SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

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Prepared by wholesale and Retail chair Department of the Durban University of Technology (DUT)

RESAERCH PROJECT: SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Submitted to: The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA)

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DISCLAIMER

IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT ANY OPINIONS EXPRESSED IN THIS REPORT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE SERVICE PROVIDER AND NOT THE SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE COMMITTEE (W&R SETA).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The wholesale and retail industry in South Africa is experiencing significant changes due to technological advancements and evolving consumer behaviour. As a result, there is a growing demand for employees with the skills necessary to thrive in this rapidly changing environment. This study aimed to identify the key skills that will be crucial for success in the future workforce, including critical thinking, adaptability, collaboration, and digital literacy. By developing a strong foundation in these areas, individuals will be better equipped to navigate the challenges and opportunities of tomorrow's dynamic and ever-changing workplace. Therefore, this study highlights the importance of ongoing learning and upskilling to stay ahead in a competitive market, and emphasizes the value of creativity, emotional intelligence, and problem-solving in driving innovation and growth. Through a combination of literature review, survey and interviews with industry experts, the study provides insights into the skills that employers are looking for in the wholesale and retail sector, as well as how these skills can be developed and nurtured in the workforce. The findings of this study will serve as a valuable resource for industry stakeholders, policymakers, and educators looking to support the growth and development of the wholesale and retail industry in South Africa. Overall, this study serves as a roadmap for individuals seeking to thrive in the skills for the future and secure their place in an increasingly complex and interconnected global economy.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Skills for the Future is a W&R SETA funded research project, initiated and undertaken in partnership with the Wholesale and Retail Leadership Chair Department of the Durban University of technology (DUT). The W&R SETA (Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority) offers a range of skills funded programmes aimed at upskilling employees in the wholesale and retail industry. These programmes cover a variety of areas such as customer service, merchandising, stock control, and sales techniques. Participants in these programmes are expected to receive training in the latest industry practices and techniques, as well as practical experience in a retail setting. The goal of these programmes is to equip individuals with the skills they need to succeed in a fast-paced and competitive industry. By participating in these skills funded programmes, students in learnership and employees can enhance their career prospects and take advantage of new opportunities within the wholesale and retail sector. The W&R SETA is committed to supporting the growth and development of the industry through these valuable training initiatives. The Dashboard Report - Skills for the Future and the strategic framework on skill set preparation for the future further below, paint out the picture of the main themes that were investigated, as well as the specific findings and recommendations for the W&R SETA to consider. This report comprises four important sections:

- Section A: Dashboard Report - Skills for the Future and a strategic framework on skill set preparation for the future.
- Section B: Introduction, Literature Review, and Research methodology.
- Section C: Findings and interpretation of quantitative and qualitative results.
- Section D: Recommendations and Conclusion.

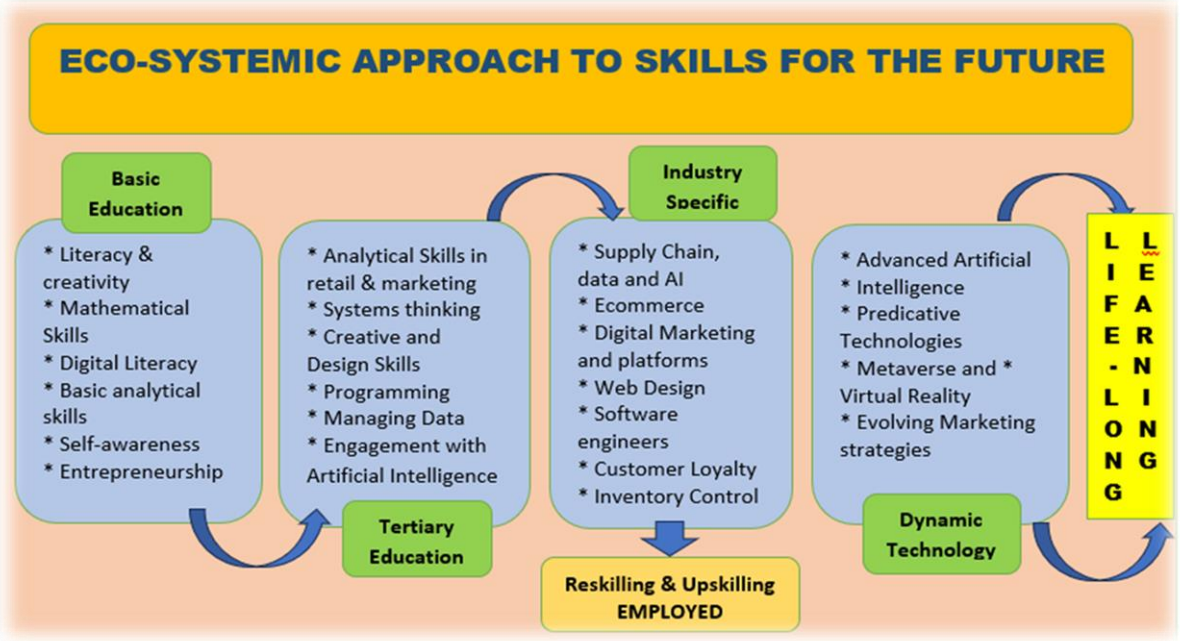
SECTION A: DASHBOARD REPORT - SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE AND A STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK ON SKILL SET PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

This section encompasses two subsections. Subsection A1 explains and describes the dashboard report-skills for the future, and subsection A2 discusses the strategic framework on skill set preparation for the future. The Eco-systemic approach to skills for the future involves upskilling and reskilling, learning and institutional engagement, and retail specific interventions to develop analytical, creative and technological skills.

Analytical, Creative and Technological Skills

The rapid growth in the use of technologies and the proliferation of digital devices globally is having a profound impact on economies, business models and skills sets required. Global think tanks on skills provision and the labour market demands namely, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the World Economic Forum (WEF) are driving research and conversations on skill sets required for the future to meet evolving industry demands. Stemming from worldwide trends amongst a broad range of skill required for the future, the three main skills required are analytical skills, creative skills, and technological skills. These skills are expected to be developed and grounded beginning at the basic education level and setting the foundation for higher order skills to be nurtured. Higher order skills such as advanced technological skills, business processing skills, data management skills and computer application skills are listed below foundational skills in the ranking of skills required. Thus, highlighting the longitudinal nature of skills acquisition. Employees in the retail sector are required to be problem-solvers, critical thinkers, and innovators due to shifts in the work paradigm. The pace of digital transformation highlights the value of life-long learning, with insightful caution that static skill sets could be perilous in an era of constant flux. The graphic below highlights an ecosystemic approach to managing skills for the future encapsulated in life-long learning.

Having a combination of analytical, creative, and technological skills can make any individual a well-rounded and versatile professional who is able to adapt to different situations and excel in a variety of roles. These skills are highly sought after in today's fast-paced and constantly evolving job market.



As stated earlier, the eco-systemic approach to skills for the future involves upskilling and reskilling, learning and institutional engagement, and retail specific interventions.

- **Upskilling and reskilling**

The preparation of a workforce for the future has to be distinct with a balanced strategy on programmes and interventions for those who are currently employed and those who are about to enter the future workforce. Currently employed individuals may have the experience but lack the new emerging skills required and their competency levels have to be enhanced. Employers in the retail sector need to constantly upskill and reskill current employees so that employees are adaptable. Significantly, retail organisations are adopting the “grow and build your own timber strategy” to bridge the digital skills gaps of employed individuals by launching internal training programmes so that employee skills remain relevant.

Engaged employees are more likely to apply acquired skills and perform better. Upskilling and reskilling in basic digital literacy at the entry level could include programmes such as excel/ SAP or similar, cloud based SAAS solution training, on-the- job training and outsourced external training courses.

- **Learning and Institutional engagement**

Strong engagement between institutions of learning and industry is a pivotal cog in the preparation of fit-for-purpose graduates who could flow into industry in a productive and seamless manner. Ongoing curriculum conversations and work-based learning serves as a bedrock for skills in demand as it will be in consonance with industry and respective changes in the sector. Beneficiaries of the funding that received to study technology-based programmes articulated that studying a course in technology was an essential tool in the preparation for the world of work. Beneficiaries were also confident that their study in technology had equipped them for the future digital work environment. Study content for the respective programmes was aligned to the workplace and this can only be further solidified in a meaningful way by constant engagement between the consumers of skills required and skills delivery providers.

- **Retail Specific interventions**

The findings lucidly enunciate that basic digital literacy skills are essential skills in the current evolving digital era which can aid prospective and existing employees to navigate the online world effectively. This emphasises that possessing basic digital skills is fast becoming a non-negotiable entity for employability. Focus should be placed on the three categories of the evolving digital literacy, namely, (a) locating and consuming digital content, (b) creating digital content, and (c) communicating digital content. For businesses to be more competitive specific skills have to be developed and skills in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and relationship-building in commerce and ecommerce have to be harnessed.

Moreover, the operational engagement of the sector is experiencing seismic shifts with the utilisation of artificial intelligence gaining traction in supply chain, whilst software application development and knowledge of 2D and 3D technology is becoming invaluable to organisations, as they reimagine and reconfigure business models seeking specific skills. Additionally, organisations are strengthening their strategic outlook and are seeking design thinkers, strategy and future thinking, agile and innovative professionals who can navigate business intelligence and a digital strategy. What is emerging is that the retail sector is not only focusing on generic digital and technical skills but also a leadership and future leadership that can help organisations charter a digital road map in the retail sector. Leadership skills are increasingly in demand to propel technologically driven aspirations.

A1. DASHBOARD REPORT - SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

The Dashboard Report - Skills for the Future summarises the findings of a literature analysis, as well as qualitative and quantitative investigations conducted to assess the prominent future skills required for strengthening and growing the South African wholesale and retail industry. The key findings were divided into themes, which included analytical, creative, and technological skills; evolving market forces; satisfying new techno-savvy customers; the impact of digitalization on the sector; the prominence of data; retail-specific interventions; upskilling and reskilling; learning and institutional engagement; state and future skills; and other benefits. However, the Dashboard Report - Skills for the Future presents particular findings and significant recommendations for the W&R SETA to consider.

DASHBOARD REPORT - SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

Key Findings - Theme	Specific Findings	Recommendations for the W&R SETA to consider
Analytical, Creative and Technological Skills	• World Economic Forum state that the three main skills for the future are analytical, creative, and technological skills. • Higher order technological skills, business processes and other application were located lower down the order, highlighting the importance of foundational skills. • Employees in the retail sector should possess problem-solving and critical thinking abilities to find innovative solutions. • The pace of digital transformation highlights the values of life-long learning.	• Skills development initiatives should promote the development of employees' analytical, creative, problem-solving, technological, and critical thinking abilities within the retail sector. • Analytical, creative, and digital skills should be introduced and nurtured at Basic Education level – there should be greater and ongoing collaboration with DBE, W&R SETA, and industry on the future skills agenda. • Advanced, analytical, creative, and technological skills should be contextualized and aligned to industry requirements. As a custodian of skills development, the W&R SETA should be engaging DHET to champion curriculum conversations between the sector and institutions of higher learning (universities, University of Technologies and TVET Colleges.
Evolving Market Forces	• The majority of the respondents agreed that emerging technological trends would have a substantial impact on the skills required in the retail sector. • 93.9% of the respondents stated that the retail industry was going through a period of change. • Employees who are adaptable to new technologies, trends, and customer behaviours will help drive innovation, improve customer satisfaction, and ultimately contribute to the long-term success of their organisations and remain competitive in the evolving retail landscape. **Industry have identified a range of the following digital trends impacting on the retail sector:**	▪ Regular skills audits should be conducted to provide targeted training programs to bridge skills gaps. ▪ Cement partnerships with industry, training providers and leveraging internal company resources to ensure employees are equipped with the necessary skills for the future retail landscape. ▪ There should be investment in training and development programs that foster soft-skills and adaptability training programmes. ▪ Future skills development should link to emerging technologies in the retail industry. ▪ Entry level digital skills should be foregrounded amongst the employed and entry level workforce via reconfigured skills programmes, learnerships, bursary funding. ▪ Future skills development programmes should factor in training on artificial

	✓ Advancements in Geo location tagging. ✓ Artificial Intelligence and machine across the retail cycle. ✓ Augmented job functions ✓ Real time distribution technologies eg Drone delivery ✓ Hyper personalised shopping experience technologies ✓ Augmented and Virtual reality shopping experiences. ✓ Metaverse presence – still to gain momentum. ✓ Innovative partnership and loyalty program integrations. ✓ Self-checkout and automated checkout ✓ Robot shoppers and shelf replenishers ✓ Intuitive shopping/ tracking shopping habits ✓ Technology and inventory readiness ✓ Information Security and Cyber security.	intelligence in retail operations automation, inventory readiness supply chain, and augmented and virtual shopping experiences.
The Satisfying New Techno-savvy customer	▪ Prioritizing an understanding of the new customer amongst retail employees ▪ Skills in customer service and personalization are crucial for creating an exceptional customer experience. ▪ Businesses in the retail sector need to reward employees who consistently demonstrate exceptional customer understanding and service. ▪ Retailers must foster a culture of continuous improvement within the organisation.	▪ Incorporate evolving customer satisfaction metrics as part of the performance evaluation of training programmes for retail staff. • Invest in digital customer relationship management (CRM) training programmes in incongruence with technologies and software utilized in industry. • Funded training initiatives should involve regular surveys, mystery shopper programs, or data analysis of customer complaints and preferences. • W & R SETA programmes should align to business strategies through constant engagement.
Impact of Digitalization on the sector	▪ Retail organisations are utilizing ecommerce, data analytics, and online marketing in the retail industry. ▪ Employees in the retail industry need to be comfortable with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies. 83.9% of respondents agreed that being skilful at using online tools and engaging customers through digital channels will be crucial.	▪ Prioritizing training and development programs to enhance employees' skills in digital platforms. ▪ Encouraging the exchange of knowledge and experiences among the current workforce, to foster a collaborative learning environment. ▪ Introducing short collaborative projects where learners can share their expertise and learn from each other's experiences. ▪ Enhance a culture of continuous learning within the organizstion. ▪ Promote the proficiency of using online tools and interacting with clients via digital channels in its funding model which must be monitored by performance evaluation criteria.

		▪ Beneficiaries should be digitally tracked in their learning journeys to assess progression and relevancy.
Prominence of data	• 82.8% of the respondents affirmed that knowledge and skills in data analytics was essential as a future skill. • 87.9% of the respondents indicated that knowledge and skills in data management would be required as a future skill. • Employees in the retail sector should possess the knowledge to analyse data and develop strategies based on consumer preferences. **The following technological skills were identified by industry as skills employees in in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate:** ✓ Data mining ✓ Data Analysis ✓ Data interpretation ✓ Data based decision making.	• There should be support for the development of data analytics skills, such as introducing or expanding data analytics courses or programs in the retail sector to proactively mitigate the increasing demand for data analytics professionals. • Career opportunities in retail and data analytics can be promoted through career fairs, industry forums, online platforms, or informational campaigns. • Creating funding incentives for organisations that prioritize data analytics skills in their workforce. • Collaboration between academia and industry to foster innovation and knowledge exchange in the field of data analytics. • Training programmes should include a focus on enhancing customer experiences in the context of data management.
Retail Specific interventions	▪ Basic digital literacy skills are essential in today's digital era to navigate the online world effectively. ▪ To prioritize the development of sales techniques, negotiation skills, and relationship-building in commerce education and training programs. ▪ Digital skills will be essential to be in the retail sector due to effects of technology on the supply chain processes. ▪ Knowledge and skills in app application development will be required as a future skill. ▪ Retail employees should have a basic understanding of both 2D and 3D technology in order to effectively sell and support products related to these technologies. ▪ Business leaders should develop skills to foster digital innovation within their organisations and stay competitive in a rapidly evolving business landscape. **Industry required the following employee's skills and competencies for the future:** ✓ Design Thinking ✓ Coaching and mentoring	• There should be investment in the development of basic digital literacy skills for both employed and entry level employees to remain relevant. ▪ Training interventions should incorporate topics on digital sales techniques, negotiation skills, and relationship-building. • To improve digital skills among retail workers at all levels in order to enable them to face the disruptive effects of digital technologies in the supply chain. ▪ Providing specialized training workshops or offering mentorship programs to improve proficiency in these key areas. • Offering classes, workshops, or resources to help individuals gain the necessary knowledge and skills in this software application and development at a higher level. • To incorporate 2D and 3D technologies training interventions to build competencies and capabilities. ▪ Advanced executive programmes should be launched to enhance business leaders' digital innovation skills, digital strategy development, and fostering a culture of innovation.

	✓ Servant leadership ✓ Strategy and future thinking ✓ Collaboration ✓ Business Intelligence ✓ Cultural intelligence ✓ Agility ✓ Innovation, creativity & critical thinking ✓ Merchandise skills.	▪ Preparing employees for digital transformation and technologies should integrate programmes that include innovation & creativity, leadership & mentoring, and strategy & design thinking.
Upskilling and reskilling	• Employers in the retail sector need to constantly upskill current employees to remain adaptable. • Companies were adopting the "build and grow your own timber strategy" to bridge the digital skills gaps by launching internal training programmes so that employee skills remain relevant. • Engaged employees are more likely to apply acquired skills and perform better. **Companies were currently preparing its workforce for future digital focused on:** ✓ Upskilling employees with basic digital literacy levels inclusive of programmes like excel/ SAP or similar. ✓ Cloud based SAAS solution training. ✓ Ongoing in-house training and collaborative project ✓ On the job learning ✓ Outsourced external courses.	• Ensure that employees are well-equipped to meet the challenges of the future and drive innovation and growth within the organisation. • Prioritize upskilling and adaptability amongst the employed to stay ahead in an evolving industry. • Investment in creating a structured upskilling program to help employees develop new skills and stay updated with industry trends. • Funding in-house skills development initiatives are crucial for building a skilled, motivated, and engaged workforce that can drive the organisation towards its goals and objectives. • The W&R SETA should partner with retail organisations to foster company-based interventions. • Fostering engaged employees who are motivated, skilled, and committed to the organisation's success. By investing in the growth and development of employees, organisations can enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately, drive business success. Supporting computer application training programmes required by industry
State and Future Skills	60.6% of the respondents felt that the South African government is investing in initiatives to address the needs of digital and technology related skills	• Continuous investment in education and training programmes can ensure that individuals and societies are well-equipped to thrive in the digital age.
Other Benefits	Acquiring digital skills could contribute to employees being promoted.	• Access to digital skills is an enabler to employee mobility in the form of promotions and professional growth. • To link digital skills development to organisational succession planning in a digital work environment. Skills planning and development programmes in the retail sector should prioritize interventions for supervisors and managers to stay competitive in the digital age.
Learning and Institutional engagement	• 82.3% of the respondents expressed that studying a course in technology was essential.	▪ Funding decisions must be prudent, linking financial spending with skill sets required, as opposed to funding programmes which

	• 87.3% of respondents confirmed that their study in technology had equipped them for the future digital work environment. Study material of respective programmes was relevant to the workplace	have limited employment value. A generic digital skills development initiative for a critical mass who apply for funding would not yield a return on investment. ▪ Career guidance orientation in future skills is essential from basic education level so that students attending institutions of learning should ensure that they acquire specific skills linked to a specific field and profession. ▪ There has to be a synergy between academic institutions and industry to align what is taught to what is expected by industry. Academic research programmes at institutions must be geared to ensure workforce preparation and professional growth

A2. STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK ON SKILL SET PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE

This subsection lists prospective future skill enhancement initiatives (strategies to enhance skills for the future), operating guidelines, milestones, and timeframes.

Strategies to enhance skills for the future.	Operational Guidelines	Milestone and Timeframes (Short Term 1-2 years Medium Term 2-4 years Long Term 5-7 years)
Development of Foundational Skills	• Enhance ACT foundational skills - Analytical, Creative, and technological skill sets. • Open up conversations with Department of Basic Education to establish collaborative engagement and promotion of ACT skills and the retail industry. • Launch educator development programmes linking ACT skills. • Promote retail as a career of choice in the context of skills for the future.	Medium to long term Short to Medium Term Short Term Short Term
Multi-layered Curriculum Conversations in an evolving retail sector	• Reconfigure current learnership and skills programmes by factoring in basic digital skills for current (18.1) beneficiaries and entry level (18.2) entering the sector. Alignment should expand to Quality Council of Trade and Occupations. • Contextualize technology driven and artisanal programmes in digital retail.	Short Term Medium Term

	• Introduce retail as a programme at TVET Colleges with a strong focus on information technology, data analysis & management and ecommerce. • Link the retail industry via curriculum workshops with Higher Education to design an evolving retail industry relevant curriculum.	Medium to long Term Short Term
Targeted skill sets	• Industry based skills in AI and Supply Chain, Data analytics, Business Intelligence, Digital Marketing, online shopping, application development, Leadership, and digital transformation.	Short to medium Term
Judicious Bursary Model vs a "Spray and Pray" model	• Bursary applications should be thoroughly screened so that funding is directed towards required skills essential in an evolving economy. • Programmes and qualifications on AI & supply chain, data analytics, design thinking, industrial engineering, Digital Marketing, web design, online shopping, drone technology, application development should be promoted.	Short Term Short to Medium Term
Beneficiary Tracking for life-long learning	• Evolving context cannot be remedied with once-off static programmes and study. A digital tracking model will stimulate further life-long learning to mitigate irrelevancy.	Short, Medium to long Term
Research driven Strategic implementation	• Ongoing data mining to influence implementation and quick turnaround. • Annual Skills audit from various tiers of economy. • Biennial curriculum reflections symposium with industry and education providers. • Cross-sectoral conferences underpinned by research in relevant skill set preparation and delivery	Short term Short term Short term Short term

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SECTION B: INTRODUCTION, LITERATURE REVIEW, AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1. INTRODUCTION

This study evaluated the W&R SETA's current strategic framework on skills development and further propose a model for navigating digital disruption, fostering innovation, and meeting future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. Currently, the global labour markets are undergoing rapid transformation from the trajectory of growth, geo-economics, sustainability and technology (O'Reilly and Zahidi, 2023). As advances in generative artificial intelligence (AI) continue at an unprecedented pace, large language models (LLMs) are emerging as transformative tools with the potential to redefine the job landscape. The recent advancements are expected to cause significant shifts in global economies and labour markets, given that technological advancement coincides with a period of considerable labour market upheaval from economic, geopolitical, green transition and technological forces. This first phase of the study discusses the background of strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the retail sector; international and local strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the Retail sector, and the W&R SETA strategies that address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

This study considered the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA with regard to the changing work environment (besides training interventions) and key challenges and opportunities to building the workforce of the future. The key objectives examined in this study sought to determine the relevant skills required to meet the evolving retail labour market influenced by digital innovation and disruption; examining the strategies used by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector; identifying the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector; and suggesting a model to the W&R SETA that could contribute to the development of future skills required in the retail sector in congruence with technological innovation and disruption.

In this phase, we are discussing the strategies used by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. Other objectives are currently being examined, which will be reported in phase 2 of this study.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The exponential growth of digital technologies globally has witnessed the invasive nature of innovative technologies in industry, in people's evolving engagement in society and resultant impact of economic activity and livelihoods. The impact of disruption and innovation cannot be underestimated, nor can it be wished away as society interfaces with evolutionary influences which has to be embraced and planned for. The digital lexicon has become common speak as industries are unpacking the benefits of big data analytics, artificial intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), virtual reality and auxiliary technologies (World Economic Forum, 2023). Businesses are exploring how best to enhance efficiency, personalize customer shopping experiences, reinvent supply chains, and re-imagine business models. The evolving economic environment will also potentially sprout a litany of new business opportunities and skills required. To this extent, the "Skills for the Future" can encompass a wide range of challenges and considerations related to preparing the retail industry, individuals, and the workforce for the evolving demands of the future.

The business sector and industries have at different levels embraced digital transformation to enhance business practices, operational efficiencies, to yield better profit margins and to remain relevant in a disruptive environment. Challenges are presented in forecasting the impact of required future skills on the retail sector in order to remain competitive. Therefore, rapidly changing trade patterns, the emergence of new customers and the demand for employees with appropriate skills need to be addressed. In line with objectives of this study, the W&R SETA intends to anticipate and address the skills required for work readiness associated with an evolving retail landscape and the digital economy.

The implication of this study is that there is a need for all stakeholders to collaborate to develop citizen's knowledge about 4IR, assist them in identifying the associated opportunities and prepare them to mitigate against the challenges associated with it. Stakeholder collaboration in this context would include initiatives such as hosting conversations on varied sectors, with different categories of population groups or different demographics, towards promoting an inclusive 4IR. Thus, there is also a need to customize knowledge sharing by different levels of population groups to increase degrees of understanding and uptake. Increasing knowledge levels of 4IR and related disruptive technologies will facilitate the understanding of and interest in grasping opportunities brought about by this revolution and, most importantly, guide choices for future skills (careers) and jobs.

3. RESEARCH AIM

This study looks at the W&R SETA strategies navigating digital disruption, fostering innovation, and meeting future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. It further aimed to evaluate the W&R SETA's current strategic framework on skills development and towards proposing a model for navigating digital disruption, fostering innovation, and meeting future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To determine the relevant skills required to meet the evolving retail labour market influenced by digital innovation and disruption.
2. To examine the strategies used by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.
3. To identify the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

4. To suggest a model to the W&R SETA that could contribute to the development of future skills required in the retail sector, aligned to technological innovation and disruption.

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the relevant skills required in an evolving retail labour market which are influenced by innovation and disruption?

2. What are the different training intervention and strategies implemented by the W & R SETA with regard to the changing work environment?
3. How effective are the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector?

4. What model could guide and support the W&R SETA to contribute to the development of future skills required in the retail sector aligned to technological disruption and innovation in the sector?

6. ADDRESSING OF SKILLS ANTICIPATION (FORECASTING SKILLS DEMAND)

Bikse, Grinevica, Baiba Rivza and Rivza (2022) acknowledge the benefits and challenges of the disruptive innovation and the effects in the labour market and the employability skills like digital skills, social skills, core skills, contextual skills and scientific literacy required in the 21st century. With the rise of AI, metaverse, and web3 technologies such as VR, blockchain, and NFTs technologies; it's clear that the kinds of skills organisations need are evolving. According to the World Economic Forum (2023) and Bikse, Grinevica, Baiba Rivza and Rivza (2022), the main competencies and skills which strongly relate to employability and are needed in the future conferring to technological change and the challenges of the labour market are mentioned in figure 1 below.

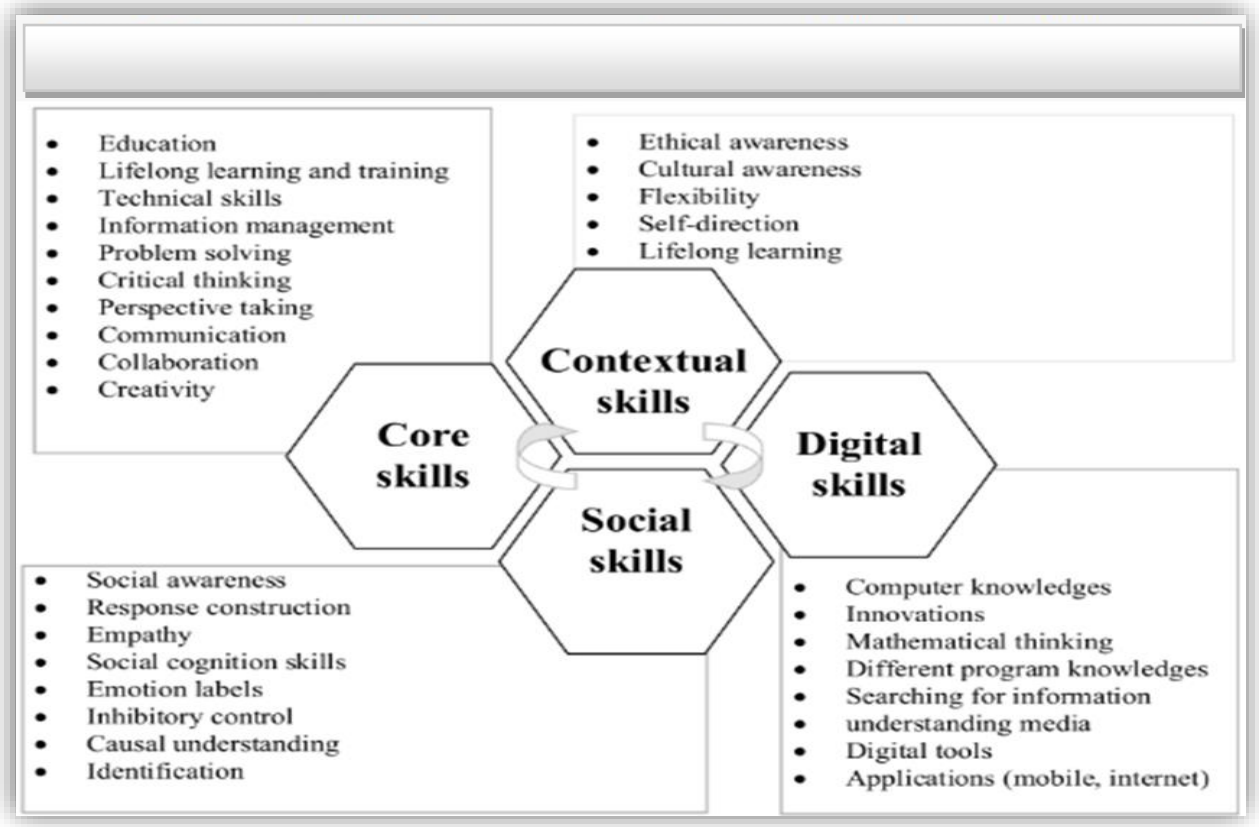


Figure 1: Competencies and skills for employability

Source: Bikse, Grinevica, Baiba Rivza and Rivza (2022)

In addition to core skills discussed by Bikse, Grinevica, Baiba Rivza and Rivza (2022), the World Economic forum (2023) provides in-depth details regarding core skills in 2023, skill evolution 2023–2027, top industries for increasing skill requirements, 2023–2027, and reskilling and upskilling priorities in the next 5 years. Figure 2 illustrates the core skills for workers and estimated average skills set in 2023.

