert that effective career guidance is crucial for managing the difficulties of the school-to-university transition and addressing its competitive nature. Global recognition of the need for quality career guidance is evident from formal reviews conducted in 55 countries, showing its widespread application. Arthur & Kuranchie (2022) emphasise the role of quality assurance, stating that despite the numerous organisations having their quality control mechanisms, the formal review plays an essential role in ensuring consistency and effectiveness. The study has indicated that the schools and the universities need to work together to offer an adequate and precise career guidance. It supports my research topic directly, which involves improvement of the quality of career guidance in the school-university partnerships with an understanding that effective collaboration must be right there to facilitate career deciding needs of students.

### **2.3.10 Challenges and Opportunities in Sustaining School-University Partnerships**

While school-university partnerships offer considerable potential for mutual institutional enrichment, they are concurrently characterised by a range of complex and persistent challenges that must be navigated to realise their full impact.

These challenges are dynamic and can evolve as the partnership progresses. Addressing these issues effectively need ongoing attention and adaptation as the collaborations starts (Fernández Díaz et al., 2010). Maintaining school-university partnerships involves several challenges despite their benefits for career guidance. One important issue is the alignment of goals and expectations between schools and universities, which can lead to problems and inefficiencies (Jones et al., 2023). Differences in priorities, such as universities focusing on research while schools address immediate educational needs, can create tensions that affect partnership effectiveness (Parker et al., 2009). Additionally, it is not easy to control the utilisation of money and material resources, since funding and administrative backup is significant to support such cooperation. Financial restrictions, including competing financial interests, may also restrict the fund used to finance partnership activities (Brown et al., 2024). It may also be that routine personnel turnover, or an institutional reorientation may disturb established programs and strategies, so communication, commonality of purpose and plans should be instituted to maintain a program going and achieving success (Jones et al., 2023). It is critical to overcome these obstacles in terms of formulating strategies that will maintain effective school-university collaboration. funding and administrative backup is significant to support such cooperation. Financial restrictions, including competing financial interests, may also restrict the fund used to finance partnership activities (Brown et al., 2024). It may also be that routine personnel turnover, or an institutional reorientation may disturb established programs and strategies, so communication, commonality of purpose and plans should be instituted to maintain a program going and achieving success (Jones et al., 2023). It is critical to overcome these obstacles in terms of formulating strategies that will maintain effective school-university collaboration.

### **2.3.11 Affordances and Benefits**

Despite the challenges, school-university partnerships offer numerous benefits that contribute to their ongoing success. One huge advantage is the enhanced resource sharing that these collaborations facilitate. By pooling resources and expertise, schools and universities can provide more comprehensive career guidance and support than either institution could achieve independently (Hwang et al., 2021). This resource sharing includes access to specialised career guidance tools, industry networking, and educational materials that enrich the career guidance process for students.

Furthermore, partnerships between the schools and the universities promote professional growth among the teachers. Joint efforts also come in the form of training, workshops, and networking, which keep teachers and career guidance counsellors informed of trends in the industry, and best practice (O'Connor & Davis, 2022). It is an important professional development that helps to improve the quality of the career guidance that students receive as well as make sure that all the educators are well equipped to help the students plan their careers and develop.

Moreover, innovative solutions in terms of career guidance and education may be achieved because of the collaborative character of such relations. Collaboration between the schools and universities may lead to some new ideas and innovative decisions that solve new career guidance requirements by combining the approaches of different people and sources of knowledge (Wilson, 2021). Such innovations may enhance performance of the career guidance programs and lead to overall success and sustainability of the partnership to the benefit of both students and teachers.

### **2.11.1 Conflict and Clash of Cultures**

While school–university partnerships are often founded on shared needs and a mutual capacity to address them, they must nonetheless contend with the complexities of navigating two distinct institutional cultures. Goodlad (1993) highlights the inherent cultural differences between schools and universities, noting that these differences particularly in terms of operational pace and structural organisation can lead to tensions. Such cultural dissonance is evident in areas such as research, pedagogy, and responsiveness to change. As Danil et al. (2023) observe, conflicts may arise during the negotiation of collaborative priorities, especially when university stakeholders pursue research questions or initiatives that do not align with the immediate concerns or interests of schools or their learners.

A recurring source of tension within these partnerships is a perceived deficit in trust. Finkelstein et al. (2024) argue that challenges encountered during project development and implementation can foster scepticism regarding the motives and intentions of participating stakeholders, thereby exacerbating conflict. These tensions may also stem from the inherent nature of collaboration, which brings together professionals with distinct areas of expertise and institutional allegiances (Walker, 1999). Establishing transparent communication and cultivating trust among key actors within the partnership are essential strategies for mitigating such conflicts. In the context of this study, it is therefore critical that school principals and Life Orientation (LO) educators possess a clear understanding of the university's objectives, particularly the aim of equipping learners with knowledge about academic programs and the broader university environment while they are still in school.

#### **2.11.1.1 Institutional Support**

Leadership turnover within schools and districts presents a significant challenge to the continuity and effectiveness of institutional partnerships. This risk, however, can be mitigated through the strategic involvement of multiple leaders across both organizations. By ensuring that key stakeholders are consistently informed about partnership activities and are periodically engaged in collaborative events, institutions can foster shared accountability and institutional commitment, thereby enhancing the resilience and sustainability of the partnership over time (Walsh & Backe, 2013). The strategic engagement of key institutional advocates occupying stable, long-term positions plays a critical role in sustaining school-university partnerships. Institutional support is further reinforced when the tangible benefits accruing to either entity are publicly recognized and celebrated within the broader global educational discourse. Media coverage at local and national levels amplifies the visibility of these collaborations, fostering a sense of institutional pride and moral fulfilment, particularly in initiatives perceived as advancing the welfare of children. This public affirmation serves to mitigate the inherent challenges of partnership work. Consequently, both school districts and universities are inclined to endorse and retain partnerships that garner widespread acclaim and external validation, viewing them as emblematic of institutional success and social responsibility. In this regard to school-university partnership in career guidance and in case a school principal retires, the new principal who comes along may not be able to associate with school-university partnership with the same passion and interest.

are publicly recognized and celebrated within the broader global educational discourse. Media coverage at local and national levels amplifies the visibility of these collaborations, fostering a sense of institutional pride and moral fulfilment, particularly in initiatives perceived as advancing the welfare of children. This public affirmation serves to mitigate the inherent challenges of partnership work. Consequently, both school districts and universities are inclined to endorse and retain partnerships that garner widespread acclaim and external validation, viewing them as emblematic of institutional success and social responsibility. In this regard to school-university partnership in career guidance and in case a school principal retires, the new principal who comes along may not be able to associate with school-university partnership with the same passion and interest.

### **2.11.2 Funding**

A considerable number of educational innovations emerging from school–university partnerships fail to reach full implementation. In some instances, these initiatives are discontinued before undergoing rigorous testing or evaluation, while in others, despite demonstrated effectiveness, they remain confined to localised contexts without broader dissemination. Among the various contributing factors to these shortcomings, inadequate funding stands out as a predominant barrier. The process of designing, piloting, and assessing innovative practices within collaborative frameworks is inherently slow and resource-intensive, necessitating substantial financial investment.

As Coburn and Turner (2008) suggest, the likelihood of successful implementation and sustainability increases when partners engage in joint strategic planning and actively pursue shared funding opportunities. In this regard, school leaders and Life Orientation (LO) educators can play a pivotal role by co-applying for grants aimed at enhancing career guidance technologies, or by seeking university sponsorships for technology-driven initiatives, including those that leverage social media platforms to support career development.

#### **2.11.2.1 Challenges of Insufficient Funding**

Many educational innovations within school-university partnerships fail to reach full implementation due to inadequate funding. Some innovations are never fully tested or evaluated, while others, despite proving effective, struggle to expand beyond a local context. Insufficient funding is a primary reason for these failures, as developing and evaluating innovative practices is both slow and costly (Coburn & Turner, 2008). To overcome this

challenge, partners should actively seek and share grant opportunities and strategize collaboratively to enhance their chances of securing the necessary funds. For example, school leaders and learning outcomes (LO) teachers can jointly apply for funding to improve career guidance technology or seek sponsorships from universities for technology-related projects, including social media-based career guidance initiatives.

#### **2.11.2.2 Addressing Career Guidance Needs**

Career issues present a major factor in personal happiness, and they are greatly motivated by career decisions (Crumpton, 2005). To take care of these challenges regarding the careers, high schools, universities, and community stakeholders must strive to address these problems with the involvement of the policymakers. South African Schools Bill of 1996) is a framework document which gives schools space in which they can work out these issues and effectively deal with several problems. The role of the schools, in this case, is to reform their activities to balance their practice between equity and development, integration and differentiation. This change implies that the environment that supports cultural diversity and inclusivity should be created which can hardly be regarded as an adjustment in the curriculum, but a system-wide change (Van Wyk et al., 2010).

#### **2.11.2.3 Collaboration and Open Communication**

Peel et al. (2002) emphasise that successful partnerships are built on a foundation of true collaboration. A collaborative spirit among school administrators, educators, and university professors can lead to positive outcomes, particularly in career guidance design. Such collaboration can significantly impact how learners make career choices after completing matric, even when faced with existing educational issues. University professors, drawing on their field experience, can help resolve these issues and provide valuable support to schools (Peel et al., 2002).

#### **2.11.2.4 Policy and Funding Management**

Effective financial support and management are crucial for the success of school-university partnerships. Collaborative fundraising efforts by schools and universities can provide the necessary resources to facilitate projects that enhance both educators' knowledge and students' success (Edens et al., 2001). By working together to secure and manage funding, both stakeholders can ensure the successful implementation of initiatives that benefit the educational community.

## **2.13 Effective strategies for school-university partnerships**

Career indecision is an academic term that is normally used when touching on career development challenges, specifically challenges that include taking career-related decisions (Rojewski, 1994). Lynch (2002) state that it is crucial to note that not all people who experience career indecision are experiencing the discomfort. Furthermore, career indecision may function as a constructive catalyst, encouraging individuals to actively investigate diverse vocational pathways and pursue purposeful, goal-oriented actions. Sigenu (2023) draws attention to the inadequate quality of career counselling services in rural educational settings, emphasising the detrimental impact this has on learners' decision-making processes. She contends that limited access to relevant and comprehensive career guidance significantly increases the likelihood of students making poorly informed academic and occupational choices. In the absence of sufficient awareness regarding their personal competencies, available opportunities, and the broader socio-economic barriers to employment and sustainable livelihoods, learners face profound difficulties in navigating the transition from secondary education to post-school institutions and the labour market. She believes that the above challenges may be overcome through the university intervention and other stakeholders. Mentoring Programme is an innovative and partner-based program aimed at providing the learners in matric in the local participating high schools with the instruments they require to complete their final year in high school and achieve everything they can. Kinsler (2022) further contends that the programme entails mentorship by the university student volunteer to a Matric learner mentee. With the help of a prepared and systematic set of contact sessions, every learner is given individualised attention by their mentor. These mentors do their training thorough systematic training through the university accredited short course. This intense certification requires an extreme dedication, and individuals spend more than 100 hours of sustained commitment. The programme qualifies roughly 100 student volunteers annually to become mentors. It is a proud feature of the program, which once again proves that consistent efforts put into it and its immense contribution to the renewal of the educational environment within the district were worthwhile (Bernay et al., 2020).

### **2.13.1 Establish Clear Objectives and Shared Goals**

To ensure the success of school-university partnerships, it is highly important for both institutions to create clear aims and shared goals from the beginning of the partnership. This involves aligning the missions, values, and expectations of the school and university to create a common vision for the partnership (Walsh, 2006). By setting specific, measurable,

achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) goals, both parties can work towards mutually beneficial outcomes. This clarity helps in preventing misunderstandings and conflicts, ensuring that all stakeholders are on the same page regarding the partnership's aims (Anyon & Fernandez, 2008).

Maintaining effective open and continuous communication between the university and the school is vital in making sure that there is clarity in setting clear objectives. The discussions of the goals, roles, and responsibilities in partnership should be the initial steps to agree upon (Jones & Black, 2021). Progress can be assessed, and any problem encountered can be dealt with and proper adjustments made through regular review meetings. At least staying concentrated on these shared goals, this tandem can be quite competent and fruitful, which will eventually result in better educational practices and results (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

### **2.13.2 Foster Strong Communication Channels**

Effective communication is a cornerstone of successful school-university partnerships. Establishing strong communication channels ensures that information is shared promptly and accurately between the two institutions (Smith et al., 2022). This includes setting up regular meetings, creating shared digital platforms for communication, and utilizing various communication tools to facilitate ongoing dialogue. Clear communication helps in addressing issues swiftly, coordinating joint activities, and sharing feedback and insights (Harris & Patel, 2023). To enhance communication, both institutions should designate liaison officers or partnership coordinators responsible for managing and facilitating interactions (Brown & Green, 2022). These individuals can help streamline communication, address any misunderstandings, and ensure that both parties are informed about key developments and decisions. Additionally, creating a shared digital repository for documents, reports, and updates can facilitate easy access to information and support collaborative efforts (Martin et al., 2021). By prioritizing effective communication, the partnership can operate smoothly and achieve its goals more efficiently (Rakow & Robinson, 1997).

### **2.13.3 Develop Collaborative Professional Development Programs**

Collaborative professional development programs are a key strategy for maximizing the benefits of school-university partnerships. These programs can be designed to provide training and development opportunities for educators from both institutions (Walsh et al., 2000). By working together to create and implement professional development initiatives, schools and

universities can address common challenges, share expertise, and enhance teaching and learning practices (Brynjolfsson & McAfee, 2014).

The professional development activities may contain works, seminars, or combined training that takes place on educational issues or abilities (Geerts, 1973). This, for instance, can be instigated through workshops offered on current research and ideal practices by universities, and schools using practical knowledge and experiences. The given collaborative strategy allows both sides to use resources and skills of each other, and this aspect results in better educational practices. (Ostroha et al., 2021). Besides, when time is devoted to joint professional development, it encourages a spirit of community and common goal among teachers, reinforcing the effectiveness of the partnership (Jones & Black, 2021).

#### **2.13.4 Implement Joint Evaluation and Feedback Mechanisms**

Implementing joint evaluation and feedback mechanisms is essential for assessing the effectiveness of school-university partnerships and making continuous improvements (Smith et al., 2022). Both institutions should develop and agree upon evaluation criteria and methods to assess the partnership's impact on educational practices and outcomes (Anyon & Fernandez, 2008). Regular assessment provides valuable insights into what is of assistance and what areas still needs improvement (Harris & Patel, 2023).

Evaluation can be conducted through surveys, interviews, and performance metrics, with input from all stakeholders involved in the partnership (Brown & Green, 2022). Feedback mechanisms should be established to gather and analyse data, identify strengths and weaknesses, and make informed decisions for enhancing the partnership (Martin et al., 2021).

