Reviewing Retailing curricula: The role of higher education institutions and industry

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Reviewing Retailing curricula: The role of higher education institutions and industry

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report investigates the alignment between curricula offered by South African higher education institutions (HEIs) and the requirements of the retailing sector. The study's primary aim was to assess retailing curricula and the roles of HEIs and industry in curricula development. The research consisted of two phases: the first phase sought to identify the alignment between existing curricula and the sector's needs through secondary data analysis, while the second phase proposed strategies to align curricula with industry requirements.

In the first phase, a content analysis of curricula and qualifications frameworks offered by HEIs in the retail sector unveiled gaps and areas lacking alignment with industry needs. These included a lack of accessible information on retail-related qualifications, unclear perceptions of the value of qualifications, uncertainty about knowledge and skills alignment, varying entry requirements, and limited understanding of Work-Integrated Learning (WIL). These constraints were identified as significant obstacles to curriculum alignment with the dynamic retail industry.

In the second phase, 90 minute, semi-structured online interviews were conducted with three retail industry professionals and three academics. The findings suggested several key strategies to address these challenges; (1) HEIs should engage more actively and collaboratively with industry partners to ensure curricula remain relevant and up-to-date, (2) Modernizing assessment methods to better measure students' preparedness for the evolving retail industry is crucial, (3) Establish mechanisms, standards, and support systems for Work-Integrated Learning, including monitoring and evaluation to enhance the quality of these programs, and (4) Adopting holistic entry criteria and providing support for graduates transitioning into the workforce, such as career counseling, job placement services, and mentorship, is recommended.

In conclusion, fostering collaboration between HEIs and the retail sector has the potential to positively impact students, the retail industry, and South Africa's employment landscape. It is a crucial step towards producing well-prepared graduates who can contribute to the success and sustainability of the retailing sector while addressing the nation's pressing unemployment challenges.

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The retail sector is the third-largest sector of the South African economy (KPMG, n.d.) and the second-largest employer after government (Teuteberg, 2021). Despite its significant contribution to the South African economy, a number of skills gaps have been identified, including stock management, buying, data management, analytics to inform business intelligence, and compliance with legal requirements, which suggests a need for youth to upskill themselves in this sector (Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority [W&R SETA], 2020). Many youths perceive completing a qualification at a higher education institution (HEI) as the most effective way to upskill themselves in their field of interest. Despite the perceptions regarding HEIs and upskilling themselves, Nzimande (2023) predicted that the number of first-time university enrolments would reach 208 299 nationwide in the 2023 academic year. This figure accounts for only 44.02% of the total number of students who obtained a bachelor pass and a diploma pass in matric in 2022 (i.e., 473 171). This projection suggests a concern of low absorption rates for matriculants seeking admission to HEIs.

To address the challenge of low absorption rates and improve students' access to higher education opportunities, it is essential to examine the curriculum alignment between the current offerings and HEIs, particularly regarding the needs of the retail industry. The *W&R SETA Sector Skills Plan (SSP) 2020-2025* by the W&R SETA (2020:72) highlighted the need to partner with HEIs to develop a curriculum "aligned to sector labour market demands", while the W&R SETA research report on learning programmes by Meyer and Van Dyk (2022:18) emphasised the development of "up-to-date curricula and training programmes to equip employees with knowledge and skills for agility in the fast-changing W&R sector". These reports proved that alignment between curricula and sector skills was indeed an issue. By evaluating curricula's compatibility with industry requirements, we can ensure that the qualifications offered provide relevant knowledge and skills to students seeking opportunities in the retail sector. This alignment is crucial, especially considering South Africa's high unemployment rate, which stood at 32.7% in the final quarter of 2022 (Statistics South Africa, 2023). Therefore, this report aims to assess the extent to which the current curricula align with the demands of the retail industry and identify any gaps or areas for improvement.

This report analyses retail qualifications offered by HEIs and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges in South Africa to examine the extent of curricula alignment. HEIs and TVET colleges are part of the country's Post-School Education and Training (PSET) institutions. In its Post-School Education and Training Information Policy, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET; 2019:6) defined PSET institutions as "education and training institutions that have been established, declared or registered by any law assigned to the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology". PSET institutions encompass public HEIs, private HEIs, TVET colleges, private colleges, Community Education and Training (CET) colleges, and skills development providers (DHET, 2021). This report primarily focuses on public HEIs and TVET colleges, which offer a broader selection of retail qualifications, compared to private institutions. Additionally, they are more accessible to a wider population due to their affordability and presence in various regions across the country.

The DHET (2019) defined a public HEI as any HEI that is set up, deemed to be established, converted or declared a public HEI under the Higher Education Act of the Republic of South Africa. There are 26 public HEIs divided into traditional universities, comprehensive universities, and universities of technology (DHET, 2021). Throughout this report, public HEIs are referred to as "HEIs". Contrastingly, TVET colleges focus on vocational and occupational education and training to prepare students to become functional workers in a skilled trade (Western Cape Government, 2023). There are 50 TVET colleges in South Africa (DHET, 2021). Several types of retail courses are offered within these HEIs and TVET colleges, which are analysed in this report. The retail-related qualifications range from short online courses, certificates, diplomas, and advanced diplomas to degrees.

The report is divided into two phases: phase 1 is a preliminary desktop analysis and review of existing retail qualification curricula; and phase 2 is an empirical study conducted to further explore curricula alignment among HEIs. To conduct phase 1, an inductive content analysis (ICA) of secondary data available on institutional websites and curriculum books requested from HEIs and TVET colleges was conducted to draw insights into retail courses, entry requirements, National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels, and work/industry placement. Phase 1's aim is to present the findings from the content analysis and provide preliminary review and insight into curricula alignment. The findings from the content

analysis are further explored via an empirical study in phase 2 through semi-structured, in-depth interviews. As such, clarity on the main aim of this study is presented in section 2.

2. AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was derived from a number of deliverables provided by the W&R SETA, including the:

- Analysis of the retailing sector curricula content (framework of qualifications);
- Identification of limitations/constraints provided by current curricula review and development processes;
- Assessment of the role of the training providers (TVET, CET, and private/public training providers) with industry; and
- Analysis of the industry's role in curricula development and review.

Thus, the aim of this report is to review retailing curricula and the role HEIs and industry play in curricula development. To help achieve the main aim of the study, the following primary research objectives were developed, which guided phases 1 and 2:

- To identify the degree of alignment between existing curricula at HEIs offering retail-related courses and the sector's needs; and
- To align the curricula to best address the requirements in the industry.

3. METHODOLOGY FOR PHASE 1 – CONTENT ANALYSIS

This study employed ICA as a methodology for secondary data analysis. According to Kyngäs (2020), ICA is used when the data collection process is open-ended and guided by loosely defined themes. The use of this method was deemed most appropriate for this study due to the absence of previous research coverage and the fragmented nature of existing knowledge in analysing retail-related curricula. The distinguishing characteristic of ICA lies in its approach of building the analysis from a thorough examination of the texts, rather than conducting a search within the text for a predetermined set of content elements (Vears & Gillam, 2022). Another distinctive feature of this method is its use and emphasis of iterative coding. Iterative coding entails the development of codes for data labelling during the coding process itself, drawing directly from the content of the dataset (Vears & Gillam, 2022). This

content analysis procedure involved five important steps, as guided by Vears and Gillam (2022), which are outlined below.

- *Step 1* – reading and getting familiarised with the text: To comprehensively analyse the curricula books and the information from the websites of HEIs, the first step involved thoroughly reading and becoming familiar with the text. This step was particularly important because the data were collected from a variety of sources. Delving into the texts helped to gain a holistic understanding of the content.

- *Step 2* – first round of coding: In the first coding step, the data were categorised into the "big picture". This categorisation was done according to broad and relevant categories, such as the various types of HEIs, including traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities.

- *Step 3* – second round of coding: In this step, the previously identified categories were explored in greater depth. The text was examined within each category in more detail to capture the main ideas and meanings in each section while ensuring contextual relevance. Specific sub-categories were identified, including NQF level, entry requirements, qualification purpose, outcomes, syllabi (modules), industry/work placement availability, and industry projects.

- *Step 4* – refining the fine-grained sub-categories: In this step, a comparison and refinement process took place. Similar sub-categories were assessed and, if appropriate, merged into a single category. Stand-alone sub-categories were retained if they represented distinct content. This procedure was employed to check on the duplications, if any, before analysis and synthesis. Where data from the same qualifications was identified, duplicates were deleted.

- *Step 5* – synthesis and interpretation: Interpretation of the data was a critical step in the analysis process. Unlike thematic analysis, the focus in ICA was on producing a comprehensive and relevant interpretation aligned with the main aim and the specific context of curriculum books in HEIs and TVET colleges. This process connected the categories identified in the previous steps to construct a narrative that provided a foundation for the empirical investigated in phase 2.

Phase 1 of the study focused on 76 institutions, comprising 26 HEIs and 50 TVET colleges. The results are presented separately for these two types of institutions. To understand the

course/qualification content, content from HEIs websites and faculty books was analysed. This content pertained to retail-related qualifications offered, NQF level, entry requirements, qualification purpose, outcomes, syllabi (modules), industry/work placement availability, and industry projects, where applicable. The findings of the content analysis are presented next.

4. FINDINGS ON HEIs FROM CONTENT ANALYSIS

The findings on HEIs were based on various sub-categories, including NQF level, entry requirements, qualification purpose, outcomes, syllabi (modules), industry/work placement availability, and industry projects. To gain a better understanding of each of these sub-categories, refer to Annexure A. The findings presented in this section relate to the three categories of HEIs, including traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities.

4.1. FINDINGS ON TRADITIONAL UNIVERSITIES

Traditional universities are universities that offer theoretically orientated university qualifications (Kongolo & Imenda, 2012). Theoretically orientated qualifications focus on theoretical and academic knowledge over practical or vocational training. Traditional universities in South Africa include (DHET, 2023):

- Rhodes University;
- Sefako Makgatho Health Sciences University;
- Stellenbosch University (SU);
- University of Cape Town;
- University of Fort Hare;
- University of Free State;
- University of KwaZulu-Natal;
- University of Limpopo;
- University of North-West;
- University of Pretoria;
- University of Western Cape; and
- University of the Witwatersrand (Wits).

The findings from traditional HEIs are presented in subsections 4.1.1 to 4.1.3 and include an overview, qualification purpose and outcomes, NQF level, entry requirements, and prerequisites. Generally, this analysis would also have included work placement/industry projects, but this could not be established at the traditional universities reviewed.

4.1.1. Overview of traditional universities offering retail-related qualifications

Of the 12 traditional universities, information on retail-related qualifications could only be obtained from two university websites, namely Wits and SU. Information regarding retail-related qualifications at most other institutions was not publicly available and they were therefore excluded from this analysis.

Table 1 compares the qualifications, modules, NQF level, prerequisite(s) and the module purpose and outcomes of the retail-related qualifications offered by Wits and SU. It is important to note that these institutions offer retailing modules within a qualification and not as a separate qualification.

Table 1: Overview of traditional universities offering retail-related qualifications

Name of Institution	Qualification the module falls under	Module	NQF level	Prerequisite	Module purpose and outcomes
SU	Omnichannel Retail Marketing	Marketing 314	7	Marketing 214	This module aims to introduce students to various key aspects of retailing in both physical stores and cyber environments through an omnichannel approach. Marketing 214 is a prerequisite module for Marketing 314. This module framework contains important information regarding the module's format, content, assessments, and administration. The module framework is a document that is regarded as an agreement between a lecturer and a student. After the successful completion of this module, students will be able to: • Apply in-depth knowledge of the key aspects of retail in the current omnichannel retail environment internationally and in South Africa; • Critically analyse current retail strategies and advise on future omnichannel strategies; • Advise retailers on managing the retail mix using an omnichannel approach; • Possess sufficient knowledge to strategically manage retail outlets within an omnichannel environment; and • Understand the role and potential of technology in retail.
Wits	BCom Marketing	Retail Management	6	N/A	This module aims to equip students with a sound fundamental knowledge base and skills regarding retail management. This course aims to equip first-line managers with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their management role within the retail environment.
Wits	Retail Management	N/A	N/A	This is an online course – matric passes and anyone in managerial positions in the retail sector can qualify for the programme	The purpose of this course is to equip participants with a sound fundamental knowledge base and skills regarding retail management. The course is aimed at equipping first-line managers with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their management role within the retail environment. The course has relevance for participants who engage in processes across the retail sector to create sustainable value for organisations. The course aims to develop an integrated conceptual understanding, synthesis, and application of specific issues in retail management.

Name of Institution	Qualification the module falls under	Module	NQF level	Prerequisite	Module purpose and outcomes
					Upon completion of the course, participants should be able to: • Describe the relevance and role of retail management; • Discuss the legal issues of human resource management in the retail industry; • Explain the role of visual merchandising, store layout, retail image, and store atmospherics; • Outline the requirements of effective integrated marketing communication in retailing and develop a retail communication plan; • Illustrate the importance of multichannel and online retailing and mobile apps; • Describe the importance of customer service, customer relationship management, and the customer decision-making process in retail marketing; • Identify target markets and the fulfilment of customer needs; • Discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the retail industry and retail management in a post-COVID-19 context; and • Develop a comprehensive retail strategy, including identifying target markets, meeting customer needs, and monitoring marketing performance.