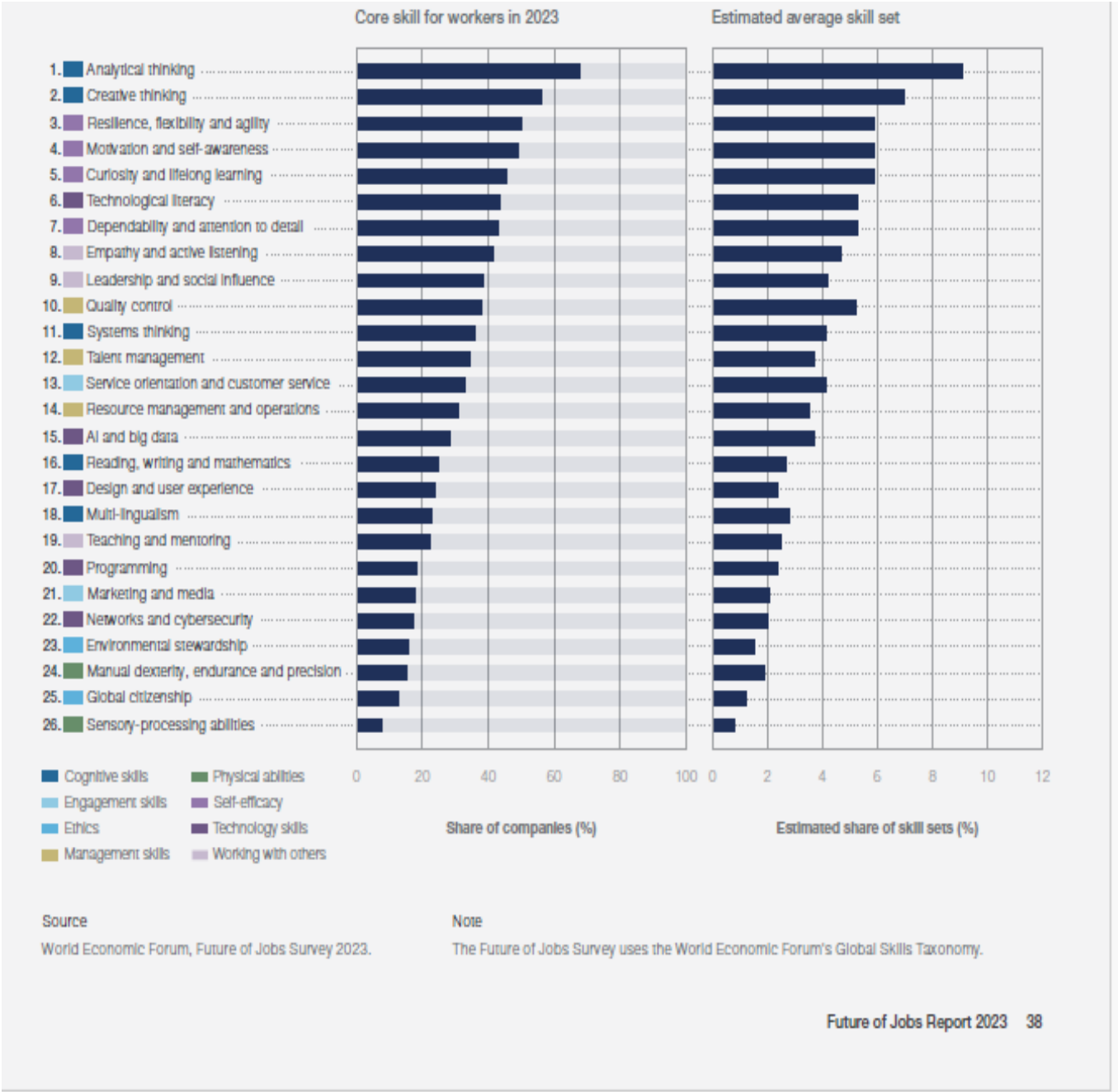


Figure 2: Core skills in 2023

Source: World Economic Forum (2023)

Figure 2 above highlights the core skills required by workers today. The World Economic Forum (2023) presents the skill evolution or skills on the rise and decline between 2023–2027 as outlined by businesses surveyed.

Industry requirements are packaged as per skill set requirements into the following categories, namely cognitive skills, engagement skills, physical skills, management skills, ethical skills, self-efficacy skills, technological skills, and working with others. What is abundantly clear is that the top three skills which emerge are as per the Table 1 below.

Table 1: Categories of skills required by industry and skill set as per categories

	Categories of skills required by industry	Skill set as per categories
1	Cognitive skills	analytical, creative, systems thinking skills, multilingualism reading writing and mathematics
2	Self-efficacy skills	resilience, flexibility, agility, motivation, self-awareness, curiosity, life-long learning, dependability and attention to detail
3	Technological skills	technological literacy, artificial Intelligence, big data, design & user experience, programming, network & cybersecurity

The above Table 1 further illustrates that the skill set required in a continuum range from foundational and basic skills which are layered into higher order skills. On the other of the continuum the skills on the decline are physical attributes skills which are functional skills focusing on manual dexterity, endurance and repetitive work, precision and sensory processing abilities. The emergence of artificial intelligence and machine learning places these skills at risk, explaining their decline in importance. Table 1 reports business expectations for the evolution of the importance of skills to their workers in the next five years. Cognitive skills are reported to be growing in importance most quickly, reflecting the increasing importance of complex problem-solving in the workplace. Surveyed businesses report creative thinking to be growing in importance slightly more rapidly than analytical thinking.

Technology literacy is the third-fastest growing core skill. It is also observed that self-efficacy skills rank above working with others in the rate of increase in importance of skills reported by businesses. The socio-emotional attitudes which businesses consider to be growing in importance most quickly are curiosity and lifelong learning; resilience, flexibility, and agility; and motivation and self-awareness – evidence that businesses emphasize the importance of resilient and reflective workers embracing a culture of lifelong learning as the lifecycle of their skills decreases. Systems thinking, AI and big data, talent management, and service orientation and customer service are on the rise. In light of the above, it is therefore, crucial to understand that workers will require skills training (reskilling and upskilling) if companies are to meet the increasing ethical demands placed on them as a result of adopting frontier technologies and adapting to the technological transition. Figure 3 below demonstrates Reskilling and upskilling priorities in the next 5 years, between 2023-2027 (World Economic Forum, 2023). As skills are being disrupted, businesses are designing and scaling up their training programmes.

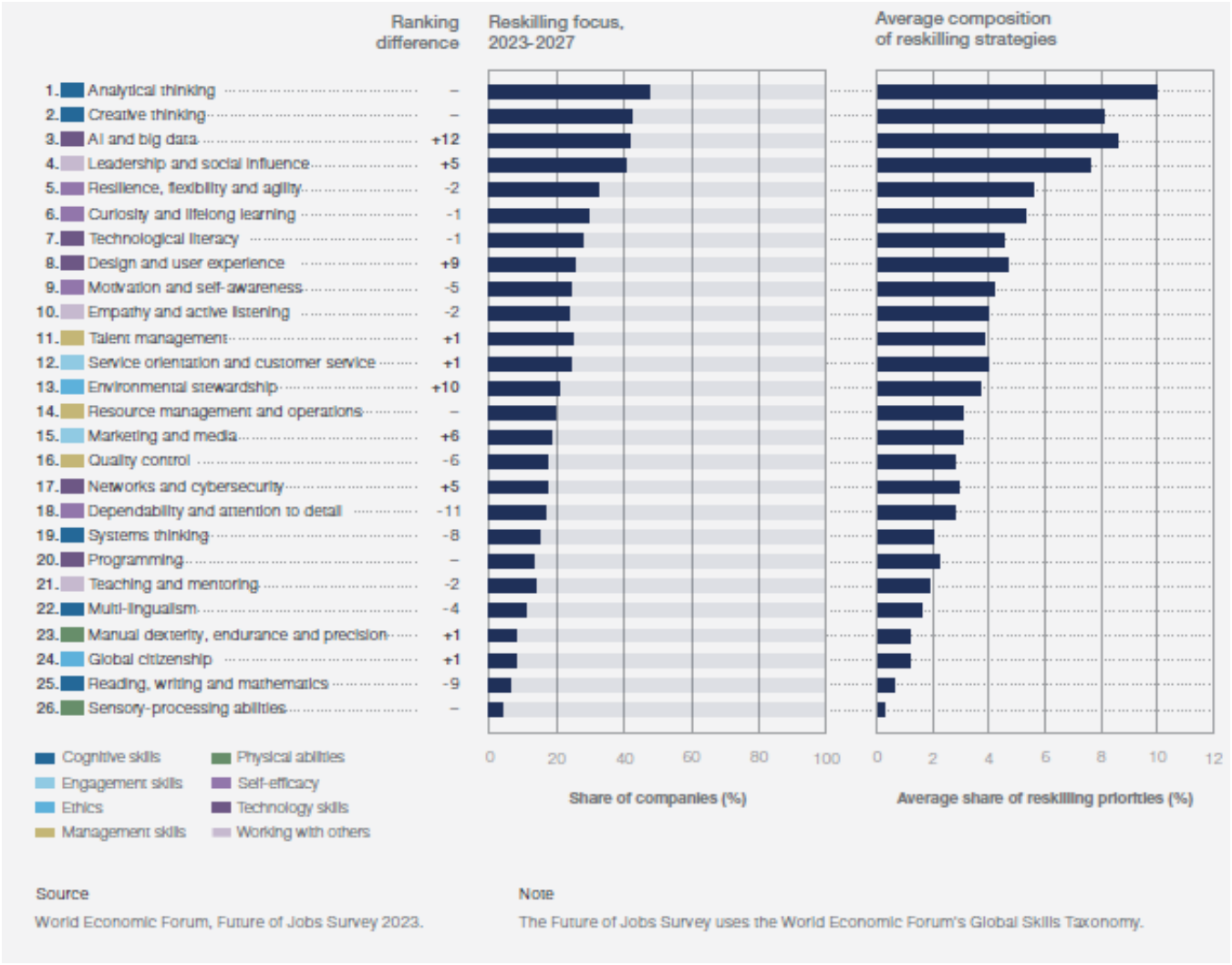


Figure 3: Reskilling and upskilling priorities in the next 5 years

Source: World Economic Forum (2023)

Figure 3 shows the training strategies of companies responding to the Future of Jobs survey. The highest priority for skills training from 2023 to 2027 is analytical thinking, which is set to account for 10% of training initiatives, on average. As it can be seen in Figure 3, the second priority for workforce development is to promote creative thinking, which will be the subject of 8% of upskilling initiatives.

According to the World Economic Forum (2023), the skills that companies report to be increasing in importance the fastest are two skills, which companies prioritize much more highly than would appear according to their current importance to their workforce: AI and big data as well as leadership and social influence. With reference from Figure 1 to Figure 3, the World Economic Forum (2023) displays industry-specific variations in the evolving importance of skills. Taking into account all industries in the survey, Figure 4 below demonstrates the declining of the Retail and Wholesale of Consumer Goods in terms of importance of physical abilities, which rank the last industry at 38.8% in terms of Top industries for increasing skill requirements between 2023 – 2027.

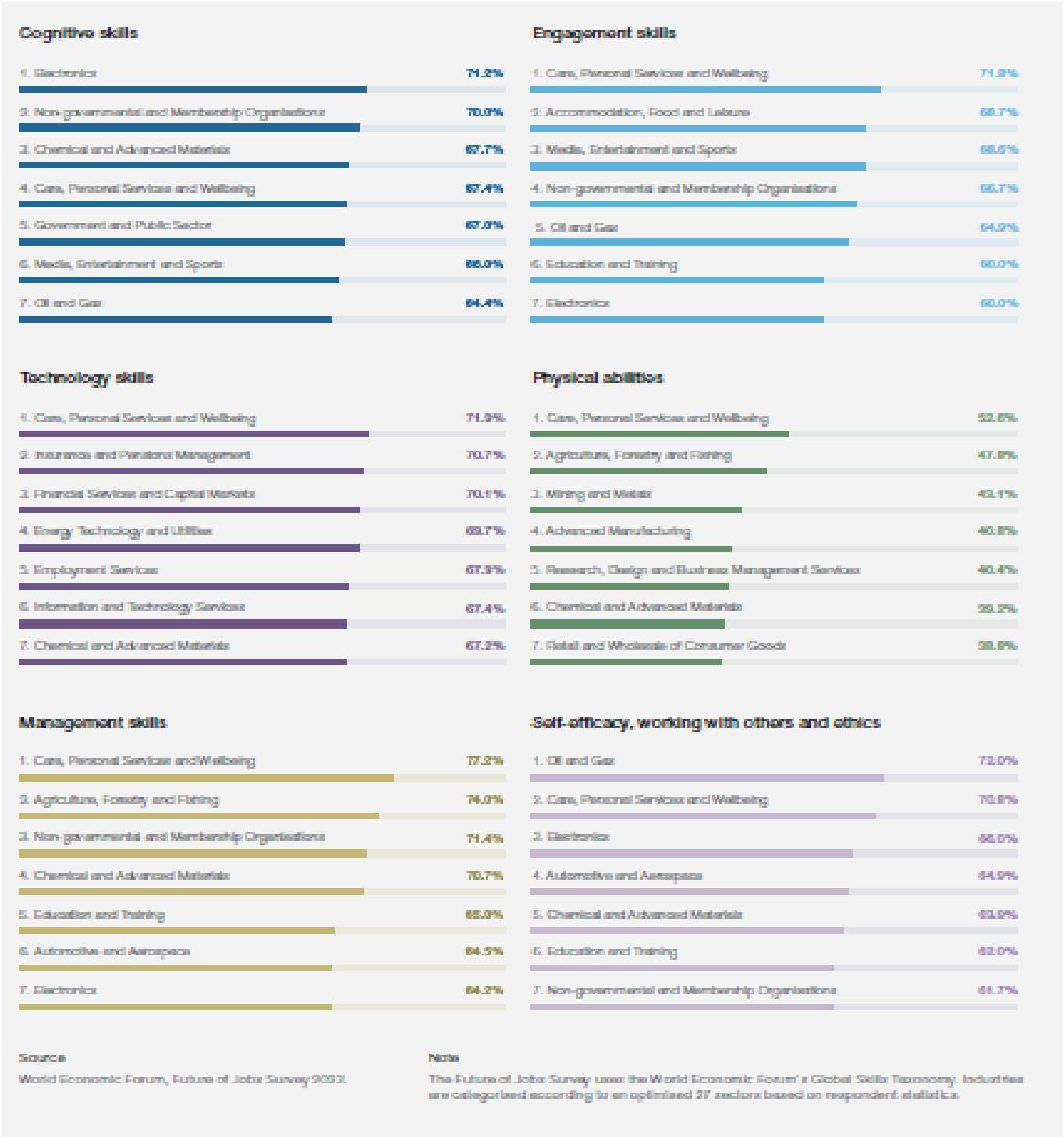


Figure 4: Top industries for increasing skill requirements, 2023-2027

Source: World Economic forum (2023).

All Figures displayed above illustrates that there is a huge problem of global skills shortage around future technologies (Marr, 2023). This implies that the retail sector, particularly, will be undergoing significant transformations due to advances in technology, changing consumer behaviours, and economic shifts (Ramazanov et al., 2021). Addressing the future skills requirements in the retail sector involves a multifaceted approach, including technological upskilling, enhancing customer service, focusing on sustainability, and promoting a culture of adaptability and learning (Morandini et al., 2023). Due to advanced technologies and innovation, a degree of frictional skill mismatch and skill shortages is to be expected in any dynamic economy. However, persistently high skill mismatch and skill shortages over the longer term can have adverse economic consequences for individuals, firms, and the economy as a whole (OECD and ILO, 2018):

- **At the individual level**, skill mismatch has a negative impact on job satisfaction and wages,
- **At the firm level**, skill mismatch has been associated with lower productivity, and increased on-the-job search and turnover, while skill shortages have been shown to increase the cost of hiring and hinder the adoption of new technologies.
- **At the macroeconomic level**, mismatch increases structural unemployment or under-employment, reduces economic growth and has equally adverse effects on labour productivity.

According to the OECD and ILO (2018), anticipating skill needs assists informed and strategic choices by policy makers as well as labour market participants, and improves the functioning of the labour market. Availability of skills and access to training relevant to labour market needs are important factors for enabling productivity, economic growth, and social inclusiveness. The OECD and ILO (2018) indicated that skills anticipation or forecasting skills demand matters for various reasons that include:

- Many economies are experiencing gaps between the demand and supply of skills.
- A number of factors are influencing the global evolution of skills demand and supply, such as technology, demography, trade, climate change and work organisation.

- Mega trends and local drivers of change will interact to affect local skill supply and demand in different ways.

- Many issues contribute to skills imbalances. Skills supply and demand evolve at different paces. Fiscal and macroeconomic policies and credit and technology constraints can slow down demand-side changes in response to the availability of higher-level skills.

- The lead time for introducing changes to education and training curricula and the delivery of training may lead to individuals obtaining qualifications that are not well matched to the new skill needs of employers.

- Information asymmetries limited geographical mobility, imperfect recruitment practices and barriers to training provision or participation may also generate skill mismatch.

- In periods of weak aggregate demand, job seekers may accept jobs for which they are over-skilled or over-qualified. In the opposite case, workers may be offered jobs for which they are under-skilled or under-qualified.

- Skills mismatch may evolve among existing workers because of skills obsolescence, resulting for example, from the adoption of new technologies or changes in production processes. The skills of workers may also erode if they suffer long-term unemployment, and they are not able to use and maintain their skills.

The OECD and ILO (2018) asserted that skills need analysis and anticipation are used as one of the approaches to identify skills required for the future. The results of skills needs analysis and anticipation are used widely: by vocational guidance and career counselling; for budget allocations for education and training programmes; in the design of occupational and competency standards and training programmes; in informing human resource development decisions by enterprises; in targeting retraining programmes offered through employment services; in informing policy decisions on the encouragement of workforce migration; as a component of industrial, investment, trade, technology and environmental policies; as an input to national and sectoral employment and skills strategies; and as a mechanism for evaluating training programmes and measuring the impact of skills policies.

8. STRATEGIES USED TO ADDRESS THE FUTURE SKILLS REQUIREMENTS (NEEDS) IN THE INTERNATIONAL LABOUR MARKET

According to the World Economic Forum (2023), the highest priority for skills training from 2023 to 2027 is analytical thinking, following by creative thinking, which are the subject of upskilling initiatives. Therefore, in the 27 industries illustrated in figure 4, including the wholesale and retail sector, reskilling and upskilling are among key strategic priorities in the next 5 years. According to the OECD and ILO (2018), beside the skills needs analysis and anticipation, skill needs information is an additional method used to identify fast track candidates with skills that are in high demand. Skill needs information approach is used in two dimensions:

- In employment policy, skill needs information is commonly used to update occupational standards and to design apprenticeships, re-training courses and on-the-job training programmes.
- In education policy, it is used to inform curriculum development and set the number of student places at all levels of education, including technical and vocational education and training (TVET) programmes. Skill needs information also feeds into career guidance to inform students' choice.

According to the World Economic Forum (2023), some of the strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the international labour market have been crucial for retailers to remain competitive and meet the evolving demands of the market and consumers. Therefore, approaches or methods developed to identify and analyse current and future skills needs may be many. Therefore, the OECD and ILO (2018) asserted that there are a number of available skills needs assessment and anticipation tools and instruments that can steer skills development and matching policy more effectively. Each method has its own strengths and weaknesses. Their use largely depends on the study objectives (qualitative or quantitative), level of analysis (national, sectoral, or local), and availability of data and analytical capacities. Table 2 presents skills anticipation and forecasting methods, their requirements, advantages, and disadvantages.

Table 2: Skills anticipation and forecasting methods, their requirement, advantages, and disadvantages.

Instrument	Data Requirement	Technical Expertise	Advantages	Disadvantages
Focus groups, round tables, expert workshops, expert opinion surveys and Delphi style methods	• No specific data requirements.	Technical expertise in qualitative methods is required: • Expertise in preparation of (structured) interviews, focus groups, Delphi methods, etc. • Synthesizing qualitative outcomes often proves to be challenging in new contexts.	• Holistic. • Direct user involvement. • May be able to address problems in greater depth. • Useful mechanisms for exchanging views.	• May be non-systematic. • May be inconsistent. • May be subjective. • May be non-representative and provide a partial view. • May be anecdotal, not grounded in reality.
Sector studies	• Some data requirement (depending on methods used within sector). • Sector based data from statistical surveys; employer-employee surveys, etc.	Technical expertise required: • Understanding sector based labour markets, occupations and skills requirements. • Analysis of primary and secondary data. • If primary data has to be collected: survey methodology skills	• Holistic (for the sector). • Strong on sectoral specific, including detailed information on capabilities, competencies and skills.	• Partial (beyond sector). • Potentially biased. • May introduce inconsistency across sectors.
Employer-employee skills surveys; enterprise/ establishment skills surveys	• A firm registry from which the sample frame will be formed. • No further data needed for the primary data collection survey.	• Survey design and conduct (representativeness, weighting, questionnaire design, interviewer training). • Analysis of survey outcomes. • Methods to ensure representativeness.	• Direct user involvement. • If the survey is factual, focuses on how people behave, not on what they perceive. • In case of opinion surveys, allows direct skills measurement.	• Response rates are often too low • Large samples are needed to get robust data, therefore may be expensive • May be subjective and inconsistent
Quantitative forecasting models	• Reliable and consistent time series on labour markets (sector, occupation, qualification) and population (age, gender, labour market participation) is necessary.	• Expertise in modelling. • Statistical and programming experience. • Several years of experience (with a new model) is required to produce sensible analyses.	• Comprehensive. • Consistent. • Transparent an explicit • Measureable	• Data hungry. • Costly. • Not everything is quantifiable. • May give false impression of precision.
Foresights and scenario development	• May use a number of input data and reports, such as results of quantitative forecasts, labour market information, sector studies, but it is not compulsory.	• Foresight sessions require skilful moderators. • Expertise in compiling diverse qualitative information into a report. • Expertise in engagement of all stakeholders.	• Holistic. • Direct user involvement. • May be able to address. problems in greater depth • Useful mechanisms for exchanging views. • Takes into account uncertainties for the future.	• May be non-systematic. • May be inconsistent. • May be subjective.
Graduate surveys / Tracer studies	• Primary data collection. • Tracer studies require the contact details of recent graduates. • Additional administrative data from the education institutions can be used to enrich data.	• Survey design and conduct; (representativeness, weighting, questionnaire design, interviewer training). • Analysis of survey outcomes • Methods to ensure representativeness .	• May provide useful information for improving quality of training programmes. • Relatively low cost, easy execution.	• Difficult to establish detailed information and contacts for forming a sample / population for the survey. • Confined to workers' early market experience and findings may be biased and subjective.
Vacancy surveys	• Primary data collection. • Vacancy surveys can either use existing administrative data or processes of PES, or they can be conducted as employer surveys. Using administrative data requires adequate processes ensuring consistency and representativeness of data.	• Survey design and conduct (representativeness, weighting, questionnaire design, interviewer training). • Analysis of administrative. data and survey outcomes. • Methods to ensure representativeness .	• Direct user involvement. • Targets jobs actually available - demand proxy. • Objective.	• Partial coverage, non-representative for all demand. • Short-term demand only. • Data processing takes time while part of vacancies may be already taken.

Source: OECD and ILO (2018)

In addition to skills anticipation and forecasting methods, their requirements, advantages and disadvantages suggested by the OECD and ILO (2018), the World Economic Forum (2023) also illustrates some strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the international labour market (Table 3).

Table 3: Strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the international labour market.

Strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the retail sector	The practice of strategies used to address the future skills requirements in the retail sector
Upskilling and Reskilling	The rapid adoption of technology in retail has made it essential for employees to acquire new digital skills. Retailers have been investing in upskilling and reskilling programs to ensure their workforce is proficient in using point-of-sale systems, inventory management software, e-commerce platforms, and data analytics tools.
Adaptability and Learning Agility	In a rapidly evolving retail landscape, adaptability, and the ability to quickly learn new skills are highly valued. Retailers have been promoting a culture of continuous learning and offering opportunities for employees to develop these skills.
Collaboration and Teamwork	Cross-functional collaboration and teamwork are important for success in the retail sector. Employees have been encouraged to develop skills related to collaboration, communication, and problem-solving to work effectively with colleagues from various departments.

Source: World Economic Forum (2023)

Table 3 describes some strategies used to address the skills requirements in the international labour market. Therefore, for most organisations, a good starting point to address skills requirements in this era of technological advancement was to identify the skills gaps or the skills they needed, depending on their plans for products/services and business processes. According to Marr (2023), the best approaches that have been used to build and maintain required skills, whether in the industry or within the organisation included attracting new talent, boosting talent retention, and upskilling employees within the organisation and industry.

Talent development may be different for each corporation, but the most obvious options include formal education and training programs, mentorship programs, and informal on-the-job learning opportunities (Carruthers, 2023). According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO, 2023), there is a chronic mismatch between the skills required by the labour market and those being given by the workforce in many countries. In order to eliminate potential gaps between the supply and demand of skills, skills anticipation is a purposeful and methodical process by which participants in the labour market recognize and get ready to satisfy future skill shortages. Through institutional processes and informational resources, a skills anticipation strategy improves the application of skills and human capital development by empowering training providers, young people, policymakers, employers, and employees to make better educational and training decisions (ILO, 2023). In developed countries (Europe), Six strategies or guides have been used to anticipating and matching skills and jobs (ILO, 2023). Table 4 presents the ILO strategies used to anticipating and matching skills and jobs in the international labour market.

Table 4: The ILO strategies used to anticipating and matching skills jobs.

ILO Strategies	Objectives of the strategy
Using labour market information	The objective of this strategy (guide) is to offer direction through labour market monitoring and evaluations of skills supply and demand. It offers guidance and recommendations for policy- and decision-makers on how to react to market signals and early warning signals brought on by labour market information (LMI). Numerous decisions are long-term; individuals, organisations, and businesses are preparing for the future rather than the present labour market. This strategy helps to use the knowledge people presently possess to predict which skills will be required in the future, even though we can never be certain of what will happen. This strategy serves as a source of inspiration for technical analysts and professionals looking to enhance LMI systems further and use them to policy evaluation and intervention.
Developing skills anticipations	This strategy covers the development of skills anticipations, scenarios, and skills forecasts, and aims to support setting up skills forecasting systems at national level by means of quantitative and/or qualitative approaches. The strategy is built on a number of experiences and case studies in both developed and developing countries. It proposes a set of instruments devised to help guide new initiatives in this area. The strategy is intended specifically for countries that are starting to develop systems of skill needs anticipation. It provides information for sponsors and implementers of skill needs anticipation initiatives, such as policymakers, education and training providers, public employment services, social partners and research and specialist organisations.

Working at sectoral level	This strategy addresses methods, processes and institutional mechanisms of skills identification and anticipation at sectoral level.
The role of employment service providers	This strategy provides in-depth consideration of the role of employment service providers (public and private) in anticipation and matching. It is directed at employment policymakers, managers and professionals working in the organisations that provide employment services in developing and transition countries. The aim of the strategy is to provide its audience with practice-relevant policy options and practical examples from case studies across the world.
Developing and running an establishment skills survey	This strategy covers the development and carrying out of establishment skills surveys. Such surveys are designed to generate data on employers' skills needs and their human capital development strategies. If done regularly, the surveys help to analyse the trend in skills needs and identify potential skills bottlenecks. Survey results can be used in designing and improving training provision, career guidance, skills development policy evaluation, and reshaping business strategies for human resource management and development.
Carrying out tracer studies	This strategy aims to contribute to improving TVET, as well as higher education, by conducting high quality graduate surveys or tracer studies. Such studies should allow analysis of the impacts of study programmes and conditions at education institutions. The key objective is to identify the relevance of education/training for the transition to a job and further vocational career in the first years after graduating.

Source: Adapted from the ILO, 2023

A study conducted by the ILO, OECD, Cedefop and ETF, cited by the OECD and ILO (2018) revealed that, though the countries surveyed use a wide range of methods for their skill needs assessments, countries tend to use more elaborate approaches or a combination of approaches. Some sort of employers' skills surveys were the most commonly used method across the G20 countries that took part in in the survey, followed by sectoral analyses and surveys of workers and graduates. Quantitative forecasting models were also used by over half of the G20 countries. Thus, in order to anticipate skills for sectors exposed to international trade a combining various qualitative and quantitative approaches was used, including an employer survey, interviews with informants, expert workshops, analysis of labour market information etc. It aims to facilitate national and sectoral stakeholders in analysing their own skills needs, to develop their capacity to do so, and to support them in developing and implementing training measures and institutional arrangements (OECD and ILO, 2018). The other ILO tools include skills technology foresight, a practical guide to anticipating skills for green jobs, and the inter-agency compendium of various approaches to anticipating and matching skills and jobs produced by the ILO. Table 5 presents the ILO tools for skills needs analysis and anticipation.

Table 5: The ILO tools for skills needs analysis and anticipation.