## **SECTION B: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study is grounded in Transformational Leadership Theory, a theoretical framework that provides a comprehensive lens for analysing leadership dynamics, especially within the context of fostering effective school-university partnerships aimed at improving career guidance for learners. Initially conceptualized by Burns (1978), Transformational leadership distinguished by its emphasis on articulating a compelling vision and empowering others is particularly significant within educational settings. According to Sugianto (2024), transformational leaders motivate stakeholders through visionary direction, attend to individuals' developmental needs, and cultivate a culture of innovation and creative problem-solving. Within the context of

school-university collaborations, such leadership is instrumental in steering sustainable partnership initiatives and aligning them toward the shared goal of enhancing student success.

Building upon Burns' foundational ideas, Bass's Transformational Leadership Model (1985) advanced the theory by delineating four core dimensions: idealised influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualised consideration (Zivkovic, 2024). Together, these components illustrate how transformational leaders serve as ethical role models, inspire collective purpose, stimulate critical and innovative thinking, and respond to the unique needs of individuals. These elements collectively deepen the influence of transformational leadership across personal, relational, and organisational domains.

Transformational leadership emphasises that leadership is neither an inherent personality trait nor solely a learned skill but rather a dynamic process shaped by evolving motivations and core values. Leaders who adopt this style go beyond managing and controlling; they seek to inspire their followers to reach higher levels of personal development, aligning their individual goals with the broader goals of the organization or collective. Bass (1999) expanded on Burns' work by highlighting the role of transformational leadership in managing stress among followers, particularly in situations marked by environmental, organizational, and relational complexities. According to Bass, transformational leaders effectively navigate these contingencies by maintaining a focus on motivation and values, thus creating a stable yet adaptable environment conducive to innovation and collaboration (Bass, 1999)

## **2.14 Key Principles of Transformational Leadership Theory**

Transformational Leadership Theory is grounded in four foundational dimensions- Idealised Influence, Inspirational Motivation, Intellectual Stimulation, and Individualised Consideration. Together, these elements explain how transformational leaders inspire, elevate, and mobilise their followers by creating conditions that enable collaboration, creativity, and continual development (Sugianto, 2024). Leaders drive significant positive change and achieve impactful outcomes in various organizational contexts. Avolio and Bass (1991) later identified four primary components of transformational leadership—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—which together form the foundation of this leadership style. Leaders who embody these traits elevate their followers' concerns for achievement, self-actualization, and the well-being of both the organization and society (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Idealized influence allows the leader to serve as a role model

through ethical behaviour, building trust and admiration among followers. Inspirational motivation encourages the collective pursuit of a shared vision, while intellectual stimulation challenges followers to think critically and innovatively. Finally, individualized consideration ensures that leaders recognize and cater to the unique developmental needs of each follower. These aspects are essential in educational settings, where leadership bridges the gap between academic institutions and real-world challenges students will face in their careers (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Transformational leadership promotes continuous improvement and adaptability by fostering these partnerships which are critical in addressing the evolving demands of career guidance in schools.

### **2.14.1 Intellectual Stimulation**

Intellectual Stimulation, one of the core components of Transformational Leadership Theory, refers to the leader's ability to foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills among followers it's also challenges followers to think critically. Intellectual Stimulation, a central component of transformational leadership theory, pertains to the leader's capacity to promote creativity, encourage analytical thinking, and enhance problem-solving abilities among followers. It challenges individuals to critically evaluate existing practices and consider innovative alternatives. As highlighted by Moreno-Casado et al. (2021) and Iraizoz et al. (2023), intellectual stimulation reflects a leader's ability to motivate subordinates to re-examine entrenched routines and explore more effective, forward-looking strategies.

Within school-university partnerships aimed at strengthening career guidance, Moreno-Casado (2021) emphasises the value of adopting innovative engagement models such as hybrid career fairs and open-day formats to increase accessibility and participation. Suhartini et al. (2022) further argue that the creative and innovative capacities of school principals play a vital role in strengthening school management and supporting Life Orientation teachers. Such capacities include organising professional development workshops, taking calculated risks, and generating new ideas that enrich academic activities and enhance collaboration with external stakeholders.

Transformational leaders, by fostering questioning, innovation, and new perspectives, enable school-university partnerships to co-design novel responses to share educational challenges (Suhartini et al., 2022). Intellectual stimulation, therefore, becomes essential in improving career guidance systems, integrating university outreach programmes within school contexts,

and advancing evidence-based pedagogical practices. Ultimately, this dimension supports both institutions in cultivating continuous learning, reflective practice, and mutual growth.

This leadership style gives motivation to individuals to question assumptions, and looks at new ideas, and develop innovative solutions to complicated challenges. In the context of school-university partnerships for career guidance, intellectual stimulation becomes essential in driving innovation in educational practices and collaboration. School principals, acting as transformational leaders, challenge Life Orientation teachers and other stakeholders to think creatively about how they can improve career guidance programs (Avolio & Bass, 1991). By fostering an environment of intellectual stimulation, principals promote a culture of continuous learning and adaptability, crucial for meeting the diverse and evolving career needs of students (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

The implication of this research is that intellectual stimulation plays a significant part in fostering vibrant school-university collaboration that is sensitive to the requirements of the students and the current conditions of the labour market. By cultivating the environment of intellectual engagement, transformational leaders empower educators and university partners to invent new career guidance curriculum specific to the individual interests of students. Also, intellectual stimulation will allow stakeholders to embrace new technologies and approach to career education so that students will be equipped adequately to handle their career environment in the future (Bass & Riggio, 2006). By initiating a more personalised, effective career guidance based on critical thinking and problem-solving skills with intellectual stimulation, teachers will be able to enhance the education of all students and, by extension, the overall success of school-university partnerships.

#### **2.14.2 Idealised Influence**

Idealised Influence, another key component of transformational leadership, refers to the leader's ability to act as a role model, inspiring trust, respect, and admiration among followers through ethical behaviour and a clear articulation of shared values (Avolio & Bass, 1991).

Idealised Influence, a central dimension of transformational leadership, describes the leader's capacity to serve as a moral exemplar who inspires trust, admiration, and respect through principled conduct and the articulation of shared values (Avolio & Bass, 1991).

Transformational leaders exhibit integrity, consistency, and a strong sense of direction. Within school-university partnerships, idealised influence is essential for fostering mutual trust and reinforcing a sense of fairness and representation between collaborating institutions (Khan et al., 2022). When leaders present themselves as credible and ethical role models, schools and universities are more likely to commit to joint objectives such as enhancing career development initiatives, supporting teacher professional growth, or promoting collaborative research. School principals, as primary institutional leaders, are therefore expected to model exemplary behaviour and establish enduring partnerships with university stakeholders, ensuring clarity, trust, and long-term cooperation.

Leaders who exhibit idealised influence set a moral standard for their followers and motivate them to align their personal goals with the broader objectives of the organisation. In this study, idealized influence is particularly relevant to understanding the role of leaders and Life orientation teachers in shaping students' career aspirations. Principals, as transformational leaders, serve as ethical senior members for staff and students, inspiring them to pursue high standards in both academic and career-related endeavours (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Principals' integrity and commitment to excellence cultivate trust, which is crucial for successful school-university partnerships in career guidance. Idealised influence also plays a significant place in creating a positive and collaborative school culture. Here, both teachers and students feel empowered to take ownership of their career development. Principals and LO teachers, as role models, demonstrate the value of higher education and the importance of setting ambitious career goals (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Furthermore, the trust established between school leaders and university partners, underpinned by shared values, fosters successful collaborations that ultimately benefit students by expanding their career opportunities. When school leaders are seen as visionary, ethical figures, they create a conducive environment for partnership success, enhancing career resources for students (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

### **2.14.3 Inspirational Motivation**

Inspirational Motivation is a vital aspect of transformational leadership that involves the leader's ability to inspire and challenge followers to achieve higher levels of success by providing them with meaning and purpose in their work. This component stresses clear communication, goal setting, and creating a shared vision that motivates individuals to align their personal ambitions with organizational goals (Bass, 1985). Inspirational Motivation,

another significant element of transformational leadership, involves the leader's ability to communicate an inspiring and meaningful vision that challenges followers to strive for higher levels of achievement. This dimension highlights the importance of clear communication. Inspirational motivation requires leaders to articulate a compelling and future-oriented vision that energises all stakeholders. In school-university partnerships, this involves jointly defining long-term goals such as broadening learners' access to higher education or strengthening teaching quality. Leaders who employ inspirational motivation ensure that teachers, learners, university personnel, and community partners collectively pursue a clearly expressed and meaningful common purpose.

In this study, inspirational motivation is central to school principals' efforts to build a vision for career guidance that unites teachers and external partners, such as universities. By clearly communicating the importance of career guidance and setting high expectations for student achievement, principals foster a sense of purpose among staff, encouraging LO teachers to actively engage in forming partnerships with universities (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Through Inspirational Motivation, principals create a forward-thinking school culture in which all stakeholders—teachers, students, and university partners—are inspired to collaborate on enhancing career guidance and improving student outcomes (Avolio & Bass, 1991). Long et al. (2014) highlight that transformational leaders who inspire their followers through clear goals and expectations create environments where collaboration and innovation flourish. In this study, principals using inspirational motivation to foster school-university partnerships are better positioned to help students succeed in both higher education and future careers. By aligning school goals with external resources, transformational leaders enable students to explore career aspirations more effectively, enhancing the overall quality of career guidance programs (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005)

#### **2.14.4 Individualised consideration**

Individualised Consideration focuses on leaders' responsiveness to the unique developmental needs of individuals, offering tailored support, mentorship, and professional development opportunities. In school-university partnerships, individualised consideration ensures that teachers, learners, and university partners receive context-specific guidance whether through targeted teacher training, mentoring initiatives, or learner-focused career advising. Addressing these differentiated needs strengthens the partnership's overall effectiveness and promotes sustained engagement (Klaray, 2024).

Transformational leadership emphasises collective achievement, ethical conduct, and shared accountability, encouraging a culture of collaboration and mutual empowerment. In this regard, leaders and followers mutually inspire one another toward heightened motivation, creativity, and moral purpose (Gu et al., 2024).

Within school-university partnerships, transformational leadership manifests as a leadership approach that inspires and motivates staff and students to work collaboratively toward a shared vision while fostering a culture of innovation, change, and continuous improvement (Klaray, 2024). Leaders who adopt this approach cultivate commitment through compelling visions, high expectations, and support for personal and professional development (Kilag et al., 2024). Their emphasis on collaboration, open communication, and empowerment creates a dynamic environment in which individuals are encouraged to extend their capabilities and exceed performance expectations (Sweet, 2023).

Moreover, transformational leaders must balance inspirational and motivational roles with the practical administrative responsibilities inherent in institutional management. As noted by Kulchottananon and Waikhuntod (2024), transformational leadership often relies on a single influential leader who elevates others through a shared vision, high expectations, and encouragement of innovation. This perspective positions transformational leadership as a form of top-down inspiration that drives organisational change (Alabi, 2024).

## **2.15 Relevance of Transformational Leadership to the Study**

Transformational Leadership Theory is particularly pertinent to this study, as it provides a lens for examining the role of school principals as leaders in cultivating effective collaborations between schools and universities to strengthen career guidance initiatives. Within this framework, principals operating as transformational leaders are expected not only to promote high academic standards but also to establish structures that support learners' career development (Joseph, 2023; Li et al., 2023). As central figures within educational institutions, principals exert significant influence on teaching practices through their leadership behaviours, which in turn affect learner performance (Hensmans et al., 2023).

Because transformational leadership emphasises vision, motivation, and individualised support, it is widely regarded as an effective approach for enhancing both teaching quality and student learning outcomes. Although prior research underscores the importance of leadership in education, the specific effects of transformational leadership on the performance of teachers and learners continue to warrant deeper scholarly investigation (Hensmans et al., 2023; Pokhrel et al., 2024).

Kouzes & Posner (2006) highlight those transformational leaders "encourage the heart" by recognising both individual and collective achievements, reinforcing shared values through these celebrations. Here, the principal's role goes beyond administrative duties, as they must motivate Life Orientation (LO) teachers to collaborate with external stakeholders, like universities, to broaden career opportunities for students (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). Through inspirational motivation and idealized influence, principals create an environment where all stakeholders work towards improving career outcomes for learners (Bass, 1985).

Additionally, transformational leadership improves school-university collaboration through capacity building and continuous striving. Career guidance always remains a dynamic process in which various parties need to be incorporated, and transformational leaders can assist in the formation of a long-lasting relationship between the educational institutions and universities, which will improve the access of students to sources of different career information. In this work, the concept of transformational leadership as defined by Bass (1985) and Avolio (1999) especially intellectual stimulation and inspirational motivation are used to assess as to how such unions make career guidance practices creatively adaptive. School leaders that foster teamwork among internal employees and external organizations are in a good position to ensure that students consider a series of career opportunities and assist them in making sound career decisions about their respective futures (Avolio & Bass, 1999).

In this study, Transformational Leadership Theory is selected as the most appropriate framework because it aligns well with the study's focus on fostering effective school-university partnerships for career guidance. Transformational leadership emphasises the role of leaders in inspiring, motivating, and fostering change within organisations, which is crucial when aiming to develop collaborative initiatives between schools and higher education institutions. The theory provides a comprehensive understanding of how leadership behaviours, such as intellectual stimulation, idealized influence, and inspirational motivation, can encourage collaboration, innovation, and sustained partnerships, directly impacting the success of career guidance programs.

Alessa (2021) further states that transformational Leadership Theory is appropriate for the scope of this research, which examines the long-term sustainability of partnerships. One of the main functions of transformational leadership is to be able to foster creativity and innovation, making it an ideal lens through which to explore how these partnerships can evolve to meet the changing needs of students and the educational landscape (Bass, 1999). By focusing on how principals can lead the charge in developing meaningful partnerships with universities, this theory provides a relevant and dynamic framework that addresses the complexities of career guidance programs and their implementation in schools.

The transformational leadership theory enables further exploration of the emotional nature of leadership in these alliances in general and the way in which the principals as transformational leaders can encourage trust and cooperation between the teachers, university, and students (Kouzes & Posner, 2006). The quality of the provided career guidance directly depends on the possibility of school leaders to act as role models and develop the culture of shared responsibility. The emphasis in this research on the outcome of careers and effective partnership necessitates a theory that will explain such leadership-centered dynamics, and the transformational leadership theory is one theory that perfectly fits the situation.