Sources: Stellenbosch University (2023); Wits Enterprise (2023); Wits Marketing (2023)

4.1.2. Describing the module prerequisites, module purpose, and module outcomes at traditional universities offering retail-related qualifications

At SU, retail is offered as a module called Omnichannel Retail Marketing (Marketing 314) under the marketing degree at the third-year level. This is a semester-long course that introduces students to various aspects of retailing in physical stores and cyber environments through an omnichannel approach. The content moves from an overview of strategic planning in retail to gradually delving into specific topics, such as store formats, location, understanding consumers, technology, retail image, merchandising and pricing, and marketing communication (SU, 2023). The emphasis on omnichannel retailing is appropriate, given the increasing importance of a seamless shopping experience across online and offline channels (Nguyen et al., 2022). With the rise of technology and the increasing popularity of e-commerce, customers are no longer restricted to purchasing items from physical stores (Stiehler-Mulder & Cunningham, 2022). Instead, they can buy products through multiple channels, such as online stores, social media platforms, mobile applications, and physical stores, which is critical knowledge to include in retail-related qualifications.

As part of its BCom programme, Wits offers a Retail Management module at the second-year level as a semester module taught over seven weeks. This module aims to equip students with a sound fundamental knowledge base and skills regarding retail management. Unfortunately, specific information about the module outcomes could not be ascertained. Wits also offers the Retail Management online course, which aims to equip participants with a sound fundamental knowledge base and skills regarding retail management. The course seeks to equip first-line managers with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their management role within the retail environment and covers important aspects of the retail business in the module outcomes. The course is relevant to participants who engage in processes across the retail sector to create sustainable value for organisations.

Furthermore, this course aims to develop an integrated conceptual understanding, synthesis, and application of specific issues in retail management (Wits Enterprise, 2023)

Main finding 2:
- SU focuses on omnichannel retailing as well as technology in retail, which is included in the module purpose and module outcomes and is publicly available online.
- Wits targets its retail-related module to students in the BCom, which equips students with a sound fundamental knowledge base and skills regarding retail management and is included in the module purpose. However, no module outcomes were publicly available online.
- Wits targets its retail-related qualification to line managers in retail and equips them with the knowledge and skills required to fulfil their management role within the retail environment, which is included in the module purpose and module outcomes and is publicly available online.

The section that follows analyses the NQF levels, prerequisites, and entry requirements at traditional universities offering retail-related qualifications.

4.1.3. Analysis of the NQF levels, prerequisites, and entry requirements at traditional universities offering retail-related qualifications

From the two traditional universities analysed, the NQF levels for the two qualifications in which retail-related modules have been embedded could be established. SU's Marketing 314 (part of the Omnichannel Retail Marketing qualification) is at NQF level 7, which is equivalent to a bachelor's degree or an advanced diploma. Contrastingly, the Wits Retail Management module (part of the BCom Marketing qualification) is at NQF level 6 and is equivalent to a diploma or an advanced certificate, as it is at a second-year level of study out of three years of study.

At SU, Marketing 214 is a prerequisite module, which lays the foundation for content covered in Marketing 314. Therefore, students must have completed and passed Marketing 214 to be accepted onto the Marketing 314 module. At Wits, it was unclear what the prerequisites were for the Retailing Management module in the BCom. No prerequisites were prescribed for the Retail Management online course, but rather entry requirements, as this course is

targeted at retail line managers. The entry requirements include a matric pass awarded upon achieving an admission point score (APS) score of 15 in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) (Razeen, 2022) as well as experience in managerial positions in the retail sector.

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Main finding 3:

- Both SU and Wits prescribe the NQF level for the retail-related modules in their respective qualifications, with SU indicating that its Marketing 314 module is NQF level 7 and the Wits Retail management module in its BCom is NQF level 6.

- Prerequisite related information was only accessible for SU and not Wits's Retail Management module in the BCom.

- The Retail Management online course at Wits does not have prerequisites, but rather entry requirements, including a matric pass and managerial experience in retail.

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Work placements play a significant role in bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge gained in the classroom and practical application in the real-world retail setting. However, lack of publicly accessible information about work placements at traditional universities hinder prospective students' ability to fully understand the kind of qualification they intend to enrol in. It is essential for traditional universities to provide adequate and comprehensive information on their websites.

4.2. FINDINGS ON UNIVERSITIES OF TECHNOLOGY

A university of technology is an HEI specialising in engineering, technology, and applied and natural sciences. Like traditional universities, universities of technology offer programmes leading to certificates, diplomas, and degrees (Newman, 2022). However, these universities of technology tend to specialise in hands-on, applied, and practical fields of study, such as engineering, technology, design, and health sciences. Universities of technology focus more on the vocational skills for learners, while traditional universities maintain a broader focus encompassing humanities and social sciences. This way, universities of technology tend to be more industry-specialised, preparing students for specific occupations or careers (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2010). Not all information was available across all institutions. Sections 4.2.1 to 4.2.5 analyse the available information pertaining to the NQF level, credits, qualification purpose and outcomes, syllabi, entry requirements, and work placement/industry projects of the programmes from the universities of technology.

4.2.1. Universities of technologies offering retail-related qualifications

There are currently six universities of technology in South Africa (DHET, 2021). However, only five of these six universities of technology offer retail-related courses/qualifications, including:

- Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT);
- Central University of Technology (CUT);
- Durban University of Technology (DUT);
- Tshwane University of Technology (TUT); and
- Sol Plaatje University.

Main finding 4:

Five of the six universities of technology offer retail-related courses/qualifications. Currently, Mangosuthu University of Technology is the only university of technology that does not offer a retail-related qualification.

The section that follows presents the NQF level and credit weighting of retail-related qualifications offered at universities of technology.

4.2.2. Types of qualifications, NQF levels, and credit weighting of retail-related qualifications offered at universities of technology

The types of qualifications offered at universities of technology include diplomas and advanced diplomas. Universities of technology offer diplomas rather than degrees, because they tend to be inclined towards offering more vocational/practical qualifications (CHE, 2010; Newman, 2022). Generally, diplomas are set at NQF level 6 and advanced diplomas are set at NQF level 7, as indicated in Table 3. While NQF level 6 specifically emphasises a comprehensive understanding and application of specialised knowledge and skills, NQF level 7 represents more advanced knowledge and skills in retail, which comes with a more in-depth understanding of the retail industry and its challenges, as well as the ability to apply advanced management concepts and techniques in a retail context.

Five universities of technology offer Diplomas in Retail Business Management, with DUT offering an additional Diploma in Management Sciences: Retail Management. Moreover, of

the five universities, only two universities of technology include articulation routes into advanced diplomas, namely DUT's Advanced Diploma in Management Sciences (Retail Management) and TUT's Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management. One of the universities of technology offers neither a diploma nor an advanced diploma, but a higher certificate in retail management set at NQF level 5.

In conjunction with the NQF level, each university of technology has also included the credit weighting that needs to be obtained to complete the qualification. Credits are the number of notional study hours required to achieve the learning outcomes. Notional hours include study time, assignments, and examinations. According to the credit rating system, 10 notional hours are equivalent to one credit (University of South Africa [Unisa], 2023b). Thus, a student must spend 3 600 notional hours to complete a diploma-level qualification.

In general, the diplomas offered at the universities of technology outlined in Table 3 require students to obtain a credit weighting of 360 to complete the qualification and are significantly higher than the credit weighting specified for advanced diplomas and higher certificates, which should comprise 120 credits. The main reason for the variation in credit weightings is due to the number of modules to be completed in each year of study, whereby diplomas include more modules and are completed over three years, and advanced diplomas and higher certificates include fewer modules and are completed in one year. A summary of the NQF levels and credit weightings per qualification is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Overview of universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications

Institution	Title of qualification	NQF level	Credit weighting
CPUT	Diploma in Retail Business Management	6	360
CUT[1]	Higher Certificate in Retail Management	5	120
DUT	Advanced Diploma in Management Sciences (Retail Management)	7	120
DUT	Diploma in Management Sciences: Retail Management	6	120
TUT	Diploma in Retail Business Management	6	360
TUT	Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management	7	120

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[1] Information obtained from CUT was not made publicly available as the institution was, at the time, still in the process of finalizing their curriculum. The information included in this report was obtained directly from the program coordinator.

Vaal University of Technology (VUT)	Diploma: Retail Business Management	6	360

Sources CPUT (2023), DUT (2023b), Tshwane University of Technology (2019) and VUT (2023)

Main finding 5:

Four universities of technology offer diplomas, two offer advanced diplomas, and one offers a higher certificate. All diplomas and advanced diplomas are set at NQF levels 6 and 7 respectively, and the higher certificate is set at NQF level 5. Credit weightings for diplomas are 360, while advanced diplomas and higher certificate are 120, as based on the duration of the qualification.

The section that follows presents the entry requirements for universities of technology offering retail qualifications.

4.2.3. Entry requirements for universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications

Table 3 outlines the entry requirements for universities of technology offering retail qualifications. The table lists the names of the institutions, titles of the qualifications, and entry requirements for each qualification. The qualifications covered in the table include the higher certificate, diploma, and advanced diploma in retail.

Table 3: Entry requirements for universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Entry requirements
CUT	Higher Certificate in Retail	The minimum entry requirement is the NSC or the National Certificate Vocational (NCV) with appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement as defined in the minister's policies: • Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Senior Certificate; • Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Certificate (Vocational); and • Prospective students working in the retail sector could alternatively use the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) route for admission to the learning programme. As per the CUT calendar, the minimum statutory requirements for an NCV at NQF level 4 higher certificate are: • 40% in English; • 30% in either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy; • 40% in Life Orientation; and • 50% in the other four vocational subjects.

DUT	Diploma in Management Sciences: Retail Management	• NSC NQF level 4 equivalent qualification, with a minimum of 24 points, excluding Life Orientation;
		• An NCV level 4 issued by Umalusi (the Council for quality assurance in general and further education and training) with:
		  ▪ At least 50% in three fundamental subjects, including English; and
		  ▪ At least 60% in three compulsory vocational subjects; *or*
		• Admission based upon work experience, age, and maturity – a person may, subject to the such requirement as the Senate may determine, be admitted if such a person has an NSC, Senior Certificate or an equivalent certificate, but lacks not more than one requirement for admission provided that:
		  ▪ The person shall have reached the age of 23 in the first year of registration and shall have at least:
		    ○ Three years' appropriate work experience; and/or
		    ○ Capacity for the proposed instructional programme, which shall be tested at the discretion of the respective head of department; and
		  ▪ The relevant Faculty Board shall be satisfied that the applicant has the sufficient academic ability to ensure success and that the person's standard of communication skills and/or work experience is such that the person, in the opinion of the relevant Faculty Board, should be able to complete the proposed instructional programme successfully. If required, the communication skills and study skills shall be tested; and
		  ▪ The person's application for admission in terms of Rule G7 (3) is approved prior to registration. This rule states that "a National Senior Certificate (NSC) as certified by the

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Entry requirements
		Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi), with a minimum of achievement rating of 3 for English and a minimum achievement rating of 3 in four recognised NSC 20-credit subjects." (Durban University of Technology, 2023b).
TUT	Diploma in Retail Business Management	• An NSC with a bachelor's degree or a diploma endorsement, or an equivalent qualification with an achievement level of at least a 4 for English (home language or first additional language) and a 3 for Mathematics or a 4 for Mathematical Literacy. • An NCV at NQF level 4 with a bachelor's degree or a diploma endorsement, with at least 50% for English (home language or first additional language), and 40% for Mathematics or 50% for Mathematical Literacy, and 40% for Life Orientation (excluded for APS calculation), and 50% for any other three compulsory vocational subjects.
TUT	Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management	A Diploma, or National Diploma, or a Bachelor's degree in Retail Business Management, or an equivalent qualification at NQF level 6 with a minimum of 360 credits (Tshwane University of Technology, 2020).
DUT	Advanced Diploma in Management Sciences	A Diploma in Management Sciences, marketing or retail specialisation, or a cognate 360-credit NQF level 6 qualification.

Sources: CPUT (2023); CUT (2023); DUT (2023b); TUT (2023); VUT (2023).

4.2.3.1. Higher certificate level

The minimum entry requirement for admission into CUT's Higher Certificate in Retail programme is either an NSC or an NCV, with appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement, as defined by the Higher Education Minister's policies. An NCV is a high-standard, skills-focused qualification that parallels the NSC. Instead of Grades 10, 11, and 12 (which are set by Umalusi), learners can complete NCV levels 2, 3, and 4 (which are set by the DHET and endorsed by Umalusi). The minimum statutory requirements for NCV level 4 students who wish to pursue this programme are also listed, which include achieving 40% in English, 30% in either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, 40% in Life Orientation, and 50% in the other four vocational subjects. Additionally, prospective students who work in the retail sector may use the RPL route to gain admission to the programme. RPL "is a process by which both formal learning for recognised awards, informal learning from experience and non-formal learning for uncertificated but planned learning (e.g. workshops/seminars that are uncertificated) is given academic recognition" (Garnett & Cavaye, 2015:28).

4.2.3.2. Diploma level

Admission requirements for the TUT diploma programme are an NSC with a bachelor's degree or diploma pass, or an NCV at NQF level 4 with a bachelor's degree or diploma endorsement, or an equivalent qualification. Additionally, applicants must meet the minimum achievement levels of at least 50% for English, 40% for Mathematics or 50% for Mathematical Literacy, 40% for Life Orientation (excluded for APS calculation), and 50% for any other three compulsory vocational subjects.