Skills for trade and economic diversification: A practical guide. ILO, 2012	Addresses anticipation of skills needs in promoting trade strategies and in exporting industries
Anticipating skill needs for green jobs: A practical guide. ILO, 2015a	Addresses approaches to analysing and anticipating skills needs for the green economy and sustainable development.
Guidelines for inclusion of skills aspects into employment-related analyses and policy formulation ILO, 2015b.	Addresses the analysis of skills barriers to employability and skills needs for employment, and how to integrate the analysis in the process of national employment policy formulation.
Skills technology foresight guide, MSM Skolkovo-ILO, 2016	Addresses a foresight approach to steer experts and practitioners in defining future technological change and related changes in work organisation, job tasks and skills needs.
Guide to anticipating and matching skills and jobs. Cedefop-ETF-ILO, 2015-2017	An inter-agency compendium of tools for guidance and assistance in designing methods, instruments and institutional solutions to meet the challenge of matching current and future skills and jobs.
➢ Volume 1: Using labour market information	Provides guidance on the principal types of data, data sources and indicators that can answer key policy questions related to overcoming. or preventing skills mismatch.
➢ Volume 2: Developing skills foresights, scenarios and forecasts	Addresses quantitative and qualitative methods of anticipation and forecasting of future skills needs at a macroeconomic level.
➢ Volume 3: Working at sector level	Addresses methods, processes and institutional mechanisms of skills identification and anticipation at sectoral level.
➢ Volume 4: The role of employment service providers	Addresses the role of public employment services and private employment agencies in skills anticipation and matching, including the collection and use of relevant labour market information.
➢ Volume 5: Developing and running an establishment skills survey	Provides guidance on the implementation of surveys among employers (establishments) on skills shortages and gaps, recruitment difficulties and training measures.
➢ Volume 6: Carrying out tracer studies	Assists training providers and analysts in designing and implementing surveys among their graduates on their employability, how their skills. are used, and how those skills relate to gaps on the labour market.

Source: OECD and ILO (2018)

9. STRATEGIES USED BY THE W&R SETA TO ADDRESS THE FUTURE SKILLS REQUIREMENTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN RETAIL SECTOR.

a. The role of the SETAS to address the future skills requirements in the retail sector.

The functions and responsibilities of SETAs are set out in Chapter 3, section 10 of the Skills Development Act, 1998 which are to (Government Gazette, 2019):

- Develop and implement a sector skills plan. This is a plan to describe the trends in each sector, the skills that are in demand and to identify priorities for skills development.
- Develop and administer Learning Programmes. These include Skills Programmes and Learnerships; Support the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is the framework, based on eight levels, on which any qualification or learning outcome can be registered.
- Undertake Quality Assurance on provision of learning in line with the QCTO requirements which include the following: Accredit education and training providers, and Monitor provision to ensure that programmes are being followed.

In light of the above, the W&R SETA mission statement consists of developing a skilled, capable, competent, and professional workforce to transform the Wholesale and Retail sector (W&R SETA, sector skills plan (SSP, 2020 – 2025).

b. The current W&R SETA approach in addressing the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

Different approaches have used by the W&R SETA to address, anticipate and develop required skills in the retail sector. Some of the strategies used by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector are illustrated in Figure 1.

But it is crucial to understand that the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA) in South Africa may have implemented various strategies to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. However, this study discusses the most recent initiatives or developments in addressing the approaches being used by the W&R SETA for future skills. Some general strategies and approaches that W&R SETA, organisations and government agencies often use to address future skills requirements in the retail sector include the following (W&R SETA Sector Skills Plan (2020-2025): Table

- **Skills Needs Analysis**: W&R SETA typically conducts comprehensive skills needs assessments to identify the current and future skill gaps within the South African retail sector. These assessments are essential for understanding the specific areas and levels of expertise that are in demand.

- **Collaboration with Stakeholders:** W&R SETA collaborates with industry stakeholders, including retail businesses, trade associations, labour unions, and educational institutions, to ensure that the skills development programs are aligned with industry needs.

- **Curriculum Development:** The organisation may be involved in the development and updating of curricula and training materials to ensure that they reflect the latest industry trends and technologies. This may include the development of new qualifications, courses, and apprenticeship programs.

- **Learnerships and Apprenticeships:** W&R SETA often promotes learnerships and apprenticeships as a means of providing practical training and work experience to individuals entering the retail sector. These programs help bridge the gap between theoretical education and practical skills.

- **Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL):** Recognizing and accrediting the prior learning and experience of workers in the retail sector is a strategy to ensure that skills are acknowledged and utilized effectively.

- **Continuous Training and Development:** To address the rapidly evolving nature of the retail industry, W&R SETA encourages ongoing training and development for retail workers to keep their skills current and relevant.

- **Digital Skills Emphasis:** Given the increasing role of technology in retail, there is a focus on digital skills training, including e-commerce, data analytics, and point-of-sale systems.

- **Soft Skills Training:** Developing soft skills, such as customer service, communication, and problem-solving, is also crucial for the retail sector, and W&R SETA includes programs that emphasize these skills.

- **Funding and Incentives:** W&R SETA offers financial incentives and grants to encourage retail businesses to invest in skills development and training for their employees.

- **Monitoring and Evaluation:** W&R SETA likely monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of their skills development programs and adjusts them as needed based on feedback and industry changes.

Figure 5 summarises some strategies being used by the W&R SETA to address the future skills required by the South African retail sector.

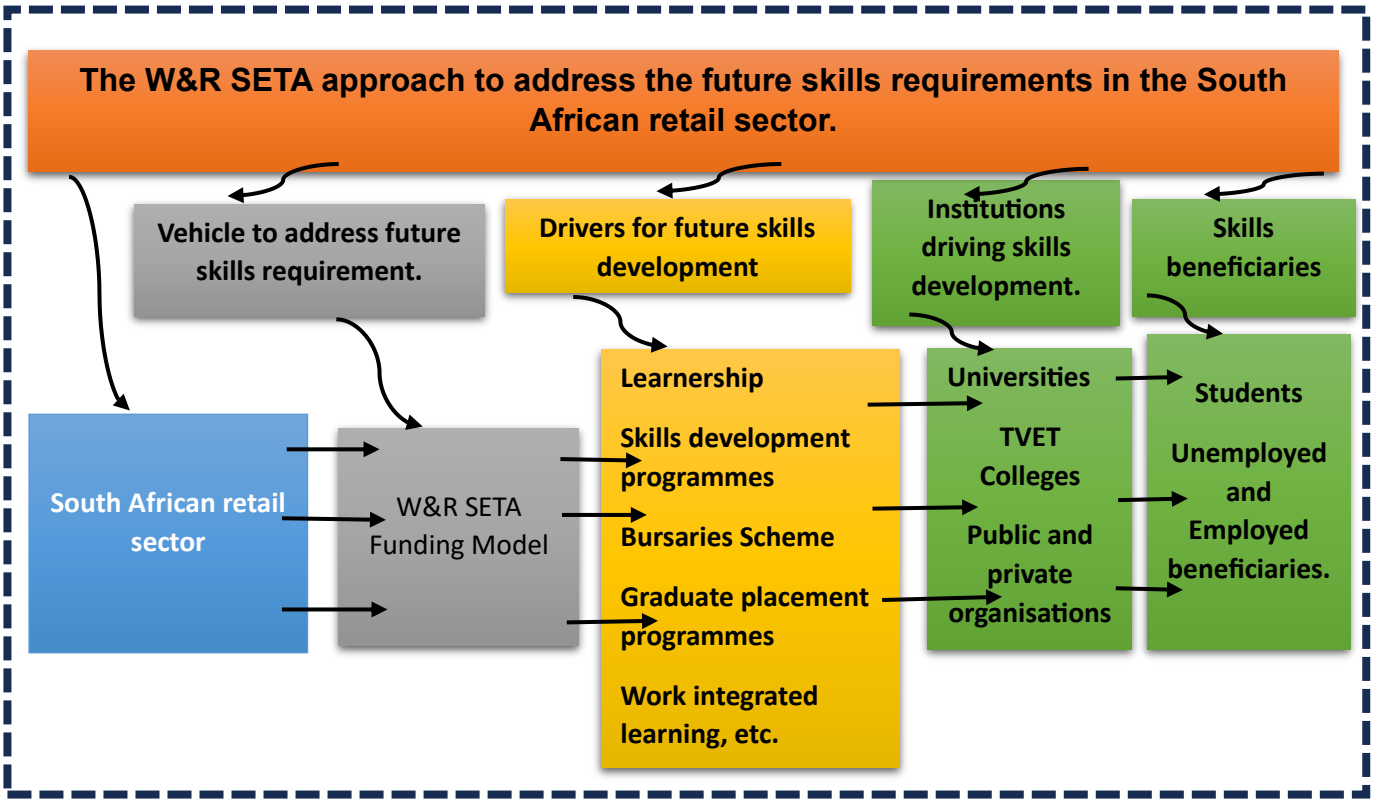


Figure 5: Current strategies used by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

Figure 5 shows the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

According to the W&R SETA Sector Skills Plan (2020-2025), Institutions providers of future skills development include Further Education and Training Committee; Higher Education and Training Committee; Association of Private Providers of Education Training and Development; Southern African Society for Cooperative Education; Universities; TVET Colleges; Private Training Providers; and Community Colleges. However, the specific strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to promote skills development comprise Learnership; Skills development programmes; Bursaries scheme; Graduate placement programmes; Work integrated learning, On the Job-training, etc. The description of these programmes is as follow:

- **Bursary Scheme**

In response to the skills shortages identified in the Sector Skills Plan, W&RSETA took significant steps to bridge the gap by establishing a Bursary Scheme in 2011. This scheme was designed to offer financial support to deserving students pursuing qualifications related to the wholesale and retail sector, whether they were enrolled at public or private universities, universities of technology, or TVET colleges (W&R Seta, 2020). Through the Bursary Scheme, W&RSETA aimed to create a pool of skilled potential employees, specifically in areas where skills were scarce and critically needed within the sector (Nyapokoto, 2022). This initiative not only closed the disparity between the supply and demand for skills in the retail industry but also contributed to enhancing the sector's appeal as a preferred career choice (McKinsey, 2019). The administration of this scheme took place through educational institutions, and eligible students were required to apply directly at the institution where they were accepted or registered for their wholesale and retail studies (Forbes, 2019).

- **Work-Integrated Learning**

Work-integrated learning is one of the components of skills development within the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority's (W&R SETA) approach in South Africa. This strategy underscores the importance of combining theoretical knowledge with practical experience to prepare individuals for success in the retail sector. Work integrated learning include the following strategies:

- ***Internships**:* W&R SETA actively promotes internships, which offer students and recent graduates the opportunity to work within retail organisations. Internships allow individuals to apply their classroom learning to real-world situations, gaining practical experience in areas such as store management, sales, marketing, and customer service (Truman, 2014).

- ***Apprenticeships**:* Apprenticeships are structured training programs that blend classroom instruction with on-the-job training. They are particularly valuable in the retail sector, where hands-on experience is essential. Apprentices can work directly under the guidance of experienced mentors, honing their skills in areas like logistics, inventory management, and merchandising (W&R Seta, 2020).

- ***On-the-Job Training**:* Encouraging on-the-job training means that individual entering the retail sector receive guidance and mentoring as they work. This approach enables them to develop relevant skills in real-time and helps them become proficient in areas such as point-of-sale systems, product knowledge, and customer interaction (W&R Seta, 2020).

- ***Practical Experience**:* Work-integrated learning emphasizes the significance of practical experience in a sector where interpersonal skills, adaptability, and problem-solving are paramount. Students and learners gain insights into the day-to-day operations of retail businesses, learning to navigate the challenges and opportunities that arise (W&R Seta, 2020).

- ***Industry-Ready Graduates**:* By combining academic coursework with hands-on experience, work-integrated learning ensures that individuals graduate or complete their training ready to make an immediate and valuable contribution to the retail sector. They are equipped not only with theoretical knowledge but also the practical skills required to excel in the industry (W&R Seta, 2020).

- **Skills Development Centre**

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) has taken a significant step to support the National Skills Development Plan and the National Development Plan by partnering with Sekhukhune TVET College to establish its inaugural Skills Development Centre (W&R Seta, 2020). This forward-thinking initiative aims to provide vital infrastructure support to Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges, aligning with the National Skills Development Plan's objectives.

Moreover, it aligns with the National Development Plan's ambitious goal of producing 30,000 artisans annually by 2030 (W&R Seta, 2020). Located in Groblersdal, Limpopo, this state-of-the-art centre is being constructed at a cost of R146 million. Once completed in 2024, the Skills Development Centre will play a pivotal role in producing skilled artisans across various sectors, including wholesale and retail (Redflank, 2021). This forward-looking investment not only addresses skills shortages but also strengthens the nation's capacity to meet its artisan production targets and foster economic growth. It is a testament to W&RSETA's commitment to skills development and its active role in supporting educational institutions and advancing workforce preparedness.

- **Graduate Placement and Internship Project**

W&RSETA demonstrates a keen awareness of the challenges faced by unemployed graduates, many of which result from a misalignment between the skills possessed by graduates and the actual requirements of the industry (W&R Seta, 2020). To address this issue, the authority collaborates with and receives support from the Wholesale and Retail Sector to provide students with valuable work experience opportunities. This strategic approach is designed to equip students with practical skills, real-world exposure, and a deeper understanding of the industry's demands, thereby enhancing their readiness for the world of work (Nyapokoto, 2022). By offering students the opportunity to gain hands-on experience in the retail sector, W&RSETA not only bridges the skills gap but also significantly improves the employability of graduates (Jacobs and Karpova 2023). This approach ultimately empowers them to navigate the competitive job market more effectively, matching their skills to industry needs and increasing their chances of securing meaningful employment. It also serves as a testament to W&RSETA's commitment to nurturing a skilled and job-ready workforce, contributing to the overall growth and success of the retail industry in South Africa (W&R Seta, 2020).

- **Qualification Development:**

Qualification development is a vital component of the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA)'s role in South Africa. W&R SETA takes on the responsibility of adapting qualifications to harmonize with the dynamic demands of the retail sector. This process encompasses both the creation of new qualifications and the revision of existing ones to ensure they remain relevant. It also includes the development of apprenticeships, learnerships, and short courses that cater to the industry's evolving needs. W&R SETA's qualification development efforts are designed to keep pace with the changing landscape of the retail sector. This entails introducing innovative programs that reflect emerging industry trends and skills requirements. For instance, as e-commerce continues to reshape retail, W&R SETA may introduce qualifications in e-commerce management, covering aspects like online sales strategies, digital marketing, and data analytics (Aspeling, and Mason, 2020).

Training Programs: They facilitate and fund training programs to upskill and reskill individuals in the retail industry. These programs can cover areas such as customer service, e-commerce, supply chain management, and more. For more than a decade, the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&RSETA) has been actively implementing the Retail Management Development Programme (RMDP). Launched in 2012, this program was a direct response to the noticeable skills gaps within the middle management ranks of the retail sector (Hermanus, 2022). The RMDP was specifically designed to address these skill shortages and create a pool of skilled middle managers, as identified in W&RSETA's Sector Skills Plan. The program's primary objective is to equip its delegates with the essential skills and knowledge required to become effective managers in the retail industry. Furthermore, it serves as a steppingstone for graduates, preparing them to continue their learning journey by pursuing a career path into the Intermediate Leadership Development Programme (ILDP).

As of the current 2021/22 period, the RMDP continues to make a significant impact, having registered a total of 320 delegates through its partnership with Regenesys Business School. This ongoing commitment to skill development and management training underscores W&RSETA's dedication to nurturing competent and effective middle managers in the retail sector (Lincoln, 2020). By addressing skills gaps at this crucial level of leadership, the program contributes to the sectors overall growth, performance, and success. Therefore, training interventions via institutions providers may not be the only strategy implemented by the W&R SETA to anticipate and develop skills for the future. With regard to the changing work environment, this study will develop an innovative approach that may facilitate future skills development in order to anticipate the disruptive effects of innovation and technological advancement on skills gaps, future skills demand, and evolving work environment in the retail industry. Consequently, the W&R SETA plays a crucial role in contributing to education and training, quality assurance, and curriculum development (W&R SETA Sector Skills Plan, 2020-2025). The purposes of the W&R SETA to anticipate and develop skills for the future consist of the following (W&R SETA Sector Skills Plan, 2020-2025):

- To ensure the delivery of programmes against qualifications across all the sub-frameworks that support economic growth, encourage employment creation and enable social development for workers, unemployed and pre-employed (beneficiaries: students).

- To facilitate workplace-based experience as part of a qualification or a post-graduate qualification with a specific focus on occupations that support growth encourage employment creation and enable social development.

- To provide support for, and prioritisation of, Centres of Specialisation, where practically possible.

- To provide support for TVET colleges in implementing occupationally directed programmes; and

- To facilitate partnerships and collaboration with higher education and research institutions, amongst others, which is central for evidence-based understanding of skills demand and supply.

10. CURRENT AND EMERGING W&R SETA'S PRIORITY SKILLS

a. Existing and Known skills still in demand in the retail sector

According to W&RSETA Report on sector skills plan (SSP) 2020 – 2025, the emerging occupational skills that may be currently in demand (these are not official occupations in existence yet) include: Sales Assistant (General) / Retail Buyer / Butcher / Blockman / Retail Manager (General) / Sales & Marketing Manager / Retail Supervisor / SHEQ Practitioner / Retail Pharmacist/ Sales Representative. The following are among the new and emerging top-up skills (W&RSETA Report on sector skills plan (SSP) 2020 – 2025): Digital marketing skills; Digital customer communication skills; Problem solving skills; Financial literacy skills; Data analytics skills; Ethics & discipline; and Information Communication Technology (ICT) skills, such as Software Developers, Business Analysts and Computer network, and Systems Engineer.

Furthermore, the following skills are also in demand by the W&R SETA: Electronic Payment System Developer, Mobile Application Designer, System Architect, Data Scientist, Sensor Installation and Repair Technician. According to (Fraser, 2023), South Africa's biggest retailers are hiring and looking for the following skills: Supply chain management experience, SEO, Project Management (WMS), Machine Learning, AI, Software Engineers (Golang), Programming, Engineers (Golang and ReactJS), Software Engineers (Golang and ReactJS), Risk, Governance and Compliance across the business, Cross-functional skills of IT with Marketing and Merchandise, Chartered Accountants and L&D, respectively, Data Management, Analytical Skills, IT Architecture and Development in the Omni channel space, IT Governance, and Data/Information Security and Cyber Security. The preceding list is not exhaustive because of disruptive innovation, technological advancement, and a changing environment that are impacting the workplace.

b. Emerging skills in demand in the retail sector

In order to forward the transformation agenda envisioned by the Employment Equity Amendment Bill, employers would continually require support to addressing skills levels across occupational levels. Moreover, Table 6 indicates future skills required by employers in the retail sector (Sareen, 2023).

Table 6: Types of skills in demand within the retail sector.

E-commerce and Omni channel Expertise	With the growth of online shopping and Omni channel retailing, employees need skills in website management, digital marketing, and understanding the customer journey across various touchpoints. Retailers are training their employees to excel in these areas.
Data Analytics and AI	Retailers are increasingly leveraging data analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) for customer insights, demand forecasting, and inventory optimization. Skills related to data analysis, machine learning, and AI are in high demand in the retail sector.
Customer Service and Personalization	Providing exceptional customer service remains crucial in retail. Employees are being trained to offer personalized shopping experiences, which require strong interpersonal skills, empathy, and the ability to anticipate customer needs.
Supply Chain Management	The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities in supply chains. Retailers are investing in training employees to better understand supply chain logistics, procurement, and inventory management to ensure resilience and efficiency.
Sustainability and Ethical Practices	As sustainability becomes a key concern for consumers, retail companies are focusing on sustainable practices. Retailers are training their workforce in sustainability, eco-friendly product knowledge, and ethical sourcing.
Cybersecurity	With the increasing threat of data breaches and cyberattacks, retailers are prioritizing cybersecurity training to protect sensitive customer and company data. This includes educating employees on best practices in data security and fraud prevention.
Remote Work Skills	The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of remote work in the retail sector, especially for roles in marketing, customer service, and IT. Training for remote work skills, such as digital communication and project management, has become essential.
Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity	Retailers are emphasizing diversity and inclusion training to create welcoming environments for employees and customers alike. These skills are important for managing diverse teams and addressing the needs of a diverse customer base.
Automation and Robotics:	The integration of automation and robotics in tasks like inventory management and order fulfilment is increasing. Retailers are providing training to help employees work alongside and maintain these technologies.

Source: Sareen (2023).

Table 6 refers to the types of skills in demand within the retail sector.

In addition to elements illustrated above, Businesstech (2023) indicates that most in-demand job skills in South Africa have increased for professionals in the fields like Restaurant & Hospitality, Architecture & Engineering, Finance and Business & Management professionals. Interestingly, there was a decline for jobs in Sales, Information Technology, Admin, Office, and Support professionals over the same period. Table 7 shows the most in-demand job skills in South Africa currently.

Table 7: The most in-demand job skills in South Africa

	Increase in hiring activity	
Restaurant & Hospitality	• Counter / Waiter / Bartender • Food & Beverage Control	+40%
Architecture & Engineering	• Civil Engineering • Structural Engineering	+6%
Finance	• Bookkeeping • Financial / Project Accounting • Payroll & Wages	+3%
Business & Management	• Infrastructure / Operations Consulting • Business Development	+1%
	Decrease in hiring activity	
Sales	• Representative • Consulting	-8%
Information Technology	• Software Development • Business Analysis	-7%
Admin, Office and Support	• Switchboard • Reception	-2%

Source: (Businesstech, 2023).

The Businesstech report (2023) also highlights a demand for skills in warehousing and logistics in the provinces of Gauteng and Western Cape. The three skills currently in demand, mainly in Gauteng, were in the field graphic designers, user interface designers and copywriters. Quite surprising the report noted that these fields did not always require a diploma (22% have at least a diploma) or degree (18% a degree) qualification for their positions. Therefore, the model to upskilling and reskilling employees must involve and support the culture of lifelong learning ecosystem. Table 5 displays skills and lifelong learning ecosystem model. It shows the guiding principles for skills and lifelong learning, levels of intervention, challenges for skills and lifelong learning, as well as skills and lifelong learning policy options and solutions. For employees to remain competitive in this era of digital technology, lifelong learning is a key requirement. Figure 6 serves as a framework for future skills development and lifelong learning. It also represents an Ecosystem model for future skills development in the wholesale and retail industry.

According to Popenkova (2023), an ecosystem model is crucial for future skills development in the wholesale and retail industry as it provides a holistic approach to understanding and addressing the evolving needs of the industry. This model allows for the identification of key stakeholders, such as employers, employees, educators, and government agencies, and their interconnected roles in shaping the industry's workforce development. By understanding the ecosystem of the wholesale and retail industry, stakeholders can collaborate and coordinate their efforts to ensure the development of relevant and adaptive skills in the workforce. This includes identifying emerging trends and technologies, anticipating future skills requirements, and creating training programs that meet these needs. Additionally, an ecosystem model can facilitate partnerships between industry and educational institutions to design curriculum and training programs that align with industry standards and best practices. This collaboration can help bridge the gap between the classroom and the workplace, ensuring that students and employees are equipped with the necessary skills to succeed in the industry.

Ultimately, an ecosystem model fosters a more sustainable and resilient workforce in the wholesale and retail industry by promoting continuous learning and skill development. By investing in future skills development, stakeholders can adapt to industry changes, stay competitive, and drive innovation and growth in the sector.

Figure 6. AN ECOSYSTEM MODEL FOR FUTURE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

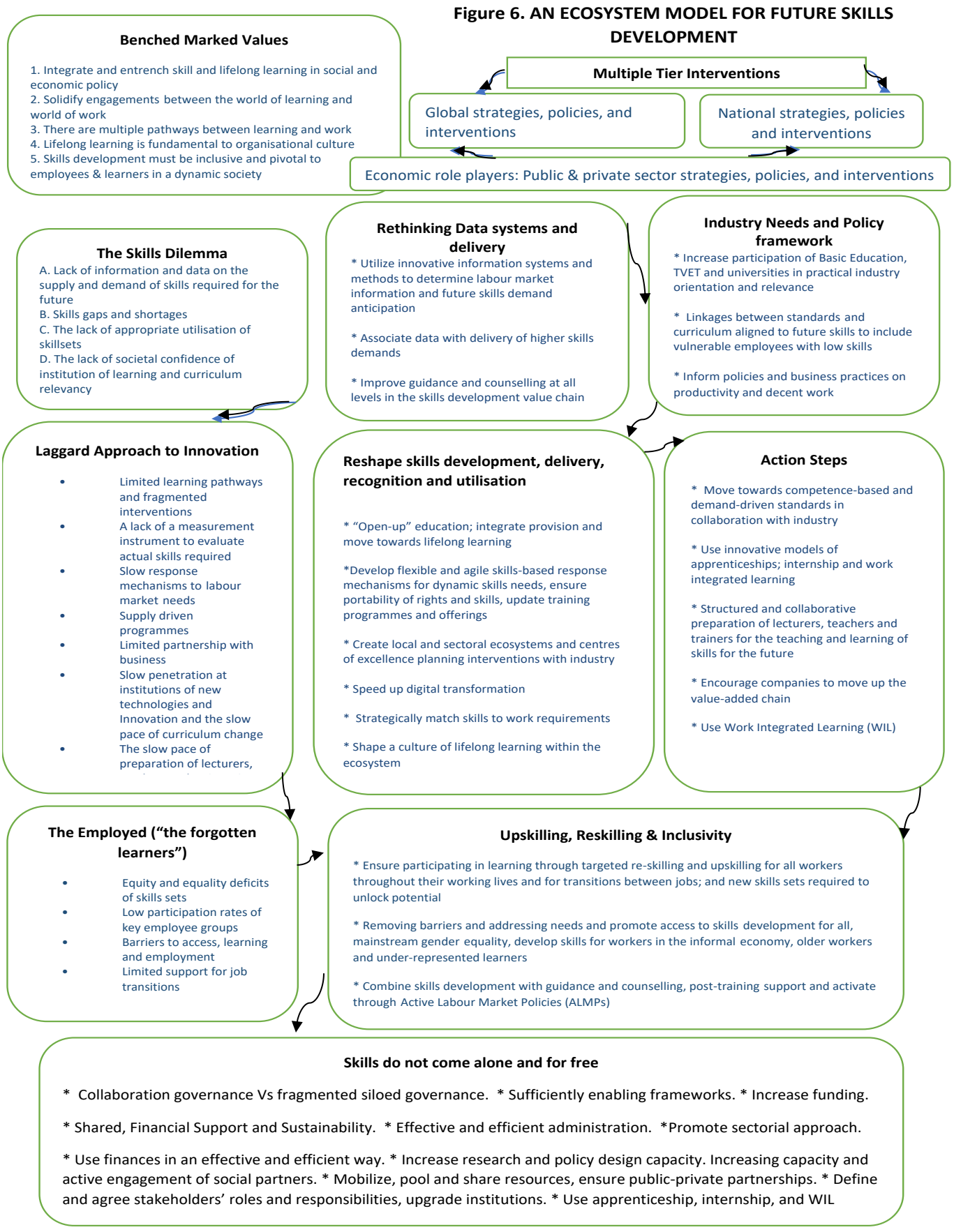


Figure 6: An ecosystem Models for future skills development. Source: Adapted from the ILO (2021)

11. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Saunders et al (2019) postulated that the term research methodology refers to a philosophy, which denotes a system of beliefs and assumptions about the development of knowledge. It refers precisely to what researchers are doing when embarking on research: developing knowledge in a particular field. The knowledge development this study is embarking upon the W&R SETA strategies for navigating digital disruption, fostering innovation, and meeting future skills requirements in the South African Retail Sector. The study is addressing the potential disruption problem that innovation and technological advancement may cause in meeting future skills. This research study intends to anticipate the identification of possible skills gaps that could affect the W&R SETA efforts to respond to the growing skills demand, as well as the identification of future skills required by the Wholesale and retail sector to promoting the retail sector.

11.1. Research design.

The research philosophy and approaches for this study refer to assumptions about the W&R SETA's current strategic framework on skills development and model for navigating digital disruption, fostering innovation, and meeting future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. Therefore, the mixed methods is applied in this study in order to ensure efficient and effective data collection and analysis. A Mixed methods approaches consist of the combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches (Noble, 2019). Mixing approaches is essential for this study as it envision to get more viewpoints from employers and beneficiaries upon the variables being studied. Therefore, mixed methods involve procedures that enable the validation of data from both quantitative and qualitative studies. It assists in confirming assumptions where findings from the qualitative study confirm those from quantitative study (Creswell, 2018).

In this study, data are collected by employing mixed instruments, namely a survey questionnaire and interview questions using respectively Microsoft Forms, and teams meeting interviews and focus groups). In this study, the survey approach will provide a numerical description of trends using an online questionnaire. Figure 7 illustrates the mixed methods design implemented for data collection and analysis.

The research design will guide the researchers through all the steps that need to be taken when developing a research methodology.

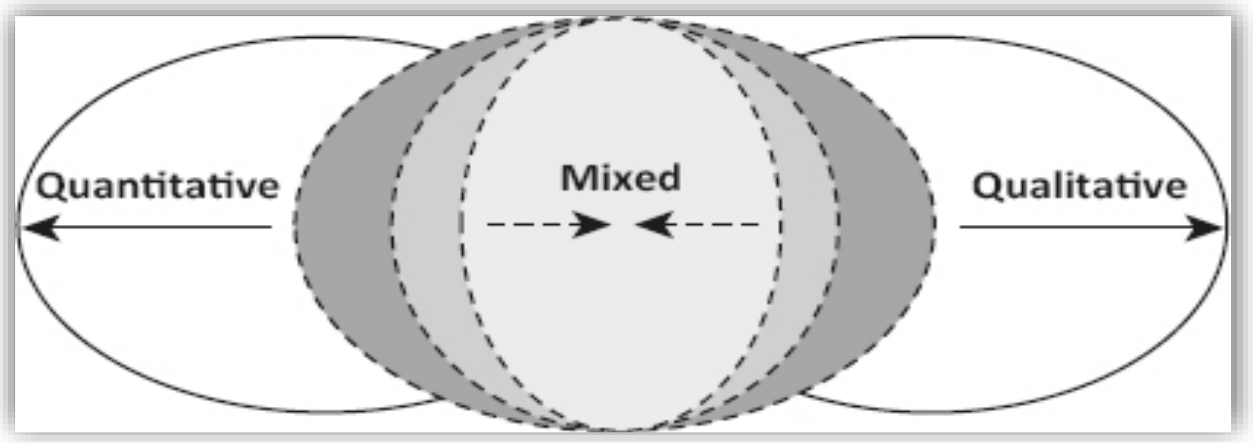


Figure 7: Mixed method design implemented for data collection and analysis

Source: Adapted from Creswell, 2018

The understanding of Figure 7 is illustrated in the following Table 8.