## **2.16 Conclusion**

This chapter has critically examined the literature on school-university partnerships, particularly in the context of career guidance and collaborations. While there are critiques surrounding power imbalances and sustainability challenges, the overwhelming consensus is that these partnerships provide significant benefits, particularly for under-resourced schools. International and local studies alike demonstrate that when schools and universities work collaboratively, students are better equipped for career success, with clearer pathways and enhanced guidance also discussed transformational. Leadership Theory that offers a robust framework for understanding leadership dynamics within school-university partnerships aimed at enhancing career guidance. The three key pillars Idealised Influence, Inspirational Motivation, and Intellectual Stimulation each plays a critical role in shaping how leaders inspire, motivate, and innovate to drive collaborative success. The next chapter will provide a comprehensive examination of the research methodology employed in this study.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The previous chapter provided a complete review of the related literature, which laid the foundation for the theoretical framework guiding this study. Transformational leadership theory, with its emphasis on change, vision, motivation, and empowerment, serves as the guiding lens for understanding leadership dynamics within the context of school-university partnerships.

In this chapter, I present the research design and methodology employed for this study. I began by discussing the interpretive paradigm and the qualitative approach, which align with my aim to understand the meanings and perspectives of participants in the context of their experiences. I then delved into the case study methodology, which provides an in-depth examination of the school-university partnership, focusing on career guidance initiatives. This is followed by a detailed explanation of the research methods used, including sampling, data generation, and data analysis techniques. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness, ethical considerations, and the study's limitations.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM**

In this study, I adopt the interpretive paradigm, which focuses on understanding the world through individuals' subjective experiences. As defined by Burrell and Morgan (1979, p.28), the interpretive paradigm seeks to "understand the fundamental nature of the social world at the level of subjective experience". This approach is especially useful for exploring social phenomena from the participants' perspective, rather than imposing the researcher's own interpretations.

In this study, the interpretive paradigm serves as an epistemological foundation for understanding school-university partnerships and assessing how career guidance impacts learners' access to and success at university, particularly in the context of collaborations between high schools and a University of Technology. Interpretivism aligns with Creswell's (2017) assertion that knowledge is socially constructed and emerges from people's interactions with one another. Guba and Lincoln (1994) further explain that interpretivism acknowledges the existence of multiple, context-dependent realities, each representing a different version of "truth."

The study collects qualitative data from diverse participants over time, as is common in interpretive research methods like case studies and ethnography (Mayers, 2008; Saunders et al., 2012). By examining the social construction of meaning through participants' individual goals, intentions, and communication, the study aims to uncover the nuanced idea of school principals, life orientation educators, and university staff on their roles and experiences within the school-university partnership (Weber & Croucher, 2018).

### **3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH**

In this study, I adopted a qualitative research approach, which Creswell (2014) describes as an inquiry process focused on understanding social or human problems through distinct and rigorous methodological traditions. Qualitative research offers a framework for interpreting human behavior and understanding complex social dynamics, which aligns perfectly with my study's goal of exploring the nuances of school-university partnerships and career guidance initiatives. By using face-to-face interviews and behavioral observations of participants' daily activities, I aimed to gain a comprehensive understanding of their perspectives and interactions, capturing the richness of their experiences.

As Creswell (2012) points out, qualitative research is inherently interpretive, drawing from multiple data sources and positioning the researcher as a key instrument in the research process. In my study, my role as the researcher is crucial, as I interpret the understanding that participants attach to their experiences and responses. This interpretive nature of qualitative research allowed me to gain an authentic understanding of the participants' lived experiences and the social contexts in which they operate (Creswell, 2014). By focusing on the perspectives of the participants, I captured nuanced insights that are critical for understanding the complexities of school-university collaborations and career guidance.

One of the core strengths of qualitative research is its ability to explore research questions from the perspective of the participants themselves, examining their experiences, meanings, and interpretations (Hammarberg et al., 2015). This approach allows me to gather in-depth insights that reflect the true sentiments of the participants, as they share their personal accounts of how school-university partnerships and career guidance initiatives unfold. By asking open-ended and probing questions during interviews, I was able to gather detailed responses that go beyond surface-level understanding, offering rich, meaningful data that is essential for this study (Msweli, 2011). Through this methodology,

I aimed to explore the lived experiences of high school principals, Life Orientation teachers, and university staff, shedding light on how they interact and contribute to students' academic and career readiness.

The goal of this research is to understand the lived experiences of key stakeholders namely, high school principals, Life Orientation teachers, and university staff within the context of school-university partnerships, particularly focusing on career guidance initiatives. By employing a qualitative approach, I aimed to explore the dynamics of these interactions and the roles each participant plays in enhancing students' career preparedness. The insights I gathered from this study contributed valuable knowledge to the field of educational partnerships and offer practical recommendations for improving career guidance programs in schools and universities as suggested by Cohen (2019).

### **3.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a case study design, which allows for a focused and in-depth exploration of a specific instance within its real-world context, providing a rich understanding of the complexities involved (Yin, 2017; Bryman, 2008; Rule & John, 2011). The case study approach is particularly suitable for this research because it enables an intensive investigation of a particular phenomenon in this case, the partnership between a university of technology and two high schools. Rather than offering a broad overview of multiple instances, the case study design concentrates on one unique case, allowing for a more detailed exploration of the dynamics at play and the factors that influence the outcomes (Rule & John, 2011). As McCombes (2023) explains, this methodology is beneficial when the researcher seeks to examine a single case or group, providing an absolute view of the situation. It enables a full understanding of how specific factors within a case contribute to broader patterns or outcomes, making it a powerful tool for this study, which aims to examine the effectiveness of university- school partnerships in delivering impactful career guidance (McCombes, 2023).

The case study design was further justified in that it was a qualitative study, which is congruent with the nature of the study, which aimed at describing the lived experiences and worldviews of the participants. McCombes (2019) describes case studies as highly beneficial in terms of capturing the shades of a given phenomenon because unlike other types of research, doing a case study enables the researcher to dive into the matter in question. The present study with the purpose to gain an insight into the beliefs of the different stakeholders of the given partnership,

namely school principals, teachers, and the university staff about the efficacy of the given partnership in terms of career guidance can best be achieved through this qualitative method. Through a narrow and delimited case, the research is in a position to provide deep, contextualized information concerning the nature of the mechanisms that facilitate or undermine the realization of successful school-university collaborations towards career guidance (Stake, 2005). Such an emphasis on qualitative approaches enables further consideration of the nuances and obscurities of these collaborations, mostly with respect to the provision of career guidance (Creswell, 2013).

The present study particularly looks at the joint venture between a University of Technology and two high schools, in which the key issue focuses on career guidance as one of the important elements within the partnership. The focus on career guidance is mostly driven by the idea that such a field is gaining prominence as the factor smoothing the transition of school students to college or the professional world (McMahon & Tatham, 2021). Since the partnership between the institutions of higher learning and high schools is one of the main aspects of the present work, it is important to note an environment in which the cooperation between the two institutions occurs. The study has a timeframe of 2023 and 2024 to guarantee that the results can be applicable to modern practice and vision of it (Cohen et al., 2021). Within the spatial scope, the analysis is limited to the Umlazi region, which has its own specific educational and socio-economic features and contributes to the involvement of an additional layer of the study into the results (Mthembu, 2022). With attention on these schools, and the university of technology, the research sought to develop an excellent comprehension of the facts of how the partnership of schools–university regarding career guidance can exploit the best potential to yield the advantages of students and specifically in localities with their own special problems and promise.

### **3.5 SAMPLING AND SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

Sampling is a critical component of the research study, as it determines how participants are selected to provide the most relevant and reliable information. According to Creswell (2014), sampling methods should align with the study's objectives and the characteristics of the population under investigation. This study utilised both purposive and convenience sampling methods to ensure that participants were chosen based on their relevance to the research topic and their availability.

This study employs a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling to select

participants who possess specific characteristics best suitable for the research questions and were accessible for participation. Purposive sampling is a deliberate strategy used to select participants or settings that are best suited to provide detailed and relevant insights into the research problem. As explained by Peterson et al. (2017), purposive sampling enables the researcher to select participants with attributes that are essential to the study, which is particularly useful when the goal is to explore specific knowledge or experience not easily accessible from a general population (Cohen et al., 2011).

For this study, one University of Technology and two high schools were selected as the case sites. The decision to select only one University of Technology was based on the need for in-depth analysis of a single institutional partnership, which can provide rich, focused insights into the dynamics of school-higher education collaborations, particularly in the context of career guidance. Selecting more than one university might introduce complexity without providing significantly different perspectives on the partnership. As McMillan and Schumacher (2010) suggest, choosing a single university allows for a more manageable, comprehensive exploration of the collaboration in a particular context.

Similarly, the choice of two high schools was deliberate. According to Maxwell (2012), the selection of a manageable number of schools ensures that the data remains focused while allowing for a comparison of perspectives across different settings. The decision to limit the study to two schools was informed by practical considerations, such as ensuring a balance between breadth and depth. Selecting two schools allows for an analysis of how the partnership functions in different high school environments while still maintaining the depth needed to understand the nuances of career guidance programs. Three schools would have introduced additional complexity that might not have contributed proportionally to the richness of the data (Yin, 2017). Therefore, two schools are deemed sufficient to achieve meaningful comparative insights while ensuring the research remains focused.

From the University of Technology, two participants were selected: The Director of Stakeholder Relations and an Admissions Officer. These roles were chosen because they hold unique positions with direct involvement in managing partnerships between the university and external institutions, making their insights critical to understanding the dynamics of the collaboration, particularly in terms of career guidance. The Director of Stakeholder Relations is involved in strategic decisions regarding partnerships, while the Admissions Officer's role

provides a perspective on the practicalities of student recruitment and transition, both of which are relevant to the study.

### **Purposive sampling**

The purposive sampling strategy was employed to select these two participants because they are uniquely positioned to provide the necessary insights into the university's role in facilitating school-university partnerships. According to Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling is especially valuable when selecting individuals with specialized knowledge or experience that directly contribute to understanding the research problem.

For the two high schools, the study selected two principals and four Life Orientation (LO) teachers, totalling six participants. The principals were chosen because of their leadership roles in the schools, which provide them with a strategic overview of the school's educational objectives and partnerships. LO teachers were selected due to their direct involvement in delivering career guidance programs to learners, which is central to this study's focus. Life Orientation is the main subject in South African schools that addresses career guidance, making these teachers essential to understanding the impact of the school-university collaboration on students' career planning and choices. Each of the two schools is represented by three participants, which provides a balance between leadership (principals) and implementation (LO teachers). This selection ensures a comprehensive perspective on the school's role in the partnership, from both a strategic and practical standpoint. As Creswell (2014) notes, selecting participants who represent multiple facets of the research context enhances the depth of the data while maintaining focus on the central research questions. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants from each school based on their roles in career guidance and their involvement in the partnership with the University of Technology. This approach ensures that the data collected is directly relevant to the research focus on career guidance programs and school-university collaborations.

### **Convenience Sampling**

In addition to purposive sampling, convenience sampling was employed to enhance the feasibility of the study. Convenience sampling allows for the selection of participants who are easily accessible and available to the researcher, which is particularly important in terms of logistical considerations such as time and location. As Bertram and Christiansen (2014) describe, convenience sampling involves selecting participants who are located within the

researcher's immediate network or geographical area, thus reducing costs and time constraints. This method ensures that the data collection process can proceed smoothly without unnecessary delays. The use of convenience sampling complements purposive sampling by enabling the researcher to efficiently gather data from participants who meet the study's criteria and are accessible for participation, optimizing the whole efficiency of the research study.

The combination of purposive and convenience sampling ensures that the study includes participants with relevant experience and invaluable insights into the effectiveness of school-university collaborations in delivering career guidance, while also maximizing efficiency in accessing and engaging with participants. The selected participants—university staff, high school principals, and LO teachers—are positioned to provide critical insights into the dynamics of the partnership and its impact on educational transitions, particularly in terms of career guidance.

### **3.6 Data generation method**

Data generation refers to the systematic process of collecting information to understand a specific phenomenon or context in research. It encompasses various methods that researchers employ to gather qualitative or quantitative data, depending on the objectives of the study. According to Flick (2018), data generation is fundamental to qualitative research as it enables the exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences within their social contexts.

#### **3.6.1 Interviews**

Data was generated through semi-structured interviews, a method widely acknowledged for its flexibility and depth in qualitative research. Semi-structured interviews, as described by Davis and White (2023) and Thomas (2022), offer a blend of predefined open-ended questions and the flexibility to explore emerging themes. This allows participants to share their experiences freely while also providing the researcher with the opportunity to probe deeper into unexpected insights. According to Green and Brown (2023), this approach fosters an interactive dialogue, where the core questions guide the interview, but the researcher can follow up on new topics that emerge during the conversation, creating a dynamic and responsive exchange.

In this study, I prepared an interview guide tailored to the research objectives. As articulated by Jameson et al. (2023) and Nguyen (2022), an interview guide is a structured tool that includes two levels of questions: primary thematic questions, which address the central research themes, and secondary probing questions, which explore issues that arise

spontaneously during the interview. This structure ensures that the interviews remain focused on the research goals while providing the flexibility needed to capture detailed and contextually rich responses from participants. The guide was designed specifically to explore how school-university partnerships contribute to career guidance, particularly in the context of preparing students for higher education.

The interviews involved face-to-face interactions with school principals, Life Orientation teachers, and university staff members. Face-to-face interviews are ideal for this study because, as stated by Carter and Gibson (2024), they allow for more in-depth engagement with participants. This format facilitates the clarification of responses, the opportunity to ask follow-up questions, and the establishment of rapport, all of which can enrich the data collected. By interviewing these key stakeholders, I aimed to capture detailed insights into the effectiveness of the partnerships and how they impact students' preparedness for university life, career choices, and future educational transitions.

By employing semi-structured interviews, I was able to gather a comprehensive range of perspectives from participants involved in the school-university partnerships. This method is particularly valuable for exploring complex, subjective experiences and providing a deep understanding of how career guidance is integrated into these collaborations. As outlined by Patel and Singh (2024), such interviews offer the flexibility necessary to uncover both expected and unforeseen insights, thus enabling a richer understanding of the processes and dynamics that shape the partnerships' role in supporting students' transitions to higher education.

### **3.7 Data analysis**

Data analysis refers to the systematic process of examining and interpreting data to uncover patterns, themes, and insights that inform research findings. It is a critical phase in qualitative research, as it allows researchers to make sense of complex data collected from participants. According to Braun and Clarke (2016), data analysis involves organizing and systematically interpreting qualitative data to derive meaningful conclusions and inform research questions. In this study, data analysis occurs through thematic analysis, which is particularly suited for qualitative data and provides a structured approach to identifying and interpreting patterns within the data.

### **3.7.1 Thematic Analysis**

Thematic analysis is the most recognized research method in qualitative research that includes identifying themes, analysing data, and reporting patterns within a dataset (Clarke & Braun, 2021). It is a flexible approach that can be applied to various types of data, including interview transcripts, observational notes, and open-ended survey responses, allowing researchers to tailor the analysis to the specific context and objectives of their study (Smith & Jones, 2023). This adaptability makes thematic analysis particularly useful for exploring complex, nuanced topics where the researcher needs to understand the underlying patterns that emerge from participants' experiences (Reed, 2022).