The DUT's Diploma in Management Sciences (Retail Management) requires applicants to have an NSC or equivalent with a minimum APS of 24 points (excluding Life Orientation) or an NCV at NQF level 4. Alternatively, applicants may be admitted based on work experience, age, and maturity (DUT, 2023a). The department reserves the right to apply a ranking system where the number of applications received exceeds the available places. Such rankings are based on NSC or NCV applications received via the Central Applications Office, with preference given to learners from designated groups.

The Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management at TUT and the Advanced Diploma in Management Sciences at DUT are postgraduate qualifications offered by their respective faculties of Management Sciences. However, the two programmes have some differences in the admission requirements and selection process. The TUT programme requires applicants to have completed a relevant undergraduate degree or diploma and achieve high academic performance in their third-year subjects. All applicants who meet these requirements will be evaluated and ranked, and only the top performers will be selected for admission. Contrastingly, the DUT programme has a minimum admission requirement of a Diploma in Management Sciences with a specialisation in Marketing or Retail or a similar qualification with 360 credits at NQF level 6. This suggests that the DUT programme is more focused on prior knowledge and experience in management and may be more suited to individuals who have already completed a relevant undergraduate qualification. The TUT programme uses a competitive ranking system in terms of the selection process, while the DUT uses a non-ranking selection process with seemingly more lenient admission requirements.

Main finding 6:

- Retail qualification entry requirements for various universities of technology vary and accommodate both academic and vocational backgrounds.
- There are some disparities in admission standards and selection processes across institutions. While some universities employ a competitive ranking system based on academic performance, others adopt a non-ranking approach that considers work experience and maturity.

The next section presents the qualification purpose and qualification syllabi for universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications.

4.2.4.   Qualification purpose and qualification syllabi for universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications

Table 4 indicates the qualification purpose, qualification outcomes, and syllabi (modules) for universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications. The table only includes detailed information pertaining to VUT's diploma in Retail Business Management, DUT's

Diploma in Management Sciences: Retail Management, and TUT's Diploma in Retail Business Management. Detailed information related to the following programmes could not be publicly ascertained:

- TUT's Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management and Diploma in Retail Business Management;
- DUT's Advanced Diploma in Management Sciences (Retail Management) and Advanced Diploma in Management Sciences; and
- CPUT's Diploma in Retail Business Management and Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management.

Table 4: Qualification purpose and syllabi (modules) for universities of technology offering retail-related qualifications

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Qualification purpose	Syllabus/Modules in course		
			Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
VUT	Diploma: Retail Business Management	Retail practitioners are responsible for determining all the activities in the sale of goods and services to consumers. These activities include buying, retail merchandising and mathematics, shopper behaviour and shopper marketing, determining the appropriate design and layout of a retail store, warehousing, store risk assessment, retail promotions and marketing, and tenant relations in shopping centres.	• Retail Business Management I • Retail Operations Management I • Accounting Skills • Consumer Behaviour • Applied Communication Skills I • ICT Skills	• Retail Business Management II • Retail Operations Management II • Logistics I • Applied communication skills II • Mercantile Law	• Retail Business Management III • Retail Operations Management III • Shopping Centre Management • Personal Selling • Entrepreneurship • Applied Retail Management
DUT	Diploma in Management Sciences: Retail Management	Note: no qualification purpose provided, but a description of the programme was available on the website and included the below. Retail is one of the fastest-expanding sectors in the South African economy, employing one in five economically active people, yet it is not always considered as a career option. Perhaps it is because retailing is such a common part of our everyday lives that it is often taken for granted. Retailing is the sale of goods and services to the ultimate consumer for personal, family or household use. The scope of retail is broad, with the result that a career in the field can end up in various areas. Career options range from in-store positions to various	• Cornerstone 101 • Environmental Sustainability • Introduction to Business • Law for life • Quantitative Approaches to Management • Academic Literacy & Practice • Business Communication & Info Literacy • Financial Literacy • Time & Stress Management • Introduction to Business Law	• Introduction to Technology • Retail Fundamentals • Retail Operations Management 1 • Retail Operations Management 2A • Retail Operations Management 2B • Finance for Managers • Retail Marketing • Theory & Practice of Selling	• Employee Relations • Logistics • Retail Merchandise Management • Retail Operations 3A • Retail Operations Management 3B • Applied Retailing • Retail Buying • Work Preparedness

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Qualification purpose	Syllabus/Modules in course Year 1	Year 2	Year 3
		alternatives in regional and head offices as well as distribution centres.			
TUT	Diploma in Retail Business Management	No qualification purpose available on the website.	• Communication for Academic Purposes • Computer Literacy • Computer Literacy II • Information Literacy I • Life Skills I • Professional Selling I • Retailing I • Retail Operations Management I •	• Practical Accounting I • Consumer Behaviour • Retailing II • Retail Operations Management II • Supply Chain Management I	• Communication for Occupational Purposes • Financial Management for Retailers II • Law for Retailers • Retailing III • Retail Operations Management III • Supply Chain Management II
	Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management	Aims to provide students with advanced knowledge and skills in retail financial management, retailing, retail operations management, and research methodology. This qualification aims to equip retailing practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage the sale of goods and services to consumers.	Year modules: • Advanced Retail Financial Management IV • Retailing IV • Retail Operations IV • Research Methodology IV		

Sources: CPUT (2023); CUT (2023); DUT (2023b); TUT (2023); VUT (2023)

VUT's Diploma in Retail Business Management purpose is clearly indicated on the university's website and supported with the syllabus per year. The syllabus is taught over six semesters, comprising two semesters per study year, and each semester consists of various modules. In the first two semesters, students must complete the following modules: Retail Business Management I, Retail Operations Management I, Accounting Skills, Consumer Behaviour, Applied Communication Skills I, and ICT Skills. These modules provide a broad overview of the retail industry and its operations as well as the basic knowledge and skills necessary to manage a retail business. In the third and fourth semesters of the second year, the programme becomes more specialised, with the following modules: Retail Business Management II, Retail Operations Management II, Logistics II, Applied Communication Skills II, and Mercantile Law. These modules deepen student understanding of the retail business and its operations and the legal and regulatory framework that governs retail. In semesters five and six of the third year, students are introduced to more advanced retail areas through: Shopping Centre Management, Personal Selling, Entrepreneurship, and Applied Retail Management. The latter is introduced through a work-integrated learning (WIL) experience. These modules provide students with the practical skills and knowledge required to manage a successful retail business, ensuring that graduates are job-ready.

DUT's Diploma in Management Sciences is also offered with a Retail Management specialisation, but the purpose of the qualification is not clearly articulated on the website, rather a description of the programme is provided. This programme is divided into three years, where the first year includes courses intended to provide a foundation for the programme, namely: Cornerstone 101, Environmental Sustainability, Introduction to Business, Law for Life, Quantitative Approaches to Management, Academic Literacy & Practice, Business Communication & Info Literacy, Financial Literacy, and Time & Stress Management. These courses cover various topics, from basic business concepts to communication and time management skills. In year two, the programme blends more specific topics related to retail management with law, technology, and finance. Examples of more retail-specific courses in year two include Retail Fundamentals, Retail Operations Management, and Retail Marketing. The programme advances and prepares students for the workplace in year three. Courses in the third year include Employee Relations, Logistics, Retail Merchandise Management, Retail Operations Management, Applied Retailing, Retail Buying, and Work Preparedness through a WIL programme whose duration is not stated.

TUT's Diploma in Retail Business Management does not include a qualification purpose on the website. However, the available information describes that the qualification comprises three years of study. In the first year, students undertake five modules: Communication for Academic Purposes, Computer Literacy I and II, Information Literacy I, Life Skills I, Professional Selling I, Retailing I, and Retail Operations Management I. In the programme's second year, students complete the following five modules (with the prerequisites in brackets): Practical Accounting I; Consumer Behaviour, Retailing II (Retailing I), Retail Operations Management II (Retail Operations Management I), and Supply Chain Management I. The third year comprises six modules, most of which are designed to provide students with advanced knowledge and skills in communication, financial management, law, retailing, and supply chain management. The third-year modules are: Communication for Occupational Purposes (Communication for Academic Purposes), Financial Management for Retailers II (Practical Accounting I), Law for Retailers, Retailing III (Retailing II), Retail Operations Management III (Retail Operations Management II), and Supply Chain Management II (Supply Chain Management I).

The purpose of the TUT' Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management qualification is to provide students with advanced knowledge and skills in retail financial management, retailing, retail operations management, and research methodology. This qualification aims to equip retailing practitioners with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively manage the sale of goods and services to consumers. Specifically, the qualification covers a range of retail-related activities, such as buying, retail merchandising and mathematics, shopper behaviour and marketing, store layout design, warehousing, store risk assessment, retail promotions and marketing, and tenant relations in a shopping centre. By looking at its content, the TUT's programme aims to prepare graduates for careers in retailing, providing them with a comprehensive understanding of retail activities coupled with the practical skills and knowledge required to succeed in the industry.

Main finding 7:
- In general, all modules offered in the various qualifications have a strong emphasis on retailing and retail operations, which are completed from the first year to the third year and advance in complexity.

- All qualifications also include an accounting and/or finance-related module in the second and third years and a law-related module.

- Basic communication and/or literacy skills as well as computer literacy skills are offered in year one.

- Students also undertake marketing-related modules concerning personal selling and consumer behaviour as well as logistics or supply chain management.

- VUT's Diploma in Retail Business Management includes business management at all three levels of study, as this is a core module in the qualification. However, TUT does not offer business management at any level despite the name of the qualification.

- VUT is the only institution offering Shopping Centre Management and Entrepreneurship modules in the third year of study, and the only institution offering life skills in the first study year.

- The syllabus of DUT's Diploma in Management Sciences: Retail Management comprises a few modules that other diplomas do not, including Environmental Sustainability, Time & Stress Management, Introduction to Technology, Employee Relations, Retail Merchandise Management, Applied Retailing, Retail Marketing, Retail Buying, and Work Preparedness.

- TUT's Advanced Diploma in Retail Business Management offers Advanced Retail Financial Management IV, Retailing IV, Retail Operations IV, and Research methodology IV as year modules.

The next section describes WIL within retail-related qualifications at universities of technology.

4.2.5. WIL within retail-related qualifications at universities of technology

The review established that three universities of technology have WIL-related requirements as per their curricula, including CUT, DUT, and CPUT. DUT has an eight-credit module at third-year level, titled Work Preparedness, that has WIL embedded (guest lecturers are invited to address students on the development of curriculum vitae and preparation of interviews). Students are also required to be placed in industry during their Applied Retailing module, also at third-year level, and are required to clock 200 hours. Students are placed in industry during the June/July recess (three weeks) and again for two months in November and December of the same year to meet the minimum requirements to complete the module.

Companies that absorb the DUT retail students include: Truworths, The Foschini Group (Markham), Edward Snell, Hype check, Checkers, Woolworths, and Mr Price.

Not much information could be ascertained from CUT and CPUT regarding their WIL programmes. However, CUT requires work placement under its Higher Certificate in Retail and CPUT's Diploma in Retail Business Management requires three months of WIL to give students first-hand practical experience.

> **Main finding 8:**
> Only three of the universities of technology analysed include WIL as part of their retail-related qualifications.

The following section presents the findings on comprehensive universities.

4.3. FINDINGS ON COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES OFFERING RETAIL-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

In this section, findings about comprehensive universities are presented. Comprehensive universities offer theoretical-orientated university degrees and vocational-orientated diplomas and degrees (Universities South Africa, 2020). Unlike TVET colleges and traditional universities, comprehensive universities combine theoretical knowledge with practical skills, in the process preparing students for academic pursuits and the workplace demands. These institutions blend theoretical orientation and practical or vocational training. There are currently six comprehensive universities in South Africa, four of which offer retailer-related qualifications, namely:

- University of Johannesburg (UJ);
- Nelson Mandela University (NMU);
- Unisa; and
- Walter Sisulu University.

Of the four universities mentioned above, only three had publicly available information. This was analysed and reviewed, and is discussed in sections 4.3.1 to 4.3.3.

4.3.1. NQF levels and entry requirements of comprehensive universities offering retail-related qualifications

Table 5 summarises the NQF levels and entry requirements of retail-related qualifications, including higher certificates, diplomas, and advanced diplomas, at comprehensive universities.

Table 5: Summary of the NQF levels and entry requirements of retail-related qualifications offered at comprehensive universities

Name of institution	Title of qualification	NQF level	Entry requirements
Unisa	Higher Certificate in Retailing	5	Applicants (new applicants and Unisa students who applied for admission to a new qualification) may only register if they have received an offer of placement from Unisa and have accepted the offer online.
UJ	Certificate in Retail Management	5	A Grade 12 or an NSC NQF level 4 or equivalent qualification on NQF level 4 and an APS score of 22 or higher with Mathematical Literacy (3) and English (3) will be considered.
UJ	Diploma in Retail Business Management	6	An APS of 22 or higher in Mathematics
NMU	Diploma in Management (retail management)	6	Candidates must hold an NSC. In addition, candidates must obtain an APS of at least 30 points or more on the rating system. Applicants who do not meet the requirements for direct admission but who have an APS of 22 or higher will be referred for access assessment. Applicants over the age of 23 who do not comply with the requirements stipulated above may be admitted to the programme at the discretion of the head of department, who will take applicants' work experience, academic records, and psychometric test results into consideration.
UJ	Advanced Diploma in Retailing	7	A suitable diploma or bachelor's degree or equivalent qualification to NQF level 6 (as determined by a Status Committee)
NMU	Advanced Diploma in Business Studies (Management Practice)	7	A relevant 360-credit diploma in the chosen field of specialisation or an equivalent qualification with a mark of at least 60% obtained in the relevant majors of the previous qualification

Sources: NMU (2023); UJ (2023a, 2023b, 2023c); Unisa (2023a)

As indicated in Table 5, the NQF level for a higher certificate is 5. NQF levels of the Diploma in Retail are 6 across all institutions. The table also shows that the advanced diploma carries an NQF level of 7, which is the same at traditional universities and universities of technology whose NQFs were analysed earlier in this report. Therefore, traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities are all on par regarding their NQF levels and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) regulations.