Table 8: Mixed Methods

	Quantitative	Qualitative
Definition	Data that can be numerically analyzed and quantified into hard facts.	Non-numerical data that describes qualities, opinions, or feelings.
Collection Methods	Online, in-person, and phone interviews or surveys with closed-ended questions, controlled experiments, and more	Open-ended survey questions, unstructured interviews, focus groups, observation, and more
Best For	Drawing conclusions through larger-scale studies, conducting statistical analyses.	Formulating hypotheses and gathering detailed information from smaller groups
Analysis	Statistical analysis through charts, tables, and statistical programs.	Manual analysis through grouping of common themes and other methods.
Question Example	"Did you buy ice cream today? 1) Yes 2) No"	"Why did you buy ice cream today?"
Data Example	67% of respondents bought ice cream today.	"I saw ice cream on sale by the checkout and it was an impulse buy. I wanted to treat myself."

Source: Adapted from Creswell, 2018

According to Saunders, 2019, the core assumption of mixed methods is that when researchers combine statistical trends (quantitative data) with stories and personal experiences (qualitative data), this collective strength provides a better understanding of the research problem than either form of data alone (Creswell, 2018). The choice of using mixed methods in this study appears to be relevant for the level of interaction between the quantitative and qualitative strands, the relative priority of the strands, the timing of the strands, and the procedures for mixing the strands. Strand is a component of a study that encompasses the basic process of conducting quantitative or qualitative research: posing questions, collecting data, analyzing data, and interpreting results based on that data (Creswell, 2018). Thus, the level of interaction is the extent to which the two strands (quantitative and qualitative) are kept independent or interact with each other.

11.2. Research population

According to (Shukla, 2020), population refers to the set or group of all the units on which the findings of the research are to be applied. t it consists of all the units on which the findings of research can be applied. In other words, population is a set of all the units, which possess variable characteristic under study and for which findings of research can be generalised. In addition, any population that is the subject of a particular study formulates the research population. This implies that the research population refers to the total number of individuals from whom data will be gathered, which is inclusive of individuals, households, businesses, companies, and or professional people (Wiid and Diggines 2021). For the purpose of this study, the research population will consist of employers from the retailing sector, academic institutions (TVET Colleges and Universities) and beneficiaries who have received support from the W&R SETA. Employers, institutions, and beneficiaries form part of qualitative and quantitative research population of the study. The convergent-parallel mixed method will be used for data collection in this study.

11.3. Sampling

According to Wiid and Diggines (2021) the research population must be clearly defined with respect to the “sample units, sample elements extent and time”. In accordance with Wiid and Diggines, this entails dividing the population into groups from which data can be obtained. For the purposes of this study the research population will be divided into three distinct units as follows:

- Beneficiaries of the W&R SETA Funding supports
- South African HEIs (Universities and TVET colleges) and
- Employers (companies participating in the W&RSETA placement programme)

In the case of beneficiaries, the sampling unit and sampling element are the same. However, in the case of the HEIs the sampling unit will consist of academic and administrative staff with knowledge of student placements at their respective institutions. For employers participating in the W&RSETA programme, the sampling element will consist of human resources staff and supervisors directly involved in the placement of graduates. Furthermore, the sampling frame will consist of the W&RSETA database for all participating beneficiaries, HEIs, and employers. Simple random sampling will be used to select beneficiaries and avoid sampling bias on the part of the researchers. The sample size will be determined once the population size has been determined.

11.4. Data collection methods

According to Creswell (2015), data collection refers to obtaining of useful information on fundamental quality characteristics produced through a process. In qualitative research, data is usually collected from a smaller sample, which provides rich and deep insight into the phenomenon under study. To obtain a better understanding of the topic under study, data collection will be carried out using a mixed-methods design and the convergent parallel design, which can be expressed as a combination of qualitative and quantitative (QUAL+QUAN) (Morse, 1991 cited in Demir and Pismek 2018). A convergent parallel design entails that the researcher concurrently conducts the quantitative and qualitative elements in the same phase of the research process (Creswell & Pablo-Clark, 2011). Figure 9 illustrates the convergent-parallel approach that will be implemented in this study. According to Edmonds & Kennedy (2017), the convergent-parallel approach is a concurrent approach and involves the simultaneous collection of qualitative and quantitative data (usually both QUAL and QUAN are the emphasis), followed by the combination and comparisons of these multiple data sources (i.e., the two methods are ultimately merged). This approach involves the collection of different but complementary data on the same phenomena. Thus, it is used for the converging and subsequent interpretation of quantitative and qualitative data.

This approach is often referred to as the concurrent triangulation design (single-phase) because the data is collected and analysed individually but at the same time.

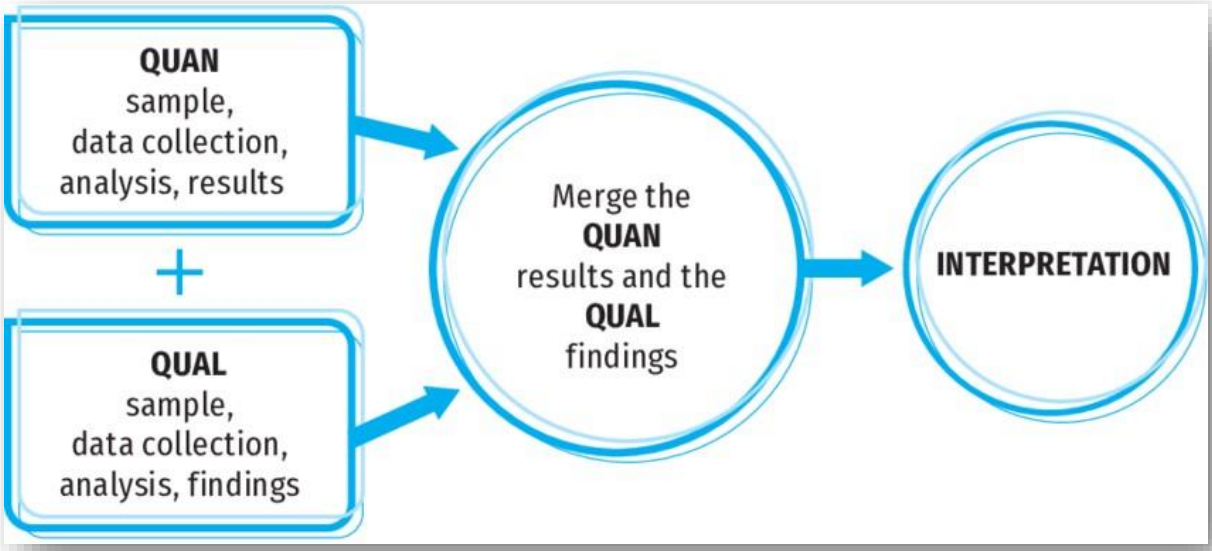


Figure 8: Convergent-Parallel Approach

Source: Adapted from Edmonds & Kennedy (2017)

This figure suggests that the parallel-databases design is structured so the QUAN and QUAL data are collected separately (not within the same measures) but at the same time (concurrently). The analyses of data will also be examined concurrently. The results will be then converged by comparing and contrasting the data en route to one overall interpretive framework. This design allows researchers to validate data by converging the QUAN results with the QUAL findings. This design is also referred to as a triangulation design and convergence model, as seen in Edmonds & Kennedy (2017) examination. In this study, methods of collecting qualitative data involve direct interaction with the focused group (Sekaran and Bougie, 2013) that was organised by the retail chair office to gather people's perceptions, meanings and understanding of situations and constructions of reality related to the future skills demand and development (Punch and Oancea, 2014).

Furthermore, Quantitative data collection will consist of distributing questionnaire to the beneficiaries using google MS form.

11.5. Data analysis

Data analysis in mixed methods research relates to the type of research strategy chosen for the procedures. According to Creswell (2018), data analysis in mixed methods consists of separately analysing the quantitative data using quantitative methods and qualitative data using qualitative methods. Data analysis involves combining both databases using approaches that mix or integrate the quantitative and qualitative data and results (the mixed methods analysis). The analysis occurs from both quantitative (descriptive and inferential numeric analysis) and qualitative (description and thematic text analysis) approaches and often includes the two approaches (Creswell, 2009). This study will employe the Software Program of Statistical Package for Social sciences (SPSS version 24.0) for quantitative method and NVivo (14 pro) software package and thematic text analysis for qualitative method respectively.

The two techniques will be helpful and assist the researchers in terms of the interpretation of numerical and theoretical data within the Tables and Graphs, which will represent an easier way to understand data analysis, particularly in explaining the necessity for developing graduates' placement programmes. According to Creswell (2011), data are processed through four basic mixed methods designs that comprise the convergent parallel design, the explanatory sequential design, the exploratory sequential design, and the embedded design. The convergent parallel design framework will be implemented in this study for the purposes of reflecting the process of interaction, priority, timing, and mixing data (Creswell, 2011). The usage of the convergent design will consist of understanding or developing a more complete comprehension of the research problem by obtaining different but complementary data for validation purposes.

Therefore, quantitative data collection and analysis, and qualitative data collection and analysis will be processed, compared, and interpreted using the framework of mixed methods design for data analysis, which involves descriptions, relationships, comparisons and interpretation or predictions of both quantitative and qualitative results. The analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data will be considering the examination of research questions in line with descriptive analysis (quantitative results), inferential analysis (qualitative results), mixing and interpretation of data, representation, and interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Results.

11.6. Ethical Considerations

Ensuring ethical research is essential to the safety and security of research participants. This means informed consent will be available for participants to understand the purpose of the survey, how their data will be used, and any potential risks or benefits of participation. For the study, the following ethical consideration have been taken into account:

- **Clear and Comprehensive Consent Statement:**

A clear and comprehensive consent statement that explains the purpose of the survey, how the data will be used will be provided including the duration of participation, and any potential risks or benefits associated with participation. A consent form will also be presented to interviewees before the collection of data. A checkbox at the beginning of the survey, which participants must check to indicate their informed consent before proceeding with the survey will be provided in the case of the online survey. The study instruments will incorporate simple and easily understandable language, avoiding technical jargon.

- **Voluntary Participation:**

Participation in the data collection process will be voluntary, and participants can withdraw from the survey or interviews at any time without penalty. Participants will be informed that non-participation or withdrawal will not affect their relationship with the researcher or organisation.

- **Privacy and Confidentiality:**

Participants will be assured that their responses will be kept confidential and that their identities will be anonymized in compliance with the Protection of Personal Information Act (POPIA).

- **Contact Information:**

Participants will be provided with contact information for the researcher and the office of the DUT W&RSETA Retail Chair to allow them to ask questions, raise concerns, or seek clarification about the data collection process and their participation.

- **Data Handling and Storage:**

The researchers will ensure that the data is handled and stored data responsibly, ensuring data accuracy and security. Data will be stored for an appropriate duration and disposed of properly as directed by the W&RSETA. Adhering to these ethical considerations is essential for maintaining the trust and integrity of research and for ensuring that research is conducted in a responsible and respectful manner. Researchers will be aware of and follow the relevant ethical guidelines and standards set forth by the Durban University of Technology and professional associations. The research team also consists of researchers who have been trained in research ethics.

SECTION C: FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

12. FINDINGS: QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESULTS

12.1. Quantitative data analysis and interpretation

According to Ali (2021), quantitative data analysis is a systematic process of both collecting and evaluating measurable and verifiable data. It contains a statistical mechanism of assessing or analyzing quantitative data. A quantitative research analyst's main purpose is to quantify a hypothetical situation. Therefore, prior to discussing and interpreting quantitative data analysis, it is critical to recognize that quantitative data analysis and interpretation are significant in a study for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, quantitative data analysis enables researchers to accurately evaluate and interpret data in a consistent and trustworthy manner. It takes a methodical approach to quantitative research, ensuring that the results are founded on strong statistical concepts.

The interpretation of quantitative data can help inform evidence-based decision-making. It gives insights on trends, patterns, and linkages that can be used to make recommendations, clinical interventions, or commercial plans (Abulela & Harwell, 2020). In summary, quantitative data analysis and interpretation are critical components of every study because they give correctness, objectivity, generalizability, statistical inference, informed decision-making, reproducibility, and precision. These advantages enhance the overall validity and trustworthiness of the study's conclusions. The following are the results of the statistical analysis from the survey performed to obtain respondents' thoughts on the necessary skills required or to be acquired for the future of the retail sector in South Africa.

12.2. Age categories

According to Roselli (2018), age category in a study refers to the grouping of participants based on their age range or demographic. Common age categories can include children (0-12 years), adolescents (13-17 years), young adults (18-25 years), adults (26-64 years), and older adults (65+ years). These age categories help researchers analyze data and draw conclusions based on different age groups. In this study, the results related to the age categories include respondents ages comprising from 18 to 65 years old. Figure 9 shows the age category selected for this study.

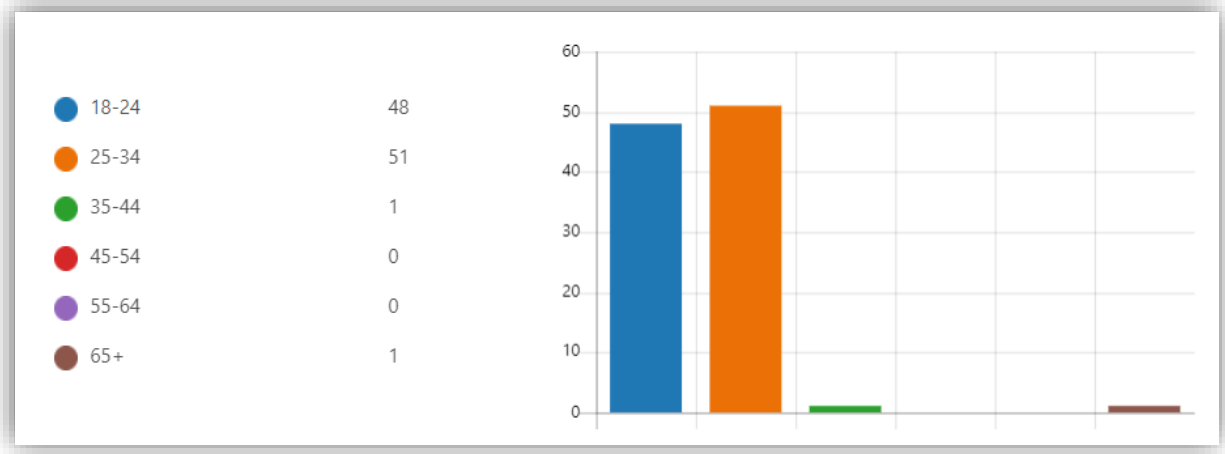


Figure 9: Age categories

Based on the presented statistical results from figure 9 (age groups), the following interpretations can be made:

- Age distribution: The figure shows the age distribution of the participants in the study. The largest proportion of participants falls into the age group of 18 to 24 (47%), followed closely by the age group of 25 to 34 (49%).
- Minority age groups: The age groups of 35 to 44 and 65 and older each represent only 1% of the participants. This indicates that these age groups were underrepresented in the study.
- Majority age range: Overall, the majority of the study participants (96%) fell within the age range of 18 to 34 (47% from 18 to 24 and 49% from 25 to 34).

- Absence of certain age groups: Notably, the statistical results indicate that no participants aged between 45 and 64 took part in the study. Therefore, this study does not include any representation from this age group.

In summary, this statistical analysis provides insights into the age distribution and representation of different age groups in the study. It highlights the dominance of participants between 18 to 34, while mentioning the absence of participants aged between 45 to 64.

12.3. Gender categories

Cartwright and Nancarrow (2022) attested that in a study, gender refers to the categorization of individuals based on their biological and physiological characteristics, such as reproductive organs and chromosomes that typically align with male or female categories. Gender is different from the concept of sex, which is based on physical characteristics, while gender is socially constructed and encompasses cultural, societal, and personal attitudes and behaviours associated with masculinity and femininity. In a research study, gender may be considered as a variable that can impact the results and interpretation of the findings. Researchers often analyse data based on gender to assess potential differences or similarities among participants of different genders. Gender is an important consideration in research to ensure inclusivity and accuracy in results. In this study, gender categories represent elements that include male, female and respondents, which did not like to disclose their gender (prefer not to say).

Figure 10: Gender

Figure 10 (Gender) indicates the statistical results, which show the gender distribution of the study's participants. It indicates that 49% of the participants identified themselves as both male and female, meaning there was an equal representation of males and females among the participants. Additionally, 2% of the individuals decided not to disclose their gender and therefore may not be identified as either male or female in the dataset.

12.4. Ethnicity categories

According to Garcia et al. (2022), ethnicity is a social construct that refers to a group of people who share a common cultural background, heritage, language, and traditions. In a study, ethnicity can be used as a demographic variable to understand how different cultural groups may experience or respond to certain phenomena. Researchers may collect data on participants' ethnicity to help identify patterns or disparities based on cultural differences. It is important to approach the study of ethnicity with sensitivity and cultural competence to avoid perpetuating stereotypes or biases. This section discusses the race group or ethnicity of respondents.

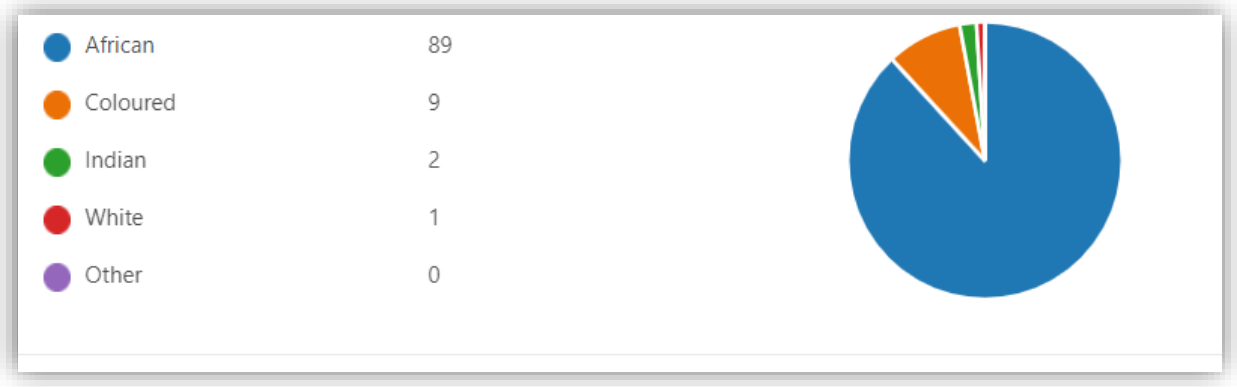


Figure 11: Ethnicity

The statistical results of Figure 11 provide information about the ethnicity distribution among the participants. The results indicate that:

- 88% of the participants were Africans: This means that the majority of the participants belonged to the African ethnic group, constituting the largest portion of the sample.
- 9% were coloured: This suggests that a smaller proportion of the participants identified themselves as being of mixed race or having multiracial backgrounds. This group represents the second-largest ethnic group within the sample.
- 2% were Indians: This indicates that a small percentage of participants were of Indian ethnicity, reflecting their representation in the sample.
- 1% were white: This finding implies that a very small proportion of the participants identified themselves as white. This group represents the smallest ethnic category within the sample.

Thus, the statistical results show the distribution of ethnicity within the sample, with Africans being the majority, followed by coloured individuals, Indians, and finally white individuals.

12.5. Nationality

In a study, nationality refers to the country or sovereign state of an individual's citizenship or origin. It is often used as a demographic variable to analyse differences or similarities between individuals from different countries or regions. Nationality can provide insights into cultural backgrounds, societal norms, and potential biases or influences that may affect research outcomes. Researchers may collect data on nationality to explore how it relates to various factors such as behaviour, attitudes, beliefs, or experiences (Leyva et al. 2021). This section examines respondents'' nationality.

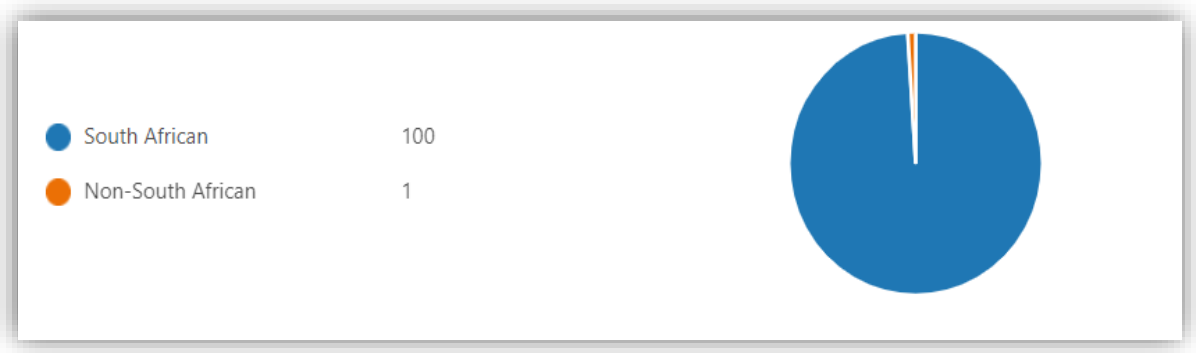


Figure 12: Nationality

The statistical results in Figure 12 indicates the distribution of participants based on their nationality. It reveals that the majority, specifically 99% of the participants, were South Africans, while only 1% were Non-South Africans. This information helps provide an understanding of the composition of the participants in terms of nationality.

12.6. Highest level of Education

Highest level of Education in a study refers to the highest level of education completed by participants in the study. This could include educational levels such as high school diploma, associate degree, bachelor's degree, master's degree, or doctorate. Higher education level is often considered a measure of one's knowledge, skills, and expertise in a specific field (Idris and Lindrayeni, 2019). The Highest level of Education of respondents is examined in this section.

Figure 13: Higher level of Education

The statistical results from figure 13 suggests that among the respondents in the context of higher education:

- 30% have completed Grade 12NSC (which stands for Grade 12 National Senior Certificate, an educational qualification).
- 25% have a diploma, which indicates that they have completed a specific course or program of study at a college or tertiary institution.
- 21% have a bachelor's degree, which implies that they have successfully completed an undergraduate program at a university or similar institution.
- 13% have a higher certificate, meaning they have obtained a qualification that is higher than a high school diploma but lower than a bachelor's degree.

- 10% possess other qualifications, which could refer to credentials like postgraduate degrees, vocational training certificates, or any other educational achievements not specified in the given options.

These results provide insights into the distribution of educational attainment among the respondents in the higher education sector.

12.7. Position in the organisation

In a study, the position of participants in the organisation refers to where an individual fits into the hierarchy or structure of the organisation (Munir et al., 2021). This could include roles such as manager, supervisor, or any other relevant position that is relevant to the study being conducted. Understanding the position in the organisation of individuals involved in the study is important for determining their level of influence, authority, responsibilities, and potential biases that may impact the research results. This section presents the results of respondents' position in the organisation.

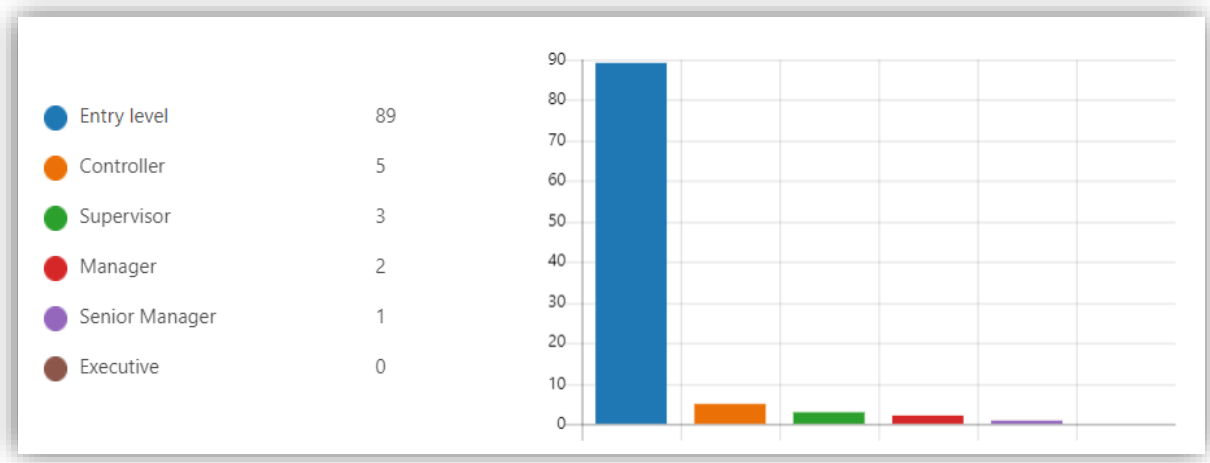


Figure 14: Position in the Organisation

Based on the statistical results shown in figure 11.6, the following inferences can be made:

- Company Position Distribution: The majority (88%) of the respondents held entry-level positions within the company. This indicates that a large number of employees in the survey were in the early stages of their careers.

- Controllers: About 5% of the respondents were in a controller position. Controllers typically hold a higher level of authority and responsibility, often supervising financial operations or accounting departments.

- Supervisors: Approximately 3% of the respondents had supervisory roles. Supervisors have oversight over a team or a specific department, ensuring that tasks are carried out effectively and efficiently.

- Managers and Senior Managers: Both managers and senior managers were equally represented in the survey at 1% each. These individuals are often responsible for setting strategic goals, making crucial decisions, and overseeing the overall operations of a department or business unit. (Add comments)

Overall, this statistical breakdown provides insights into the hierarchical structure of the organisations and the distribution of employees across different positions. The majority of workforce is South Africa holds entry-level positions which suggests that the workforce is predominantly in the early stages of their careers, potentially reflecting the dynamics of employment patterns and career development in the South African context. The 5% representation in controller positions aligns with the broader trend in the country's job market, where certain segments of professionals assume higher authority and responsibility, often in financial or accounting domains. The 3% in supervisory roles mirrors a smaller but significant group overseeing specific teams or departments, contributing to the overall organisational structure. While the 1% of managers and senior managers emphasizes the importance of strategic decision-making, aligning with the complex business landscape in South Africa.

13. ANTICIPATED FUTURE SKILLS

This section indicates the perception of respondents concerning anticipated future skills required in the retail sector.

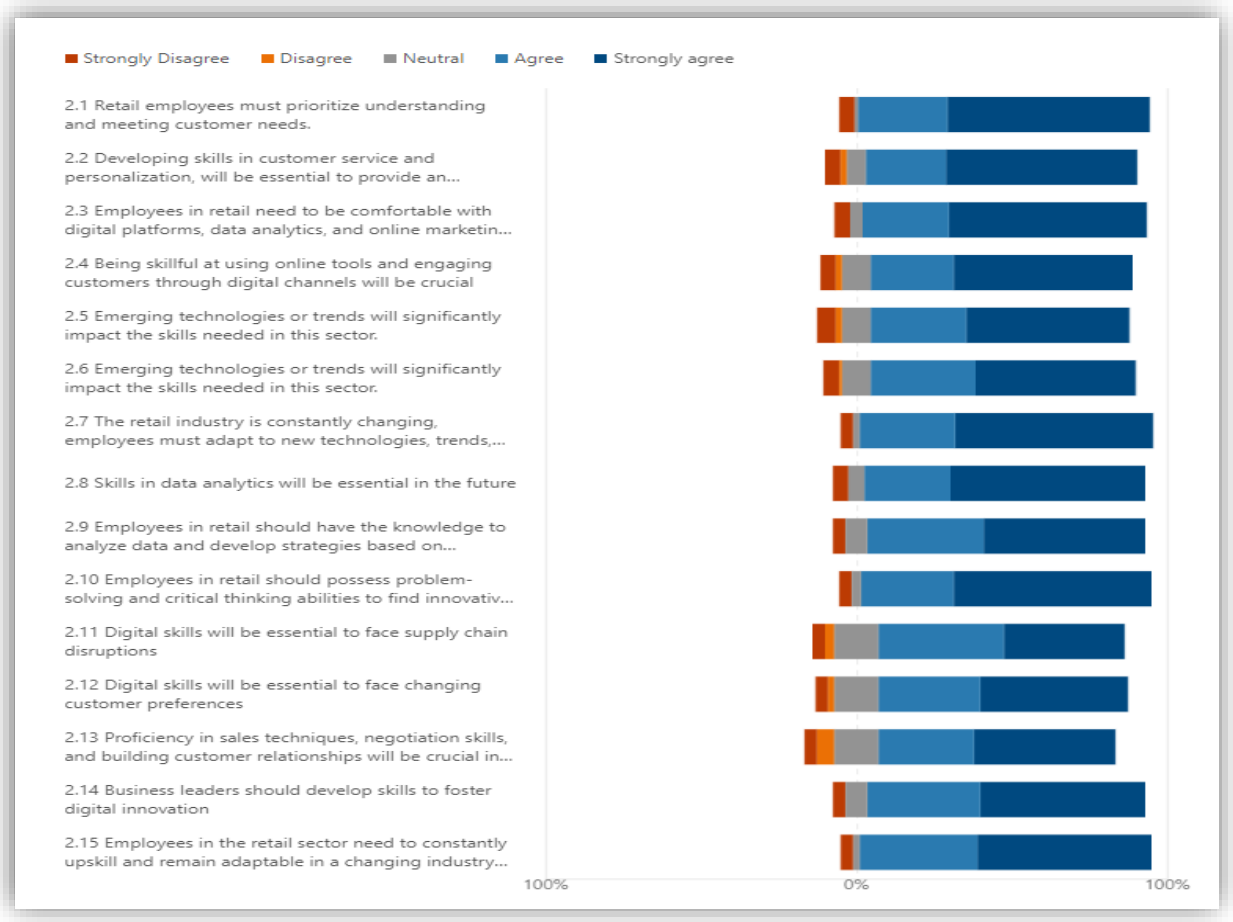


Figure 15: Anticipated Future Skills

Figure 15 is broken down and discussed after each statement, forming a sub-heading. The following sub-sections contain an explanation and analysis of each statement, as well as statistical responses based on respondents' opinions, thoughts, or beliefs.