For this study, I used thematic analysis to analyse data generated from semi-structured interviews. The data collection process involves transcribing interviews verbatim in detail to ensure accuracy and reliability. Transcription is crucial as it allows me to closely examine participants' exact words, which are essential for understanding the meanings behind their responses. By using participants' original phrases, I kept the integrity of the data and participants and also ensured that their perspectives are accurately represented (Bryman, 2022).

The analysis unfolded in several stages, beginning with familiarization with the data. In this phase, I immersed myself in the transcripts, reading and re-reading them to gain an initial understanding of the content and to identify preliminary impressions or potential themes (Bazeley, 2022). Following this, I generated codes—labels that categorize and summarize key segments of the data that are relevant to the research questions. These codes helped in organizing the data and served as the foundation for identifying larger patterns (Saldaña, 2021).

Once coding was completed, I grouped related codes together to form broader themes. This thematic map evolved iteratively as I refined the connections between themes and sub-themes, identifying how they relate to one another and to the research questions. Finally, I defined and named the themes, providing clarity on how each theme contributes to answering the research questions. Throughout the process, I ensured that participants' voices remain central by including direct quotes to support the findings and illustrate the themes. This approach guarantees that the analysis remains grounded in participants' lived experiences, offering a comprehensive and authentic understanding of their perspectives on school-university partnerships in career guidance (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2021). By applying thematic analysis in this manner, I aimed to generate valuable insights into the dynamics and effectiveness of these partnerships, contributing to the broader discourse on career guidance

and educational collaborations.

### **3.8 Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, trustworthiness is vital to ensure that the findings are credible and reliable. It refers to the processes and methods that allow researchers to demonstrate the accuracy, authenticity, and applicability of their study's outcomes (Cohen et al., 2021). Trustworthiness is typically assessed through four main criteria: credibility, transferability, confirmability, and dependability (Nowell et al., 2021). As emphasized by Tracy (2021), ensuring trustworthiness is not only about ensuring accuracy but also about upholding the integrity of the research process. This research incorporated multiple methodological approaches to strengthen the credibility and reliability of the results, including using a tape recorder to capture interview responses. This increased the accuracy of the data collected while enabling me to fully focus on the participant during the interview, which is crucial for maintaining an unbiased perspective (MacNeill et al., 2022). Furthermore, I ensured that the interview questions were clear, concise, and communicated in English to eliminate any potential barriers to understanding (Flick, 2022). The use of data collection methods such as interviews, further strengthened the trustworthiness of the findings, as this method allowed for cross-verification and reduced the likelihood of biases (Bryman, 2022). Below, I outlined how, I operationalized each aspect of trustworthiness in this study.

#### **3.8.1 Credibility**

Credibility refers to the believability and truthfulness of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). It is critical to ensure that the study's results are accurate and reflect the real experiences of participants. To achieve credibility, researchers must verify descriptions of participants' experiences through member checks, ensuring that the study's findings resonate with the participants' own perceptions and experiences (Houghton et al., 2021). In this study, I enhanced credibility by recording participant interviews and reviewing these recordings for accuracy and consistency. I also engaged in member checking by sharing the transcripts or summaries of the interviews with participants, allowing them to confirm that their views have been accurately captured. This included key role players, such as school principals, Life Orientation (L.O.) teachers, and university staff, allowing me to compare how different stakeholders perceive the effectiveness of school-university partnerships in career guidance. The heterogeneity of the participant pool enhanced the credibility of the findings by offering a more comprehensive and

multifaceted perspective on the dynamics of school-university collaboration (Bazeley, 2021).

### **3.8.2 Transferability**

Transferability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other settings, contexts, or populations (Tobin & Begley, 2022). To achieve transferability, it is essential to offer comprehensive accounts of the research setting and the characteristics of the participant group, and settings so that others can assess whether the findings can be applied to similar situations (Larkin et al., 2021). In this study, I focused on ensuring that the research findings are applicable to broader educational contexts, especially in school-university partnerships across different regions. I interviewed participants twice to gain deeper insights into their perspectives, ensuring that the data gathered is comprehensive and allows for more generalizable conclusions. Additionally, I provided rich, contextual data through detailed field notes, allowing readers to judge the applicability of the study's findings to other educational environments (Lodico et al., 2021). This approach will enhance the potential for transferability by making the findings relatable to similar educational contexts.

### **3.8.3 Confirmability**

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the findings of the study are grounded in the data and can be verified by other researchers (Shenton, 2021). It involves ensuring that the data collected, and the subsequent interpretations, are a true reflection of the participants' experiences rather than influenced by the researcher's biases or preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To enhance confirmability in this study, I engaged in detailed auditing and reflection throughout the research process. This included cross-checking interview recordings with the transcriptions to ensure the accuracy and consistency of the data. Furthermore, by maintaining a transparent research process, I provided sufficient documentation of the decisions made during the study, allowing other researchers to follow the same methodology and reach similar conclusions. This approach is in line with the recommendations of Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2021), who argue that confirmability is enhanced through an open and rigorous approach to data collection and analysis.

### **3.8.4 Dependability**

Dependability refers to the consistency and stability of the research process, ensuring that the data collection methods yield reliable and repeatable results (Morse, 2022). It assesses how

well, the study's processes can be repeated in similar contexts with similar participants. To enhance dependability, I utilized semi-structured interviews, which offer a structured yet flexible approach to data collection. This method allowed for consistency in the questions asked while providing room for participants to expand on their responses. By using the same set of questions for all participants, including school principals, L.O. teachers, and university staff, I ensured that the data collected remains comparable and stable across different interviews. Additionally, by recording and transcribing all interviews, I created a reliable set of data that can be revisited and verified throughout the research process (Baker & Edwards, 2021).

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations are central to ensuring that the rights of participants are respected throughout the research process (Head, 2022). The principles of ethical research emphasised honesty, integrity, and transparency, particularly when dealing with human subjects (Wiles, 2022). Given that this study involves human participants, namely school principals, L.O. teachers, and university staff members it is imperative that ethical clearance is obtained from the appropriate bodies before the research begins. I have secured ethical clearance from the University of KwaZulu-Natal's ethics committee (see appendix A, page 99) to conduct the research and obtain permission from the Department of Education (see appendix B, page 100) and the relevant university gatekeeper for conducting research within the schools (see appendix C, page 101) (Jones & Curzon, 2022). Requesting letter to schools (see appendix D, page 102) and interview schedule (appendix F, 104) Furthermore, all participants were required to sign informed consent forms, (See appendix E, page 103) indicating their voluntary participation in the study and their understanding of the research's objectives. They were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty, ensuring that their participation is voluntary and based on fully informed consent (Denzin & Lincoln, 2022). Additionally, to protect the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms will be used in the study's reports. The study adheres to all ethical guidelines, ensuring that participants' rights and dignity are respected throughout the research process.

### **3.10 Limitations of the Study**

In this study, there are several limitations that could affect the generalizability and applicability of the findings to broader educational contexts. One significant limitation is the scope of the study, which focuses specifically on two schools within the Umlazi District and a single

university of technology. The relatively small sample size, with a limited geographical focus, may not adequately represent the diverse range of schools and universities that exist in other regions. This factor may affect the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to other contexts or applicable across broader populations or contexts to other schools, especially those in different districts or in more urban settings. According to Creswell (2013), the context and characteristics of a specific location can significantly influence the findings, limiting their applicability to broader populations. As such, the results of this study may only be relevant to similar settings, and not necessarily transferable to other educational institutions in different regions or with different institutional profiles.

Another limitation in my study is related to the selection of participants. In this research, I interviewed a small group of participants, including school principals, Life Orientation teachers, and staff from a university of technology. While these individuals have valuable insights into the study's focus on school-university partnerships, their perspectives may not fully represent those of other educational professionals, such as teachers from different subjects or stakeholders from other universities, such as community colleges or traditional universities. The sample size and selection process may limit the diversity of viewpoints that could be captured, thus constraining the breadth of the findings. Vincze (2013) notes that technical generalization, where conclusions are drawn from a limited sample, often falls short in providing a comprehensive understanding of larger trends or diverse educational practices. Therefore, the findings from this study may not fully reflect the perspectives of other educators or institutions.

Finally, a third limitation arises from the methodological approach I have chosen. The study is primarily qualitative, relying heavily on semi-structured interviews to gather data from participants. While this method allows for an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives, it also introduces the potential for subjectivity and researcher bias. The way questions are framed, the interpretation of responses, and the selection of interviewees could all influence the outcomes. Additionally, the semi-structured nature of the interviews means that the data collected may vary across participants, leading to inconsistencies in the type of information provided. This limitation is common in qualitative research, where the richness and depth of responses can be both a strength and a potential weakness. The findings may not be as easily replicable or generalizable to different settings, as qualitative data is often context-specific and shaped by the unique perspectives of participants (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). As such, the findings of this study should be understood within the

limitations of the research design and the specific context in which it was conducted.

### **3.11 Conclusion**

The focus of this chapter was to establish the methodological framework for the study, providing a clear understanding of how data was generated, analysed, and interpreted throughout the research process. The purpose was to ensure that the methods used are appropriate, credible, and aligned with the study's objectives, while also addressing the ethical considerations and limitations that may impact the findings. I achieved this by explaining the rationale behind my choice of qualitative research methods, particularly semi-structured interviews, and thematic analysis, and detailing how these methods will help me gather meaningful insights from participants. The chapter also discussed how I ensured the trustworthiness of the data, and the careful handling of ethical issues, including participant consent and confidentiality. The role of trustworthiness in ensuring credible and reliable findings, and the ethical responsibilities of researchers when working with human participants in the study.

In the next chapter, I shifted focus to data presentation and analysis. This section delves into how the data collected from interviews and observations was systematically analyzed using thematic analysis. The chapter presents the main themes and patterns that emerged from the data, offering a detailed exploration of the participants' experiences and perspectives. It also explores how these findings address the research questions and contribute to a deeper understanding of the topic under study. Through this process, the research formed the foundation for drawing conclusions and making recommendations based on the analysis of the collected data.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

In the previous chapter, I explained the research design and methods used in this study. I discussed why I chose a qualitative approach, how I conducted semi-structured interviews, how I selected participants, and the ethical rules I followed. These methods helped me gather detailed information from school principals, Life Orientation teachers, and University of Technology staff members about school-university partnerships in career guidance. Additionally, I also provided how the data was analysed to identify key themes that emerged from the participants' responses.

This chapter articulates the results obtained through the research process based on the following research questions:

1. How do school-university partnerships regarding career guidance improve access and success of learners at university?
2. What are the tensions and affordances of school-university partnerships regarding career guidance?

Firstly, I provide a profile of the research sites and participants to give background on the schools and universities involved in the study. The findings are systematically presented through the identification of overarching themes and corresponding subthemes, derived from recurring patterns in the data as they relate to each research question.

#### **4.2 PROFILES OF RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS**

Introducing sites is important because it helps establish the research setting, allowing the reader to understand the demographics, resources, and environment that might impact the study's findings. The literature highlights the need to clearly describe study participants as a key first step in data processing (Caluza, 2022). The next subsection provides an overview of the research sites and participants for this study.

##### **4.2.1 Siyakhula High School**

Siyakhula High School, located in Umlazi, south of Durban, is a quintile three institution, serving students from Grade 8 to Grade 12. With an enrolment of 1,500 students and a staff

complement of 40 teachers, including those funded by the school governing body, the school is well-respected in the community for its strong academic performance. Boasting a 100% pass rate, Siyakhula High School is recognized for its commitment to quality education.

At the helm of the school is Mr Zikhali, the principal, who brings 15 years of experience in the education sector, eight of which have been in his current leadership role. Holding a Bachelor of Education Honours degree along with leadership certifications, he plays a crucial role in the school's success. Supporting the school's educational objectives are two Life Orientation teachers, Miss Ndlozi and Miss Ntoshe. Miss Ndlozi, aged between 30 and 35 years, has six years' experience in the education sector and with a bachelor's degree in education. Meanwhile, Miss Ntoshe, a more experienced educator at 45 years old, has been teaching Life Orientation for 15 years and possesses a Bachelor of Education Honors degree. Both teachers, holding post level 1 positions, contribute significantly to the holistic development of students at Siyakhula High School.

#### **4.2.2 Sukuma High School**

Sukuma High School, also situated in Umlazi, provides education to 980 students from Grade 8 to Grade 12. This quintile three school operates with the support of 18 teachers, including those funded by the school governing body. As part of the study, Sukuma High School offers valuable insights into the challenges and successes of schools within the same geographical area but with different dynamics.

The school's leadership is spearheaded by Mr Kunene, the principal, who has dedicated 18 years to the education sector, eight of which have been in his current role. Holding a Bachelor of Education Honors degree and a certificate in finance management, he brings a strong administrative and academic background to his role. Integral to the school's Life Orientation curriculum are two teachers, Mrs Zakuza and Mrs. Maphumulo. Mrs. Zakuza is aged between 25 and 30 years, with teaching experience of five years and holds a degree in Education. She occupies a post level 1 position. Complementing her is Mrs Maphumulo, a 41-year-old educator with vast experience in teaching. She has a Bachelor of Education Honor's degree and a Diploma in Accounting, positioning her at post level 2. Together, these educators contribute significantly to the personal and social development of their students.

#### **4.2.3 Richards Bay University of Technology**

Richards Bay University of Technology plays a pivotal role in this study by offering a perspective on higher education and its influence on student transitions from secondary school to tertiary education. This institution is instrumental in exploring how academic preparedness, institutional support, and career pathways shape student experiences. Among the key contributors from the university is Mr Tango, a dedicated staff member who has been with the institution for 15 years. Beginning his career in a general staff role, he has since advanced to middle management, holding a Master of Business Administration degree from a prestigious university. His experience provides valuable insights into the operational and academic aspects of higher education. Additionally, Mr Chetty, a 45-year-old staff member with 20 years of experience in the higher education setting, enriches this study with his expertise. Holding a master's degree and various management qualifications, he plays a significant role in shaping institutional policies and student support structures at the university.

### **4.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

This section seeks to discuss further the study findings reflecting on existing literature and key theories that relate to this study. This will be accomplished with the aid of research questions which this study aimed to answer.

#### **4.3.1 Theme 1: The Role of School-University partnerships in improving learner access to university**

In this theme, I explore two sub-themes of how school-university partnerships can significantly enhance learners' access to university.

##### **4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Provision of Knowledge on Minimum Requirements for Admission**

School-university partnerships aim to improve students' understanding of university admission requirements, which are often unclear and lead to missed higher education opportunities (Gale & Parker, 2018). Effective partnerships ensure students are well-informed about entry criteria, application processes, and academic expectations (Gamede, & Uleanya, 2020). Some participants believe universities provide sufficient information, while others feel students still lack important details. The perspectives on the provision of knowledge on minimum requirements for admission between schools and universities regarding the role of school-

university partnerships in improving learner access to university reveal varied opinions among educators.