> **Main finding 9:**
> At comprehensive universities, **h**igher **c**ertificates are at NQF level 5, **d**iplomas are at NQF level 6, and **a**dvanced **d**iplomas are at NQF level 7.

In terms of entry requirements, of those comprehensive universities offering retail qualifications, two institutions – namely the UJ and Unisa – offer certificate-level qualifications. The UJ's Certificate in Retail Management and Unisa's Higher Certificate in Retailing are qualifications designed to prepare individuals for careers in the retail industry. The UJ's Certificate in Retail Management has the entry requirements of a Grade 12 or an NSC NQF level 4, or an equivalent qualification on NQF level 4 and APS of 22 or higher with Mathematical Literacy (3) and English (3). The Higher Certificate in Retailing offered by Unisa is open to new applicants and Unisa students who have received an offer of placement and have accepted the offer online. This course has a one-year full-time or two years part-time duration.

The Diploma in Retail Business Management offered by the UJ requires an APS of 22 or higher in Mathematics. NMU's Diploma in Management (Retail Management), aimed at individuals seeking management positions in the retail and manufacturing sectors, requires an APS of 30. NMU states that applicants who do not meet the requirements for direct admission but who have an APS of 22 or higher will be referred for access assessment. Moreover, NMU employs the discretion of the head of department, who will consider applicants' work experience, academic records, and psychometric test results.

The Advanced Diploma in Retailing offered by the UJ requires applicants to have a suitable diploma or bachelor's degree or an equivalent qualification at NQF level 6, as determined by a Status Committee. The Advanced Diploma in Management with specialisation in Retailing offered at NMU requires applicants to have a relevant 360-credit diploma in the chosen field of specialisation or an equivalent qualification with a mark of at least 60% obtained in the relevant majors of the previous qualification.

Main finding 10:

Entry requirements for the retail-related qualifications offered by the different institutions vary and depend on the APS, the previous qualifications obtained as well as the discretion of the head of department and/or university in some cases.

The next section presents the findings related to the qualification purpose, qualification outcomes, and syllabi (modules) for comprehensive universities offering retail-related qualifications.

4.3.2. Qualification purpose, qualification outcomes, and syllabi for comprehensive universities offering retail-related qualifications

The qualification purpose, qualification outcomes, and syllabi for the three comprehensive universities offering retail-related qualifications, including the UJ, Unisa, and NMU, are summarised and presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Qualification purpose, outcomes, and syllabi (modules) for comprehensive universities

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Purpose and/or outcomes	Modules		
UJ	Certificate in Retail Management	The purpose of this programme is to provide students with basic understanding, knowledge, and skills around the retail industry and retail operations. On a more practical level, the programme provides students with an opportunity to develop their sales skills and interact within a retail sales role. Furthermore, the programme assists in developing the English and mathematical skills needed in the field of retailing.	• Retailing • Mathematics for Retailers • English • Retail Operations Management • Personal Selling • Retail Technology		
Unisa	Higher Certificate in Retailing	The purpose of the qualification is to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to enter a retailing environment and to be able to contribute immediately to store management. Successful learners will have a basic knowledge and understanding of all crucial aspects of managing a retail store, including sales skills, merchandise buying, and the management of human resources.	• Basic Numeracy • Practising Workplace English • Introduction to Human Resource Management • Introduction to Marketing • Introduction to Retailing • Introduction to Merchandising • Introduction to Marketing Communication • Retail Store Management • Fundamentals of Retail Buying • Sustainability and Greed		
NMU	Diploma in Management – Retail Management	*Purpose:* To provide students with an understanding of the nature, scope, and practices relevant to the field of retail management and the ability to manage aspects of retail activities in an organisation. *Outcomes:* • Demonstrate an understanding of the role of the retail sector in the South African economy; • Apply the knowledge of retailing principles and practices to develop skills for effective management of retail businesses; • Demonstrate effective leadership, teamwork, and communication skills in the management of human resources; • Use theoretical concepts and analytical skills in retail planning-related problem-solving and decision-making; and	*Year 1:* • Introduction to Microeconomics • Introduction to Macroeconomics • Introduction to Management • Introduction to Marketing • Introduction to Logistics • Introduction to Tourism • End-user Computing • Communication in English A	*Year 2:* • Accounting Fundamentals • Financial Statements • Commercial Law: General Principles Contracts • Commercial Law: Specific Contracts • Quality Management • Integrated Production Concepts • Planning & Control	*Year 3:* • Business Ethics • Managing Business in Africa • Introduction to Employment Relations • Employment Relations Processes *Electives:* • Retail Location • Retail Strategy • Merchandise Management • Retail Control

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Purpose and/or outcomes	Modules		
		• Apply the risk management principles within a retail institution.	• Business Accounting	• Organising and Leading • Introduction to Retailing • Retail Planning	• Financial Management Fundamentals • Working Capital Management • Investment Management • Financial Management: Financing
UJ	Diploma in Retail Business Management	The purpose of this programme is to develop students' applied and practical competencies in the acquisition, understanding, and application of retailing principles. It provides a focused and applied specialisation within the retail field to ensure that students understand the practices and theory. The purpose of this qualification is to develop competent retail managers for the retail industry and develop skills for the sector in general.	*Year 1:* • Applied Accountancy Skills • Business Management 1 • End-user Computing • English • Retailing 1	*Year 2:* • Business Management 2 • Consumer Behaviour • Personal Selling • Retailing 2	*Year 3:* • Business Law • Business Management 3 • Labour Relations and Law • Logistics • Retailing 3
UJ	Advanced Diploma in Retailing	*Purpose:* To develop graduates' applied and practical competencies in the acquisition, understanding, and application of retailing principles. *Outcomes:* • Contribute to the development, growth, competitiveness, and sustainability of retail organisations; • Formulate, plan, strategise, execute, measure, and improve retail business processes, practices, systems, and solutions; • Contribute through sound research to the development of retail organisations, processes, systems, and solutions; and • Comply with good governance, strong ethical principles, and quality performance standards	• Applied Research for Retailers • Contemporary Retailing • Cost and Financial Management for Non-Financial Specialists • Strategic Retailing		

Name of institution	Title of qualification	Purpose and/or outcomes	Modules
		when implementing, managing, and improving retail business practices.	
NMU	Advanced Diploma in Business Studies (Management Practice)	This qualification aims to prepare students academically and professionally in the selected field to manage various businesses successfully through appropriate planning, organising, directing, and controlling the functions and processes of such establishments. They will be able to collect, analyse and critically review data for effective business and financial decision-making, and communicate such decisions and relevant information coherently and reliably. Successful candidates will be able to work independently and as members of a team. Job opportunities exist across all management levels and industry sectors. Specific opportunities exist in the fields of retail store management, retail buying, franchising, business administration, production, and personnel management.	• Financial Management • Strategic Management • Business Research Principles • Management Practice Project • Principles of Corporate Citizenship • Quantitative Management Practice • Quantitative Merchandising Practice • Employment Relations

Sources: NMU (2023); UJ (2023a, 2023b, 2023c); Unisa (2023a)

4.3.2.1.   Higher certificate

Unisa's Higher Certificate in Retailing (NQF level 5) is designed to equip learners with the knowledge and skills to enter into a retailing environment and to be able to contribute to store management immediately. Successful learners will have a basic knowledge and understanding of all crucial aspects of managing a retail store, including sales skills, merchandise buying, and human resources management. This qualification is presented using both online and distance learning modes. Compulsory modules on the course include: Basic Numeracy, Practising Workplace English, Introduction to Human Resource Management, Introduction to Marketing, Introduction to Retailing, Introduction to Merchandising, Introduction to Marketing Communication, Retail Store Management, Fundamentals of Retail Buying, and Sustainability and Greed. This is a more introductory programme, covering a wide range of business functions.

Similarly, the UJ's Certificate in Retail Management is also at an introductory level and aims to provide students with a basic understanding, knowledge, and skills related to the retail industry and retail operations. Like Unisa's higher certificate qualification, the UJ programme aims to develop skills via the modules of Personal Selling, English, Mathematics, and Retailing, but also includes Retail Operations Management and Retail Technology.

4.3.2.2.   Diploma

The UJ offers a Diploma in Retail Business Management over three years. The purpose of this qualification is to develop competent retail managers for the retail industry and develop skills for the sector in general. Students are expected to develop applied and practical competencies in the acquisition, understanding, and application of retailing principles. As such, in the first year, students take courses in Applied Accountancy Skills, Business Management 1, End-user Computing, English, and Retailing 1. In the second year, students undertake Business Management 2, Consumer Behaviour, Personal Selling, and Retailing 2. The third year includes Business Law, Business Management 3, Labour Relations and Law, Logistics, and Retailing 3. The UJ's diploma course includes more business-related courses, such as Applied Accountancy Skills, Business Management 1, and End-user Computing. This suggests that, along with retailing knowledge, the course is designed to provide a basic understanding of business functions.

NMU offers a Diploma in Management – Retail Management that focuses on the role of retailing, retail environment, online and multichannel retailing, retail risk management, and retail human resource management. This qualification offers students an understanding of the nature, scope, and practices relevant to the field of retail management and the ability to manage aspects of retail activities in the organisation. In its first year, the NMU diploma emphasises introductory modules that are more from a general management perspective. In the second year, more finance, law, accounting, and management modules are completed with the Introduction to Retailing and Retail Planning. In the final year, students can select electives focused on the financial or retail stream, where the retail stream includes electives like Retail Location, Retail Strategy, Merchandise Management, and Retail Control.

4.3.2.3. Advanced diplomas

The UJ's Advanced Diploma in Retailing was designed to develop graduates' applied and practical competencies in the acquisition, understanding, and application of retailing principles. It provides an intensive, focused, and applied specialisation within the retail field to ensure students have a deep and systematic understanding of current thinking, practice, theory, and methodology. With modules like Applied Research for Retailers, Contemporary Retailing, Cost and Financial Management for Non-Financial Specialists, and Strategic Retailing, the qualification aims to empower students to contribute to the development, growth, competitiveness, and sustainability of retail organisations. The qualification outcomes include to formulate, plan, strategise, execute, measure, and improve retail business processes, and comply with good governance, strong ethical principles, and quality performance standards when implementing, managing, and improving retail business practices.

NMU's Advanced Diploma Business Studies (Management Practice) includes a retail-focused stream. The purpose of the qualification is to prepare students academically and professionally in the selected field to manage various businesses successfully through appropriate planning, organising, directing, and controlling the functions and processes of such establishments. Specific opportunities exist in the fields of retail store management, retail buying, franchising, business administration, production, and personnel management. Modules in this qualification are somewhat generic to business management and include

Strategic Management, Management Practice Project, Principles of Corporate Citizenship, Quantitative Management Practice, and Employment Relations. For the retail stream specifically, Quantitative Merchandising Practice is included to facilitate learning in the retail store management and retail buying, similar to the Strategic Retailing module offered by the UJ. Moreover, NWU's advanced diploma also offers Financial Management and Business Research Principles, which UJ also offers via the advanced diploma.

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Main finding 11:

- Both higher certificate modules have similar purposes and syllabi. Unisa's syllabus includes a wider variety of modules pertaining to marketing and more specific retail categories, including merchandising and retail buying, but similar to the UJ, Unisa includes English and Maths. The UJ offers a module on Retail Technology and Unisa offers modules in Sustainability and Greed as well as Human Resource Management.

- Concerning the diplomas, the UJ's diploma specialises in Retail Business Management and includes Retailing and Business Management as core modules as well as marketing modules like Consumer Behaviour and Personal Selling. Other modules focused on law and accounting, similar to NMU. However, NMU offers a more general management diploma with a more financial focus and students are only introduced to retailing modules in their second year. In their third year, students can then opt for a more retail-specific stream by choosing specific retailing electives.

- For the advanced diplomas, the UJ centres on retailing specifically, whereas NMU emphasises general business studies (management practice) where the modules are also mainly focused on business and other management modules. Nevertheless, the Merchandise Management module incorporates aspects of retail buying and forecasting. The NMU and UJ advanced diplomas are similar in their inclusion of a research-based module and financial management.

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The next section presents information pertaining to WIL at comprehensive universities.

4.3.3. WIL programmes and experiential learning at comprehensive universities offering retail-related qualifications

Information related to WIL offered at comprehensive universities was not publicly available on websites. Some information on the WIL programme at the UJ was identified. The UJ

offers a WIL project within the Diploma in Retail Business Management, which takes place as a Personal Selling project. Students are provided with products to sell on behalf of a company and must meet a certain number of sales to pass the module. Furthermore, the UJ incorporates experiential learning by integrating retailing simulations into the retailing modules in the curricula at both diploma and advanced diploma levels. The simulations aim to illustrate a real-life retailing environment and include daily functions and activities that retailers perform. The simulations require students to meet a goal and make strategic retail-related decisions to achieve the goal. The UJ offers these simulations both online and face to face, as capacity and resource constraints inhibit the success of WIL in the retailing modules.