14. Retail employee's perception about prioritising understanding and meeting of customer needs

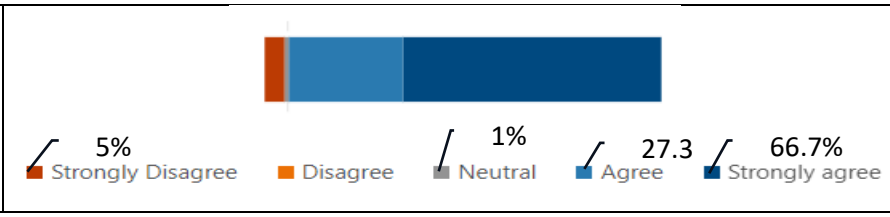
Retail employees must prioritise understanding and meeting of customer needs	

Figure 16: Retail employee's perception about prioritising understanding and meeting of customer needs

According to Inabo and Writer (2023), customer perception is the opinions, feelings, and beliefs customers have about a brand. It plays an important role in building customer loyalty and retention as well as brand reputation and awareness. In this study, respondents were asked to describe their perspective of the importance of prioritising understanding and meeting of customer needs. The statistical results suggest that the majority of respondents 94% agreed that retail staff should prioritize understanding and meeting customer needs. On the other hand, there was a small percentage (5.1%) who strongly disagreed with the idea. The fact that only 1% of the respondents were neutral indicates that most people hold a clear opinion on the matter.

Overall, these results highlight the importance of retail staff understanding and addressing customer needs, as a majority of the survey participants expressed agreement with this idea. Therefore, based on these results the W&R SETA and retail organisations should implement customer service training programs for retail staff to enhance their understanding and skills in meeting customer needs. The training should focus on building empathy, active listening, and problem-solving, and effective communication techniques. This will enable retail staff to better understand customer requirements and provide personalized service. In addition, the W&R SETA and retail organisations should also consider the following:

- Incorporate customer satisfaction metrics as part of the performance evaluation process for retail staff. This will create accountability and incentivize employees to prioritize customer needs. Reward and recognize employees who consistently demonstrate exceptional customer understanding and service.

- Empower retail staff with decision-making authority to resolve customer issues promptly and effectively. Encourage them to take ownership of customer needs and find suitable solutions, even if it requires going beyond established protocols. Granting autonomy will enhance customer satisfaction and allow retail staff to respond appropriately to unique customer situations.

- Foster a culture of continuous improvement within the organisation by regularly reviewing and analysing customer feedback, survey data, and industry trends. Encourage retail staff to share insights, best practices, and recommendations for better understanding and meeting customer needs. This will create an environment of learning and innovation within the retail team, etc.

Many other aspects may be taken into consideration, but implementing these recommendations will reinforce the emphasis on understanding and meeting customer needs, resulting in enhanced customer satisfaction.

15. Developing skills in customer service and personalisation

In this section, respondents were asked if improving abilities in customer service and personalization would be necessary to create a great shopping experience.

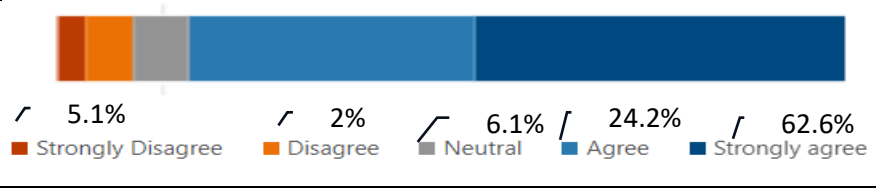
Developing skills in customer service and personalisation will be essential to provide an exceptional shopping experience	

Figure 17: Developing skills in customer service and personalisation

The result revealed the following:

- 86.8% of respondents indicated that developing skills in customer service and personalization will be essential to provide an exceptional shopping experience. This indicates a strong consensus among the majority of respondents that such skills are crucial for creating a positive customer experience.

In addition, this still suggests that a significant portion of respondents recognize the importance of developing these skills for an exceptional shopping experience.

- 6.1% of respondents were neutral. This group may not have a strong opinion regarding the statement, possibly indicating a lack of awareness or ambivalence towards the impact of customer service and personalization on the shopping experience.

- 5.1% of respondents strongly disagreed and 2% of respondents disagreed that that developing skills in customer service and personalization will be essential to provide an exceptional shopping experience. This indicates a notable minority who strongly hold the opposite view or express dissatisfaction, suggesting that they do not believe these skills are necessary to deliver an exceptional shopping experience.

According to Price (2023), developing skills in customer service and personalisation is important for several reasons. Customer service skills help to build strong relationships with customers, leading to increased loyalty and repeat business. In addition, strong customer service skills enable employees to effectively address and resolve customer issues and complaints, ensuring customer satisfaction and retention. However, in a competitive market, excellent customer service can be a key differentiator that sets a company apart from its competitors. Customer service skills are crucial for providing a positive customer experience, driving customer loyalty, and ultimately contributing to the success and growth of a business. Therefore, based on the above results, the W&R SETA and retail organisations should focus on training and developing customer service and personalization skills. Since a significant majority of respondents strongly agreed that developing these skills is essential, it is important for businesses to invest in training programs and workshops to enhance the capabilities of their employees in these areas. This could be done through role-playing exercises, specialized training sessions, or by bringing in experts to provide guidance. In addition, the W&R SETA and retail organisations should pay attention on the following:

- Implement technology solutions to enhance customer service: Technology can play a significant role in personalization and improving the overall customer service experience. Companies should consider investing in customer relationship management (CRM) systems or other software that can help track customer preferences, automate personalized recommendations, and streamline communication with customers. This will enable businesses to provide a more seamless and personalized shopping experience for their customers.

- Provide incentives and recognition for exceptional customer service: To motivate employees and encourage them to consistently provide outstanding customer service, organisations can implement incentive programs or recognize top performers. This can be in the form of bonuses, public recognition, or even career advancement opportunities for individuals who consistently excel in delivering exceptional shopping experiences.

- Continuous monitoring and evaluation of customer service standards: To ensure that customer service and personalization are consistently meeting customers' expectations, businesses should implement a system for ongoing monitoring and evaluation. This could involve regular feedback surveys, mystery shopper programs, or data analysis of customer complaints and feedback. By identifying areas that need improvement, companies can implement necessary changes to enhance the shopping experience.

In summary, the primary recommendation would be to prioritize customer service and personalization as key focus areas within the organisation, by investing in training, constantly monitoring, and evaluating, and leveraging technology to make continuous improvements.

15.1. Employees comfortability with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies

Respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the assertion that personnel in retail must be familiar with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the increase of e-commerce and digital technology.

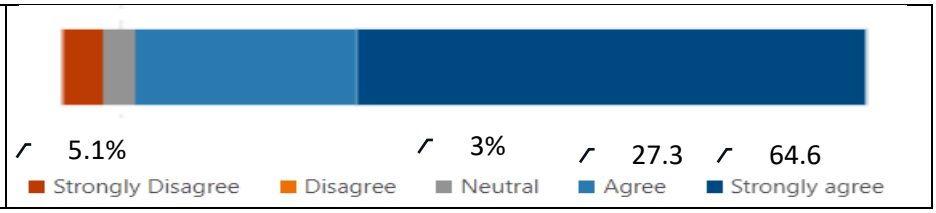
Employees in the retail industry need to be comfortable with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies.	

Figure 18: Employees comfortability with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies

According to Gao et al (2023), the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies has made it essential for employees to be comfortable with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing. By equipping employees with these skills, businesses can stay competitive in an increasingly digital world. Therefore, digital platforms provide a way for businesses to connect with their customers, manage transactions, and streamline operations. Employees who are comfortable using these platforms will be better able to serve customers, communicate effectively with colleagues, and make data-driven decisions. Data analytics is also becoming increasingly important in the business world. By analysing data, businesses can gain insights into customer behaviour, market trends, and performance metrics. Employees who are skilled in using data analytics tools will be able to make informed decisions that drive business growth.

In addition, Gao et al (2023) stated that online marketing is another key skill that employees need to have in today's digital age. With the majority of consumers turning to the internet to research products and make purchases, businesses need to have a strong online presence.

Employees who are well-versed in online marketing strategies will be able to help their organisation attract and engage customers online. In this study, the statistical results aligned to employees' comfortability with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies reveal the following:

- 91.9% of respondents agreed that employees in the retail industry need to be comfortable with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies. This indicates a significant proportion of respondents, which agreed with the statement.

- 3% of respondents remained neutral, indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. This group may have no strong opinion on the matter or may be unsure about the impact of digital technologies in the retail industry.

- 5.1% of respondents strongly disagreed that employees in the retail industry need to be comfortable with digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing due to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies. This suggests a smaller portion of the respondents who do not see the need for these skills or do not believe in the influence of digital technologies in retail.

But mostly, the results show that a majority of respondents recognize the importance of digital skills in the retail industry, while a small percentage do not agree with this view or remain unsure. Based on the statistical results, the recommendation to the W&R SETA and retail organisations would be to prioritize training and development programs to enhance employees' skills in digital platforms, data analytics, and online marketing in the retail industry. This would help employees adapt to the rise of e-commerce and digital technologies, ultimately benefiting the company and meeting the changing needs of the industry.

15.2. Skills to engage customers through digital channels

In this section, respondents were asked to provide their thoughts on the importance of being skilled at using online tools and engaging clients through digital channels.

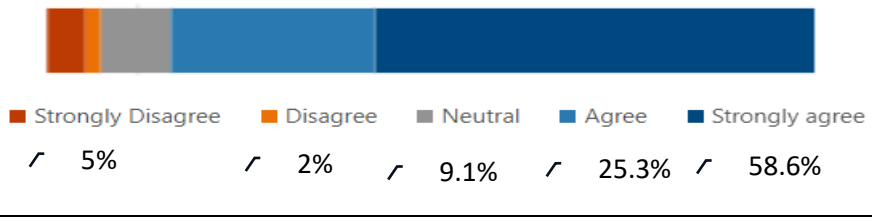
Being skilful at using online tools and engaging customers through digital channels will be crucial.	

Figure 19: Skills to engage customers through digital channels

According to Dooley (2023), in today's digital age, engaging customers through digital channels is crucial for businesses to stay competitive and relevant. Having the right skills and knowledge to effectively engage customers through these channels is essential for success. Having the right skills to engage customers through digital channels is essential for businesses to succeed in today's digital landscape. By leveraging these skills effectively, businesses can build strong relationships with customers, drive engagement, and ultimately achieve their business goals. The statistical results show the distribution of responses to a statement regarding the importance of being skilful at using online tools and engaging customers through digital channels. The results reveal the following:

- 83.9% of respondents agreed that being skilful at using online tools and engaging customers through digital channels will be crucial. This indicates a majority of respondents hold a strong belief in the significance of these skills in the digital era. They recognize the importance of these skills.

- 9.1% of respondents were neutral. This group of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement, suggesting they may not have a strong opinion or may require more information to form a definitive stance. However, 5.1% and 2% of respondents respectively strongly disagreed or disagreed that being skilful at using online tools will be crucial. This small portion of respondents indicates a minority who do not believe in the importance of these skills.

However, the majority of respondents (58.6%) strongly agreed on the need of being proficient in using online tools and interacting clients via digital channels, with a smaller percentage agreeing (25.3%). The neutral and disagreed groups account for a smaller number of responses. This means that training will be required to develop the necessary abilities for using internet technology and engaging clients through digital channels. In other words, since the majority of respondents strongly agree on the need to be proficient in using online tools and interacting with clients via digital channels, it is recommended to provide training and skill development opportunities to enhance their digital capabilities. This can include workshops, online courses, or one-on-one coaching sessions to improve their proficiency and confidence in using digital tools. Furthermore, to support the employees in their effort to become proficient in digital interactions, it is important to provide them with necessary resources. This may include access to updated software, tools, and platforms, as well as guidelines or best practices for effective online communication with clients. Providing ongoing support and assistance can also help them overcome any initial challenges they may face during the transition. Other aspects of consideration include:

- Collaboration and Knowledge Sharing: Encourage the exchange of knowledge and experiences among the workforce to foster a collaborative learning environment. This can be achieved through team meetings, discussion forums, or collaborative projects where they can share their expertise and learn from each other's experiences. Encouraging knowledge sharing can help accelerate skill development and create a culture of continuous learning within the organisation.

- Performance Evaluation: Include the proficiency in using online tools and interacting with clients via digital channels as a part of performance evaluation criteria. This will highlight the importance of these skills and encourage individuals to continuously work towards improving their digital capabilities. Recognize and reward employees who demonstrate exceptional proficiency in utilizing digital channels effectively to motivate others and create healthy competition within the organisation.

In summary, by prioritizing training and skill development, providing resources and support, promoting collaboration and knowledge sharing, and integrating digital proficiency into performance evaluation, organisations can empower their employees to effectively leverage online tools and digital channels for enhanced client interactions.

15.3. Emerging technologies impacts on skills required in the retail sector

Respondents were asked to demonstrate their grasp of the assertion that emerging technology or trends will significantly impact the skills necessary in the retail sector.

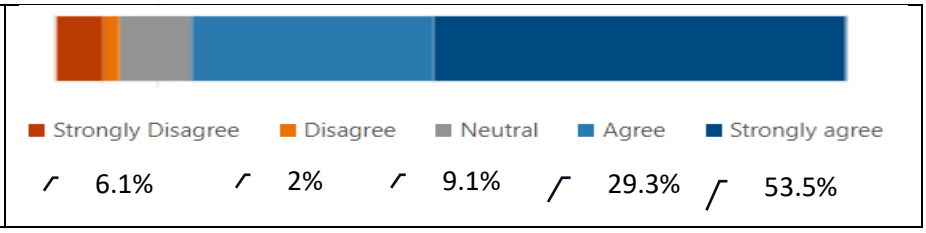
Emerging technologies or trends will significantly impact the skills needed in the retail sector.	

Figure 20: Emerging technologies impacts on skills required in the retail sector

According to Renz et al (2022), emerging technologies play a crucial role in shaping the retail sector and have a significant impact on the skills required by employees in the industry. These technologies are constantly evolving and transforming the way that retailers operate, interact with customers, and manage their businesses. As a result, there is a growing demand for employees with the skills and expertise to navigate and leverage these technologies effectively. Renz et al. (2022), emphasised that the adoption of emerging technologies in the retail sector is driving the need for employees with a diverse set of skills, including data analysis, technical proficiency, and problem-solving abilities. Retailers are increasingly looking to hire employees who are adaptable, innovative, and willing to learn new technologies as they emerge. By staying ahead of technological trends and investing in training and development programs, retailers can ensure that their workforce is equipped with the skills needed to succeed in the digital age. In this study, the statistical results aligned with respondents' perceptions are as follows:

- 82.8% of respondents agreed that emerging technologies or trends will significantly impact the skills needed in the retail sector. This implies that a majority of the respondents recognize and believe in the influence of emerging technologies or trends on the skills required in the retail industry.

- 9.1% of respondents remained neutral, indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. These individuals may have been unsure or found it difficult to form an opinion on the impact of emerging technologies or trends on retail sector skills.

- 6.1% of respondents strongly disagreed and 2% of respondents disagreed that emerging technologies or trends will significantly impact the skills needed in the retail sector. This suggests that a small proportion of the respondents hold a contrasting view and believe that emerging technologies or trends will not have a significant impact on the skills required in the retail industry.

Consequently, it is critical that research be undertaken to analyse the perspectives of the minority, while the W&R SETA should focus on investing efforts and resources to acquire essential skills that link to emerging technologies or trends that are significantly affecting the retail industry. This is because most respondents agreed that emerging technologies or trends would have a substantial impact on the skills required in the retail sector. Given that a majority of respondents strongly agreed that emerging technologies will have a significant impact on the retail sector, it is essential for retail businesses to prioritize technology training for their employees. This will enable them to adapt to and utilise new technologies effectively, ensuring they remain competitive in the evolving retail landscape. Furthermore, evaluating the existing workforce's skills and identifying any gaps in relation to emerging technologies is crucial. Retail businesses should conduct regular skill assessments and provide targeted training programs to bridge these gaps. This could involve partnering with training providers or leveraging internal resources to ensure employees are equipped with the necessary skills for the future retail landscape. By considering these recommendations, retail businesses can prepare their workforce for the impact of emerging technologies and trends, ensuring they remain competitive and capable of leveraging technology to its full potential in the sector.

15.4. Employees adaptability to new technologies, trends and customers behaviours

This part explored respondents' perspectives on the retail industry, which is always changing and requires employees to adapt to new technology, trends, and behaviours.

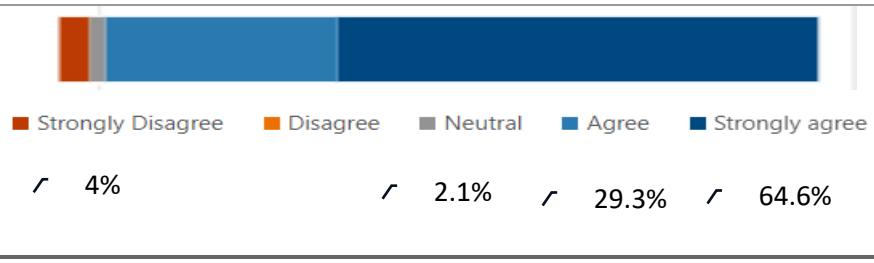
The retail industry is constantly changing, employees must adapt to new technologies, trends and consumer behaviours.	

Figure 21: Employees adaptability to new technologies, trends and customers behaviours

According to Avci (2023), in today's rapidly evolving business landscape, adaptability among employees is crucial for the success of any organisation. This is particularly true when it comes to new technologies, trends, and changes in customer behaviour. In other words, employees who are adaptable to new technologies, trends, and customer behaviours will help drive innovation, improve customer satisfaction, and ultimately contribute to the long-term success of their organisations. It is important for companies to invest in training and development programs that foster adaptability among their employees in order to stay ahead in today's fast-paced business environment. In this study, the statistical results indicate that most respondents (93.9%) agreed that the retail industry is going through a period of change. This suggests that they recognize the need for employees to adapt to new technologies, trends, and behaviours in order to keep up with these changes. On the other hand, a small percentage (2%) of respondents remained neutral on the issue, possibly indicating a lack of strong opinion or uncertainty about the changing nature of the retail industry.

Lastly, 4% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, expressing their dissatisfaction with the idea that the retail industry is changing, and employees need to adapt. This minority opinion could be attributable to a variety of issues, including aversion to change and a belief that the industry does not respond quickly to change. As a result, new technologies and trends will impact behaviours change through investments in staff upskilling and reskilling within the retail sector.

15.5. The significance of future skills development in data analytics in the retail sector

Respondents were asked to indicate if skills in data analytics will be essential in the future.

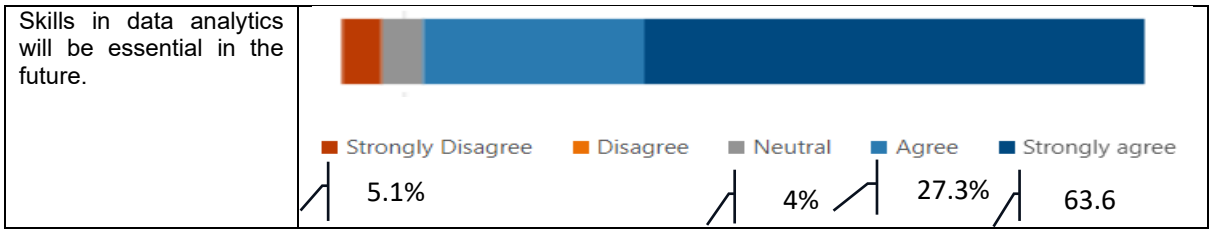


Figure 22: The significance of future skills development in data analytics in the retail sector

According to Oksavik (2020), future skills development in data analytics is crucial for retailers looking to stay competitive in an increasingly data-driven marketplace. By investing in training and development in this area, retailers can better position themselves for success in the future. The statistical results suggest the following:

- 90.9% of the respondents agreed that skills in data analytics will be essential in the future.
- 4% of the respondents were neutral, meaning they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.
- 5.1% of the respondents strongly disagreed that skills in data analytics will be essential in the future.

Overall, most of the respondents (63.6%) have a positive attitude towards the importance of data analytics skills in the future. This implies that efforts, resources, and measures should be developed and implemented to support and encourage the development of data analytics skills, such as introducing or expanding data analytics courses or programs in the retail sector. This can help individuals acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to meet the increasing demand for data analytics professionals. In addition, training and upskilling programs should be improved and adapted for individuals who are interested in acquiring or improving their data analytics skills. This can be targeted towards various demographics, including students, professionals from other fields, or individuals looking to make a career switch. In order to facilitate skills analytics development, industry collaborations academic institutions are vital.

Fostering partnerships between educational institutions and industries will be essential to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application in data analytics skills. This can involve internships, collaborative projects, or guest lectures delivered by industry experts to provide employees/students with real-world experience. Consequently, in order to develop data analytics skills, the W&R SETA will have to consider the following:

- **Promote awareness and career prospects:** Disseminate information about the growing importance of data analytics skills and the potential career opportunities in the field. This can be done through career fairs, industry forums, online platforms, or informational campaigns to increase the understanding and interest in data analytics.

- **Foster a data-driven culture:** Encourage organisations across the retail sector to adopt a data-driven decision-making approach and invest in data analytics capabilities. This can be achieved by highlighting successful case studies, providing guidance or resources on integrating data analytics into existing processes, and creating incentives for organisations that prioritize data analytics skills in their workforce.

- **Collaboration between academia and industry:** Facilitate and sustain effective and efficient collaboration between academia and industry by creating research partnerships or joint initiatives. This can ensure that research is aligned with industry needs and vice versa, fostering innovation and knowledge exchange in the field of data analytics.

15.6. Skills and strategies development based on consumer preferences.

Respondents were required to exhibit the level of their knowledge by indicating if employees in the retail sector should have the knowledge to analyse data and develop strategies based on consumer preferences.

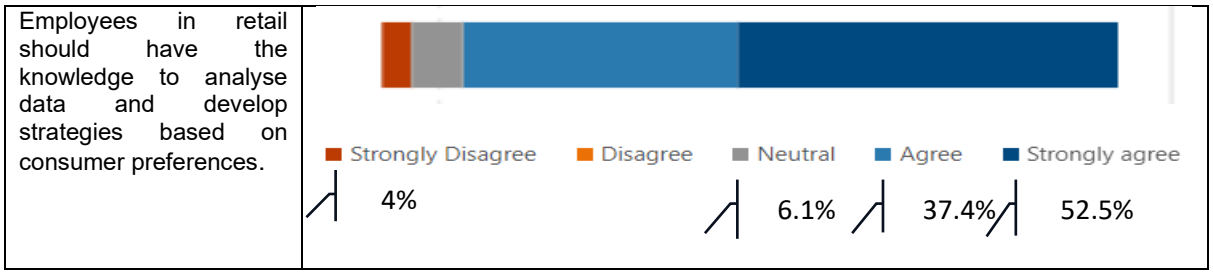


Figure 23: Skills and strategies development based on customer preferences

According to Du toit (2016), Consumer preferences play a crucial role in shaping the success of businesses in the marketplace. It is important for businesses to continually develop their skills and strategies in order to meet and adapt to changing consumer preferences. Therefore, skills and strategies development based on consumer preferences is crucial for businesses looking to succeed in today's competitive marketplace. By continuously adapting to changing consumer preferences and developing the necessary skills and strategies to meet those, businesses can drive innovation, enhance customer satisfaction, and ultimately increase their competitiveness in the market. The statistical analysis shows that a majority (89.9%) of the respondents agreed that employees in the retail sector should possess the knowledge to analyse data and develop strategies based on consumer preferences.

This suggests that a significant portion of the respondents recognize the importance of data analysis and strategy development for retail employees. In other words, a sizable proportion of respondents believe in the importance of data analysis and strategy development for retail professionals. Only a small percentage (6.1%) of respondents expressed neutrality, implying that most respondents had an opinion on the matter rather than being indifferent. Lastly, a relatively small percentage (4%) of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement. This suggests that a minority of respondents do not believe in the necessity of retail employees possessing data analysis and strategy development skills. But it can be determined that a significant portion of the respondents see the value in employees in the retail sector having the ability to analyse data and develop strategies based on consumer preferences.

15.7. Problem solving and critical thinking abilities development within the retail sector

Respondents were required to indicate their perception based on employees in the retail sector, which should possess problem-solving and critical thinking abilities within the retail sector to find innovative solutions.

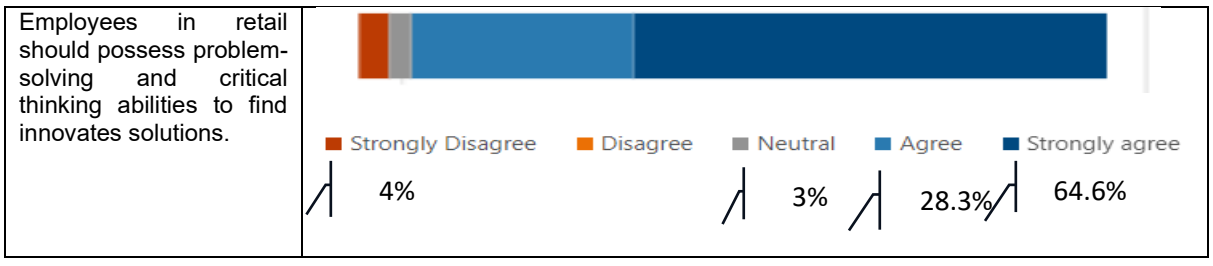


Figure 24: Problem solving and critical thinking abilities development within the retail sector

Schwencke (2023) postulates that Problem solving, and critical thinking abilities are crucial skills for individuals working in the retail sector. Retail employees are often faced with complex challenges, such as managing customer complaints, resolving inventory issues, and addressing operational inefficiencies.

Developing strong problem solving and critical thinking abilities can help retail workers effectively navigate these challenges and contribute to the success of their organisation. In Addition, developing problem solving and critical thinking abilities within the retail sector is essential for driving success, fostering innovation, and enhancing customer satisfaction. Retail employees who possess these skills are better equipped to navigate challenges, drive efficiency, and contribute to the overall success of their organisation. The statistical results indicate the opinions of respondents regarding the importance of problem-solving and critical thinking abilities for employees in the retail sector to find innovative solutions. Therefore, 92.96% of respondents agreed that employees in the retail sector should possess problem-solving and critical thinking abilities to find innovative solutions. This indicates a strong belief among a majority of respondents that these abilities are important for employees in the retail sector. In addition, 3% of respondents were neutral, meaning they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement.

This suggests some uncertainty or lack of opinion among this group regarding the importance of these abilities for employees in the retail sector. Furthermore, 4% of respondents strongly disagreed that employees in the retail sector should possess problem-solving and critical thinking abilities. This indicates a small but notable proportion of respondents who do not see the importance of these abilities for employees in the retail sector. But most respondents recognize the significance of problem-solving and critical thinking abilities for employees in the retail sector to find innovative solutions, although there is some variability in the strength of agreement. Therefore, the W&R SETA should consider investing efforts and resources to promote the development of employees' problem-solving and critical thinking abilities within the retail sector.

15.8. Digital skills and supply chain disruptions.

Respondents were asked to indicate their views about the importance of digital skills in facing supply chain disruptions.

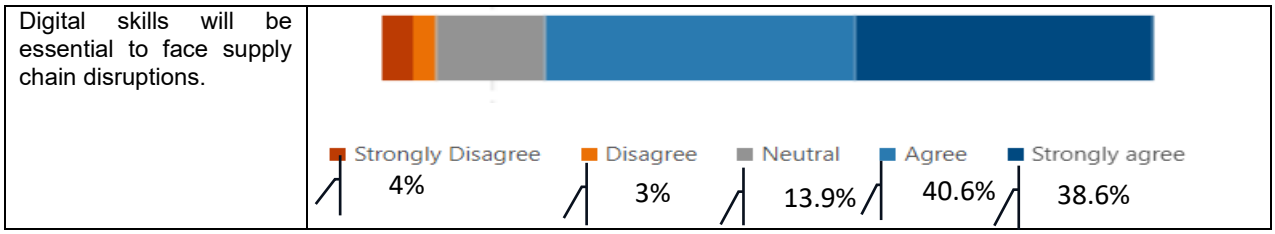


Figure 25: Digital skills and supply chain disruptions

According to Dubey (2023), digital skills have become increasingly important as technology continues to advance, and businesses are increasingly reliant on digital tools and platforms. Digital skills allow individuals to effectively navigate and utilize these technologies, enhancing their productivity and competitiveness in the workplace. In the context of supply chain disruptions, digital skills have become even more crucial. The rapid pace of technological advancements has led to the integration of digital tools and solutions into supply chain operations, making it easier to track and manage inventory, forecast demand, optimize logistics, and communicate with suppliers and customers. Dubey (2023) emphasised that digital skills play a critical role in mitigating supply chain disruptions and enabling businesses to navigate and adapt to changing circumstances. Investing in digital skills development for employees and implementing digital solutions within supply chain operations can enhance operational efficiency, improve risk management, and ultimately drive business success in an increasingly digital world. Therefore, the statistical results indicate the distribution of responses from the respondents regarding their agreement or disagreement on the importance of digital skills in facing supply chain disruptions.

According to the results, 79.2% of respondents agreed that digital skills will be essential. This indicates that a significant portion of the respondents recognize the importance of digital skills in managing and overcoming supply chain disruptions. On the other hand, 13.9% of respondents expressed a neutral stance. This suggests that these individuals may not have a strong opinion one way or the other regarding the necessity of digital skills in addressing supply chain disruptions. Furthermore, respondents' uncertainty towards the importance of digital skills in addressing supply chain disruptions in South Africa could be influenced by their lack of awareness, as individuals may not fully comprehend the potential benefits of such skills. Additionally, limited exposure to the practical impact of digital skills on supply chain management leaves respondents without first-hand knowledge, making it difficult for them to form a definitive opinion. The inherent uncertainty associated with the volatile nature of supply chain disruptions further amplifies this neutrality, as respondents' express hesitancy due to doubts about the specific digital skills required and their effectiveness in addressing unpredictable challenges within the supply chain.