Miss Ndlozi, a Life Orientation teacher at Siyakhula High School, emphasized the need for universities to engage with schools early in the year. She believes that universities should provide clear presentations on the courses they offer and the required points for admission. As she stated:

*“I feel like the institutions, especially when it comes to the beginning of the year, need to come, and do the presentations. For instance, for these careers or occupations that the institution is offering, how many points required, so that the learners will know”* (Miss Ndlozi -LO Teacher).

This suggestion aligns with Mrs. Zakuza, a Life Orientation teacher at Sukuma High School, who shared a similar sentiment, saying:

*“The only relationship that we have is with one university, we've never ever had a university that wants to come to our school and do a career day to discuss admission requirements”* (Mrs. Zakuza- LO Teacher).

Both teachers highlight the importance of direct interaction between universities and schools to provide students with necessary admission information. However, Miss Ntoshe, another Life Orientation teacher from Siyakhula, offered a more critical perspective. She argued that current university visits fail to provide comprehensive information about the courses and their respective requirements. According to her:

*“No, I don't think there is a good relationship simply because universities don't give our learners enough information based on the courses offered”* (Miss Ntoshe-LO Teacher).

This critique suggests a gap in the effectiveness of university-school partnerships when it comes to delivering detailed and relevant course-specific information to students. In contrast, Mrs. Maphumulo, also a Life Orientation teacher presented a more balanced viewpoint. She acknowledged the value of university visits, stating:

*“I agree there is a good relationship between schools and universities because they come and give us new information”* (Mrs. Maphumulo-LO Teacher).

While she appreciates the existing collaboration, her statement hints at the possibility for further improvement in the relationship to make it more comprehensive. Furthermore, Mr. Zikhali, the principal of Siyakhula High School, provided a broader perspective on the issue. He acknowledged the importance of university visits in sharing admission requirements but suggested that these minimum requirements should not be viewed as definitive standards for acceptance. As he noted:

*“You know the partnership will improve the grades so that we can have more learners qualifying to meet the requirements. And number two my firm belief, through observation, at the universities those minimum requirements written in their prospectus are just minimum requirements and that’s what it means.”* (Mr. Zikhali-Principal Siyakhula).

This statement implies that the relationship between schools and universities should also focus on helping students exceed these minimum standards, thus opening more opportunities for admission. Mr. Kunene, the principal of Sukuma High School, also affirmed the value of university visits but emphasized the personal responsibility of students. He stated:

*“I think the university has done their part. But learners must pay attention to what they are told, read the copies with relevant information, and visit the websites. They will be empowered with the right knowledge that will improve their chances to enrol with the universities.”* (Mr. Kunene-Principal Sukuma)

The data presented reveals a range of perspectives on the effectiveness of school-university partnerships in improving learners' access to university. While some educators acknowledge the positive role that university visits and information sharing play in helping students understand admission requirements, others criticize the lack of detailed and comprehensive information provided during these engagements. The findings suggest that, although universities contribute valuable insights about minimum requirements, there are significant gaps in the depth and specificity of the information shared, particularly regarding course-specific details. Some teachers advocate for more structured and proactive engagement, such as early-year presentations, to ensure that students are well-informed about their academic

options. Additionally, the data highlights the importance of students taking personal responsibility in utilizing the resources provided by universities.

The findings align closely with recent literature on the role of school-university partnerships in improving access to higher education and the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory. Gale et al. (2018) argue that universities need to go beyond merely disseminating information, adopting more interactive, student-centred approaches to foster smoother transitions to higher education. Similarly, Watts et al. (2020) stress that career guidance should be dynamic and sustained, rather than reliant on once-off informational sessions. This view is reflected in the data, where participants such as Miss Ndlozi and Mrs. Zakuza call for more frequent, structured engagements between universities and schools. The literature also emphasizes the crucial role of student agency in utilizing the resources provided by universities.

Kuh et al. (2011) found that students who actively sought knowledge and engaged with available resources showed higher levels of academic preparedness and success. This aligns with the perspectives of Mr. Kunene, who stresses that students must take personal responsibility in using the information provided to them. The alignment with Transformational Leadership Theory becomes evident when considering the role of university leaders in inspiring and empowering students. According to Gamede & Uleanya,(2020), transformational leaders not only provide information but also motivate their followers to go beyond basic expectations and strive for higher performance. The data from the participants suggests that universities could enhance their leadership approach by adopting this transformational style, encouraging students to exceed the minimum admission requirements and pursue excellence. In this sense, universities are not just providers of information but are also responsible for inspiring students to take ownership of their educational journeys.

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Enhancing learner motivation and subject support through alumni and peer engagement**

In the context of rural South African schools, fostering learner motivation and academic resilience remains a persistent challenge, as socioeconomic hardships, limited exposure to tertiary environments, and outdated educational resources continue to undermine student aspirations. Transformational Leadership Theory offers a compelling framework for addressing these barriers through strategic alumni and peer engagement initiatives.

Transformational leaders inspire followers by crafting a compelling vision, offering personal support, encouraging intellectual growth, and modelling aspirational values (Rojak, 2024). These four dimensions—idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration—are particularly vital in settings where learners face both material and psychological constraints (Nhlumayo, 2024; Naidoo, 2024; Richardson & Khawaja, 2025).

Mr Zikhali principal of Siyakhula High School exemplified idealised influence when he reflected on the power of relatable role models:

*“We should strengthen our ties with universities—invite former learners who are now successful graduates to come and inspire our learners. Seeing someone from the same background succeed brings hope. And if possible, they can even assist with Maths or Sciences. That exposure can transform their mindset and make university more reachable”* (Mr Zikhali).

By deliberately positioning alumni as living proof of achievement, he cultivates admiration, trust, and a shared vision of success—key facets of transformational leadership that Sliwka et al. (2024) identify as critical for mobilizing under-resourced communities around a collective goal.

Complementing this vision, Mr Kunene, principal of Sukuma High School, illustrated individualized consideration through his call for tailored academic interventions that could assist learners excel in their academic activities and qualify to access the university:

*“Our university partners could send small student teams to run winter schools in subjects where learners struggle. These mentors know the curriculum and can give one-on-one attention. It’s that personal touch which makes the difference”* (Mr Kunene).

Naidoo (2024) corroborates that sustained, personalized mentorship in KwaZulu-Natal has a dual effect: it strengthens content mastery while building emotional bonds that reduce dropout rates. By responding directly to learners’ unique learning gaps and emotional needs, transformational leaders ensure that each student feels seen, supported, and capable of academic growth.

Mrs Maphumulo, a Life Orientation teacher at Siyakhula High School, highlighted the persuasive force of storytelling in creating inspirational motivation:

*“When alumni share their journeys—the failures, the breakthroughs, the struggle with assignments—our Grade 12s see that success is not instantaneous. It’s inspirational. They leave believing, ‘If they did it, so can I’*  
(Mrs Maphumulo).

According to Nhlumayo (2024), such narratives galvanise learners’ intrinsic motivation, particularly those who are first-generation university applicants, by reframing setbacks as integral steps toward achievement. In weaving alumni testimonials into the school’s culture, leaders articulate an appealing vision of possibility that spurs learners to transcend self-doubt.

Transformational leadership’s emphasis on intellectual stimulation was brought to life by Miss Ntoshe, who described her Saturday science clubs:

*“In our Saturday classes, we invite former learners now studying at university to pose real-world problems and guide experiments.* (Miss Ntoshe).

Rojak (2024) notes that when leaders foster environments of inquiry and critical thinking, students develop deeper conceptual understanding and adaptability. By challenging learners to engage in hands-on, collaborative problem-solving, alumni mentors stimulate creativity and analytical skills, essential for both academic success and future leadership.

Finally, Miss Ndlozi underscored the synergistic effects of inspirational motivation and individualised consideration through a ‘study buddies’ programme:

*“Our former learners who are at universities can help our learners a lot, not just with academic work but also serving as a motivation to our matriculants”*  
(Miss Ndlozi).

Richardson and Khawaja (2025) affirm that learner-centred initiatives addressing both academic and emotional dimensions yield higher retention and performance, this stresses the pressing need for universities to intervene as Miss Ndlozi commented that it helps with both academic activities and motivates learners. By integrating emotional check-ins with targeted

academic coaching, transformational leaders cultivate a growth-oriented mindset, where learners feel both challenged and cared for.

Together, the insights of these five participants demonstrate that university students and peer engagement—when orchestrated through the four pillars of Transformational Leadership—can transform rural schooling into a dynamic ecosystem of aspiration, support, and achievement. This holistic approach moves beyond conventional outreach, embedding sustainable leadership practices within the school community and forging a continuous cycle of community investment and educational excellence (Richardson and Khawaja 2025). This practice fosters inspirational motivation, a key pillar of transformational leadership where the leader communicates an appealing vision and encourages followers to transcend personal limitations and this was reflected by Ms Ndlozi, one of the LO educators. In this case, alumni become informal leaders whose testimonies stimulate learners to develop positive academic identities and overcome self-doubt.

Literature reinforces the role of peer-based interventions and community narratives in boosting learner morale. Richardson and Khawaja (2025) assert that learner-centred strategies and relatable role models enhance engagement and cognitive perseverance, especially among first-generation learners. The impact of alumni mentors is particularly significant in rural schools, where students often lack exposure to post-secondary opportunities. This aligns with Mr Zikhali's perspective as he emphasises that university students will be of assistance when it comes to Maths and Science winter classes. These stories and lived examples provide not just information but also inspiration, validating learners' dreams in tangible ways.

This form of engagement encourages intellectual stimulation, where learners are challenged to think differently about their own potential and future. Instead of viewing university as a distant and elite goal, it becomes something that people “like them” have already achieved. This perception shift can be pivotal in increasing both motivation and academic performance. As Nhlumayo (2024) observed, transformational leadership in rural school contexts often involves re-framing what is possible for learners by introducing credible and relatable sources of inspiration. Ultimately, aligning alumni engagement and university partnerships with transformational leadership theory enables a more holistic, sustainable, and empowering form of academic support. It moves beyond conventional outreach and fosters a leadership culture that is relational, future-focused, and rooted in contextual realities. The strategic use of alumni and peer mentorship is not only practical but deeply transformational—it cultivates aspiration,

builds confidence and strengthens school-university ecosystems capable of nurturing long-term educational success.

#### **4.3.2 Theme :2 The role of school-university partnership in improving learner success in university**

This theme explores how partnerships between schools and universities can improve student outcomes, particularly in preparing learners for higher education. Two key sub-themes are discussed: the role of parental support and involvement in high school learners' success and the motivational role of universities in inspiring academic success.

##### **4.3.2.1 Sub-theme 1: The role of parental support and involvement in high school learners' success**

Research shows that parental involvement plays a crucial role in learners' academic, social, and emotional development. According to Castro et al. (2015), when parents actively participate in their children's education, learners are more likely to succeed. Jaynes (2018) similarly emphasizes the importance of collaboration between schools and families, noting that effective school leaders recognize the shared responsibility of supporting student achievement. In interviews, educators consistently highlighted a lack of parental support as a barrier to learner success. Mrs. Maphumulo LO teacher from Sukuma High School, stressed that many parents in her community are unfamiliar with university systems and expectations. As a result, they are often unable to guide or support their children effectively in preparing for higher education. She stated:

*“I think parents support would help learners to succeed and access universities because in our area, we have a lot of learners who come from backgrounds of parents that have no idea what happens at university and not supportive” (Mrs Maphumulo – LO Teacher).*

This concern was echoed by Miss Ndlozi from Siyakhula High School, who observed that many learners reach Grade 12 still relying solely on their teachers for university and career guidance. She commented:

*“Most of learners get to grade 12 level still depending on the teacher information only in terms of careers, most of the time, we are being failed by*

*our learners' parents. They are not supportive at all” (Ms Ndlozi – LO Teacher).*

Similarly, Mrs. Zakuza, another LO educator, noted that some learners face the additional challenge of having no parental figures at all, which hinders their academic growth. She stated:

*“There are children who are coming from poor backgrounds, where there are no parents, no support at all, and they are parents to themselves which hinders them from excelling” (Mrs Zakuza-LO educator).*

The participants collectively highlight the pressing concern of limited parental involvement, which they identify as a key factor influencing learners' academic success (Kimwarey et al. 2014).

Several participants, including Mrs. Zakuza and Ms. Ndlozi, expressed concern about the lack of parental support, identifying it as a major barrier to academic success. This aligns with Castro et al. (2015), who found that active parental involvement boosts learner outcomes. Transformational leadership, which seeks to inspire and empower all stakeholders (Bass & Avolio, 2021), support the idea that both parents and educators must be motivated to foster learner achievement. Thus, the absence of parental engagement undermines collaborative efforts vital for learner success and access to university.

#### **4.3.2.2 Sub-theme 2: How universities serve as an inspirational motivation in enhancing learners' success**

Another significant way in which school-university partnerships contribute to learner success is by providing motivation and a sense of purpose. Drawing on Bass's (1985) theory of transformational leadership, this sub-theme focuses on inspirational motivation, which involves encouraging learners to aim higher by aligning personal goals with broader educational aspirations. Participants emphasized that motivational outreach from universities can have a profound impact on learners' academic drive.

Miss Ntoshe, an LO teacher from Siyakhula High School, believes that university-led career presentations offer essential extrinsic motivation, especially for learners from under-resourced backgrounds. She explained:

*“Learners are coming from the backgrounds where there's no motivation, when you are coming here, telling us about what universities offer and university life, a lot of learners will be motivated and start visualising themselves at a university”* (Miss Ntoshe-LO Educator).

Mrs. Maphumulo shared a similar view, stressing that learners often lose motivation due to a lack of external encouragement. She noted that regular interaction with university representatives could encourage students to strive for better results. She said:

*“Learners will do better if they get support, I mean if they get motivation from universities. University presentations might boost learners’ performance as it motivates learners”* (Mrs Maphumulo- LO Educator).

Miss Ndlozi further reinforced this point, stating that exposure to university representatives often inspires learners to take their studies more seriously and think positively about their future. She stated this:

*“I've seen lots of changes from my learners, if there is one representative from the higher education institution, they motivate them in a way that, even though they are not eagerly aware of what they want to do in life, but they can't wait to get to university which makes them excel”* (Miss Ndlozi- LO Educator).

The findings indicate a significant concern among the participants regarding the lack of parental involvement in learners’ academic progress. Participants identified that many parents, particularly in under-resourced communities, are unfamiliar with university systems and therefore unable to effectively support their children's preparation for higher education. This aligns with Castro et al. (2015), who highlight that active parental involvement contributes positively to learners’ academic, emotional, and social development. Similarly, Jaynes (2018) emphasizes the importance of collaboration between schools and families to enhance student outcomes. From the perspective of Transformational Leadership Theory, parents function as informal leaders by setting high expectations, providing encouragement, and helping learners define goals which are the core elements of inspirational motivation. When this role is absent, learners often lack the necessary support to navigate academic challenges and plan for university.