Main finding 12:

The UJ integrates WIL as part of the Diploma in Retail Business Management in the Personal Selling module. To enhance experiential learning, the UJ offers both online and face-to-face simulations in the retailing modules at diploma and advanced diploma levels to illustrate a real-life retailing environment, and includes daily functions and activities that retailers perform.

5.   FINDINGS FROM TVET COLLEGES FROM CONTENT ANALYSIS

TVET colleges focus on vocational and occupational education and training to prepare students to become functional workers in a skilled trade (Western Cape Government, 2023). The findings presented in sections 5.1 to 5.3 include an overview of TVET colleges, a review of the NCV levels, entry requirements, qualification purpose/qualification outcomes, and syllabi for TVET colleges, as well as WIL and work placement at TVET colleges offering retail-related qualifications.

5.1. OVERVIEW OF TVET COLLEGES OFFERING RETAIL-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

Out of 50 TVET colleges, seven institutions were found to offer retail-related qualifications. These include:

- Eastcape Midlands TVET College;
- False Bay TVET College;

- Ehlanzeni TVET College;

- Gert Sibande TVET College;

- Majuba TVET College;

- Northlink TVET College; and

- West Coast TVET College.

The section that follows presents the NCV levels and entry requirements of TVET colleges with retail-related qualifications.

5.2. NCV LEVELS AND ENTRY REQUIREMENTS AT TVET COLLEGES OFFERING RETAIL-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

Of the seven institutions listed in section 5.1, publicly available information could only be ascertained from three institutions. Table 7 summarises the NCV levels and entry requirements for TVET colleges offering retail-related qualifications. NCV allows students to master a specific set of skills in preparation for the workplace, which is offered at levels 2, 3, and 4, and is equivalent to grades 10, 11, and 12 respectively (Coastal KZN TVET College, 2023). Each NCV generally takes a year of study.

Table 7: Summary of the NQF levels and entry requirements for TVET colleges offering retail-related qualifications

TVET name	Title of qualification	NCV level	Entry requirements
Eastcape Midlands TVET College	National Certificate: Wholesale and Retail Operations	2	Grade 9 or equivalent
False Bay TVET College	National Certificate: Wholesale and Retail	2	Grade 9 or Adult Basic Education and Training NQF level 1: Wholesale and Retail. It is assumed that students accessing this qualification are competent in communication at NQF level 1 and mathematical literacy at NQF level 1. You will be asked to attend an assessment and interview.
Gert Sibande TVET College	National Certificate: Wholesale and Retail Operations	2	Grade 9 or equivalent

Sources: Coastal KZN TVET College (2023); Eastcape Midlands TVET College (2023); False Bay College (2023); Gert Sibande TVET College (2022)

Based on the summary presented in Table 7, it is evident that all three TVET colleges offer a National Certificate in Wholesale and Retail Operations. All qualifications include minimum

entry requirements of a grade 9 level, which is also equivalent to an NQF level 1 and an NCV level 1. All three TVET college retail-related qualifications exit at NCV level 2.

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Main finding 13:

All three TVET colleges offer the National Certificate in Retail and Wholesale Operations with a minimum entry requirement of a grade 9 level and exits at NCV level 2.

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The section that follows presents the qualification purpose, qualification outcomes, and syllabi for these three TVET colleges.

5.3. QUALIFICATION PURPOSE, QUALIFICATION OUTCOMES, AND SYLLABI OF TVET COLLEGES OFFERING RETAIL-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

During the analysis, it proved challenging to identify the qualification purpose, outcomes, and syllabus for each TVET college. Only False Bay TVET College made this information publicly available online, whereas Eastcape Midlands TVET College only provided the qualification purpose. Gert Sibande TVET College did not have this information available on its website. Table 8 summarises the information that could be identified on the two TVET websites.

Table 8: Qualification purpose, qualification outcomes, and syllabi for TVET colleges offering retail-related qualifications

TVET college name	Title of qualification	Purpose	Outcomes
Eastcape Midlands TVET College	National Certificate: Wholesale and Retail Operations	This programme addresses skills and competencies for enabling entry-level employment and positions. Qualifying learners will access opportunities for further development and training in the specialised areas of Wholesale and Retail, such as Operations, Administration, Merchandising, Stock Control, and Customer Service.	Not available
False Bay TVET College	National Certificate: wholesale and Retail	This is a one-year (12 months) full-time course. Qualifying students will be able to access opportunities for further development and training in the specialised areas of Wholesale and Retail, such as Operations, Administration, Merchandising Stock Control, Customer Service, Visual Display Merchandising, and Help Desk Operations.	• Complete basic calculations • Define the core concepts of the wholesale and retail environment • Interact with customers

Sources: Coastal KZN TVET College (2023); East Cape Midlands TVET College (2023); False Bay College (2023); Gert Sibande TVET College (2022)

As outlined in Table 8, the purpose for both qualifications clearly articulates that students will be provided with entry-level skills and knowledge, which provides opportunities for further training and development. Although specific modules in the syllabi were unattainable, both qualifications mention that students will be equipped with skills and competencies in Operations, Administration, Merchandising, Stock Control, and Customer Service, and False Bay TVET College specified the additional modules of Help Desk Operations and Visual Display Merchandising. Moreover, False Bay TVET College included some of the main outcomes of the qualification, which was to complete basic calculations, define the core concepts of the wholesale and retail environment, and interact with customers. Eastcape Midlands TVET College did not specify the qualification outcomes on its website.

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Main finding 14:

- Both qualification purposes indicate that students are equipped with entry-level skills and competencies that can be further developed.
- Skills and competencies mentioned in both qualifications are in the areas of Operations, Administration, Merchandising, Stock Control, and Customer Service.
- False Bay TVET College offers skills and competencies in Help Desk Operations and Visual Display Merchandising, and articulates some of the qualification outcomes.
- Eastcape Midlands TVET College did not include qualification outcomes on its website.

</div>

The next section describes WIL and work placement at TVET colleges.

5.4. WIL AND WORK PLACEMENT AT TVET COLLEGES OFFERING RETAIL-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS

No information about work placement could be established among the three TVET colleges. Since most retail courses offered at TVET colleges are at NCV level 2, work placement may not essential, thus explaining the absence of WIL across the TVET colleges analysed.

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Main finding 15:

No WIL or work placement-related information could be established among TVET colleges.

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Annexure B presents the implications of the main findings above, which provides insights that were explored in phase 2 of the study.

6. IDENTIFIYING THE GAPS AND INFORMING PHASE 2

Based on the proposed implications and main findings presented in Annexure B, the following gaps have been identified, which inform the empirical investigation undertaken in phase 2:

- Gap 1: Many institutions do not make their information on retail-related qualifications available or easily accessible.
- Gap 2: Retail industry perceptions about the value and importance of the various types of qualifications offered at HEIs and TVETs is unclear.
- Gap 3: Alignment between the knowledge, skills, and competencies (modules) acquired from the different levels of qualifications at HEIs and TVETs and whether this aligns with retail industry requirements for potential graduate employees is unknown.
- Gap 4: Perceptions of academics and industry regarding having varying entry requirements that are open to all types of students have yet to be explored.
- Gap 5: Proper understanding of the need for WIL and how it contributes to industry and employability is lacking.

In line with the gaps identified above, a number of objectives were proposed to guide the investigation undertaken in phase 2, namely:

- To analyse the role of industry in curricula development and review;
- To identify areas in the curricula where there is alignment/lack of alignment;
- To understand why the lack of alignment between curricula and industry needs exists;
- To identify the limitations/constraints provided by current curricula development and review processes;
- To propose recommendations to maintain alignment between curricula and industry needs in future;
- To analyse the retailing sector's curricula relevance;
- To explore whether existing subjects/modules offered in curricula align with the skills needs of the retailing industry;

- To explore whether existing subjects/modules offered in the curricula align with the current trends, specifically Fourth Industrial Revolution trends of the retailing industry; and

- To recommend how HEIs can adapt curricula to incorporate new skills required by the industry on an ongoing basis.

7.   METHODOLOGY FOR PHASE 2 – EMPIRICAL STUDY

To build onto the secondary data collected in phase 1 of the study, the main objective was to explore these insights and implications on a deeper level and to obtain the opinions of academics and industry representatives on the findings from phase 1 to empirically support the findings in this report. Therefore, a qualitative data collection approach was employed. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews that were conducted virtually via Microsoft Teams, at the participants' convenience. The interviews were 90 minutes long and were audio- and video-recorded. A non-probability sampling method was employed through a purposive sampling technique that required participants to: (1) hold an academic position at an institution that offers retail-related qualifications, such as lecturers or programme managers in retail; or (2) be industry representatives who work in talent management and/or recruitment for retailers. Three academic participants and three industry representatives participated in the interviews.

Some of the participants were contacted via the researchers' network of contacts and others were identified by an external research agency that assisted with the data collection and data analysis process. The reason for employing an external agency was to mitigate any bias or sharing of company-sensitive data (including the curricula) with the researchers, who are employed at the UJ. The external agency made arrangements to organise and set up the interviews, conduct the interviews, and analyse the data. The researchers obtained ethical clearance from the university's ethics committee (ethical clearance number 2023SCiiS030). These ethical considerations were outlined in the consent form provided to each participant before the interview, where consent had to be provided, and included:

- Participants' anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by giving each participant a pseudonym (i.e., participant 1, participant 2);

- Participants' role in the study was clarified, including the duration of the interview and that they were required to provide their own perspective on the discussion topics as honestly and reliably possible;

- Participants were made aware that the interviews were recorded for transcription purposes;

- Participants were made aware that should they wish to withdraw at any time, they would be able to without facing any implications or consequences; and

- Participants were made aware that all data collected and stored would be encrypted and password-protected, and the relevant steps would be taken to safely destroy the data.

Once data were collected, the external agency undertook to analyse the data, which is discussed next.

7.1. ANALYSING AND INTERPRETING DATA

Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method used to identify and analyse patterns or themes within a dataset of textual, visual, or audio information. It is commonly employed in fields like psychology, sociology, and qualitative research to uncover underlying themes or patterns in qualitative data. Thematic analysis typically involves four main steps, as outlined below.

- *Data familiarisation*: In the first step, researchers become familiar with the data they have collected. This involves reading or reviewing the data multiple times to gain a deep understanding of its content. Researchers immerse themselves in the data to identify potential patterns, ideas, or themes that may emerge by making initial notes or annotations about interesting segments of data. These notes serve as the foundation for the subsequent stages of analysis.

- *Generating initial codes*: After gaining a good understanding of the data, researchers begin the process of coding. Coding involves systematically labelling or tagging specific pieces of data that are relevant to the research question. These codes are typically short and descriptive phrases. To do this, researchers identify words, phrases, or sentences that represent ideas, concepts, or patterns within the data. Codes are often generated in an inductive manner, allowing themes to emerge naturally from the data, rather than being predetermined.

- *Searching for themes*: Once a set of initial codes has been created, the next step is to group these codes into potential themes. Researchers look for patterns, commonalities, and connections among the codes. Themes are overarching concepts or ideas that capture the essence of the data. They should be coherent, meaningful, and relevant to the research question.

- *Reviewing and defining themes*: In the final step, researchers review and define the identified themes. This involves checking the coherence and consistency of each theme by revisiting the coded data. Researchers provide a clear and concise description of each theme, supported by selected quotes or examples from the data. They also consider the broader implications of the themes in relation to the research question.

8.   PHASE 2 EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The findings are presented in relation to the primary objectives identified for this study as well as the gaps identified and subsequent research objectives in an attempt to provide practical recommendations to help address the gaps in the alignment between retail curricula and the retail industry. For a big picture on how the objectives, gaps, and recommendations interlink, refer to Annexure C.

8.1. PRIMARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 1

The first primary objective for this study was to identify the degree of alignment between existing curricula at HEIs offering retail-related courses and the sector's needs. The associated gaps identified from phase 1 of the study in relation to this primary objective include:

- Gap 1: Many institutions do not make their information on retail-related qualifications available or easily accessible.

- Gap 2: Retail industry perceptions about the value and importance of the various types of qualifications offered at HEIs and TVETs is unclear.

To help address these gaps, the following secondary research objectives were developed and used to form the foundation of the questions to explore in phase 2 of the study:

- To identify areas in the curricula where there is a lack of alignment;

- To analyse the role of industry in curricula development and review;

- To understand why the lack of alignment between curricula and industry needs exists; and

- To analyse the retailing sector's curriculum relevance.

Based on the analysis, there are three main themes explaining the degree of alignment between retail curricula and the retail industry's needs. These were thematically grouped in relationships and context (see sections 8.1.1 to 8.1.2). For the purpose of the analysis, the participants were provided with pseudonyms as follows:

- P1: academic;

- P2: academic;

- P3: industry;

- P4: academic;

- P5: industry; and

- P6: industry.

8.1.1. Main finding 1: Relationships

The relationship between industry and academia in the retail world could be placed on a spectrum as it fluctuates and varies. There is no single formula that is being implemented to ensure a successful relationship. On one end, the interaction is described as an "ever-evolving web" (P1), with a good multi-directional flow of information, resources, and strategy. There are "excellent interactions" that make the relationship resilient to change – it grows and adapts to its environment; grabbing onto opportunities that head its way. On the other end, there is a distinct disconnect that comes from "not seeking active participation" (P5). There "isn't quite a relationship" between industry and academia, instead there are "pockets" where somewhat of a relationship exists between individuals, not on an "institutional level" (P2).