These factors collectively contribute to a nuanced and reserved perspective among respondents in evaluating the significance of digital skills in navigating supply chain disruptions in South Africa. Additionally, a small percentage of the respondents, specifically 4% and 3% respectively, strongly disagreed or disagreed that digital skills will be essential in facing supply chain disruptions. This indicates that a minority of the respondents do not believe digital skills are crucial in managing disruptions to the supply chain. However, the results imply that there is a wide-ranging acknowledgment among the majority of respondents that digital skills will play a significant role in effectively dealing with supply chain disruptions. These findings necessitate that the W&R SETA work quickly to improve digital skills among retail personnel in order to provide them with relevant knowledge and abilities that will enable them to face or solve the disruptive effects of digital technologies in the supply chain.

15.9. Digital skills effects on customers preferences

In this section, respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the critical effects of digital on changing client preferences.

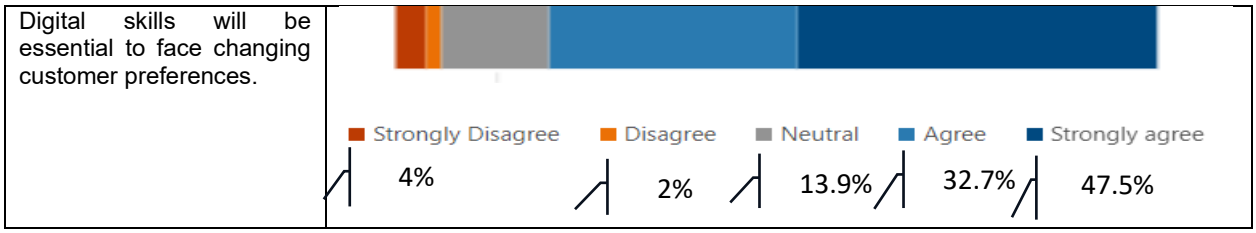


Figure 26: Digital skills effects on customers' preferences

Noornisha (2023), suggests that Digital skills have a significant impact on customers' preferences and behaviour. As more and more consumers become proficient in using digital technologies, their expectations and preferences for digital experiences also change. The impact of digital skills on customers' preferences is profound, and businesses need to adapt and digitize their operations to cater to the needs and expectations of this tech-savvy customer base. However, the statistical results indicate the respondents' opinions regarding the importance of digital skills in meeting changing customer preferences. Therefore, 80.2% of the respondents agreed with the statement. This suggests that a significant majority of the respondents believe that digital skills are essential for facing changing customer preferences. On the other hand, 4% of the respondents strongly disagreed and 2% disagreed with the statement, indicating that a small proportion of respondents (6%) do not consider digital skills to be essential in addressing changing customer preferences.

The results also show that 13.9% of the respondents were neutral, indicating that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. Accordingly, the majority of respondents believe that digital skills are important for adapting to changing customer preferences. Existing literature in South Africa might highlight the existence of a digital divide, where certain demographics or regions have less access to technology and digital skills. Respondents from these groups may express neutrality, reflecting a lack of personal engagement with digital tools and their impact on customer preferences.

Similar to the lack of awareness mentioned in the previous context, respondents may not fully understand how digital skills can influence customer preferences. Literature could point to gaps in knowledge and education regarding the broader impact of digitalization on consumer behaviour. Consequently, the W&R SETA will have to play a key role to invest in digital skills training by providing employees with training and resources to enhance their digital skills. This can help them adapt to changing customer preferences. This can include courses on social media marketing, data analysis, website development, and other relevant digital skills. The following aspects may contribute to developing employees' digital skills within the retail sector:

- Foster a digital-first culture: Create an environment that values and promotes digital skills and innovation. Encourage employees to think creatively and leverage technology to better meet customer needs. Encouraging regular knowledge sharing and collaboration can help enhance digital skills across the organisation.

- Leverage technology tools and platforms: Identify and invest in digital tools and platforms that can help automate processes, gather customer insights, and improve overall customer experience. This could include customer relationship management (CRM) systems, data analytics tools, or customer feedback platforms.

- Continuously monitor and adapt to changing customer preferences: Stay updated about the latest trends and technological advancements relevant to your industry. Additionally, regularly collect and analyse customer feedback to identify changing preferences and adapt your digital strategies accordingly.

- Collaborate with external experts and partners: Seek partnerships with organisations or experts who specialize in digital skills training or have expertise in customer preferences. Collaborating with external experts can provide fresh perspectives and help enhance your organisation's digital capabilities.

- Embrace innovation and experimentation: Encourage employees to experiment with new digital approaches and technologies. Creating a culture that embraces innovation can help identify and adopt novel solutions that effectively cater to changing customer preferences.

- Develop omni-channel strategies: Recognize that customer preferences may vary across multiple digital channels. As such, develop omni-channel strategies that ensure a seamless and consistent customer experience across different platforms like websites, mobile apps, social media, and more.

- Regularly assess and update digital strategies: Conduct regular assessments of your organisation's digital strategies to ensure they remain aligned with changing customer preferences. This can involve reviewing website analytics, social media metrics, and other relevant data to identify areas for improvement and implement necessary changes.

- Communicate the importance of digital skills to employees: Ensure that employees understand the importance of digital skills in adapting to changing customer preferences. Provide clear communication about the organisation's digital goals and strategies and encourage employees to continuously improve and update their digital skills to stay relevant in a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

15.10. Proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building customer relationships.

Respondents were required to indicate their opinions about the way proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building relationships will be crucial in commerce.

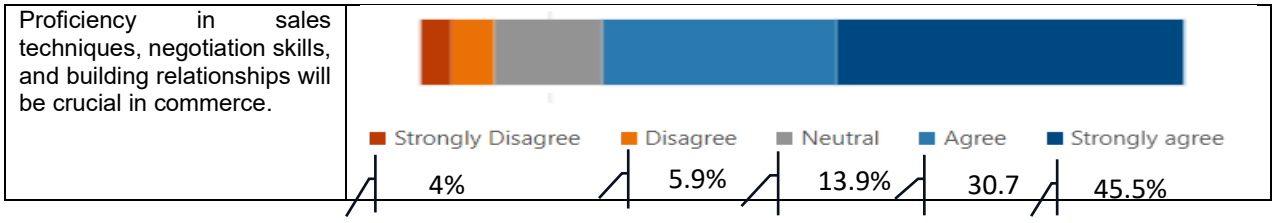


Figure 27: Proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building customer relationships

According to (Kelwig and Writer, 2023), proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building customer relationships is essential for sales professionals to achieve their goals and succeed in a competitive marketplace. Developing these skills requires practice, ongoing training, and a commitment to continuous improvement. The statistical results can be interpreted as follows:

- 76.2% of the respondents agreed that proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building relationships will be crucial in commerce. This indicates that a significant portion of the respondents believe that these skills are essential for success in commercial activities.

- 13.9% of the respondents were neutral, implying that they neither agreed nor disagreed with the statement. These individuals may not have a strong opinion or may require further information before forming an opinion on the matter.

- On the other hand, 4% of respondents strongly disagreed, and an additional 5.9% disagreed that proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building relationships will be crucial in commerce. This suggests that a small proportion of the respondents do not perceive these skills as essential for success in commerce or may have alternative perspectives.

Respondents' neutral stance on the importance of proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building customer relationships in commerce can be attributed to diverse experiences and backgrounds, leading to varied perspectives on the significance of these skills. Some individuals may not immediately connect these proficiencies with overall success in commerce, contributing to their neutrality. The perceived relevance of these skills may differ based on industry or sector, and a lack of personal experience or exposure to effective practices could also influence a neutral response. Accordingly, the majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building relationships are crucial in commerce. Therefore, the W&R SETA will have to prioritize the development of sales techniques, negotiation skills, and relationship-building in commerce education and training programs. This could include incorporating these topics into curriculum, providing specialized training workshops, or offering mentorship programs to improve proficiency in these key areas. Additionally, it may be beneficial to conduct further research or surveys to gain deeper insights into the specific skills and strategies that are most valued by professionals in commerce, in order to tailor education and training programs accordingly.

15.11. Business leaders championing Digital skills

It is essential that business leaders embrace digital skills development to foster innovation. Respondents were required to indicate their perception about business leaders' skills development in order to foster digital innovation.

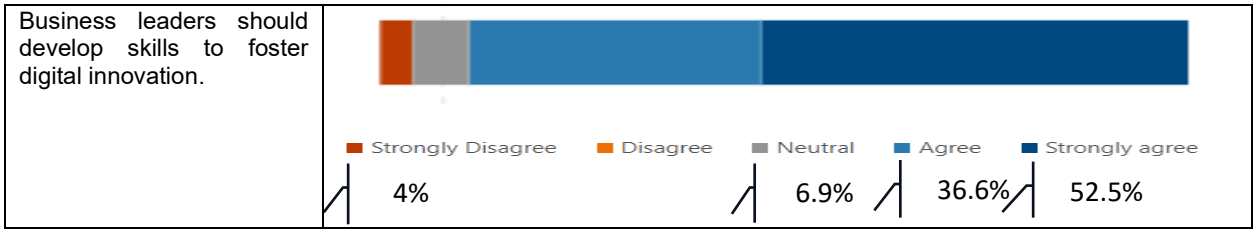


Figure 28: Business leaders championing Digital Skills

According to Mutsuddi and Sinha 2021 (2021), business leaders play a crucial role in championing digital skills within their organisations to drive innovation, meet customer demands, enhance efficiency and productivity, attract top talent, and future-proof the organisation. By investing in digital skills, businesses can position themselves for success in the digital age. The statistical results indicate the percentage distribution of respondents' opinions on whether business leaders should develop skills to foster digital innovation. Therefore, 89.1%% of respondents agreed that business leaders should develop skills to foster digital innovation. This implies that a significant majority of respondents support the idea of business leaders acquiring capabilities to drive digital innovation. In other words, respondents agreed, indicating a substantial proportion of individuals who believe that business leaders should possess these skills. In addition, 6.9% of respondents were neutral, suggesting they neither agreed nor disagreed with the notion that business leaders should develop skills for digital innovation. These individuals might have reserved opinions or lacked enough information to form a decisive stance.

Furthermore, 4% of respondents strongly disagreed that business leaders should develop skills to foster digital innovation. This relatively small percentage reflects a minority who strongly oppose the idea of business leaders acquiring digital innovation skills. The results suggest that a majority of respondents support the notion of business leaders acquiring skills for digital innovation, though there is a notable proportion with a more neutral stance or opposition. Thus, based on these results, the W&R SETA as well as business leaders should invest in training programs to enhance their digital innovation skills. Furthermore, business leaders should proactively develop their digital innovation skills and create an environment that promotes collaboration, experimentation, and continuous learning. By doing so, they can successfully foster digital innovation within their organisations and stay competitive in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. Training programs to enhance business leaders' digital innovation skills can focus on areas such as emerging technologies, digital strategy development, and fostering a culture of innovation. By equipping leaders with the necessary skills and knowledge, they can effectively drive digital innovation within their organisations. Additionally, the following aspects should be taken into account by the W&R SETA and business leaders:

- **Encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing:** Leaders should create an environment that encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing among employees. This can be done through initiatives such as cross-functional teams, innovation workshops, or regular brainstorming sessions. By fostering collaboration, leaders can tap into the diverse expertise of their employees and generate innovative ideas.

- **Stay updated with industry trends:** It is important for business leaders to stay updated with the latest industry trends and technological advancements. They should actively seek out information and resources that can help them understand the potential impact of digital innovation on their organisation. Leaders can attend conferences, participate in webinars, or join industry forums to stay informed and ensure they are equipped with the necessary knowledge.

- **Foster a culture of experimentation:** Leaders should promote a culture of experimentation and risk-taking within their organisations. This can involve creating a safe space for employees to explore new ideas, encouraging the testing of innovative solutions, and embracing failure as a learning opportunity. By fostering a culture that values experimentation, leaders can empower their teams to take risks, innovate, and drive digital transformation.

- **Provide resources and support:** Leaders need to ensure that employees have the necessary resources and support to engage in digital innovation. This may include providing funding for research and development, allocating dedicated time for innovation projects, or establishing channels for feedback and idea submission. By providing the necessary resources and support, leaders can empower their teams to drive digital innovation effectively.

15.12. Upskilling employees to meet the evolving customer.

Respondents were required to demonstrate their understanding regarding employees in the retail sector, which need to constantly upskills and remain in a changing industry driven by technology and evolving customer behaviours.

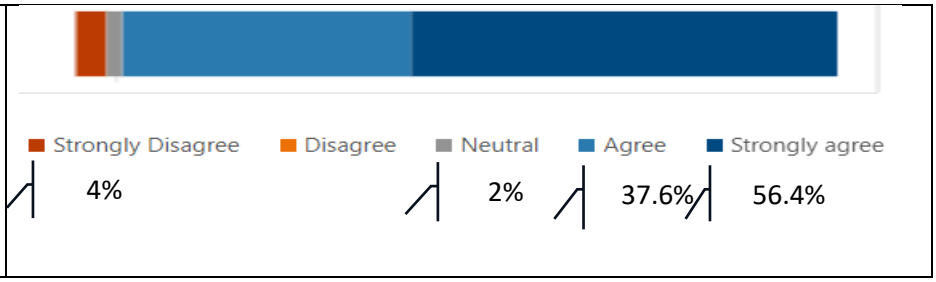
Employees in the retail sector need to constantly upskill and remain adaptable in a changing industry driven by technology and evolving customer behaviours.	

Figure 29: Upskilling employees to meet the evolving customer

According to (Tyler, 2020), training current employees helps companies meet evolving business needs and gives workers skills required to rise to new heights. As the business landscape rapidly changes, it is imperative for businesses to upskill their employees to meet the evolving needs of the customer. Upskilling involves providing employees with additional training and education to enhance their skills and knowledge in order to keep up with the changing demands of customers.

By upskilling employees to meet the evolving customer, businesses can stay competitive and deliver a better customer experience. This not only benefits the business in terms of increased customer satisfaction and loyalty but also helps employees grow and advance in their careers. In this study, the statistic results show the percentage breakdown of responses from a survey that asked respondents about their agreement/disagreement with a statement regarding employees in the retail sector needing to constantly upskill and adapt to changes driven by technology and evolving customer behaviours. According to the results:

- 96% of respondents agreed that employees in the retail sector need to constantly upskill and remain adaptable.
- 2% of respondents were neutral and did not express a clear opinion either way.
- 4% of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement.

These results suggest that a majority of respondents agreed that employees in the retail sector should constantly upskill and remain adaptable. This indicates a recognition of the need for continuous learning and adaptation in a changing industry driven by technology and evolving customer behaviours. The small percentage of respondents (4%) who strongly disagreed with the statement suggests a disagreement or scepticism about the importance of upskilling and adapting to changing industry dynamics in the retail sector. These results suggest that the W&R SETA and retail organisations should invest in creating a structured upskilling program to help employees develop new skills and stay updated with industry trends. In addition, the W&R SETA and retail organisation should prioritize upskilling and adaptability to stay ahead in an ever-changing industry. By implementing these recommendations, organisations can foster a culture that promotes continuous learning, ensures employee growth, and drives overall success. This could include regular training sessions, workshops, online courses, or mentorship programs. The W&R SETA and retail organisations will have to consider the following:

- **Offer continuous learning opportunities:** Encourage employees to participate in ongoing learning and development activities. This could be achieved through incentives such as providing paid time off for attending training programs, reimbursing course fees, or offering internal promotion opportunities based on skill development.

- **Foster a culture of adaptability:** Promote the importance of adaptability within the organisation and encourage employees to embrace change. This could involve recognizing and rewarding individuals who demonstrate adaptability, sharing success stories of employees who have adapted to changes effectively, and incorporating adaptability as a competency in performance evaluations.

- **Provide resources for self-improvement:** Offer access to resources such as books, online platforms, or industry conferences/events that can help employees enhance their knowledge and skills. Additionally, employers can build partnerships with educational institutions or training providers to provide discounted or special access to relevant courses or certifications.

- **Establish a feedback mechanism:** Encourage regular communication between employees, supervisors, and HR to understand the specific skill needs or areas for improvement within the organisation. This feedback loop should be utilized to tailor the upskilling programs and address skill gaps effectively.

- **Encourage cross-functional training:** Encourage employees to explore opportunities to learn skills beyond their specific roles. This could involve shadowing employees from different departments, participating in cross-functional projects, or job rotations. By gaining exposure to different areas of the business, employees can broaden their skill sets and become more adaptable.

- **Embrace technology and innovation:** As the retail sector continues to evolve, staying updated with technological advancements is crucial. Encourage employees to embrace new technologies, offer training on digital tools and platforms, and provide opportunities for them to implement innovative solutions in their work processes.

- **Lead by example:** Managers and leaders should serve as role models for adaptability and continuously upskill themselves. When employees witness their leaders actively seeking growth opportunities and adapting to changes, it creates a culture where continuous learning and skill development are highly valued.

- **Recognize and celebrate progress:** Establish mechanisms to acknowledge and celebrate employees' upskilling efforts and successes. This can be done through employee recognition programs, awards, or publicly sharing success stories to inspire others to follow suit.

- **Stay up to date with industry trends:** Ensure the organisation has a pulse on current and future trends impacting the retail sector. This will help in aligning upskilling programs with the evolving needs of the industry, ensuring employees are equipped with the necessary skills to remain competitive.

16. PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE SKILLS

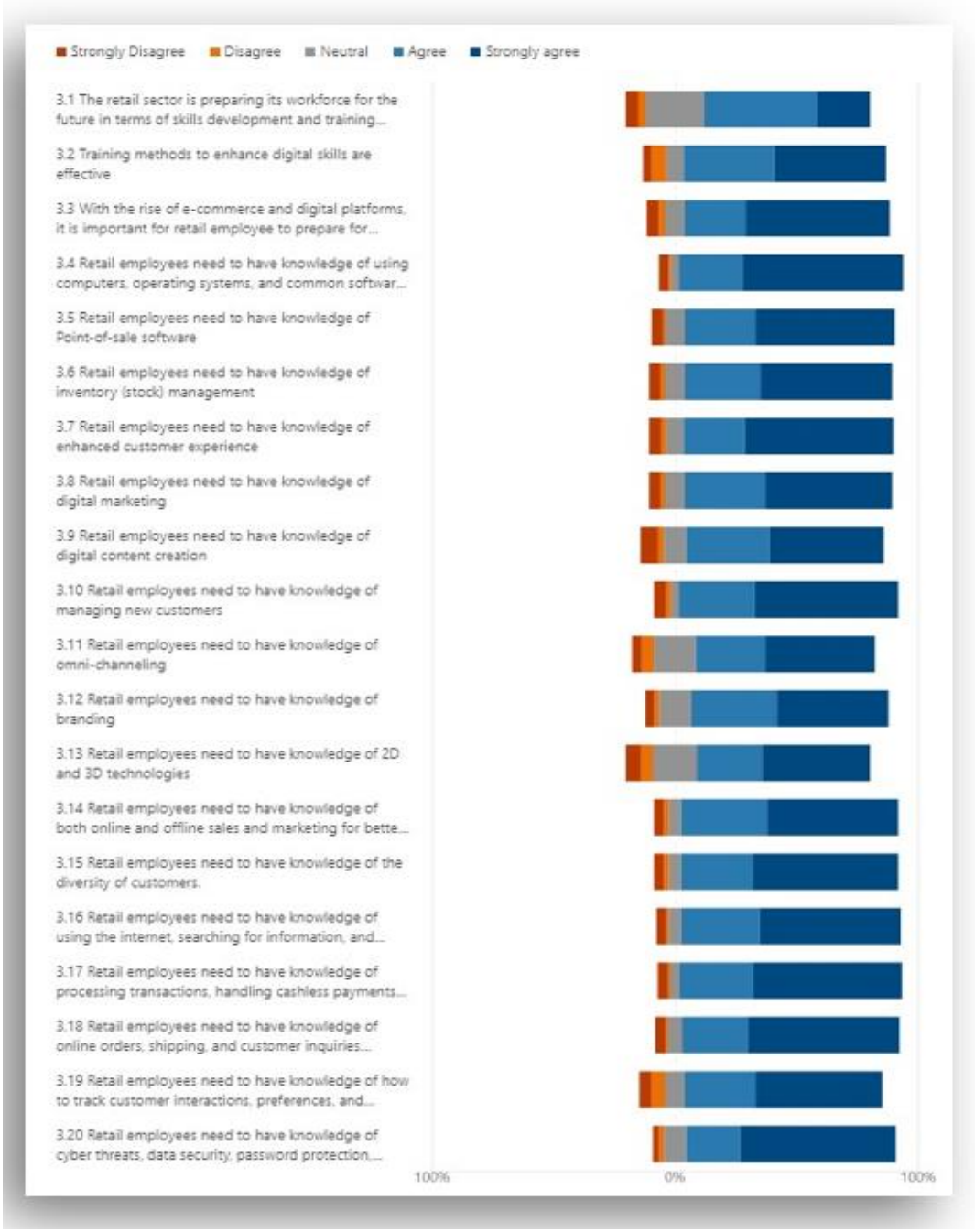


Figure 30: Preparation for future skills

According to Petreš (2023), preparation for future skills is essential for staying competitive, adapting to change, and achieving personal and professional success in today's rapidly changing world. By continuously developing new skills and staying current in their field, individuals can position themselves for long-term career success and personal growth. Therefore, figure 30 shows the distribution of responses provided by the respondents who participated in the study. The Likert scale responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 strongly agree, show a pattern in the responses provided. Except for statement 3.1 illustrated in Figure 30, the responses provided indicate a pattern among respondents of strongly agreeing with the statement in this section of the questionnaire. 3.1 shows that most of the respondents (67.7%) agreed with the statement that the retail sector is preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training. 24. 5% of the respondents seemed to hold a neutral opinion with the respect to the effort made by retailers in preparing staff in terms of skills development.

This could be influenced by several factors such as the lack of clear and visible evidence of ongoing or effective efforts in skills development within the retail sector. Respondents may be uncertain or have limited awareness of specific initiatives, programs, or investments made by retailers to prepare their workforce for the future. Additionally, some respondents might adopt a neutral stance due to a perception that while there may be efforts in place, the effectiveness or impact of these initiatives is unclear. A total of 7.8% disagreed altogether with the statement, 4.9% strongly disagreed and 2.9% disagreed.

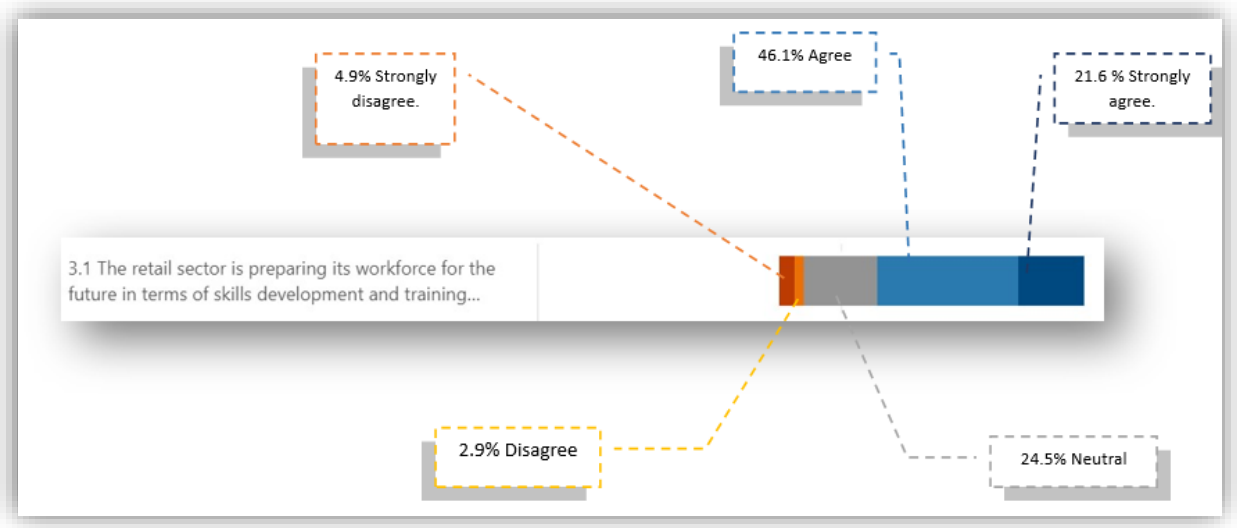


Figure 31: Preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training

According to the ILO (2021), preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills is crucial for any organisation that aims to stay competitive in a rapidly changing business landscape. By investing in the skills development and training of their workforce, organisations can ensure that their employees are well-equipped to meet the challenges of the future and drive innovation and growth within the organisation. However, respondents were required to indicate their perception based on the following statement: The retail sector is preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training (3.1). Figure 16a reveals the statistical results to the above assertion. Statements 3.1 and 3.2 refer to efforts made by retailers to equip their workforce (3.1) and refer to the training methods used to enhance skills (3.2), in particular, digital skills of the retail workforce. The responses to the two statements indicate that the majority of respondents agreed with both statements. 67.7% agreed with the statement made in 3.1 and 83.4% agreed with the statement 3.2 (See Table 9). The remaining set of statements made in this section of the questionnaire focused on ascertaining what the respondents considered as needs required by employees within the retail sector.

Most of the respondents agreed with statements made in this section in particular statements made 3.1 to 3.2 (see Figure 30). Table 9 summarises the nature of responses provided in this section of the questionnaire with respect to agree and strongly agree.

Table 9: Respondents Responses - Agreement (Agree + strongly Agree)

	Statement	Agreement		
		Agree %	Strongly Agree %	Total Agreement %
Retailer efforts to equip staff and employee training methods	3.1 The retail sector is preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training programs.	46.1	21.6	67.7
	3.2 Training methods to enhance digital skills are effective	37.3	46.1	83.4
	3.3 With the rise of e-commerce and digital platforms, it is important for retail employee to prepare for	25.5	58.8	84.3
Retail employee knowledge needs	3.4 Retail employees need to have knowledge of using computers, operating systems, and common software programs like Microsoft Office or Google Suite	26.5	65.7	92.2
	3.5 Retail employees need to have knowledge of Point-of-sale software	29.4	56.9	86.3
	3.6 Retail employees need to have knowledge of inventory (stock) management	31.4	53.9	85.3
	3.7 Retail employees need to have knowledge of enhanced customer experience	25.5	60.8	86.3
	3.8 Retail employees need to have knowledge of digital marketing	33.3	52.8	86.1
	3.9 Retail employees need to have knowledge of digital content creation	34.3	47.1	81.4
	3.10 Retail employees need to have knowledge of managing new customers	31.4	58.8	90.2
	3.11 Retail employees need to have knowledge of Omni-channelling	28.4	45.1	73.5
	3.12 Retail employees need to have knowledge of branding	35.3	46.1	81.4
	3.13 Retail employees need to have knowledge of 2D and 3D technologies	26.5	44.1	70.6
	3.14 Retail employees need to have knowledge of both online and offline sales and marketing for better	35.3	53.9	89.2

	3.15 Retail employees need to have knowledge of the diversity of customers.	29.4	59.8	89.2
	3.16 Retail employees need to have knowledge of using the internet, searching for information, and browsing websites efficiently	32.4	57.8	90.2
	3.17 Retail employees need to have knowledge of processing transactions, handling cashless payments, and resolving any issues related to the POS system.	30.4	60.8	91.2
	3.18 Retail employees need to have knowledge of online orders, shipping, and customer inquiries through digital channels	27.5	61.8	89.3
	3.19 Retail employees need to have knowledge of how to track customer interactions, preferences, and purchase history.	29.4	52	81.4
	3.20 Retail employees need to have knowledge of cyber threats, data security, password protection, recognizing phishing attempts, and safeguarding sensitive customer information	22.5	63.7	86.2

As indicated in the table 9, the majority of, more than 60% of respondents agreed with the statements in section 3. The responses indicate that the majority of respondents (>60%) agreed that retail employees need to possess knowledge of, for example, processing transactions, handling cashless payments, and resolving any issues related to the POS system (91.2%) (See Table 9). However, total agreement for statements indicating knowledge needed was lowest for statements 3.11 (knowledge of Omni-channelling) and 3.13 (knowledge of 2D and 3D technologies). Total agreement was 73.5% and 70.6%, respectively (see Table 9). It should be noted that 3.13 saw the greatest number of respondents remaining neutral with 18.6 % of respondents indicating that they were neutral to the statement that retail employees need to have knowledge 2 D and 3 D technologies. 3.11 also saw 17.6% of respondents indicating that they were neutral to the statement that retail employees should have knowledge of Omni-channelling.

The total agreement (agree + strongly agree) was highest for the following statements 3.4 (knowledge of using computers, operating systems, and common software programs like Microsoft Office or Google Suite), 3.17 (knowledge of processing transactions, handling cashless payments, and resolving any issues related to the POS system); 3.10 (knowledge of managing new customers) and 3.16 (knowledge of using the internet, searching for information, and browsing websites efficiently). Total agreement for these statements was 92.2%, 91.2%, 90.2%, and 90.2 %, respectively (see Table 9). Analysis of the findings also indicates that the level of total disagreement (disagree + strongly disagree) was generally low for all questions in this section (see Table 10). As illustrated in Table 9, respondents generally agreed with the statements in this section of the questionnaire. However, Table 10 provides a synopsis of the total disagreement (disagree + strongly disagree) for each statement expressed as a percentage of the total responses provided.