This issue is especially pronounced among students from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, as also noted by Agasist & Soncin (2021) who emphasises the influence of parental encouragement on student resilience and aspiration. Furthermore, the literature underscores the value of involving families in the transition from high school to university. Without such support, learners may struggle with accessing critical information about admissions, financial aid, or academic requirements (Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2011). In this context, universities can play a motivational role. Outreach efforts, such as campus visits or presentations, can help bridge the gap by providing learners with a clearer understanding of university life. This supports Thompson and Ballaera's (2022) view that early and meaningful university engagement can boost enrolment. As Lau, & Zheng (2025). suggest, school-university partnerships grounded in mentorship and goal alignment can significantly influence learners' academic ambitions. When framed within transformational leadership, these partnerships become powerful tools to inspire, support, and ultimately improve learner success in higher education.

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Tensions in Developing and Sustaining School-University Partnerships for Career Guidance**

The development of effective school–university partnerships in the context of career guidance remains fraught with systemic and structural challenges. Key barriers include policy misalignment, lack of funding, and lack of communication across institutional boundaries. These tensions hinder the ability of schools and universities to collaboratively support learners in their transition from basic education to higher education ( Agasist & Soncin (2021) ; Booyse & Le Roux, 2022; Van Broekhuizen, 2016).

##### **4.3.3.1 Sub-theme 1: Policy misalignment between the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)**

One of the most pressing tensions lies in the misalignment between the policies of the DBE and the DHET. Established in 2009, the DHET oversees post-school education in South Africa, including university admissions. However, its admission requirements are often misaligned with DBE's pass criteria for the National Senior Certificate (NSC) (Agasist & Soncin (2021). For instance, while many universities require a minimum achievement level of 50% for admission into undergraduate programs, the DBE allows learners to obtain an NSC with a minimum of 40% in three subjects (including the home language) and 30% in three others

(uMalusi, 2023). This discrepancy has created confusion and limited access to higher education for many learners, despite technically "passing" matric.

This policy gap was clearly articulated by Mr. Zikhali, the principal at Siyakhula High School, who emphasized that the two departments *"are not talking to each other,"* leading to disjointed efforts in preparing learners for post-secondary success. He stated this:

*"Remember that it's two, it's basic education and higher education and training. Obviously, there are certain goals for each of these entities to meet and are not talking to each other"* (Mr Zikhali-principal Siyakhula).

Similar concerns were echoed by LO teachers, such as Miss Ndlozi, who noted that learners often strive only for the DBE's minimum pass levels, unaware that such results may not meet university thresholds. She said:

*"Learners just rely on getting level three, which is pass mark and we tell them that can limit the chances of getting admitted at university as they require 50% as a minimum admission requirement"* (Miss Ndlozi-LO teacher).

Further, Mr. Kunene, the principal at Sukuma High School, highlighted the inconsistency in expectations, stating:

*"Where else in high school pass mark is 30%, it's not going to work, policy needs to be reviewed"* (Mr Kunene-principal Sukuma).

According to LO teacher Miss Ntoshe, this misalignment places pressure not only on the learners but also on higher education institutions that receive students who are underprepared. She observed that students who meet DBE standards may still fail at university, as the expectations under DHET are considerably higher. She stated that:

*"When we give them our output which is learners, who are not well prepared but passed as per DBE pass requirement, it's going to give them a strain also as a university because they will fail, as DHET requirements are above DBE"* (Miss Ntoshe-LO teacher).

The same sentiment is reinforced by another LO teacher Mrs. Zakuza, who stressed that the lack of alignment leaves learners "in the middle," bearing the consequences of two disconnected education systems. She said this:

*“There's a huge gap between DBE and DHET requirements when it comes to pass requirements and admission requirements but the person in the middle is the learner who gets affected”* (Mrs Zakuza-LO teacher).

The qualitative data reveals that educators and school leaders are acutely aware of this policy misalignment which underscores a systemic flaw that reinforces patterns of educational inequality, particularly among students from under-resourced schools (Lau, & Zheng(2025). Mr. Zikhali's assertion that "the two departments are not talking to each other" encapsulates the systemic fragmentation that hinders effective transition planning. Teachers like Miss Ndlozi and Mrs. Zakuza further illuminate how this disjointed policy landscape confuses learners and undermines their readiness for higher education.

This policy gap aligns with the Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly the dimension of idealized influence and intellectual stimulation. Transformational leaders in education must challenge entrenched systems and advocate for policy coherence. By inspiring cross-sector dialogue and encouraging innovation in policy alignment, leaders can build a shared vision that enables smoother learner transitions (Pretorius & Dube,2025) A transformational approach would therefore call for joint strategic planning between DBE and DHET to realign educational objectives and create a more cohesive learner trajectory.

#### **4.3.3.2 Sub-theme 2: Lack of Funding as a hindrance to School-University Partnerships in Career Guidance**

A key factor that limits the success of school-university partnerships in career guidance is the lack of sufficient funding. Financial resources are essential for planning, testing, and expanding educational initiatives. Without adequate funding, many innovative programs are either not fully implemented or are limited to small, local projects. As Coburn and Turner (2008) explain, creating and evaluating new educational practices is often expensive and time-consuming, making it difficult to sustain or scale up effective models. Moreover, collaboration between schools and universities is often weakened by financial constraints. For partnerships to be effective, schools and universities must actively seek funding opportunities together (Pretorius

& Dube, 2025). For instance, LO teachers and school leaders could collaborate with universities to apply for grants or find sponsors for career guidance programs, particularly those involving new technologies like social media platforms. However, this kind of joint effort is rarely seen in practice.

Teachers in the study stressed that funding is one of the biggest challenges. Miss Ndlozi, an LO teacher from Siyakhula High School, pointed out that if universities could help secure funding, it would ease the pressure on schools and benefit learners. She said this:

*“If you guys can get the funders, and then that will fund your learners and then that might make things easier”* (Miss Ndlozi-LO teacher).

While national financial aid programs such as NSFAS exist, they are not enough to support all students, especially in under-resourced communities. Additionally, support from the DBE, such as funding for career exhibitions, has been reduced or discontinued, further limiting learners’ access to career information. This concern is shared by university representatives, as Mr Chetty, a director of stakeholder relations at a university of technology, emphasized that budget constraints at both school and university levels limit the kinds of interventions that can be offered to help learners. He stated this:

*“Intervention that should be happening is limited because of one resource that we are allocated and the fact that even within the department of education is less allocation of funds for this purpose which really is needed for learners to be able to get opportunities at university level”* (Mr Chetty-University Director).

Teachers from other schools expressed similar frustrations. Mrs. Maphumulo from Sukuma High School explained that many learners do not pursue further studies because they cannot afford to, not because they lack academic ability. She also criticized universities for not sharing bursary and sponsorship information with schools. In the same school, Mrs. Zakuza added that more career guidance initiatives are needed, but funding limitations make them impossible. She said this:

*“If more institutions can assist with funding of such initiatives but, unfortunately due to this thing of no budget, it’s impossible” (Mrs Zakuza-LO teacher).*

Inadequate funding emerges as a major structural barrier that significantly limits the ability of schools and universities to establish and maintain effective career guidance partnerships (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2020; Coburn & Turner, 2008; Agasist & Soncin 2021 ). Robust career guidance requires not only committed personnel but also essential infrastructure, including digital platforms, transportation for campus visits, and print-based informational resources (Bezuidenhout, 2018; Reddy et al., 2016). Teachers such as Miss Ndlozi and Mrs. Zakuza have stressed the pressing need for universities to support the identification and acquisition of sustainable funding streams to ensure broader access and continuity. Likewise, university stakeholders like Mr. Chetty acknowledge that financial constraints at both school and university levels limit the scale and impact of outreach interventions (Council on Higher Education, 2016; Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2017).

This mutual recognition points to the importance of collaborative solutions, such as joint grant applications and the formation of public-private partnerships, as critical strategies for enhancing the pool of financial resources (Agasist & Soncin , 2021; Van der Berg et al., 2011; Pretorius & Dube, 2025). The funding challenge directly relates to the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory, particularly the dimensions of inspirational motivation and individualized consideration (Rojak,2024; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). Transformational leaders are expected to inspire stakeholders with a unifying vision while also addressing the distinct needs of various educational communities. By prioritising collective efforts to secure funding and strategically targeting resource allocation to disadvantaged learners, leaders can advance more equitable and sustainable career guidance partnerships (Bush, 2020; Gumede & Biyase, 2016). Such leadership practices not only expand opportunities for learners but also empower educators through shared responsibility and long-term planning.

#### **4.3.3.3 Sub-theme 3: Lack of communication between schools and universities**

Clear and consistent communication is essential for the success of school-university partnerships, especially in the context of career guidance. When communication is effective, information can be shared accurately and on time, enabling both parties to plan, coordinate, and support learners more efficiently. As Kinzie, Buckley,Bridges& Hayek (2011) argue,

regular communication builds trust and collaboration, which are crucial for strong partnerships. However, many LO teachers report that communication with universities is a major challenge. According to Miss Ntoshe, an LO teacher from Siyakhula High School, it is often difficult to reach university staff members or receive timely responses. She noted:

*“It's very difficult to get hold of university staff members, even when you get somebody who works at university we're not allowed to come to Campus”* (Miss Ntoshe-LO teacher).

This quote highlights the lack of direct and open communication between schools and universities. Without proper channels, teachers are unable to access the information they need to guide learners effectively. In addition, Mrs. Maphumulo, an LO teacher at Sukuma High School, stressed that limited communication reduces the ability of teachers to support their learners. She stated:

*“As life orientation teachers we are not given enough information that can help us support learners”* (Mrs Maphumulo-LO teacher).

A third and equally critical barrier is the lack of effective communication channels between schools and universities. According to Pretorius & Dube (2025), communication is foundational to trust and collaboration within educational partnerships. The findings reveal that LO teachers frequently struggle to reach university representatives, leading to delays in obtaining vital career information. As Miss Ntoshe notes, the absence of "direct communication" severely limits their ability to provide accurate guidance. This communication breakdown not only weakens institutional collaboration but also disproportionately affects learners from under-resourced schools who rely heavily on schools for post-secondary information. As Van Schalkwyk and Boughey (2021) argue, structured communication mechanisms such as shared platforms or liaison roles are critical for streamlining partnership efforts.

This challenge highlights the importance of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation within Transformational Leadership Theory. Leaders must recognize the unique needs of both schools and universities and foster open, systematic communication that supports mutual learning and responsive collaboration. By investing in formalized communication infrastructure, such as regular inter-institutional meetings and digital information-sharing tools,

transformational leaders can enhance relational trust and operational synergy across educational sectors.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Affordances in developing and sustaining school-university partnerships regarding career guidance**

School-university partnerships have emerged as a vital mechanism in promoting effective career guidance and enhancing learners' post-school transitions. These partnerships offer a range of affordances that include empowering educators and supporting learners' academic journeys. Drawing from empirical insights and supported by recent scholarship, two major sub-themes emerge: the empowerment of teachers to optimize learners' access to university, and university-led support structures that bolster academic engagement in high schools.

##### **4.3.4.1 Sub-theme 1: Empowering teachers to maximise learners' university access**

Empowerment in educational contexts is broadly defined as the process through which individuals acquire the skills, knowledge, and confidence to influence their professional roles and outcomes (Agasist & Soncin, 2021). Within school-university partnerships, teacher empowerment is a critical strategy for improving career guidance. By enhancing the capacity of LO teachers to relay current information on university access and opportunities, learners are better positioned to make informed post-matric decisions (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001). The qualitative responses of LO teachers highlight this need for continual professional development. For example, Mrs Zakuza, LO teacher at Sukuma High School, emphasized the importance of teacher workshops. She said this:

*“Even if universities don't really workshop the learners because learners, they're coming out every year. Workshopping educators means you're giving them an update year in, year out, and we're able to give it to our grade 12, grade 10, grade 11 learners” (Mrs Zakuza-LO teacher).*

Mrs Zakuza's comments underscore the need for sustained information flow from universities to educators. Similarly, she noted the constraints faced by school-based staff saying this:

*“We are always at school; we don't have that much information. We do need longer time to spend with the representatives from higher education institutions” (Mrs Zakuza-LO teacher).*

These concerns suggest that direct engagement with universities through formalised training sessions can significantly enhance the teachers' advisory role. From the university perspective, Mr Chetty, a university director, echoed these concerns by highlighting existing interventions. He stated this:

*“We have different programmes including the principals and LO teachers’ seminar where we update principals about new programmes, and exciting new projects”* (Mr Chetty-University director).

Empowerment of teachers through school-university partnerships demonstrates the intellectual stimulation and individualized consideration aspects of transformational leadership. LO teachers such as Mrs. Zakuza emphasise the importance of annual, updated workshops, which provide the knowledge needed to guide learners through complex higher education pathways. As she stated, "we're able to give it to our Grade 12, Grade 10, Grade 11 learners," once they are well-informed themselves. Recent literature supports this perspective, Nhlumayo and Chikoko (2022) argue that professional development within partnerships should not only update teachers’ knowledge but also build their capacity to become change agents within schools.

This is aligned with transformational leadership, which seeks to uplift individuals to take ownership of their roles in broader institutional change. Mr. Chetty’s mention of structured seminars for principals and LO teachers illustrate idealized influence, wherein university leaders position themselves as role models fostering educational vision. By creating deliberate spaces for engagement, university actors assume leadership that transcends administrative coordination and moves toward shared transformational goals (Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges & Hayek, 2011). Empirical findings from Raphotle and Letsie (2021) further confirm that when educators are empowered, learners gain access to more accurate and timely information about university entry, thereby reducing barriers to access for historically disadvantaged students. Such empowerment also enhances teacher self-efficacy, a key goal of transformational leadership in education (Pretorius & Dube, 2025).

#### **4.3.4.2 Sub-theme 2: Academic support through university structures**

In addition to teacher empowerment, universities can play a direct role in supporting learners’ academic success through targeted academic interventions. Such engagement includes tutoring

programs, motivational sessions, and learner mentorship during school holidays, which contribute to improved academic outcomes and readiness for tertiary education.

Mr Zikhali, principal of Siyakhula High School, highlighted the effectiveness of winter holiday programs facilitated by university students. He said:

*“The partnership will improve results so that we can have more learners qualifying to meet the standard and requirements by the university”* (Mr Zikhali-Principal Siyakhula).

These initiatives not only supplement classroom teaching but also bring relatable academic role models into learners’ lives. Moreover, LO teacher Miss Ntoshe reinforced the idea of leveraging former learners currently in university as a strategy to motivate and support current students. She stated this:

*“When their peers come to school to help them, they see things differently and performance changes”* (Miss Ntoshe-LO teacher).