To investigate what works well in the relationship the following insights were obtained:

- *Mutual interactions between industry leaders and academic experts*:
    - Industry experts offer guest lectures where they share their knowledge, expertise, and observations, and lecturers perform site visits or stay up to date with industry trends and demands (P1).

- *Open conversations within and outside of institutions and industry*:

- "Regular, ongoing meetings across campuses breaks down barriers between institutions, strengthens bonds, and allows for best-practice and a unified vision to emerge. A relationship needs to be nurtured" (P1).
- "The world is changing, but curricula haven't changed. Industry must tell us what they are looking for so that we can keep up to date" (P2).
- "SETA, WERC and advisory board meetings provide an opportunity for industry to give academia feedback on their needs. Communication is encouraged beyond these conversations through personal contact and it is suggested that representatives from either side be present for these discussions" (P4).

- *Seeing theory and practice as two sides of the same coin*:
  - There was consensus amongst participants that "academia provides strategy and theory, while retail industry brings theory to life in skills training and giving experience" (P2).
  - "Academia's role is to provide students with a theoretical understanding of concepts like customer service, sales techniques, merchandise placement, and pricing" (P1).
  - "Academia can provide students with a theoretical understanding of why things are done a particular way, or how to think for themselves. Industry comes in with practical application of the skills attached to that understanding" (P1).

From the above-mentioned findings, the following insights can be identified, which form the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 1:** Foster relationships with incentives where all parties involved benefit.
- **Insight 2:** Give equal attention to both theory and practice.

Some areas of improvement were also identified in terms of improving the relationship between industry and academia to overall boost alignment in the curricula, namely consistency and transparency in communication and collaboration. Some concerns for consideration include:

- *Power dynamics, disruptions, and delays pose problems for both industry and academia*:
  - The relationship between industry and academia extends into the political realm, where larger power structures can, at times, impose challenges and gate-keep

opportunities within these spaces – particularly when funding and financial incentives are involved.

- "Students get exposure when commissioned to do so by the retailer" (P2). There needs to be a more open and self-organised relationship that allows opportunities to occur organically and without political agenda.

- *Industry and academia are operating on opposing speeds – that is, slow to no change versus rapid and continuous evolution*:
  - The risk that retailers face when engaging with traditional universities is that they are "slow to respond to how quickly the world moves" (P5). Retail is quickly changing, but curricula do not seem to keep up.
  - The university is a "big animal" that is bureaucratic. Movement and change are not swift and funding is not easy – things do not always move as swiftly as the retailers would like them to (P1).
  - "Lecturers are not in touch with the evolving industry; they are defiant and old school" (P5).

- *Industry needs and academia skills mismatch*:
  - "The current focus of industry needs is operational, while strategy and research remain overlooked. This results in retailers employing individuals who lack qualifications and theoretical knowledge in retail. The value of an education is overlooked by industry" (P2).
  - "Every retailer is different. Every retailer has their own systems and processes and ways of doing things" (P1). It is hard to know what to prepare graduates for when the industry expectations and needs are varied.
  - When it comes to curricula development and review, "the academics have the final say … [although] we have a lot of opinions from outside our course, but we can't do everything that retail requires [and] they understand that to a certain degree" (P1).
  - It is unclear where one side ends and the other starts. What is academia's responsibility and what is up to industry?
    - "We can't train students in practical skills, we don't have the facilities to do so. And, with certain of the skills, the basic skills, I don't think we want to actually place ourselves there" (P1).

From the aforementioned findings, the following insights can be identified, which form the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 3:** Encourage consistency and transparency through open and ongoing conversation.
- **Insight 4:** Resolve internal dynamics and politics within industry and within academia.
- **Insight 5:** Play to each other's strengths and support one another in weakness.
- **Insight 6:** Give space to old and new. Some things should change, but other things could stay the same.

The section that follows presents the next theme identified from the findings that address the research gaps and objectives mentioned in section 8.1.

8.1.2. Main finding 2: The context

Industry, institutions, and individuals exist within a broader context, but experience these forces in different ways. It is important to recognise where each is coming from, what they have to offer, and what they need in return. One of the main factors influencing retail curricula are contextual factors, including:

- *The crisis of the COVID-19 pandemic:*
    - COVID-19 has played havoc, especially amongst disadvantaged demographics where "many students simply did not return to class or have the means to attend online. It is difficult already to transition from school to higher education" (P1).
    - Lecturers are facing unprecedented challenges in addition to having to cover their coursework. Some of their students prefer to attend class and complete exams online "because you don't have necessarily somebody invigilating you or watching what you're doing" (P1), which has created a sense of "shortcuts, laziness, and lack of confidence" (P2) that is being transferred into the working world.
- *The crisis of power failures:*
    - Industry has had to adapt to accommodate the operational and financial impact of power cuts. These new skills and opportunities for innovation are not being translated efficiently into curricula.
    - Loadshedding has added to the chaos of transitioning to online learning, making it near impossible for students to connect when they either do not have the technology needed or have scheduled and sporadic access.
- *The crisis of poverty:*

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- South Africa's demographics are wide and varied. It is those who are already in a position of disadvantage that face further consequences of getting left behind or excluded. Resilience is their reality. "Many such students use grant funds simply to survive, have additional setbacks (like needing taxi fare or spend more time travelling long distances to get to class or work). There is this dream of getting a degree with the assumption that it will translate to employment. This does not always match an individual's interests, academia's skills offered, or industry needs. It creates an abundance of academics and drop-outs, and fails to address the issue of unemployment" (P5).

From the above-mentioned findings, the following insights can be identified, which form the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 7:** A crisis is a trigger for change. Now is the time for industry and academia to join focus and co-create a solution. Turn a crisis into an opportunity for positive change.
- **Insight 8:** Lecturers need help to combat non-academic challenges that impact academia and then filter into the working world.

There are changes that come from within industry and academia as well as from outside of these realms. Graduates are expected to manage the expectations and execution of these skills, knowledge, and competencies. Graduates are the meeting point between industry and academia, and their perceptions from both an industry and academic perspective are identified below. Obtaining these insights was essential to form the foundation of addressing research gap 2.

- *Industry needs:*
  - "Graduates have to 'sink or swim' – they need to be resilient, cope in an always-on space and fast-paced environment, and be hard-working" (P2).
  - "Graduates have to align with organisation values, such as innovation, communication, presentation, change management, influence, project, and teamwork. They also need to perform under pressure, work well in a team, meet deadlines, and come up with their own ideas" (P3).

- Life skills and soft skills – "how to behave in an interview, improve emotional intelligence, develop the discipline of showing up, how to manage conflict and time, how to engage with customers in a friendly and respectful manner, how to articulate an email that does not read like a social media post, how to behave in a corporate space, and how to interact appropriately with their peers" (P5).
- Ever-evolving curricula to meet shifting industry needs. "Skills being taught remain the same, so changes needed to happen" (P3).

- *Academia needs:*
  - Foundational skills: "It starts at secondary school – maths, physics, life sciences, and other basic competencies" (P5). "However, lecturers are struggling with students' numeracy and literacy skills – "writing and numbers is a huge problem" (P1).
  - Assistance in transitioning students from school to higher education. School is a safe space, but that is where it ends. "There is no transition or bridging into studying and then working. Students become overqualified and inexperienced, which adds to unemployment rates" (P5).

- *Graduates need:*
  - "A bigger basket to be relevant" – a bigger offering in terms of a range of skills, training, and experience to be more employable or to get promoted once employed (P5).
  - "To be seen as individuals. They get lost in lecture theatres of 200 people or large work-experience programmes, and the content they are taught and the exposure they are given becomes less relevant if too generic or not specified to individual interests" (P5).
  - A new set of metrics – the way in which students are examined is based on educational practices that date far back. In the context of a fast-paced and quickly changing retail industry, the standard of measure is not adequate. This is also the case when outdated performance reviews are used to determine promotions. "There is a risk of over-promoting" (P5).

From the above-mentioned findings, the following insights can be identified, forming the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 9:** Match entry requirements with expectations of the curricula as well as the end-goal of role requirements in industry.
- **Insight 10:** Guide graduates in transitioning from the safe space of school and studying to the endless possibilities available to them in the world of work.
- **Insight 11:** Prioritise the student – this is where the two worlds meet. Give attention to individuals to recognise their own aspirations as well as identify what would be a best fit for them in terms of qualification and career.

The section that follows presents the second primary objective that the study aimed to address.

8.2. PRIMARY RESEARCH OBJECTIVE 2

The second primary objective for this study was to align the curricula to best address the requirements in the industry. The associated gaps identified from phase 1 of the study in relation to this primary objective include:

- Gap 3: Alignment between the knowledge, skills, and competencies (modules) acquired from the different levels of qualifications at HEIs and TVETs and whether this aligns with retail industry requirements for potential graduate employees is unknown.
- Gap 4: Perceptions of academics and industry regarding having varying entry requirements that are open to all types of students have yet to be explored.
- Gap 5: Proper understanding of the need for WIL and how it contributes to industry and employability is lacking.

To help address these gaps, the following secondary research objectives were developed and used to form the foundation of the questions to explore in phase 2 of the study:

- To propose recommendations to maintain alignment between curricula and industry needs in future; and
- To explore whether existing subjects/modules offered in the curricula are aligned with the skills needs of the retailing industry.

8.2.1. Main finding 3: The journey

The journey that students (and then employees) go on is often unintended and even accidental. It is rife with assumptions and expectations from all angles. However, there is a

great opportunity to harness the potential for choice and change in this process; to offer graduates guidance from both industry and academia, which might be embedded in retail curricula to ensure there is alignment between industry and academic. It is important to understand students' journeys as they go through their qualifications to identify where there may be gaps in curricula alignment, which are presented in the findings below. Note that these findings are from the perspective of academics and industry representatives.

- *The education journey starts with a broad umbrella before getting a handle on something more specific and specialised, but there is only so much that can be covered in the amount of time and with the resources available:*
  - Lecturers state that information regarding the courses, modules, and subjects is detailed, clear, and easily accessible to students: "it should be set out in the prospectus and available on websites" (P4); and "individuals have access to this information on the website and open days" (P2).
  - "Entry is based on the APS score which is sometimes unobtainable. Judgement of competency and capability shouldn't only be made on entry level" (P2).
  - "Students that get into the diploma have to have 25 points. And they have to have a certain level of maths and English, which is common for all the management sciences" (P1).
  - "We did have an instance a little while back when it was 24 points. And we do see that the failure rates definitely go up" (P1).
  - There are general education subjects across qualifications. These give individuals a chance to "orient themselves" – especially those whose aim is to "just get into university". "Retail isn't usually a first choice. It is rare to find a student that embarks on this journey intentionally. They usually land up here. This is what was available. It's similar to marketing" (P2).
  - "Retail 1, 2, 3 set the basis for industry. For example: life skills, selling, operations, consumer behaviour, and buying" (P4).
  - "I think students should be immersing themselves in the field that they've chosen right from year one. So that then means they only really go into retail-specific topics, or modules in their second year. And so what we used to teach over three years, we are now trying to cram into two years. And I think maybe they miss out. I think sometimes the depths of what they get is maybe not as good as it should be" (P1).

- *The career journey is a lot more complex and demanding than what many graduates anticipate:*
  - There is no easy transition from academia into industry. "Students are left to fend for themselves, they get told 'You've got a degree, figure it out'" (P5).
  - In job interviews, graduates are often given behaviour-based questions and calculations (P2) that require examples and outcomes to gauge their competencies, skills, and knowledge (P3). If this is not developed in an academic space, it makes it harder for them to adapt to the retail space where these scenarios play out in real time.
  - Organisations expect graduates to be equipped with certain fundamentals that would make them employable in any retail role.
  - "So, your students go out, and they expect to be managers from day one. And we all know, as adults have been around a while, that you can't manage people unless you've done the job yourself previously" (P1).
  - A junior-level position has a high potential to be fast-tracked to a manager. It is possible to have a seamless journey from entry level to intermediate to senior. "Most people are based in-store at the frontline, and then move into a design or tech role" (P3).

From the above-mentioned findings the following insights can be identified, which form the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 12:** Start the retail journey earlier to get more students interested in this career path.
- **Insight 13:** Debunk myths and misconceptions about retail to avoid disappointment and dropping out.
- **Insight 14:** Make retail a first choice, not a last resort, by getting students excited about the possibilities, motivating lecturers to get creative, and inspiring retailers to get involved.

In terms of the qualification journey, it was noted that each qualification journey is different due to the type of qualification that students are enrolled for. Some of the main findings that were identified that help to align the curricula are presented below.

- *Higher certificate:* "We used to offer a higher certificate, but we don't any more. It caused enormous problems where there were these students that were accepted into the programmes, where they had less points from matric, insufficient to get into the diploma. So, the certificate was offered as an alternative. Many students thought that this would fast-track them into a diploma, so it caused huge problems politically and then every other way. So, the choice was actually to stop that" (P1).

- *Diploma:* This is a three-year programme that takes students up to NQF level 6 (P1).
  - "The decision was made to offer a Diploma in Management Sciences now with specialisations in marketing, retail, operations, management, public management's human resources. And they introduced a first year that was common to all those diplomas. What they call general education subjects. So those are subjects that are presented across the board to give the students a chance to orientate themselves and be sure that they are doing what they … because some students come in … wanting to just get into university" (P1).
  - "We are not offering the Postgraduate Diploma in Retail specifically, purely because we're not getting enough because there are rules where you have to have X amount of students coming into your course, otherwise it's not worth running it and paying a staff member…. But what we do is we do allow our retail students to actually still do their postgraduate diploma, but they do it under the marketing umbrella…. Because a lot of the subjects are now more research-based. So, it's preparing them for a master's. So that is level eight" (P1).
  - "We offer a diploma that is well-rounded. It includes retail, business, applied accountancy, communications, personal selling, consumer behaviour, logistics, business law, and labour relations" (P2).