Table 10: Respondents Responses - Disagreement (Disagree + strongly disagree)

	Statement	Disagreement		
		Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	Total Disagreement %
Retailer efforts to equip staff and employee training methods	3.1 The retail sector is preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training programs.	**4.9**	2.9	7.8
	3.2 Training methods to enhance digital skills are effective	3.9	5.9	9.8
	3.3 With the rise of e-commerce and digital platforms, it is important for retail employee to prepare for	4.9	2.9	7.8
Retail employee knowledge needs	3.4 Retail employees need to have knowledge of using computers, operating systems, and common software programs like Microsoft Office or Google Suite	3.9	1	4.9
	3.5 Retail employees need to have knowledge of Point-of-sale software	4.9	1	5.9
	3.6 Retail employees need to have knowledge of inventory (stock) management	4.9	2	6.9
	3.7 Retail employees need to have knowledge of enhanced customer experience	4.9	2	6.9

	3.8 Retail employees need to have knowledge of digital marketing	4.9	2	6.9
	3.9 Retail employees need to have knowledge of digital content creation	6.9	2.9	9.8
	3.10 Retail employees need to have knowledge of managing new customers	4.9	2	6.9
	3.11 Retail employees need to have knowledge of omni-channelling	3.9	4.9	8.8
	3.12 Retail employees need to have knowledge of branding	3.9	2	5.9
	3.13 Retail employees need to have knowledge of 2D and 3D technologies	5.6	4.9	10.5
	3.14 Retail employees need to have knowledge of both online and offline sales and marketing for better	3.9	2	5.9
	3.15 Retail employees need to have knowledge of the diversity of customers.	3.9	2	5.9
	3.16 Retail employees need to have knowledge of using the internet, searching for information, and browsing websites efficiently	3.9	1	4.9
	3.17 Retail employees need to have knowledge of processing transactions, handling cashless payments, and resolving any issues related to the POS system.	3.9	1	4.9
	3.18 Retail employees need to have knowledge of online orders, shipping, and customer inquiries through digital channels	3.9	1	4.9
	3.19 Retail employees need to have knowledge of how to track customer interactions, preferences, and purchase history.	4.9	5.9	10.8
	3.20 Retail employees need to have knowledge of cyber threats, data security, password protection, recognizing phishing attempts, and safeguarding sensitive customer information	2.9	2	4.9

Responses across all statements shows that respondents did not disagree with the statements regarding retail employee knowledge and the support and training efforts retailers provide to better prepare their workforce. Total disagreement ranged from 4.9% (Retail employees need to have knowledge of using computers, operating systems, and common software programs like Microsoft Office or Google Suite) to 10.8% (Retail employees need to have knowledge of how to track customer interactions, preferences, and purchase history) (see Table 10). This shows that for all statements disagreement ranged from just below 5% to just above 10%.

The findings also show that the statements that had the greatest number of respondents disagreeing were 3.19 which asked respondents whether “Retail employees need to have knowledge of how to track customer interactions, preferences, and purchase history” at 10.8% and 3.13 which asked whether “Retail employees need to have knowledge of 2D and 3D technologies” at 10.5%.

Figure 32: Retail employees' knowledge of 2D and 3D technology

According to Vishwakarma et al. (2023), Retail employees should have a basic understanding of both 2D and 3D technology in order to effectively sell and support products related to these technologies. Having knowledge of both 2D and 3D technology will help retail employees’ better serve customers and provide a more personalized shopping experience. However, figure 32 presents the result aligned with the statement indicating that retail employees need to have knowledge of 2D and 3D technology (3.13). Respondents generally displayed more disagreement with statements that dealt with technology that may be regarded as new such as the use of 2D and 3D technology. Particularly, within a South African context such technology may be regarded as new. As shown in Figure 30, 3.13 saw the greatest number of respondents remaining neutral in their responses to the statement. This may highlight further the lack of knowledge surrounding this technology within the retail sector. Similarly, it is also likely that respondents were unfamiliar with the term Omni-channelling given the number of respondents who remained neutral in their responses (17.6%).

Respondents displayed the most agreement with statements that apply to their current understanding of the skills required in retailing. That is respondents strongly agreed with statements that indicated existing technologies that they are already familiar with such as Microsoft Office and processing transactions and handling cashless payments. In conjunction with the lower percentages of respondents showing overall agreement for with statement 3.1 (67.7%), the findings may be used to shed more light on the lower levels of agreement with the statement that the retail sector is preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training programs. Although, there seems to be some effort made to equip staff may require improvement.

17. RETAIL EMPLOYEES AND DIGITAL COMMUNICATION PLATFORMS

Due to the pervasive proliferation of digital technologies and their significant presence in the retail industry, the study attempted to establish what students of technology considered as requisite skills necessary in an evolving sector. Figure 17 reveals respondents' perceptions aligned with retail employees and digital communication platforms.

Figure 17. Preparation for the future skills

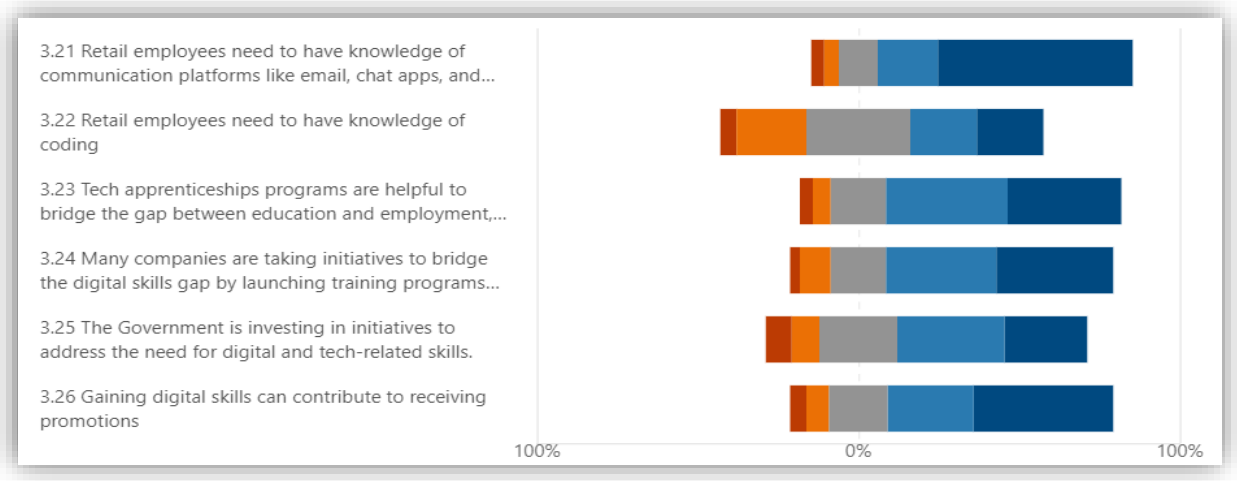


Figure 33: Preparation for the future skills

Brasse et al. (2023) stated that it is crucial for individuals to constantly prepare for the future by developing new skills. Preparation for the future through the development of new skills is essential in today's fast-paced and competitive world. By continuously learning and expanding one's skill set, individuals can enhance their employability, adaptability, personal growth, and long-term success. Figure 33 is broken down and discussed after each statement, forming a sub-heading. The following sub-sections contain an explanation and analysis of each statement, as well as statistical responses based on respondents' opinions, thoughts, or beliefs.

a. Knowledge of Coding and Retail Employees

A significant majority of 79.4% of the respondents were of the view that retail employees need to have knowledge of communication platforms like email and chat apps, signaling that skills in the development of digital applications and how to use these applications would have to offer by skills development providers and institutions.

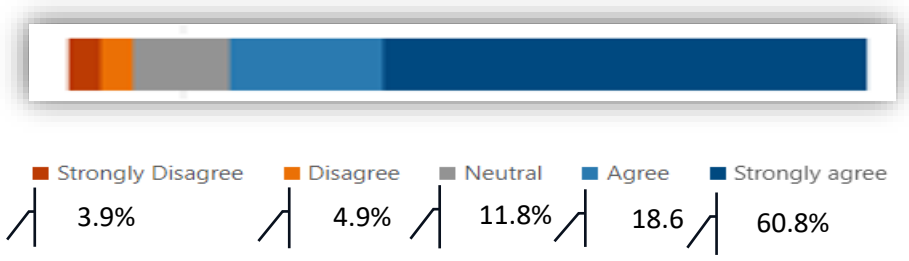
Retail employees need to have knowledge of communication platforms like email, chat apps and video conferencing software is essential for effective communication.	

Figure 34: Knowledge of coding and Retail employees

According to Ismail (2022), Coding skills are not typically required for retail employees, as their main tasks may include customer service, stocking shelves, operating cash registers, and maintaining store cleanliness. However, some retail employees may benefit from basic computer skills to navigate inventory systems or point-of-sale software.

Therefore, while coding skills are not a primary requirement for retail employees, having a basic understanding of programming concepts can still be a valuable skill that can set individuals apart and open up new opportunities in the retail industry. As companies embrace digitalization at varying levels and depths in business building skill in computer programming and coding becomes a point of business consideration. 40.4% of the respondents indicated that employees in retail need to have knowledge of coding. Interestingly, more than a quarter (26.6%) of the respondents had disagreed that knowledge of coding was essential in retail and just under a third (32.3%) remained impartial on the need for knowledge in coding. The number that supported the need of knowledge coding is interesting as reflects that there is awareness of coding and the role it could play in the sector.

b. Role of Work Based Learning

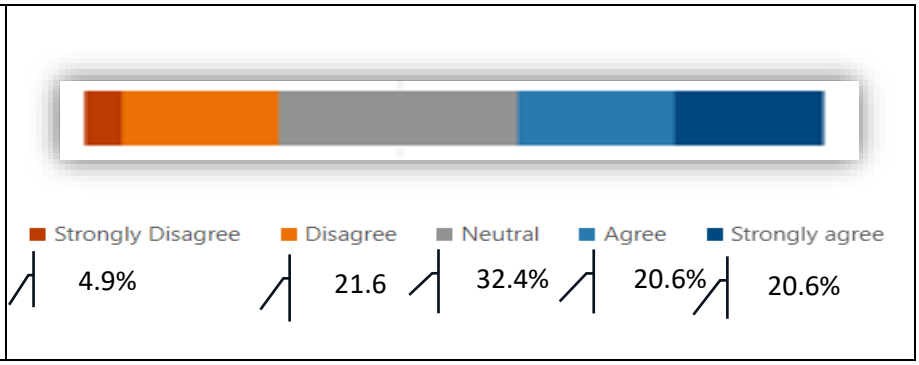
Retail employees need to have knowledge of coding.	

Figure 35: Role of work Based Learning

According to Bouronikos (2021), Work-based learning refers to programs and initiatives that enable individuals to gain practical skills and knowledge through hands-on experience in a work setting. This type of learning is often seen as a valuable component of education and training, as it provides individuals with the opportunity to apply theoretical knowledge in real-world situations and develop important workplace skills.

The role of work-based learning is to provide individuals with a practical and hands-on learning experience that complements their academic studies, helps them develop important workplace skills, and prepares them for a successful career in their chosen field. However, work-based learning, apprenticeships and internships offer students and trainees an ideal opportunity to gain invaluable practical 'hands-on' experience at the workplace. It provides student opportunities to interface with actual scenarios and application of lecture theatre knowledge in a practical manner a substantial majority (73.7%) of the respondents posit that apprenticeships play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between theory and practice by linking education and employment. An emphatic response from students underscores the relevance of work-based learning and it further suggests that skills and development programmes cannot negate the relevance of students extending their learning and getting value in the workplace.

c. In-house skills development Initiatives

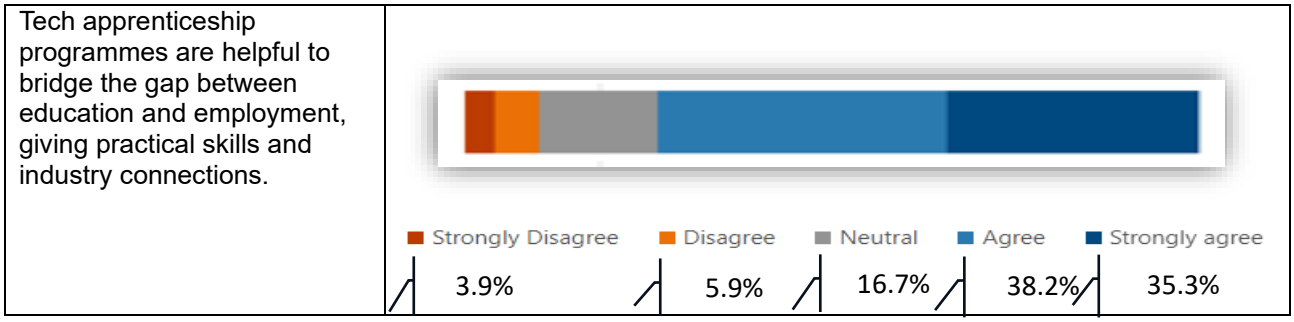


Figure 36: In-house skills development initiatives

Pitso, (2022) postulated that In-house skills development initiatives are essential for the growth and success of any organisation. In-house skills development initiatives are crucial for building a skilled, motivated, and engaged workforce that can drive the organisation towards its goals and objectives. By investing in the development of employees' skills, organisations can position themselves for success in an increasingly competitive business landscape. As organisations migrate to becoming more technological and digitally orientated it becomes critical to build digital capacity in a proactive manner.

Organisations have to make invidious decisions with regard to balancing its people strategy, the question would be whether to 'buy' or 'build' skills in organisational digital engagements. Difficult choices would have to be made on how to retain experienced employees. Building digital capacity and the capability of experienced employees will have to be balanced out in order to employ new team members. Trade-off decisions will come at a cost. The build strategy will require the upskilling and reskilling of employees in a proactive manner. 70.8% of the respondents in the study indicated that many companies were adopting the build strategy to bridge the digital skills gaps by launching internal training programmes so that employee skills remain relevant.

d. The State and Skills for the Future

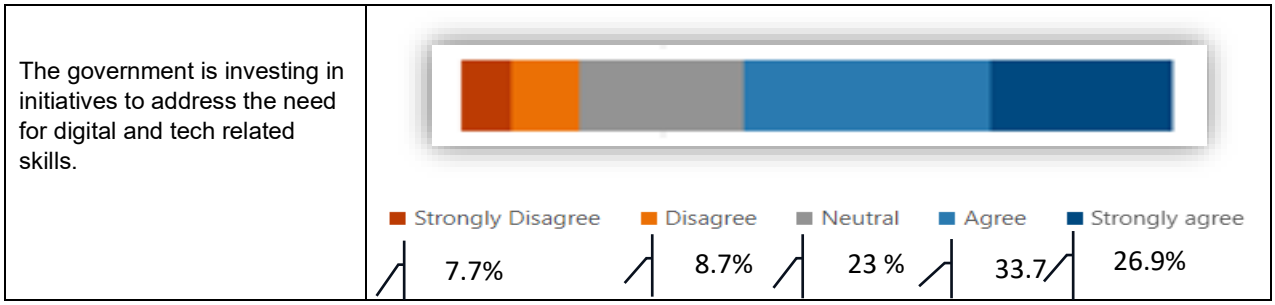


Figure 37: The state and Skills for the future

According to Birt (2023) and World Economic Forum (2020), up to 2025, workers will need to learn new skill (critical thinking and analysis, creativity, originality and initiative, leadership and social influence, technology use, monitoring and control, technology design and programming, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility, reasoning, problem-solving and ideation, etc.). This implies that the state and skills for the future are both essential components of preparing for the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. By investing in education and training programs, as well as cultivating a diverse set of skills, we can ensure that individuals and societies are well-equipped to thrive in the digital age.

In this study, it was indicated earlier that the state and state institutions play the fundamental role in literacy and education delivery at foundational and higher institutional level. Education provision is designed to harvest work ready individuals for economic participation in a professional development ecosystem feeding into various sectors. The study has gleaned that 60.6% of the respondents felt that the South African government was investing in initiatives to address the needs of digital and technology related skills. There appears to be a degree of confidence that state intervention was playing an incremental role; however, a significant 23% were neutral in their response which raises a concern that young graduates are unaware of opportunities presented by the state with regard to the preparation of skills for the future. 16.4% felt that the state was not investing in the future skills development alluding to that more was expected from the state to meet and enhance digital transformation.

e. Digital skills acquisition and employee mobility

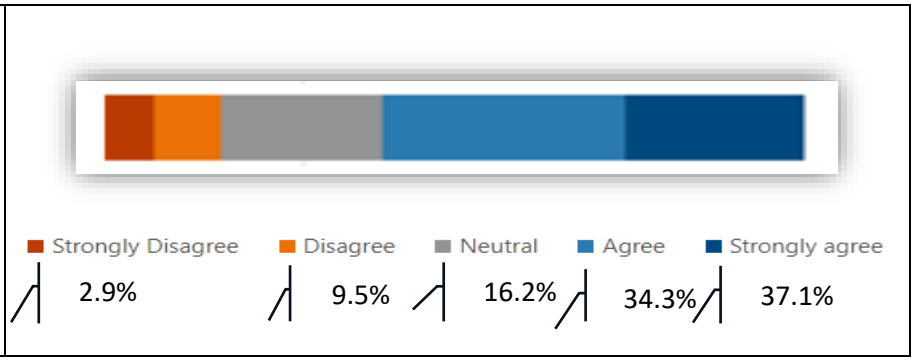
Many companies are taking initiatives to bridge the digital skills gap by launching training programmes for their employees.	

Figure 38: Digital skills acquisition and employee mobility

According to Kee et al. (2023), in today's increasingly digital world, having strong digital skills is essential for success in the workplace. Whether it's coding, data analysis, social media marketing, or graphic design, digital skills are in high demand across industries. Acquiring these skills can make employees more marketable and competitive in the job market.

Therefore, investing in digital skills acquisition and promoting employee mobility can benefit both employees and employers. Employees will be better equipped to succeed in a rapidly changing job market, while employers will have a more skilled and adaptable workforce. It's essential for organisations to prioritize these initiatives in order to stay competitive and thrive in the digital age. Employee aspiration and motivation in the workplace is driven by recognition, financial gratification, and vertical movement in an organisation. Employees are generally promoted due to their expertise, length of service and seniority. As organisations embrace technology and alter their trajectory towards greater digitalization, they would require supervisors and managers to steer the organisations and its people accordingly.

This will present a plethora of opportunities for aspirant middle and senior managers who are digitally savvy. An overwhelming majority, 71.4% of the respondents in the study postulated that acquiring digital skills could contribute to employees being promoted. This suggests that those entering the digital space are optimistic about professional growth and seniority in an organisation. Investment in future skills development opens avenues for a better future and social status for digitally proficient individuals. However, 12.4% disagreed that gaining skills could contribute to receiving a promotion and 16.2% were neutral. Respondents' disagreement and neutrality with regard to these questions could be due to individuals being mainly young and are probably more focused on gaining access to the labour market rather than looking ahead towards being promoted.

f. Training and development and Engaged Employees

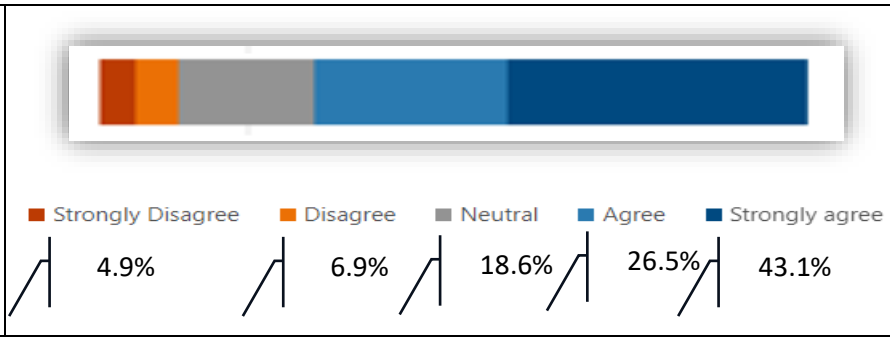
Gaining digital skills can contribute to receiving a promotion.	

Figure 39: Training and development and Engaged Employees

Organisations require employees to be engaged so that organisational targets and goals are achieved. Having engaged employees is therefore absolutely essential for organisational success. Training and development contribute to keeping employees engaged. As companies digitally migrate, they would require engaged employees who are aligned to the changing environment in the organisation. According to Oates (2023), training and development programs play a crucial role in enhancing the skills and knowledge of employees, ultimately contributing to the growth and success of a business. Engaged employees, on the other hand, are those who are dedicated to their work, motivated to achieve company goals, and committed to the organisation's mission and values. It also plays a crucial role in fostering engaged employees who are motivated, skilled, and committed to the organisation's success. By investing in the growth and development of employees, organisations can enhance employee engagement, satisfaction, and ultimately, drive business success. In this study, results show that 69.6% of respondents agreed that gaining digital skills can contribute to receiving a promotion.

18. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT AND ENGAGED EMPLOYEES

Figure 40 Illustrates respondents' perceptions aligned to the Training and development and Engaged Employees.

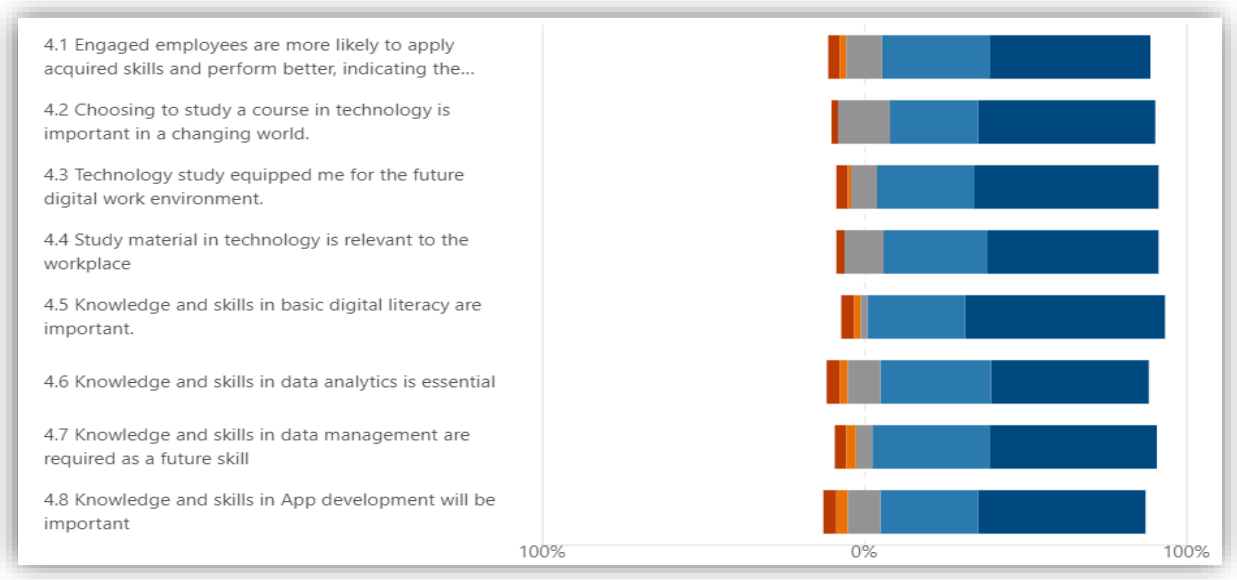


Figure 40: Training and development and Engaged Employees

g. Engaged employees

According to Pitso (2022), engaged employees are more likely to feel satisfied with their work and motivated to contribute to the success of the organisation. The results of this study show that 83.3% of the respondents were in agreement that engaged employees were more likely to apply acquired skills and perform better, demonstrating the importance and impact of training. Only 6% of the respondents stated that they did not agree that training contributed to employees being engaged and performing better. It can be surmised that training and development initiatives for employees can contribute to employees being more engaged in the workplace.

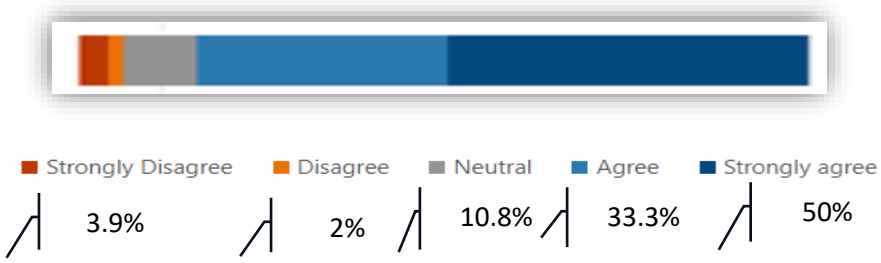
Engaged employees are more likely to apply acquired skills and perform better Indicating the impact of training programmes	

Figure 41: Engaged Employees

h. Technology education in an evolving environment

Technology education is essential in an evolving environment because it equips individuals with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate and thrive in a technology-driven world (Lim, 2021). As technology continues to advance at a rapid pace, it is crucial for individuals to have a solid understanding of how to use and leverage technology effectively in various aspects of their personal and professional lives. Technologies is gaining traction in economies and society, as it becomes imperative for individuals to have some degree and level of technological skills. 82.3% of the respondents emphatically expressed that studying a course in technology was essential.

This suggests that there is a need for greater investment guided by policy development and fiscal allocation for the promotion of digital learning programmes for entrants into the sector. Funding decisions must be prudent, linking financial spending with skill sets required, as opposed to funding programmes which have limited employment value. Moreover, judicious funding must be allocated to specific digital skills that are required by the sector ensuring access to the labour market. A wide and generic digital skills development initiative for the critical mass who apply for funding would not yield a return on investment.

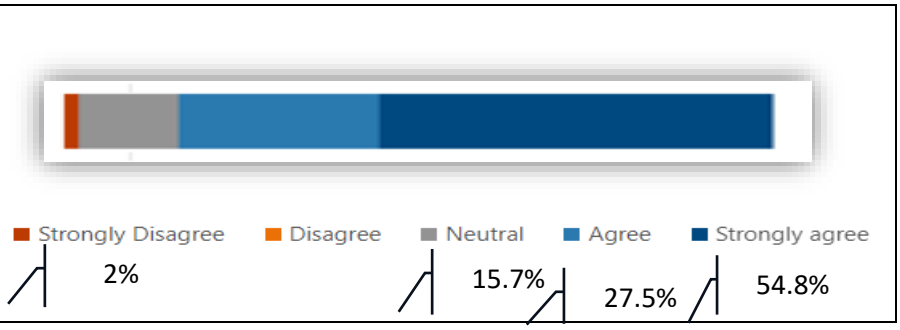
Choosing a study course in technology is important in a changing world	

Figure 42: Technology education in an evolving environment

i. Relevance of Technology education

As indicated earlier, Technology education is essential in today's world as it plays a crucial role in shaping our daily lives and driving progress in various industries. The relevance of technology education cannot be overstated. It is essential for empowering individuals, bridging the digital divide, driving innovation, enhancing career prospects, and meeting future challenges. Investing in technology education is crucial for ensuring that individuals are prepared to succeed in a technology-driven world and contribute to the advancement of society (Lim, 2021). Students attending institutions of learning should ensure that they acquire specific skills as per the chosen programme linked to a specific field and profession.

A significant majority of 87.3% of respondents had confirmed that their study in technology had equipped them for the future digital work environment. Whilst this affirms that students are confident that studying technology equips them for the future work environment it does not signal that the content studies match the skills required by industry as respondents in the study were still students. 5% of the respondents responded negatively, suggesting unhappiness in the type and nature of technology received and its non-alignment to the future digital work environment. 6.1% were neutral to the question.

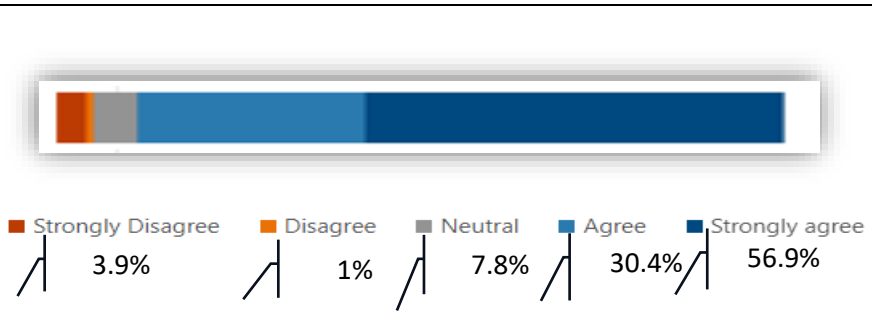
Technology study equipped me for the future digital work environment.	

Figure 43: Relevance of Technology

j. Relevancy of study content

According to Petersen (2021), the relevancy of study content is essential for ensuring that research is valuable, impactful, and contributes meaningfully to the advancement of knowledge and understanding. It is important for researchers to carefully consider the relevancy of their study content when designing and conducting research. Academic programmes at institutions are geared to workforce preparation and professional growth. It is essential that there has to be a synergy between what is taught and what is expected by industry. The majority (85.3%) of the respondents articulated that the study material of their respective programmes was relevant to the workplace, 11.8% were neutral and 2.9% had disagreed. Whilst this augurs well for the respective education providers at the surface level, it merely presents students' perception. Students may not have full knowledge of the workplace to institutional curriculum alignment.

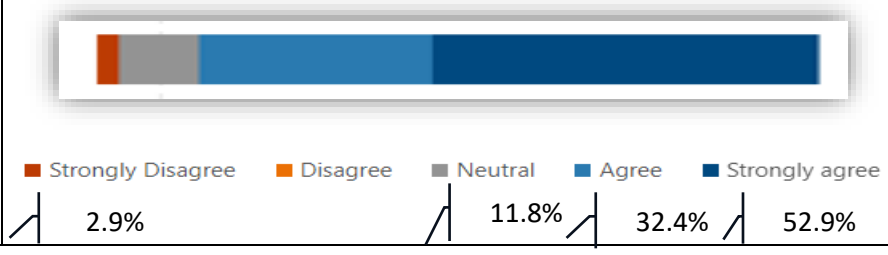
Study material in technology is relevant to the workplace.	