The provision of direct academic support by universities such as tutoring by university students and mentoring from alumni represents inspirational motivation and individualized consideration, two pillars of transformational leadership. These interventions foster aspiration and academic readiness among high school learners, particularly those from under-resourced backgrounds. Mr. Zikhali, the principal of Siyakhula High School, attested to the efficacy of these programs: “the partnership will improve results.” His comment reflects the role of school leaders as mediators in transformational partnerships, those who identify opportunity structures and mobilize external support for internal improvement (Lau, & Zheng (2025).

Likewise, Miss Ntoshe’s account of peer-led mentorship through university alumni demonstrates how relatable role models can transform learners’ perceptions of academic success. This is echoed by Van Broekhuizen (2020), who notes that contextually relevant mentorship fosters learners’ belief in their own potential, an outcome that transformational leaders aim to cultivate by setting high expectations and motivating others to exceed them. Recent work by Agasist & Soncin (2021) reinforces the idea that institutional trust and shared values are foundational to effective school-university partnerships. When university structures consistently support academic interventions, they move from transactional to transformational

relationships focusing not just on outputs such as matric results but on long-term learner trajectories and equitable access to post-school opportunities.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the qualitative findings derived from semi-structured interviews with high school principals, LO teachers, and university staff regarding the dynamics of school-university partnerships in career guidance. The data reveals both promising developments and critical gaps in these partnerships, particularly concerning learners' access to and success in higher education. Thematic analysis illuminated that while university outreach initiatives such as campus visits and informational sessions are generally appreciated by school staff, their sporadic and often surface-level nature limits their long-term effectiveness. Educators voiced a clear demand for more sustained, structured and course-specific engagements that equip learners with not just minimum entry requirements, but a deeper understanding of academic pathways and the strategic planning required to access them.

A key insight emerging from this chapter is the variance in perceptions among educators. While some participants acknowledge the positive contributions of universities, other participants highlight deficiencies in the information provided. This divergence points to inconsistencies in how partnerships are implemented across different schools and calls for a more standardized and intentional framework for collaboration. Moreover, the data underscores the critical role of learner agency and institutional support in facilitating successful transitions from secondary to tertiary education. The chapter also highlights the relevance of Transformational Leadership Theory in conceptualizing the role of universities in these partnerships. University actors are not merely passive providers of admission data; rather, they should act as transformational leaders who inspire and empower learners to exceed expectations and view higher education as an attainable and meaningful goal. The next chapter will provide a summary of the study, draw conclusions, and further interpret these findings in relation to existing literature and provide recommendations for strengthening partnership frameworks in the South African education context.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **SUMMARY OF THE STUDY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

The findings of the semi-structured interviews, which were discussed in Chapter Four, were the key findings presented. The interviews were on strategies that schools and universities can engage each other via partnerships to give career counsel to learners before they reach university level. This chapter aims at examining the role of these partnerships in enhancing access to university by learners and their success as they are at the university. It also touches on the difficulties and chances they encounter during the process of building and sustaining such partnerships.

The chapter is a summary of the whole study; it starts with the summary of the previous chapters as of the background of the study, which are a background to interpretation of the findings. I also drew the main conclusions of the findings. The recommendations on future research are then provided in the chapter closing. The chapter also returns to the two important research questions that have been used to conduct the study:

- How do school-university partnerships regarding career guidance improve access and success of learners at university
- What are the tensions and affordances of developing and maintaining school-university partnerships with respect to career guidance?

#### **5.2 Summary of the Study**

This research comprises of five interrelated chapters each of which is meant to cover a given aspect of the research process.

##### **Chapter One: Introduction and Background to the Study**

In chapter one, the background and the research problem have been presented, determining its importance, and putting it in a wider educational context. This is the reason as I opened the book with an introduction and thereafter noted the unsolved issues that militate against effective school-university collaboration especially in career guidance. This was followed by a concise statement of the problem as to how lack of communication, lack of coordination and absence of well-organized assistance systems will not only suffice in preparing a learner for

the world of higher education but in most cases, such learners will predominantly be those of lower economic status.

This study was motivated by my occupation that deals with schools on behalf of a university where I work currently. We tend to arrange the outreaches in the form of Career exhibitions and programs concerning university admission and career planning. I have found the necessity and the possibility of having better institutional partnerships. Such experiences shaped the scope of the research and inspired development of the main research questions. The chapter has been concluded by the purpose, objectives, significance of the study as well as a little preview of the methodology paving way to the subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

This chapter has entailed a detailed literature review of the scholastic literature and comes up with the theoretical perspective that informs the current study. The chapter discussed the literature on International and South African scholarship related to the school-university partnerships, where the emphasis was made to show how collaborations determine the career guidance practice. It discussed the role that organized and purposeful alliances play in ensuring that learners get to make informed career decisions and obtain opportunities to higher education better.

I have also proposed in this chapter that there are tensions that are found between these partnerships like misunderstanding in expectations, communication breakdown, scarcity of resources and policy mismatch that when found form major major setbacks in the partnership. Best practices and differences between countries were drawn by merging comparative insights of international models, which are applied in nations such as in Australia, UK, and United States.

Following this, the chapter has discussed the Transformational Leadership Theory as the theoretical framework to be used in this study. This theory can be especially applicable to the examination of leadership practices of schools and universities which may help to create effective partnerships. I made the case that transformational leadership, which is demarcated by vision-sharing, capacity-building and problem-solving together, can serve as a valuable perspective, through which educators can co-construct effective career guidance programs. Then, I summarised the main ideas, which proved the applicability of the theoretical framework to the aim of this work.

### **Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology**

In this chapter, the research design and methodology are outlined, and this was employed to answer the research questions of the study. This qualitative research was based on an interpretivism paradigm, where a deeper insight into how the participants experienced and perceived was possible. I considered this paradigm to be suitable as it endeavoured to reveal subtle understanding on the process of interpersonal and institutional interactions in school-university partnerships. I also used semi-structured forms of interviews as the main data generating method that made the responses of the participants flexible and deep.

The sampling strategies employed (purposive sampling of the key participants which were the school principals, career guidance teachers and university liaison officers who had direct contact with the partnership activities) were also explained in the chapter. To analyse data, I adopted the method of thematic analysis in this research during which I also described the themes which were inductively derived through data. I described the procedure of coding, categorisation and interpretation making every step in line with the goals of the study. Furthermore, chapter discussed factors of trustworthiness credibility including transferability, dependability and confirmability which was justified by Morrison (2022) and Cresswell et al., (2018). I also explained the ethical considerations in this chapter including informed consent, confidentiality, and data protection in detail. The chapter ended with these limitations which include the availability of participants, possible researcher bias and the contextual impediments.

### **Chapter Four: Presentation and Discussion of Findings**

This chapter introduced and explained the most interesting findings that were drawn in the process of examination of the semi-structured interviews. I started by overviewing the data, and after that, I presented the results in a theme manner. I also investigated how school-university partnerships are being undertaken and just how much they were translating to the learner readiness as far as entering higher education.

The research conducted indicated that well organized working relationships marked with organized career guidance programs, alumni and university interaction positively affected access and knowledge of university amongst learners. An example that can be given is the learners that are enrolled in mentorship programs organized by the university and visited the campuses once where they showed more apparent confidence and defined career goals.

Nonetheless, also crucial challenging issues have been addressed in this chapter. These were based on the findings and comprised of inability to communicate across institutions, absence of common strategic vision and misfit between university requirements on entry and school programs. The results also indicated that certain schools could not afford to sustain long term union, and the universities usually find it difficult to effectively connect with all schools within its region. A point that was submitted by the participants was also the participation of the alumni of the schools in their career guidance programs to avail role models whom learners can relate to. I also pointed out that there is the necessity of policy alignment and financial support systems especially to those high-achieving learners who come through from economically impoverished backgrounds. These results are the real foundation of such conclusions and recommendations, which are presented in this chapter.

### **5.3 My Reflections on Doing This Study**

The given experience of the research has proved to be educational and rewarding in intellectual growth and experience, presenting both challenges and valuable lessons. The consideration of the theoretical, contextual, and methodological outcome of the research has been able to point out the challenges of a school-university partnership in the South African education system.

**Theoretically**, partnership highlights the importance of aligning goals and resources to create effective collaborations, this is echoed by Jones et al. (2016) who share the same sentiment. In this context, high school principals play a crucial role by facilitating the involvement of universities in guiding students through career choices. I could learn to think about partnerships as not just formal understanding, once-offs, but as evolving relationships, captioned with common vision, mutual trust, and constant dialogue. This image helped me to look critically at the data and go beyond mere perception to see how the exercise of power and patterns of communication and varying priorities on the part of institutions contribute to the durability and success or failure of these unions. I was able to agree with Pulido-Gomez et al. (2025) who indicate that having well-established partnership aims, and effective lines of communication are essential to the success of a partnership. Besides, that theoretical framework made me observant of the fact that partnerships do not remain constant and need constant negotiation, flexibility, and reaction to changing environments. This lesson is especially vital in academic environments where the issues of inequality in the system and educational resource limits appear to be critical.

**Contextually**, conducting this research within South African education system enabled me to have a clear understanding of very high social and economic obstacles that beset the way our learners are leading their lives and the opportunities they are having in life. According to Nabi et al. most of the learners in poor communities have limited resources (2025). Poverty, lack of proper access to information, and a need to care about other family members are some of the things that make it significantly harder to plan and go to the university. Most learners in the country that are sitting at home are the learners, who particularly, come from the rural setting, and mostly they are orphans. This brought to my attention the necessity that the school-university partnerships need to strive to comprehend the real-life conditions of learners they tend to serve. Due to this, these partnerships cannot approach every school or learner with uniformity, which is requiring them to be dynamic and unique to the issues and requirements of the community.

This knowledge motivated me to take a better look at the idea of how such collaborations need to be performed. They ought not to be merely a matter of scoring brownie points or towing the line, but they should become a matter of ensuring that fairness may be facilitated by enabling all learners, and particularly, the financially disadvantaged learners to gain access to career advice and access to the university. These contemplations relate to the statements made by other scholars regarding the necessity to establish partnerships in the field of education in South Africa to alleviate the injustice that I assume is still present due to the history of our nation (Abdul et al., 2023; Salvo-Garrido, 2024).

Regarding **methodological perspective**, the adoption of a qualitative methodology consisting of semi-structured interviews assisted me in developing a profound and comprehensive comprehension of the manner and way in which participants encounter and observe school-university alliances. That method provided me with needed flexibility and room to pursue new ideas and unforeseen areas arising during the conversation, which the stricter methods such as surveys or statistics could not have revealed. Simultaneously, this type of research at schools was not easy to conduct since sometimes the establishment of interview was problematic due to the tight schedules of the participants which were working individuals with many demands and the issue that took much time and energy to build the trust to have open and free talks. Since Creswell and Poth (2018) caution against the dire need to exercise patience, on the one hand, and show respect and ethical sensitivity during the research conducted with a human subject on the other hand. I also remembered the need to be patient, respectful and sensitive to people whenever conducting studies on people through these challenges.

Despite these challenges, the semi-structured interviews proved to be so useful. They assisted in unearthing the perplexing lives of the various individuals within these alliances not to mention the issues and their strengths. They sounded legitimate and the voices gave the study more depth. It has assisted me to become aware of the need to have all these elements interact; that theory, reality and research techniques must complement each other when undertaking educational research. It also demonstrated the necessity to employ the flexible and responsive approach, which would enable participants to share their experiences.

This study has helped me learn that school-university partnership requires more than formal deals; it requires dedication, locally appropriate strategies, and approaches that involve everyone and involve the voice of learners. I am much more inclined now to observe how reflective research may not only contribute to the scholarly discourse but also contribute to better career counselling and university placement among the youth in uneven contexts.

#### **5.4 Conclusions drawn from the findings**

The following conclusions are drawn based on the findings of the data and the literature in the process of providing a synthesis of the information.

- **Research Question 1:** How do school-university partnerships regarding career guidance improve access and success of learners at university.

Findings of the study showed that the forming and sustaining of school-university partnerships requires both schools and universities to jointly create programs that will assist learners through university alumni such as workshops. It is evident from this study that high school learners need motivation and external stakeholders' assistance with academic activities. Although these extra classes or academic activities may result in cognitive preparedness, they may also induce socio-emotional resiliency as evinced by different recent research studies that are affirmative of the fact that, it is indeed a major indicator to student maintenance and achievement. Another learning was the emphasis by life orientation teachers that the early support together with structured programs greatly enhances the learner's readiness to university. Teachers stated that career guidance programs must begin as early as in grade nine because that lessens the pressure, this is in line with the study conducted by (Evans et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2025). School principals mentioned that campus tours could be one of the activities that may maximise opportunities for learners to access the university and this is affirmed by Patel et al. (2024) and Van Broekhuizen et al. (2017), who argue that the disclosure of information contributes to the informed decisions and the reduction of barriers to access as

it is reflected in this study, and it also aligns with the study conducted by Evans et al. 2024 that schools and universities can be interpreted as a critical role of school-university partnership regarding early intervention in career guidance by providing learners with the inevitable knowledge about the university programs, admissions, and career ways. It is hoped that this targeted early support will enable the learners to make informed choices in which their anxiety about transition is lesser and their academic readiness improves. This corroborates with the finding by Mocho et al. (2025) which opines that career advice that is timely and relevant increases learner confidence and prepares them to enter universities.

**Research Question 2:** What are the tensions and affordances of developing and maintaining school-university partnerships with respect to career guidance?

The findings of the current study showed that strong communication and shared goals lead to more effective partnership as it has been stated by school principals and Life Orientation teachers. This aligns with the findings by Smith et al., (2022) arguing that effective communication is a cornerstone of successful school-university partnerships. Establishing strong communication channels ensures that information is shared promptly and accurately between the two institutions. Open communication and mutual problem-solving became the key principles of the consistent cooperation leading to smooth collaboration (Sylvia et al., 2015; Patel et al., 2024). In addition, university personnel stated that funding and limited resources could be the reason these institutions are failing to sustain the partnership. Corbun & Turner (2008) support this view by arguing that insufficient funding is a primary reason for these failures, as developing and evaluating innovative practices is both slow and costly. Resource sharing among partners as mentioned in this study will be improved through utilising support of an external stakeholders as well. The resource constraints that also limit purposeful partnership practices is also evident in the literature of education collaboration (Evans et al., 2024).

Notwithstanding these problems, the research identified several problematic factors or affordances, which favour partnership sustainability. Trust and respect became the key principles of consistent cooperation leading the partners to smooth over the obstacles due to the open communication and mutual problem-solving (Sylvia et al., 2015; Patel et al., 2024). Key learning in this study is that partnerships are done through resource sharing that incorporates career counselling skills, community involvement and access to university facilities and information materials that strengthens both sides (Nguyen et al, 2024).