- *Advanced diploma:* This qualification is at an NQF level 7 and is designed to bridge the gap between undergraduate and postgraduate studies. It prepares students for academic writing and research methodologies, which are important for further studies (P1).
  - "The advanced diploma, they do project management, which again, is common to marketing and all the other management sciences, because we still in that management science thing. With specialisation. They do common subjects, project management, organisational behaviour, research methodology, and then unique is

retail supply chains. Advanced strategic retailing, which is basically a strategic planning, financial management, which again is common to the others. The nice thing about it for retail, that advanced diploma is all of those courses are rather useful for retail. So, there's not like the general education where you might say, 'Ah, it's not really retail-specific', but retailers, I believe, would appreciate management people with good project management skills, I mean, every new stores or project every new change in strategy as a project, and then organisational behaviour, very useful, taught by the human resources department" (P1).

- *Postgraduate diploma:* It was mentioned by P1 that their institution is not currently offering a postgraduate diploma in retail, but acknowledged the importance of this qualification, which could be specialised and prepare students for higher academic pursuits.

  - "The problem with NQF 7 and 8 is that there is a mismatch. There are only so many roles that require high qualifications. The core business is in store and qualifications aren't needed for this" (P5).

- *Master's degree:* After NQF level 8, students can pursue a master's degree specialising in retail. This degree is research-focused and helps students develop advanced knowledge and expertise in the field. "When I did my master's and doctorate, I did retail topics, but now there are retail degrees" (P1).

- *Doctorate degree:* The highest level of qualification in retail is a doctorate degree (PhD). This level (NQF level 10) allows students to conduct in-depth research and make significant contributions to the field of retail (P1).

From the above findings, the following insights can be identified, which form the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 15:** Start general and progress to specialisation. Have a strong foundation that speaks to all basic industry needs, regardless of academic qualification or industry role.
- **Insight 16:** Not everyone has an opportunity to obtain a tertiary education. Consider alternative ways of equipping them with the theory and practice needed to succeed in retail.

The section that follows presents the next theme identified from the findings that addresses the research gaps and objectives mentioned in section 8.2.

8.2.2. Main finding 4: The strategy

All participants were passionate about retail and saw great potential for it to respond to not only industry needs, but the nation's needs, too, provided that the right strategy is implemented. The strategy is open for debate, but the objective is clear: integrate hands (what we do), head (what we think), and heart (what we feel) into all things retail. One way in which academia can do this is through a WIL programme. WIL has the potential to be retail's superpower. This is how the head (academia), the hands (industry), and the heart (graduates) work together. However, there are a few creases to iron out, as presented below.

- *Placement is near impossible*:
  - "Placing students in a practical work environment to get experience, but it's a struggle to get placement. There are site visits, internships, and government-compensated programmes instead" (P2).
  - As per P2, "Students can't balance work and study effectively otherwise", if they are not given WIL opportunities.
  - "Internships are longer and based on a stricter programme" (P4).
  - "Spend X amount of time working to graduate" (P5) – which can delay graduation.
- *Permanency is not a given*:
  - Those entering the job market with work experience hit the ground running with a head start – "experience makes them more attractive to industry" (P2), but this does not guarantee employment follows experience.
  - "Ideally, there would be a permanent job at the end of WIL where the individual gets absorbed into the organisation" (P2).
  - "Companies prefer WIL when it is structured. Makes individuals more employable when they have practical experience. Practical gives a new perspective on theory – it's hard to see the benefit on paper in the work environment. You need to gain valuable and relevant experience" (P3).
  - "We offer WIL on an informal manner right now. it used to be a full-on credit that they had to get. And in the new programme, we have embedded it in what's called

'preparation for the workplace' or 'work preparedness'. So, in a way, it's cheap labour for the retailers. And students then bounce from one internship to the next, but we have a lot of retailers that actually do put their money where their mouth is and say we want 20 students or we want 30 students or whatever it might be" (P1).

- *Priorities are not based on a universal standard across retail:*
  - "Technicons tend to prioritise experience over class, there's flexibility in their schedule" (P2).
  - "Technicons are more progressive in their recruitment" (P5).
  - WIL was offered in several retail-related qualifications, and no longer is, but some are looking at bringing it back (P4).
  - "Experiences are simulated instead of being hands-on" (P5).
  - "Businesses have two hats: social consciousness and money" (P5) – this influences the opportunities made available to graduates.

From the aforementioned findings, the following insights can be identified, which form the foundation for the practical recommendations provided in section 10:

- **Insight 17:** Encourage and enforce work-life balance to avoid the exhaustion and exploitation of students.
- **Insight 18:** Work around students' schedules and needs.
- **Insight 19:** WIL needs to be taken more seriously and not be easily influenced by internal or external politics.
- **Insight 20:** If WIL is not possible, offer relevant alternatives.

A discussion of the main findings is presented below in line with the gaps and research objectives and forms the basis of the practical recommendations presented in section 10.

9. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Based on the main findings, there is a lack of alignment between retail curricula and the retail sector's needs. From the preliminary analysis in phase 1, it was identified that many institutions do not make their information on retail-related qualifications available or easily accessible and thus the sector is unaware of the skills that graduates are obtaining during their studies (gap 1). This gave rise to gap 2, which concerns the fact that the retail sector's

perceptions about the value and importance of the various types of qualifications offered at HEIs and TVETs is unclear. A few participants expressed that they felt there were excellent interactions between academia and the retail sector. However, this finding contradicts the *W&R SETA Sector Skills Plan (SSP) 2020-2025* by the W&R SETA (2020:72) that highlighted the need to partner with HEIs to develop a "curriculum aligned to sector labour market demands", as well as the W&R SETA research report on learning programmes by Meyer and Van Dyk (2022:18) that emphasised the development of "up-to-date curricula and training programmes to equip employees with knowledge and skills for agility in the fast-changing W&R sector". Other participants explained that there is somewhat of a relationship between academia and the retail sector, though there is a sense of disconnect, implying that alignment between curricula and retail sector skills was indeed an issue. Moreover, it was highlighted that the sector provides the practical expertise, while academia provides the theoretical insights and if these work together, there will be mutual benefit to both parties as well as graduates and the overall state of employment in South Africa.

The lack of alignment is also influenced by how each sector, industry, and academia respond to crises, such as COVID-19, power failures, and poverty, which negatively impact on students' ability to learn as well as how they progress in their qualification journey. Findings of a similar nature were identified in studies by Badat (2020) and Du Plessis, Jansen van Vuuren, Simons, Frantz, Roman and Andipatin (2022). Although the retail sector and academia cannot control these contextual factors, they might consider collaboratively working together and finding solutions to improve students' academic journeys to enable them to effectively progress in their studies, obtain their qualifications, and graduate with the skills that the retail sector demands. Industry participants identified these skills as soft skills, life skills, and personal values that can be integrated into teaching and learning to improve graduates' employability. Some of these skills included interpersonal skills – which were also identified by Jacobs and Karpova (2022) – namely communication teamwork and leadership, and intrapersonal skills like having a positive attitude, time management, change management, and self-management. Jacobs and Karpova (2022) further explored technical skills, which were supported more by academics who identified that basic numeracy and literacy skills obtained from secondary school are poor. Moreover, it seems that students are not guided on their transition from school to university, which also impacts their success in the first year of study. From industry's perspective, graduates need to be offered a wider range of skills, training, and experience at HEIs. Students tend to become overqualified as

they have a high NQF level-based qualification or a qualification like retail business management and assume they will enter the retail sector as junior-level managers, but this is not the case, as they are inexperienced. This was proven by Mobarak (2019), who mentioned that although academic skills are a primary requirement for employers, most employers are looking beyond these skills for work experience combined with a qualification. Hence, being overqualified and underexperienced leads to higher unemployment rates. Furthermore, the way students are assessed in academia is outdated and in the context of a fast-paced and quickly changing retail industry, the standard of measure is inadequate. The standard of assessment is dependent on the knowledge, skills, and competencies of the various qualifications (gap 3), entry requirements (gap 4), and integration of WIL (gap 5).

Academics felt that the entry requirements for these qualifications might be too high and unobtainable. Looking at what the graduates are expected to do once employed in the retail sector, perhaps their competency and capability should also be considered and not just their matric results. One institution aimed to lower its entry requirements, but saw a significant increase in failure rates. For many students, a retail-related qualification is not their first option, as most want to enter marketing or business management. Therefore, it was suggested that all first-year modules be generic for students to determine if retail is the qualification they wish to study and then more specific retail modules be introduced from second-year onwards. Some institutions have introduced higher certificates (NQF level 5) to enable matric learners who may not have met the entry requirements to study and have an opportunity to get into the diploma. Nevertheless, this had negative implications for one institution, which decided to terminate the programme. A number of HEIs offer diploma-level retail qualifications (NQF 6), a few offering advanced diplomas in retailing (NQF level 7) and one institution offered a postgraduate diploma in retailing (NQF level 8), but with the low student enrolment, the qualification is not being offered any more. In addition, from an industry perspective, there are only so many roles in the retail sector that require high NQF-level qualifications and in retail, the core business is in-store, thus such qualifications are not required for these roles. Both industry and academics agreed on the value and importance of WIL (gap 5).

WIL was viewed as an opportunity for industry, academia, and graduates to work together to improve the value of retail qualifications and the employability of graduates in the retail sector. A study by Inceoglu et al. (2016) promotes that during the WIL training, students are

exposed to new skills, knowledge, capabilities, and skills mastering that cannot be learnt in a formal classroom environment. Despite the identified importance of WIL in retail qualifications, some key concerns from both academia and the retail sector included difficulty in placing students, as WIL experience does not guarantee job placement, which many graduates assume and there is no universal standard on priorities across retail. Each institution has its own rules, some prioritise experience over knowledge or vice versa, and others are looking to integrate simulations as part of WIL, though these experiences are not seen as hands-on. WIL also depends on the resources available at various retailers and what the main objectives are of these retailers, social consciousness or money. This affects the implementation and success of a WIL programme. These findings were supported by a report by Truman, Mason and Venter (2015) on behalf of the W&R SETA. Based on the aforementioned findings and discussions, it is evident that the retail sector should play a more active role in the curricula review and development at HEIs. As it stands, graduates are not well equipped with all the skills that the retail sector requires and academia should ensure that they align their curricula accordingly.

10. PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The practical recommendations provided are based on addressing each of the research gaps identified from phase 1, which address the primary objectives and deliverables provided by the W&R SETA.

Addressing gap 1: Many institutions do not make their information on retail-related qualifications available or easily accessible:

a) Enhance curriculum visibility: HEIs should make information on retail-related qualifications readily accessible to the retail sector. This can be achieved by maintaining up-to-date programme information on their websites and actively sharing it with industry stakeholders.

b) Industry-academia engagement: Foster stronger partnerships between HEIs and the retail sector to facilitate a better understanding of the skills and knowledge students acquire during their studies. Regular meetings, forums, and industry visits can help bridge this gap.

c) Turn crises into opportunities: View the current contextual challenges as an opportunity for positive change. Collaborate with a sense of urgency to co-create solutions that

address the workforce needs of the retail sector in the face of high unemployment rates. Provide training and resources to lecturers to help them address non-academic challenges that students may face. Equip them to guide students in overcoming obstacles that could hinder their academic and career success.

d) Develop programmes to assist graduates in transitioning from the academic world to the world of work. Offer career counselling, job placement services, and mentorship to ease the transition. Prioritise the needs and aspirations of individual students. Provide guidance and support to help students identify their career paths within the retail sector, ensuring a strong fit between qualifications and industry roles.

Addressing gap 2: Retail industry perceptions about the value and importance of the various types of qualifications offered at HEIs and TVETs is unclear:

e) Develop industry-academia partnerships with incentives: Foster strong, mutually beneficial relationships between HEIs and the retail industry. Create incentives, such as research collaborations, internships, and funding opportunities to encourage collaboration.

f) Clear communication channels: Establish clear and consistent channels of communication between HEIs and the retail sector to clarify the value and importance of different qualifications. Create platforms for dialogues and feedback sessions to align perceptions.

g) Joint curriculum development: Collaboratively develop curricula with input from both academia and industry. This ensures that qualifications meet industry standards and are valued by employers. Have more regular industry advisory board meetings with a variety of members from the retail sector to offer advice and insights.

Addressing gap 3: Alignment between the knowledge, skills, and competencies (modules) acquired from the different levels of qualifications at HEIs and TVETs and whether this aligns with retail industry requirements for potential graduate employees is unknown:

h) Modernise assessment methods: Review and update assessment methods to align with the rapidly changing retail industry. Consider incorporating practical assessments, case studies, and real-world simulations to better measure students' preparedness for the workforce.

Addressing gap 4: Perceptions of academics and industry regarding having varying entry requirements that are open to all types of students have yet to be explored:

i) Holistic entry criteria: Consider a more holistic approach to entry requirements, taking into account not only matric results, but also students' competencies and capabilities. Develop bridge programmes or preparatory courses to help students meet entry criteria.

j) Alignment of entry requirements: Ensure that the entry requirements for HEI programmes align with the expectations of the curricula and the qualifications required in the retail industry. Avoid unnecessary barriers to entry.