Hynes et al. (2024) emphasise that effective partnerships involve strategic approaches crafted with awareness of the situation and are typified by constant interaction, adaptivity and a common vision that is focused on the outcomes of learners. Following, his analysis indicates the transient nature of a partnership which requires concerted work and sensitivity towards socio-economic and cultural environments in order to flourish.

## **5.5 Recommendations**

In accordance with the findings from the study, and in accordance with the two research questions serving as the guide to this research work, the below mentioned recommendations can be offered to develop the effectiveness and sustainability of career guidance within the frames of school-university partnerships.

### **1. Establish a Formalised Career Guidance Programme**

There must be genuine engagement between the schools and universities, looking to create formal career guidance programs and programmes that involve combined workshops, mentoring plans, and learning experiences in the form of visits to the campus, and extra classes at the universities. The results played special emphasis that the early support together with structured assistance greatly enhances the student's readiness to college, lessens the pressure besides raising the degree of scholastic achievement. This suggestion is consistent with the results of Evans et al., 2024 and Nguyen et al., 2025 who highlight the effectiveness of the early approaches to implementing career guidance interventions on marginalised and underprepared students. In my research, I would suggest that such programs should be made competent enough to reach the influx of the various socio-economic conditions and the cultural backgrounds of students.

### **2. Develop Accessible and Tailored Information Resources**

To remedy this situation, universities ought to invest in the development of easily navigable and user-friendly and culturally inclusive information and resources personalised to fit the requirements set by various learners with special attention on the disadvantaged learners and schools. Such resources can be (but are not confined to) digital resources, brochures, and interactive tools, which define university admissions and career pathways in a clear way. The due disclosure of this information contributes to the informed decision and the reduction of barriers to access as it is reflected in this study and affirmed by Patel et al. (2024) and Van

Broekhuizen et al. (2017). In accessibility, one should focus on language, literacy levels, and accessibility to technology to ensure maximum reach and access.

### **3. Enhance Communication through Regular, Structured Channels**

To minimise the problems caused by the lack of compatibility of goals and challenges to effective communication, universities and schools must develop the rule-bound and frequent communication system. I would advise that they embody joint policy committees, regularly planned management meetings and partnering digital platforms serving as specific areas that focus on improvement of partnership and constant feedback. A study conducted by Yin et al. (2016) and Lee (2025) helps one realize that regular and open conversation leads to developing trust and a sense of accountability which is the key towards the endurance and success of the partnership.

### **4. Pursue External Funding and Community Partnerships**

To cover the situation of unavailability of resources, it is quite crucial to take active steps to find resources outside like grants, sponsorships, and government support to build community partnership. Wider networks may offer financial, material, and human resources that are required to maintain and augment career guidance programs of individual schools and the department of education. Evans et al. (2024) also emphasise the importance of various sources of funding and community engagement to deal with capacity limitations in educational partnerships and collaborations, which makes this suggestion consistent with the works of the authors in question. A resource sharing among partners as mentioned in this study will be improved through utilising support of an external stakeholder.

## **5.6 Conclusion**

The chapter has offered a more detailed account of the whole study reflecting upon the process of the research and conclusions that could be made based on the findings emanating from the semi-structured interviews. The chapter ended with the evidence-guided proposals to promote school-university alliances in career guidance in the process to facilitate the access and success of learners to the university.

The findings report the essentiality of early and substantial cooperation of the school and university and suggestions to outline the informed introduction of learners to higher education. The handling of the tensions in the partnership especially through sound and structured

communication emerged as the determining factor of sustainability. Moreover, the external funding and collaboration in search of resources as well as collaboration in gaining funds was emphasised to be essential in the process of coping with social-economic and organisational barriers. In my opinion, the research will bring important knowledge on the way in which educational partnerships can be put together and cultivated to come up with improved access and performance of the learners. The findings and suggestions provide viable insight to policymakers, teachers, and university officials on how to enhance career counselling systems as well as institute sustainable liaisons in both South African and the wider educational environments.

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## Appendix A



15 November 2024

**Sthembile Tracy Ndlovu (223128230)**  
School of Education  
Edgewood Campus

Dear ST Ndlovu,

**Protocol reference number:** HSSREC/00007613/2024

**Project title:** School-university partnerships: A case study of a university of technology and two high schools regarding career guidance

**Degree:** Masters

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

This letter serves to notify you that your application received on 06 September 2024 in connection with the above, was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee (HSSREC) and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

**Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.**

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

**Incidents of adverse events and serious adverse events (AEs and SAEs) should be reported in writing to HSSREC, the study sponsors, and any regulatory authority (where appropriate), within 7 working days of the occurrence for local sites and 14 days for all other South African sites.**

This approval is valid until 15 November 2025.

To ensure uninterrupted approval of this study beyond the approval expiry date, a progress report must be submitted to the Research Office on the appropriate form 2 - 3 months before the expiry date. A close-out report to be submitted when study is finished.

HSSREC is registered with the South African National Health Research Ethics Council (REC-040414-040).

Yours sincerely,



Professor Dipane Hlalele (Chair)  
/nng

#### Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

**Postal Address:** Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa

**Telephone:** +27 (0)31 260 8350/4557/3587 **Email:** hssrec@ukzn.ac.za **Website:** <http://research.ukzn.ac.za/Research-Ethics>

Founding Campuses:  Edgewood  Howard College  Medical School  Pietermaritzburg  Westville

**INSPIRING GREATNESS**

## Appendix B



**KWAZULU-NATAL PROVINCE**

EDUCATION  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

### OFFICE OF THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

Private Bag X 9137, PIETERMARITZBURG, 3200

Ref No.: 2/4/8/175

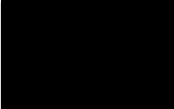
Anton Lembede Building, 247 Burger Street, Pietermaritzburg, 3201

Email: buyi.ntuli@kzndoe.gov.za

Tel: 033 392 1051

Enquiries: Mrs B. T. Ntuli

Ms Sthembile Tracy Ndlovu



Dear Ms Ndlovu

#### PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THE KZN DoE INSTITUTIONS

Your application to conduct research entitled: **"SCHOOL – UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS: A CASE OF TWO HIGH SCHOOLS AND A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY REGARDING CARCEER GUIDANCE:"**, in the KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education institutions has been approved. The conditions of the approval are as follows:

1. The researcher will make all the arrangements concerning the research and interviews.
2. The researcher must ensure that Educator and learning programmes are not interrupted.
3. Interviews are not conducted during the time of writing examinations in schools.
4. Learners, Educators, Schools and Institutions are not identifiable in any way from the results of the research.
5. A copy of this letter is submitted to District Managers, Principals and Heads of Institutions where the Intended research and interviews are to be conducted.
6. The period of investigation is limited to the period from **29<sup>th</sup> April 2024** to **31<sup>st</sup> August 2026**.
7. Your research and interviews will be limited to the schools you have proposed and approved by the Head of Department. Please note that Principals, Educators, Departmental Officials and Learners are under no obligation to participate or assist you in your investigation.
8. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey at the school(s), please contact Mrs Buyi Ntuli at the contact numbers above.
9. Upon completion of the research, a brief summary of the findings, recommendations or a full report/dissertation/thesis must be submitted to the research office of the Department. Please address it to The Office of the HOD, Private Bag X9137, Pietermaritzburg, 3200.
10. Please note that your research and interviews will be limited to schools and institutions in KwaZulu-Natal Department of Education.



Mr G.N. Ngcobo

Head of Department: Education

Date: 29<sup>th</sup> April 2024

**GROWING KWAZULU-NATAL TOGETHER**

## Appendix C

12 August 2024

REF: RD1/16/2024

Ms Sthembile Tracy Ndlovu  
Marketing and Communications

**PROTOCOL: 'School-University partnerships: A case study of a University of Technology and two High Schools regarding career guidance.'**

ch Ethics Committee considered your application at their 19 July 2024. It is my pleasure to inform you that permission for the research project above was granted.

The approval is valid for two years from 29 July 2024. Any changes to the project must immediately be brought to the attention of the MUT Research Ethics Committee.

Your acceptance of this approval denotes your compliance with South African National Research Ethics guidelines (2004) and the MUT Research Ethics Policy, Procedures and Guidelines

Good luck with your research.

Yours sincerely, [REDACTED]

## Appendix D

### Request for permission to conduct research at your school



12 March 2024

The principal

Umlazi District

Dear Sir

#### **REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT YOUR SCHOOL**

My name is **Sthembile Tracy Ndlovu (student no. 223128230)**. I am a master's student enrolled in the faculty of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Edgewood campus). I am required to conduct research as partial fulfilment of the requirements of this degree. I therefore kindly seek your permission to conduct research in your school. The title of my study is: **School-university partnerships: A case of a University of Technology and two High Schools regarding career guidance.**

This study will focus on how the school-university partnership can improve learners' quality through career guidance and prepare learners for university through career guidance and other university projects. Study will consist of school principal as the leader of the school and two life orientation teachers. Furthermore, the study will look at how university can assist to enhance learners' pre-university information and university readiness for access.

The study entails interviewing school principal and two life orientation teachers. The interview questions will be semi-structured to allow some flexibility and the entire interview process will be approximately 30-60 minutes in length.

## Appendix E

### UKZN HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (HSSREC)

#### APPLICATION FOR ETHICS APPROVAL For research with human participants

#### INFORMED CONSENT RESOURCE TEMPLATE

Note to researchers: Notwithstanding the need for scientific and legal accuracy, every effort should be made to produce a consent document that is as linguistically clear and simple as possible, without omitting important details as outlined below. Certified translated versions will be required once the original version is approved.

There are specific circumstances where witnessed verbal consent might be acceptable, and circumstances where individual informed consent may be waived by HSSREC.

#### Information Sheet and Consent to Participate in Research

Date: 03 October 2024

Greeting: Prospective participant

My name is Sthembile Tracy Ndlovu the University of KwaZulu Natal Department of Education. My contact details..... and email address.....

You are being invited to consider participating in a study that involves research in School-university partnerships - A case study of a University of Technology and two high schools regarding career guidance. The aim and purpose of this research is to improve school-university partnerships and enhance learners' quality and academic results for university access. The study is expected to enroll eight participants in total, made up of two school principals from different schools and four life orientation teachers from these two schools. It will also involve two University of Technology staff members. These institutions are in the same district. It will involve the following procedures interviews that involves recording and observation. The duration of your participation if you choose to enroll and remain in the study is expected to be two months.

There are no risks involved as the study will use pseudonyms for both institutions involved as well as participants. The study has no direct benefits to participants.

This study will be submitted to the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee for approval.

In the event of any problems or concerns/questions you may contact the researcher at .....or the UKZN Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee, contact details as follows:

#### HUMANITIES & SOCIAL SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS ADMINISTRATION

## Appendix F

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

**Proposed Time:** 30-60 minutes

**TITLE:** School-university partnerships: A case study of a University of Technology and two high schools regarding career guidance

#### **1. Biographical information**

- 1.1. Age:
- 1.2. Educational qualifications:
- 1.3. Work experience (number of years as school principal)
- 1.4. When did you become a School principal

#### **2. How do school -university partnership regarding career guidance improve access and success of learners at the university?**

- 2.1. As the school leader (Principal) from your own experience and observation, do you think partnering with universities as a school in programmes like career guidance contributes to learners' success? Please explain in detail.
- 2.2. Please explain the relationship that your school has with the local university of technology. Do you interact with university staff members to assist your learners? Please elaborate. As far as you know, do learners cooperate?
- 2.3. Please explain the level at which your learners access the local universities of technology. If no, what you think needs to be done or that you see as shortcoming?
- 2.4. From your own view, how can both schools and universities of technology enhance their partnership? to make it work for learners post matric?

#### **3. Tensions and affordances of developing and sustaining school-university partnership regarding career guidance**

- 3.1. Since you are a school leader, please elaborate the challenges that characterise the partnership between the high schools and the local universities of technology.
- 3.2. Please give more about the challenges that limit the partnership from being effective.
- 3.3. Kindly explain your plan that you believe will ensure that learners benefit during matric and when they have enrolled at the university of technology.

## I SCHOOL

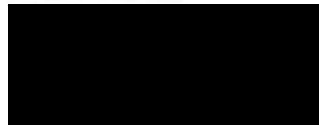
KZN Government  
Department of  
Education



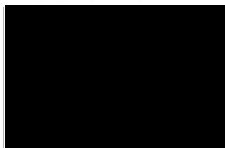
H 8 Umlazi Township  
P.O. Box 54879  
Umlazi, 4031  
TeleFax: (031) 907 4351  
Email:  
iail.com



Permission letter from the school principal



Mrs S.T Ndlovu



Dear Sir / Madam

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT  
SCHOOL**

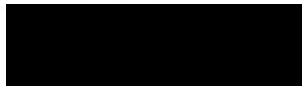
**HIGH**

The above-mentioned school hereby gives you permission to conduct research titled:  
**School- University Partnership: A case of a University of Technology and two High  
Schools regarding career guidance.**

Kindly be informed that the school will cooperate and make all necessary arrangement to  
accommodate your exercise.

We are looking forward to your innovations and exper

Yours in Education



School Principal



4031, 4031

TEL: 031 907 4351

## Appendix H

RD: 115

3549

0724

00.0000

Mrs S.T Ndlovu

Dear Sir

**RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT SECONDARY SCHOOL**

The above mentioned school hereby gives you permission to conduct research titled:  
School University Partnership: University of Technology and two High Schools regarding career guidance.

Kindly be informed that the school will cooperate and make all necessary arrangements to accommodate your exercise.

We are looking forward to your innovations and expertise

Yours in education

/ School Principal

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
RY SCHOOL  
CIPAL  
-03- 1 2  
ship, 4031  
8  
it@gmail.com

## Appendix I

1/25, 7:16 PM

Turnitin - Originality Report - Dissertation Draft 6

## Turnitin Originality Report

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Word Count: 32586  
Submitted: 6

Dissertation Draft 6 By Sthembile Ndlovu

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## Appendix J

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
KLOOF  
3610

Phone 031 – 7075912  
[REDACTED]  
Fax 031 - 7110458  
E-mail:  
dr1govender@telkomsa.net  
[REDACTED]

**Dr Saths Govender**

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6 OCTOBER 2025

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

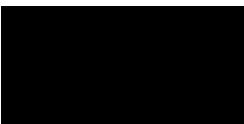
### LANGUAGE CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

This serves to inform that I have read the final version of the dissertation titled:

**School-university partnerships: A case study of  
a University of Technology and two high schools  
regarding career guidance**, by Sthembile Ndlovu, student  
number: 223128230.

To the best of my knowledge, all the proposed amendments have been effected and the work is free of spelling and grammatical errors. I am of the view that the quality of language used meets generally accepted academic standards.

Yours faithfully



**DR S. GOVENDER**  
B Paed. (Arts), B.A. (Hons), B Ed.  
Cambridge Certificate for English Medium Teachers  
MPA, D. Admin.(2003)