Addressing gap 5: Proper of understanding the need for WIL and how it contributes to industry and employability is lacking:

k) Standardise WIL practices: Collaborate to establish industry-wide standards for WIL programmes. This can include defining objectives, evaluation criteria, and ensuring that WIL experiences are hands-on and valuable.

l) WIL placement support: Create mechanisms to support the placement of students in WIL programmes. HEIs and industry can work together to identify suitable placements and guide students during their WIL experiences.

m) Monitoring and evaluation: Establish a system for monitoring and evaluating the success of WIL programmes. Collect feedback from students, industry partners, and HEIs to continuously improve these programmes.

11. CONCLUSION

This report has provided valuable insights into the alignment between existing curricula at HEIs offering retail-related courses and the needs of the retailing sector in South Africa. The objectives and deliverables set for this study have been met. This report has comprehensively analysed the curricula content (framework of qualifications) offered by HEIs in the retail sector. It highlights the gaps and areas where alignment with industry needs is lacking. Moreover, the report has identified limitations and constraints within the current curricula review and development processes. These limitations hinder the effective alignment of curricula with industry requirements, and strategies to address these constraints have been discussed. The role of HEIs has been assessed in relation to their collaboration with the retail industry. This assessment provides insights into the strengths and weaknesses of these providers in meeting industry demands, and the report delves into

the industry's involvement in curricula development and review. It highlights the need for stronger collaboration between academia and the retail sector to bridge gaps in curricula alignment.

In summary, the findings of this report emphasise the importance of bridging the gap between academia and industry in the retail sector. The identified gaps in curricula content, limitations in review processes, and opportunities for collaboration between training providers and the industry highlight the path forward. By implementing the practical recommendations outlined in this report, HEIs and the retail sector can enhance the relevance and effectiveness of retail-related curricula, ultimately benefiting both students and the industry. This collaborative effort is crucial in addressing South Africa's high unemployment rate and ensuring that graduates are well prepared to meet the demands of the retailing sector.

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ANNEXURE A

Table A: Explanation of each sub-category analysed for higher education institutions

Sub-category	Explanation of each sub-category
National Qualification Framework (NQF) level	According to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act (SAQA, 2010), the NQF is a comprehensive system approved by the minister for the classification, registration, publication, and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications. The NQF is a framework that sets the boundaries, principles, and guidelines, which provide a vision, a philosophical base, and an organisational structure for constructing a qualifications system.
Entry requirements	Entry requirements are formal criteria applicants must meet to be considered for a course. These requirements are established by the institution offering the course. They assess applicants' ability to achieve the course's objectives. Entry requirements for certificates, diplomas, advanced diplomas, and degrees related to retail may vary across institutions. In South Africa, the admission point score (APS) determines entry requirements for a qualification at the first-year level. Tsagae, Ajoodha and Kershree (2022) defined an APS as a metric developed by South African universities to assist students in determining their eligibility for a particular undergraduate degree. The APS system informs students of the grades they need to obtain to study in a specific field. The APS criteria are calculated based on the weighting assigned to each grade 12 subject's symbols. For instance, a computer science degree requires a minimum of 70% in Mathematics and 60% in English. A matric pass is awarded to students with an APS of 15 in the National Senior Certificate. A higher certificate pass requires an APS of 17, a diploma pass requires an APS of 19, and a bachelor's degree pass requires an APS of 23 (Razeen, 2022). These scores serve as indicators of students' academic performance and readiness for higher education (Tsagae et al., 2022).
Qualification	Unesco (2021) described a qualification as a recognised certification issued by an official agency or institution, indicating that an individual has met the specific learning outcomes or competencies required for the qualification title, which can be a certificate, diploma, or degree.
Qualification/Module purpose	A purpose refers to the aim of a qualification/module and describes the knowledge, skills, and competencies that learners are expected to acquire upon completion of the qualification/module and how these will be applied in the workplace or in further study (SAQA, 2023)
Qualification/module outcome	According to SAQA (2023), the term "outcome" refers to a short description of a significant, meaningful milestone of learning that is worth reporting upon and recognising. The outcome describes what learners are expected to know and/or do. In South Africa, all course outcomes must be approved by the DHET and SAQA.
Pre-requisite	A prerequisite refers to a particular course or subject that students must complete before they can register for another course at a higher level (Newyouth.ca, 2019). This requirement/precondition helps ensure students have the necessary knowledge and skills in a previous course to succeed in the subsequent course. Prerequisites are used to determine whether students have the foundational knowledge to succeed in the module.
Syllabus	A syllabus is a well-written description; it is a plan about what to be included in the course for the learning objectives (Bazyar, 2015).
Industry/Work placement	Work placement refers to a supervised work period, providing an opportunity to gain experience in a specific role within a company (Inceoglu, Selenko, McDowall & Schlachter, 2016). These periods are usually short and are incorporated into a course of study. Work placements or internships are structured and embedded in curricula, offering opportunities for "trial transitions" into the working world. In retail management, work placement is crucial because it allows retail students to apply

Sub-category	Explanation of each sub-category
	theoretical knowledge gained in class to a real-world retail setting. Across all qualifications, the government has outlined its plan to introduce approximately 107 000 workplace-based learning opportunities in various sectors of the economy in 2023 (Nzimande, 2023). These opportunities will encompass learnerships and aim to provide valuable hands-on experience for individuals. Through work placement, students acquire skills and develop professional networks that support their future professional growth in retail.
Industry projects	Industry projects are projects undertaken by students in collaboration with industry partners. Such projects provide students with opportunities to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world industry settings to gain valuable experience in the workplace (Acheson, 2014).

Source: Authors' conceptualisation

ANNEXURE B

SUMMARY OF PROPOSED IMPLICATIONS IN RELATION TO MAIN FINDINGS

Main finding 1:

- Only two traditional universities make their information on retail-related qualifications/modules in qualifications publicly available. This implies that other traditional universities either do not offer retail-related qualifications or are not making their prospective students aware of retail-related qualifications.

- Not having information publicly available might also hinder the retail industry's perceptions of accreditation if graduates indicate that they received these qualifications at traditional universities that have not made their retail-related qualification information available online.

Main finding 2:

- The target is clearly articulated in the purpose of the qualifications, which assists prospective students in determining if they are the correct fit to apply.

- The retail industry can determine whether the type of qualification aligns with its needs as an organisation.

- Making module outcomes available gives prospective students and the retail industry insight into what skills, competencies, and knowledge students should exit the qualification with.

Main finding 3:

- All information concerning the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) presented by the two traditional universities aligns with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which might improve the accreditation perceptions associated with the qualification from an industry perspective. The different levels also inform industry what graduates are expected to know once they exit the qualification.

- Making prerequisite information/entry requirements available helps prospective students determine whether they will have a chance of being accepted into the programme. Otherwise, students who do not have the necessary prerequisite knowledge and skills might enter the programme and experience challenges based on lack of knowledge and competency.

- Allowing individuals with matric passes and those in managerial positions in the retail sector to qualify promotes inclusivity, thereby broadening opportunities to a wider range of individuals.

Main finding 4:

- Most universities of technology offer retail-related qualifications that specialise in offering a hands-on, applied, and practical approach to teaching and learning. This might be attractive to the retail industry, as the positions require employees to have some sort of experience for them to be successful in acquiring the job.

Main finding 5:

- All NQF and credit-related information presented by the universities of technology aligns with SAQA, which might improve the accreditation perceptions associated with the qualification from an industry perspective.
- The different levels also inform industry what graduates are expected to know once they exit the qualification.
- Articulation routes into advanced diplomas are evident for students looking to specialise in retailing and have more advanced competencies and knowledge, which might appeal to industry-seeking individuals competent in more advanced retailing areas and management

Main finding 6:

- Offering various entry requirements might be a competitive strategy amongst universities of technology, but allows individuals who might not have prior academic experience or knowledge in the field and rather industry experience to apply.
- From a retail industry perspective, this gives current retail employees the opportunity to upskill themselves with a qualification.
- However, varying entry requirements might impact perceptions of quality, credibility, and transparency in the approval of applications.

Main finding 7:

- Foundational knowledge in accounting, law, English/communication, maths/numeracy, and computers is essential knowledge all business/retail graduates should have.

- More specific retail-related modules include supply chain management, logistics, retailing/retail operations, personal selling, and consumer behaviour, also deemed essential to successfully working in the retail industry.
- The necessity to integrate business management/entrepreneurship and retail is not always clear to students wanting to apply.
- VUT offers the Shopping Centre Management module, which other qualifications have removed from their curricula. This might influence whether students decide to apply to various institutions.
- TUT offers life skills, which might be beneficial in teaching students important skills in their professional careers.
- Some institutions provide an articulation route into advanced diplomas, enabling students to specialise if they like, indicating to students that there is room for growth in the retail industry, which might also be appealing to industry itself.

Main finding 8:

- WIL improves workplace readiness and is especially important in a vocational programme. From an academic perspective, it may prove challenging to integrate WIL into the qualification if there are not enough time, staffing, and budgetary resources.
- From an industry perspective, any type of work experience is valued and improves the chances of employment among graduates.

Main finding 9:

- All NQF-related information presented by the comprehensive universities align with SAQA, which might improve the accreditation perceptions associated with the qualification from an industry perspective.
- There are several articulation routes based on NQF levels, giving students a number of options to expand their knowledge and competencies in retail. Having this information publicly available also enables industry to identify the skill level of their employees.

Main finding 10:

- Offering various entry requirements might be a competitive strategy amongst universities of technology, but allows individuals who might not have prior academic experience or knowledge in the field and rather industry experience to apply.

- From a retail industry perspective, this gives current retail employees the opportunity to upskill themselves with a qualification.
- However, varying entry requirements might impact perceptions of quality, credibility, and transparency in the approval of applications.

Main finding 11:
- The higher certificate courses provide foundational knowledge into general competencies that retail students should have once they graduate. This enables those who do not have any previous qualifications in retail to upskill themselves and is also open to industry.
- Diplomas not focused solely on retail might undermine the value of retail. Some students might only opt for the qualifications because of the business management or finance/accounting options. Students might not have received a high enough APS to apply to business management or finance/accounting-specific modules and might have opted for those with a retail stream.
- From the information publicly available, there are not many options in advanced diplomas in retail offered at comprehensive universities. One of the universities focuses on retail specifically, whilst the other is a more general diploma in business studies. Advanced diplomas allow students to specialise and achieve more advanced knowledge and competencies in their field of study.
- Finance and research were both identified as modules in the advanced diploma, excluding other core retail modules, which are imperative for students exiting at NQF level 8. This implies the type and level of knowledge required in these two areas.

Main finding 12:
- WIL improves workplace readiness and is especially important in a vocational programme. From an academic perspective, it may prove challenging to integrate WIL into the qualification if there are not enough time, staffing, and budgetary resources.
- From an industry perspective, any type of work experience is valued and improves the chances of employment among graduates.
- Although simulations offer experiential learning, it might not provide the same benefits and experiences associated with WIL.

Main finding 13:

- The exit National Certificate Vocational (NCV) is basic and foundational, compared to preceding qualifications' NQF levels, which might impact industry perceptions when recruiting graduates.

Main finding 14:

- Not having enough information publicly available might also hinder the retail industry's perceptions of accreditation if graduates indicate that they received these qualifications at Technical and Vocational Education and Training colleges that have not made their retail-related qualification information available online.

- Basic foundational skills and competencies are mentioned in the qualification purposes, which may prove useful to students who were not able to study at a HEI.

Main finding 15:

- WIL improves the chances of employability, but might not be necessary at an NCV level 2.

ANNEXURE C

Figure C: A nexus between objectives, gaps, findings, insights, and recommendations

PRIMARY OBJECTIVES	GAPS	SECONDARY OBJECTIVES	FINDINGS	INSIGHTS	RECOMMENDATIONS
To identify the degree of alignment between existing curricula at HEIs offering retail-related courses and the sector's needs	Gap 1: Many institutions do not make their information on retail-related qualifications available or easily accessible.	To analyse the role of industry in curriculum development and review.	Main finding 1: Relationships	Insights 1 - 11	Recommendation (a)
	Gap 2: Retail industry perceptions about the value and importance of the various types of qualifications offered at HEIs and TVETs is unclear.	To identify areas in the curricula where there is a lack of alignment.			Recommendation (b)
					Recommendation (c)
		To understand why the lack of alignment between curricula and industry needs exist.	Main finding 2: The context		Recommendation (d)
	Gap 3: Alignment between the knowledge, skills and competencies (modules) acquired from the different levels of qualifications at HEIs and TVETs and whether this aligns with retail industry requirements for potential graduate employees is unknown.	To identify the limitations/ constraints provided by current curriculum review and development processes.			Recommendation (e)
					Recommendation (f)
		To analyse the retailing sector's curriculum relevance			Recommendation (g)
To align the curricula to best address the requirements in the industry.	Gap 4: Perceptions of academics and industry regarding having varying entry requirements that are open to all types of students is yet to be explored.	To propose recommendations to maintain alignment between curricula and industry needs in future.	Main finding 3: The journey	Insights 12 - 20	Recommendation (h)
					Recommendation (i)
					Recommendation (j)
	Gap 5: Proper understanding the need for WIL and how it contributes to industry and employability is lacking.	To explore whether existing subjects/modules offered in the curriculum are aligned with the skills needs of the retailing industry	Main finding 4: Strategy		Recommendation (k)
					Recommendation (l)
					Recommendation (m)

Source: Authors' conceptualisation