Figure 44: Relevance of Study content

k. Basic Digital Literacy

Digital literacy refers to the ability to use and understand technology, computers, and the internet. Basic digital literacy skills are essential in today's digital era to navigate the online world effectively. According to Haleem et al. (2022), by developing these basic digital literacy skills, individuals can confidently navigate the digital world, access information, communicate effectively, and protect themselves online. In other words, basic digital literacy plays and will play a significant role in the development of individuals in a digital era. This could further contribute to accessing employment opportunities. 92.4% of respondents indicated that basic digital literacy is important. This categorically signals that every effort has to be made to ensure access to basic digital literacy for all entering the world of work. Surprisingly, 6% disagreed and did not see the importance of basic digital education. This may suggest that a small percentage of the population sampled did not believe that basic digital education is important. This could indicate a potential lack of awareness or understanding of the significance of digital literacy in today's society. Further analysis may be needed to understand the reasons behind this perspective and how it may impact education and workforce readiness.

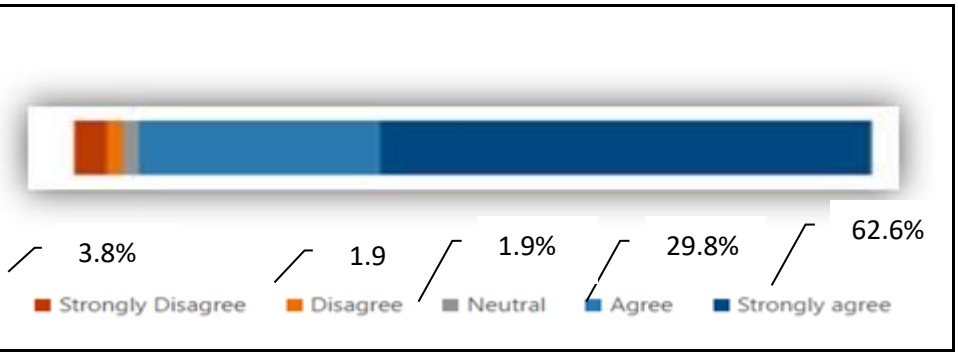
Knowledge and skills in basic digital literacy are important.	

Figure 45: Basic Digital literacy

I. Skills in Data Analytics and Data Management

Petersen (2021) indicated that skills in data analytics and data management are essential for organisations to thrive in a data-driven world. By investing in building these skills, businesses can unlock the full potential of their data and drive better decision-making, competitive advantage, and growth. The emergence of new technologies has also contributed to the growth and availability of big data which is being utilized by organisations to add value to their businesses. Big data is utilized to aid companies to enhance service levels, offer better customer personalization, more efficient supply chain, effective stock management amongst a range of other value driven benefits. 82.8% of the respondents stated that knowledge and skills in data analytics was an essential skill to possess as companies are embracing big data usage industries.

This could spawn a range of employment opportunities including opportunities in data capturing, data harvesting, data analytics and the strategic utilization of data in business expansion. Significantly, 82.8% of the respondents affirmed that knowledge and skills in data analytics was essential. Investment in the development of data analytics skills could be considered as a specialist field to fill in employment positions as they emerge across the retail spectrum. 10, 1 % of the respondents were neutral, 7% of the respondents had disagreed that data analytics was essential. Possible reasons for the neutrality and the disagreement could be due to limited knowledge on what data analytics was and how organisations could benefit from employing data analysts in a business. 87.9% of the respondents further indicated that knowledge and skills in data management would be required as a future skill, whilst 7% did not see data management gaining prominence and job for the future.

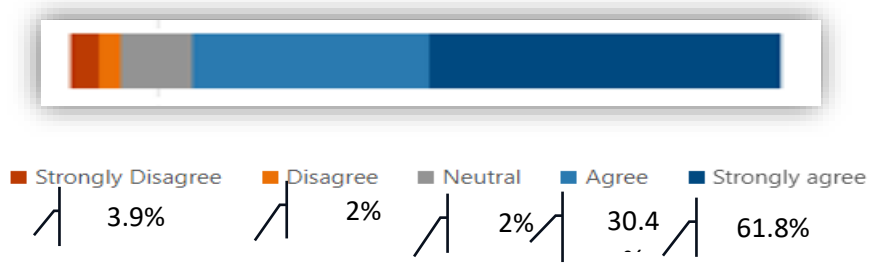
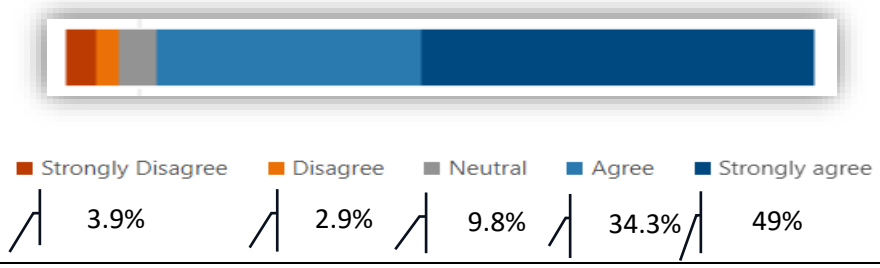
Knowledge and skills in data analytics is essential.	
Knowledge and skills in data management are required as a future skill	

Figure 46: Skills in Data Analytics and Data Management

m. Software Application development as an employment opportunity

Oza (2022) stated that software application development presents a significant employment opportunity for individuals looking for a rewarding and challenging career in the technology sector. With high demand, job security, competitive salaries, diverse opportunities, flexibility, and continued learning, software application development is an attractive field for those interested in pursuing a career in technology. Computer software applications (Apps) are increasingly being used by many industries and companies as more and more people are becoming digitally aware and competent. Applications on smart mobile phones extend the reach of a business and its customers. As the usage of 'Apps' grows it would also morph with the speed of technological evolution.

The study has ascertained that 88.3% of the respondents felt that knowledge and skills in App application development will be required. This skill won't be static, and practitioners would have to continually upgrade their skills to keep pace with changes in its offerings and increased use of the application, 4.9% remained neutral and 6,8% did not agree that knowledge and skills in applications development will be required in the future. It is rather surprising to note technology students disagreed as application usage has been embraced by the tech savvy.

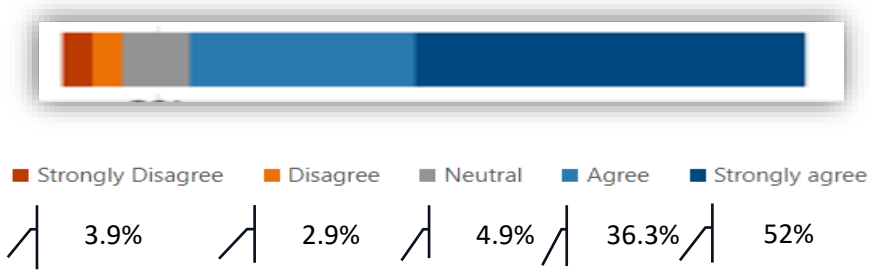
Knowledge and skills in App development will be required.	

Figure 47: Software Application development as an employment opportunity

19. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION: INDUSTRY ENGAGEMENT (CASE STUDIES OF BOXER STORES, MR PRICE, AND MILADY'S)

According to Roller (2020), Qualitative data analysis and interpretation are crucial components of a study as they provide researchers with a deeper understanding of the phenomena being studied. It helps generate new hypotheses and inform practical implications of the research. In this study, researchers utilised focus groups strategy, engaging with the industry (retail sector) to consider and reflect their perception concerning the skills for the future in line with the ongoing digital transformation in the retail sector.

South African retailers (Mr Price, Milady's and Boxer Stores) in this study were asked to indicate what the emerging technologies were and trends they thought would significantly impact on the retail sector. Participating retailers representing the retail landscape had articulated perspectives and mechanisms on how they were navigating the future in terms of skill sets required. It was felt that employees in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate skills amongst employees from basic digital literacy skills to more advanced and specialized digital skills like data analysis and interpretation, data-based decision making, artificial intelligence and machine learning and cyber security. Table 11 depicts elements of participants' replies to questions about future skills in the retail sector.

Table 11: Industry responses to questions related to the Skills for the future in the retail sector

INDUSTRY/COMPANIES	QUESTIONS	RESPONDENTS' VIEWS/PERCEPTIONS
MR PRICE RESPONSES	**OVERVIEW** How do you envision the retail sector evolving in the next decade, and what are the implications thereof?	There will be big technological advancements in the customer experience. These will target hyper personalisation for product application and fulfilment. In South Africa, ubiquitous mobile phone access will provide direction on the extent we can adopt these technologies. Supply chains will also become smarter and more efficient and aim for real time supply and delivery. Traditional retail channels and players will become blurred with new market entrants from across industry. We will also see new retail models emerge.
	In what way is your organisation embracing and adapting to digitalisation and innovation?	Cloud based approach for agility. SAAS, Dedicated Innovation hub, Investment in advanced real time data management and analytics Digital literacy upskilling, Omni channel practices, Customer relationship management.

MR PRICE RESPONSES	**ANTICIPATED FUTURE SKILLS AND PREPARATION OF THE WORKFORCE** What emerging technologies or trends that you think will significantly impact the retail sector, and if so, what are they?	Advancements in Geo location tagging; AI across the retail cycle. Augmented job functions; Real time distribution technologies eg Drone delivery; Hyper personalised shopping experience technologies; Augmented and Virtual reality shopping experiences; Metaverse presence – still to gain momentum. Innovative partnership and loyalty program integrations; Self-checkout, Automated checkout (amazon), robot shoppers and shelf replenishers
	What specific skills and competencies do you believe will be most crucial for employees in your company in the coming years?	Design Thinking, Data analysis and interpretation, Ai machine learning and robotics, Coaching and mentoring, servant leadership, strategy and futures thinking, Collaboration, Cultural intelligence, Learning agility, innovation, and creativity.
	How is your company currently preparing its workforce for the digital future in terms of skills development and training programs?	Leadership and strategy development programmes; Addressing low digital literacy levels through short courses; Coud based SAAS solution training.
	In your opinion, what are the most effective methods or strategies for ensuring that professionals in this sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition?	No comment
MR PRICE RESPONSES	**DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY** With the ongoing digital transformation, what are the digital literacy and technological skills that employees in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate?	Data Analysis and interpretation; Ai machine learning, Data based decision making, Info Sec and Cyber security.
	Can you share any initiatives or programs within the sector that are addressing the need for digital and tech-related skills?	Cannot share at this point.

MR PRICE RESPONSES	**GENERAL**	
	In your opinion how is the wholesale and retail sector promoting adaptability and a culture of lifelong learning to help professionals keep pace with changes in the industry?	There is opportunity to build more agility to keep pace with changes and trends in the industry. Greater learner exposure to technological hubs will also help foster growth.
	What feedback mechanisms are in place to continuously assess the effectiveness of skills development initiatives within your company and how is this feedback used for improvement?	Cannot share at this point.
	Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding the future of skills development in the wholesale and retail sector?	There is significant misalignment in the sector between Institutions, industry and government. A good strategy will be to create multifaceted industry led body to define and agree on the future skills required. This forum will champion upskilling at pace, and reform in current practices to build retail agility in South Africa**.**
MILADY'S RESPONSES	**OVERVIEW**	
	How do you envision the retail sector evolving in the next decade, and what are the implications thereof?	Lots more technology and AI. The most important skill will be humanizing the Retail experience within the digitization and AI. Skills that we cannot teach AI will be critical e.g. negotiation, leadership etc.
	In what way is your organisation embracing and adapting to digitalisation and innovation?	Various technology platforms for analyses of decisions made. Strong focus on building the leadership discourse as well.
	ANTICIPATED FUTURE SKILLS AND PREPARATION OF THE WORKFORCE What emerging technologies or trends that you think will significantly impact the retail sector, and if so, what are they?	No comment

	What specific skills and competencies do you believe will be most crucial for employees in your company in the coming years?	AI, BI, Leadership, Analyst type roles. Core, merchandise skills are sorely needed as well as sustainability.
	How is your company currently preparing its workforce for the digital future in terms of skills development and training programs?	Lots of in-house training, collaborative projects, focus on the job learning, some external courses are also being considered.
	In your opinion, what are the most effective methods or strategies for ensuring that professionals in this sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition?	Offering financial assistance to study as it is becoming very expensive.
	Digital Transformation and Technology With the ongoing digital transformation, what are the digital literacy and technological skills that employees in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate?	Data mining and interpretation
	Can you share any initiatives or programs within the sector that are addressing the need for digital and tech-related skills?	Not currently
	GENERAL In your opinion how is the wholesale and retail sector promoting adaptability and a culture of lifelong learning to help professionals keep pace with changes in the industry?	Firstly, by paying tranches out on time, businesses are struggling so the faster we get funds the more we can train people SAQA website shouldn't be a paid service since the SDF should be taking care of that.

MILADY'S RESPONSES	What feedback mechanisms are in place to continuously assess the effectiveness of skills development initiatives within your company and how is this feedback used for improvement?	Stakeholder engagement sessions are very effective.
	Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding the future of skills development in the wholesale and retail sector?	No comment.
BOXER STORES RESPONSES	**OVERVIEW** How do you envision the retail sector evolving in the next decade, and what are the implications thereof?	One must take care to categorise all retail under one roof. In fact, even within some categories (like food or clothing retail), there are subcategories based on offering and target market. Each sub-category will have its own unique innovations. Having said this, there may be common innovations across all categories and subcategories for example, increased innovation around smart phone interaction and activation.
	In what way is your organisation embracing and adapting to digitalisation and innovation?	More and more engagement and activation with customers through social media and cell phone. Looking for additional income streams whether leveraging off existing platforms or creating new ones.
	ANTICIPATED FUTURE SKILLS AND PREPARATION OF THE WORKFORCE What emerging technologies or trends that you think will significantly impact the retail sector, and if so, what are they?	AI without doubt - Intuitive shopping/ tracking shopping habits/ stock readiness.
	What specific skills and competencies do you believe will be most crucial for employees in your company in the coming years?	Data interpretation, data mining, critical thinking and Leadership.

BOXER STORES RESPONSES	How is your company currently preparing its workforce for the digital future in terms of skills development and training programs?	Lots of in-house training, collaborative projects, focus on the job learning, some external courses are also being considered.
	In your opinion, what are the most effective methods or strategies for ensuring that professionals in this sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition?	Offering financial assistance to study as its becoming very expensive.
	Digital Transformation and Technology With the ongoing digital transformation, what are the digital literacy and technological skills that employees in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate?	Don't underestimate the power of all staff having basic computer skills especially programs like excel/ SAP or similar. Important to raise the base of all.
	Can you share any initiatives or programs within the sector that are addressing the need for digital and tech-related skills?	None that I am aware of
	GENERAL In your opinion how is the wholesale and retail sector promoting adaptability and a culture of lifelong learning to help professionals keep pace with changes in the industry?	Not really. Up to each company according to their model and their needs
	What feedback mechanisms are in place to continuously assess the effectiveness of skills development initiatives within your company and how is this feedback used for improvement?	Pre and Post learning assessments are done to monitor transfer of skills from the training room.
	Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding the future of skills development in the wholesale and retail sector?	No comment.

Source: self-generated by the researchers

Table 11 shows the qualitative results from the retail industry. The following sub-section describes the interpretation and discussion of qualitative findings. The interpretation of findings is related to the perception of companies operating in the South African wholesale and retail industry. Industry collaboration with higher education in research studies have had a significant impact on both parties, leading to the development of innovative ideas, which enhanced research outcomes, and presented valuable interaction opportunities with researchers (Brennan, 2023). Therefore, MR Price, Milady's, and Boxer Stores were interrogated in line with the skills for the future and digital transformation in the retail sector. The researchers' interest was to witness participants understanding or thought about the future in terms of skill sets required, considering emerging technologies, customer engagements and skills for the future.

19.1. Mr Price perception or thought concerning skills for the future and digital transformation in the retail sector.

Mr Price, a leading clothing retailer indicated that it was gearing up for significant advancements in customer experiences targeting "hyper personalisation for product application and fulfilment". The widespread and ubiquitous mobile phone access amongst its customer base, was influencing the direction and extent how the company will be adopting new technologies. Mr Price viewpoint was that employees will be required to be upskilled in digital literacy and new employees would be required to be digitally savvy upon engagement. According to Raquelle Bhengu, the HR Director of Milady's (one of the divisions of Mr Price), it was critical that the most important skill required will be 'humanizing the retail experience within the digitization and the artificial intelligence (AI) space. AI was becoming an increasing powerful tool in supplier negotiations and business leadership.

- **Mr Price and Milady's view on Supply Chain and Innovation**

When asking the view of Mr Price about the emerging technologies and trends in the retail sector, they acknowledged that the utilization of big data and artificial intelligence is gradually starting to have a profound influence on supply chain processes, stock availability and just-in-time operations. Companies have been leveraging technologies in supply chains to become smarter and more efficient, creating real time supply and delivery experiences. Mr Price was bracing to the scenario where traditional retail channels and players are being challenged as new market entrants from across the industry and to reconfiguring the landscape. According to Mr Price, emerging technologies and trends has become an era to continuously envision new retail models. This will create new demands in skill sets in supply chain operations beyond current demands. The following skills were indicated by Mr Price to be currently in demand, namely:

- Industrial engineers to support and enhance supply chain operations.
- Real time distribution technologies e.g. drone technologies for deliveries
- Investment in advanced real time data management and analytics
- Advancements in geo location tagging
- Artificial intelligence across the retail cycle
- Augmented job functions
- Robotics in stock placement, stock retrieval and shelf packing

19.2. Mr Price and Milady's perception on Specific Skills and Competencies in demand in the wholesale and retail industry

In response to the question what specific skills and competencies will be most crucial for employees in retail organisations in the coming years, respondents sighted the following competencies:

- Design Thinking
- Data mining, data analysis and data interpretation
- AI machine learning and robotics
- Coaching and mentoring

- Servant leadership and leadership discourse
- Strategy and futures thinking
- Collaboration
- Cultural intelligence
- Learning agility
- Innovation and creativity thinking
- Customer centric digital understanding

19.3. Boxer Stores perception or thought concerning skills for the future and digital transformation in the retail sector.

Ian Bamber, HR Executive of Boxer Stores had cautioned against a one-size-fits-all approach to innovation and workforce preparation across the retail sector. The retail market and has different sub-categories like food, clothing, and hardware retail. Retail companies base their businesses on specific offerings and target markets resulting in respective sub-categories innovating according to their needs and requirements. A low LSM (living standards measure) target market will require a certain type of innovation and digitization as opposed to a high LSM target market. Technology usage in a low LSM business may be confined to digital marketing activations and a higher LSM digital presence can range from online shopping to metaverse engagement. The nature of the retail business, customer base and business model should guide the type, content and method of employee capacitation required.

- **Boxer Stores view on Supply Chain and Innovation**

Considering technologies, customer engagements and skills for the future, Boxer Stores had seen an increase in customer engagements and activation through social media as the business was looking towards additional income streams. The organisation further believes that AI will influence customer engagement as customer shopping habits could be tracked and responded to.

Collectively the respondents felt that with retail channels expanding, it is spawning a new type of customer and employees will need to be capacitated to effectively accommodate and respond to emerging technologies and trends. According to Boxer stores, the following customer orientated skills were to be developed,

- Omni channel practices
- Customer relationship management
- Innovative partnership and loyalty program integrations
- Metaverse presence for augmented and virtual reality shopping experience
- Automated sell-checkouts for customer convenience
- Metaverse presence for augmented and virtual reality shopping experience

19.4. Boxer Stores, Mr Price and Milady's perceptions on Preparing for Future-fit Technologies

Organisations were asked on how they currently preparing their workforce for the emerging digital technologies in terms of skills development and training programs? Mr Price had indicated that they were embracing and adapting to digitalisation and innovation and have development programmes on leadership and strategy, cloud based SAAS solution training, and short entry level digital literacy courses for employees who lack digital knowledge. The organisation also was looking towards a dedicated innovation hub and was gearing up for a cloud-based approach for greater agility in their business. Milady's had suggested that there should be a focus on increased in house and on-the-job training, collaborative projects and external courses should be considered. Although Boxer Stores indicated that it still had do more in embracing technologies, it was felt that basic computer skills especially programmes like excel, SAP or similar were essential in retail and it was important to raise the technological base of all employees.

Respondents also articulated that as there were no initiatives or programmes within the retail sector to address digital learning, tech-related skills and a culture of life-long learning companies were left to their own in-house devices to address the digital shift in the sector. This vacuum points to institution of learning to explore industry-based niche market training in the skills for the future.

19.5. Effective methods or strategies to meet digitalisation

In response to the question what the most effective methods or strategies were for ensuring that professionals in the retail sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition, retailers were of the view that there was a significant misalignment in the sector between institutions of learning, industry, and government. To proactively circumvent the situation, it was suggested that a multifaceted industry led body must be established to define and agree on the future skills required. This forum could champion upskilling at pace, and reform in current practices to build retail agility in South Africa. Funding should also be made available to upskills employees as the cost of study was expensive. It was articulated that young graduates should be recruited as they would be schooled in a digital environment studying trends. Graduates' base knowledge could be harnessed by structured and continuous workshops.

20. CONVERGING AND MIXING OF QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Table 17 represents the converging and mixing of quantitative and qualitative results. The main questions and results from the two sources of investigation are described and interpreted in the subsections below.

Table 12: Mixing of quantitative and qualitative results

STATEMENTS	QUESTIONS	QUALITATIVE RESULTS	QUANTITATIVE RESULTS
ANTICIPATED FUTURE SKILLS	**What emerging technologies or trends that you think will significantly impact the retail sector, and if so, what are they?**	Participating companies felt that the technologies below will have an impact on the retail sector. ▪ Advancements in Geo location tagging. ▪ Artificial Intelligence across the retail cycle. ▪ Augmented job functions ▪ Real time distribution technologies eg Drone delivery ▪ Hyper personalised shopping experience technologies ▪ Augmented and Virtual reality shopping experiences. ▪ Metaverse presence – still to gain momentum. ▪ Innovative partnership and loyalty program integrations. ▪ Self-checkout and automated checkout (amazon). ▪ Robot shoppers and shelf replenishers. ▪ Intuitive shopping/ tracking shopping habits ▪ Stock readiness	82.9% of respondents agreed that emerging technologies or trends will significantly impact the skills needed in the retail sector. This implies that a majority of the respondents recognize and believe in the influence of emerging technologies or trends on the skills required in the retail industry.
	What specific skills and competencies do you believe will be most crucial for employees in your company in the coming years?	The following skills and competencies were most crucial for employees in in the coming years: ▪ Design Thinking ▪ Data analysis and interpretation ▪ AI machine learning and robotics ▪ Coaching and mentoring ▪ Servant leadership ▪ Strategy and futures thinking ▪ Collaboration ▪ Business Intelligence ▪ Cultural intelligence ▪ Agility ▪ Innovation, creativity & critical thinking ▪ Merchandise skills. ,	91.9% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that skills in data analytics will be essential in the future. 64.6% of respondents agreed that employees in the retail sector should possess problem-solving and critical thinking abilities to find innovative solutions. 79.2% of respondents agreed that digital skills will be essential. 80.2% of the respondents agreed that skills and competencies will be most crucial for employees.

			76.2% of the respondents agreed that proficiency in sales techniques, negotiation skills, and building relationships will be crucial in commerce.
	How is your company currently preparing its workforce for the digital future in terms of skills development and training programs?	▪ Companies were currently preparing its workforce for future digital focused on. ▪ Leadership and strategy development programmes are implemented. ▪ Low digital literacy levels are taught via short courses. ▪ Cloud based SAAS solution training. ▪ Ongoing in-house training, collaborative project. ▪ Focus on the job learning, ▪ Outsourced external courses	46.1% of respondents agreed that the retail sector is preparing its workforce for the future in terms of skills development and training.
	In your opinion, what are the most effective methods or strategies for ensuring that professionals in this sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition?	▪ The most effective methods or strategies for ensuring that professionals in the retail sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition included: ▪ Ensuring Pre and Post learning assessments to monitor transfer of skills from the training room. ▪ Offering financial assistance to employees to study as the cost of study was becoming very expensive.	94% of respondents agreed that employees in the retail sector need to constantly upskill and remain adaptable.
DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY	**With the ongoing digital transformation, what are the digital literacy and technological skills that employees in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate?**	The following technological skills were identified as skills employees in in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate: ▪ Basic computer skills especially programs like excel/ SAP or similar. ▪ Data mining ▪ Data Analysis ▪ Data interpretation ▪ Data based decision making. ▪ Artificial Intelligence ▪ Machine learning ▪ Info Sec and Cyber security	82.8% of the respondents felt that knowledge and skills in App application development will be required. 87.9% of the respondents further indicated that knowledge and skills in data management would be required as a future skill
	Can you share any initiatives or programs within the sector that are addressing the need for digital and tech-related skills?	▪ Respondents stated that they were unaware of any current programmes addressing the need for digital and tech-related skills.	**85.8% of the respondents articulated that the study material of their respective programmes was relevant to the workplace.** **88.9% of respondents had confirmed that their study in technology had equipped them for the future digital work environment.** **83.9% of the respondents have emphatically expressed that studying a course in technology was essential.**

20.1. Impact of emerging technologies and trends in the retail sector

According to Sharma et al. (2023), emerging technologies and trends in the retail sector are reshaping the industry and driving innovation. Retailers who embrace these technologies adapt to changing consumer preferences are better positioned to succeed in a competitive market. Emerging technologies and trends in the retail sector have had a significant impact on the way consumers shop and interact with brands. These technologies are changing the way retailers do business, from increased personalization and customization to improved customer service and streamlined operations. In this study, respondents were asked to share their thoughts on the following question: ***What emerging technologies or trends do you believe will have a substantial impact on the retail industry, and if so, what are they?***

A significant majority of the beneficiaries, who have been sponsored for technology programs by the W & R SETA, have claimed that new technological trends will have an impact on the retail industry in terms of skill requirements. The industry was more explicit and detailed about the technology developments that had been reshaping retail operations and engagements. These changes are expected to have an impact on retail operations in terms of supply chain and logistics, marketing, and improved customer experience. From a global retail perspective, an increase in artificial intelligence and augmented job functions will be required. However, trends may have a specific operational impact in the following aspects:

- **Supply chain and logistics**

    - Inventory management ensuring stock availability.
    - Drone technology and distribution logistics facilitating real-time deliveries.
    - Geo location tagging to track freight in real time.
    - Robot shelf-packers.

- **Marketing**
    - Digital marketing
    - Metaverse presence in digital marketing
    - Innovative partnership and loyalty program integrations.
    - Intuitive tracking of shopping habits shaping future marketing strategies

- **Enhanced customer experience**
    - Hyper personalised shopping experience technologies
    - Self-checkout and automated checkout
    - Creating and engaging with augmented and virtual reality shopping experiences

Given the above information, both qualitative and quantitative data indicate that developing technologies will have a significant impact on the retail sector. Employers identified certain effect spots in a company's operations management, emphasizing a shift toward more advanced supply chain processes and inventory efficiencies. Organisations will need to reinvent themselves in terms of technology-based marketing tactics and customer data collection. Employers were aware of the new customer developing with the advent of a new digital era, and consequently sensitive to customer relationship with management.

20.2. Specific skills and competencies that will be crucial in the future

Individuals with a strong combination of technical skills, customer service expertise, data analysis capabilities, adaptability, critical thinking, and supply chain knowledge will be well-positioned to succeed in the future of the retail sector (Li, 2022). Ongoing training and development in these areas will be crucial for retail employees to stay ahead in a competitive marketplace. Furthermore, Li (2022) emphasised that skills like Analytical thinking and innovation, active learning and learning strategies, complex problem-solving, critical thinking and analysis, creativity, originality, and initiative, leadership and social influence, technology use, monitoring, and control, technology design and programming, resilience, stress tolerance, and flexibility, and Reasoning, problem-solving will play significant roles in future technology advancement.

In this study, beneficiaries of the W&R SETA were asked to indicate: ***What specific skills and competencies do you believe will be most crucial for employees in your company in the coming years?***

Student responses to the study emphatically stated that digital abilities will be required in the future. Data analytics abilities were ranked highest (91.9%), while 79.2% believed that competency in sales strategies, negotiation skills, and connection building will be critical in commerce. Almost two-thirds of respondents said that retail personnel should be able to solve problems and think critically in order to develop innovative solutions. Significantly, employers provided a broader perspective on the kind of talents needed in the future. These skills can be divided/grouped into four categories: analytical skills, people and leadership skills, creative skills, and technology skills.

- **Analytical Skills**

    - Data analysis and interpretation
    - Business Intelligence
    - Strategy and futures thinking
    - Agility

- **People and leadership**

    - Servant leadership
    - Collaboration
    - Cultural intelligence
    - Coaching and mentoring

- **Creative Skills**

    - Design Thinking
    - Innovation
    - Creativity
    - Merchandising

- **Technology based skills**

    - AI machine learning
    - Robotics

As a result, both quantitative and qualitative results are consistent, and digital skills were identified as critical in terms of future competencies development. Employers, on the other hand, clearly provided a more comprehensive future-oriented vision that incorporated specific skill sets. Interestingly, the broad skill set necessary was consistent with the skills for future results presented in the World Economic Forum 2023 Report, which lists Analytical, Creative, and Technological as the most in demand skills.

20.3. Workforce preparation for future skills

According to Hancock and Kothari (2021), several reasons may justify the usefulness of workforce preparation for future skills. For example, workforce preparation for future skills in the retail sector is crucial for both businesses and employees. As technology advances and consumer preferences evolve, the skills and knowledge required to excel in the retail industry are constantly changing. Therefore, it is essential for both individuals and organisations to invest in workforce preparation to stay competitive and succeed in the market. Other reasons include (Li, 2022 and Hancock and Kothari, 2021):

- One of the key reasons why workforce preparation for future skills is important in the retail sector is the need to adapt to changing technology. With the rise of e-commerce and mobile shopping, retail businesses need employees who are proficient in digital skills such as social media marketing, data analysis, and online customer service. By providing training and development opportunities in these areas, companies can ensure that their employees have the skills needed to succeed in the digital age.

- Another reason why workforce preparation is important in the retail sector is the need to meet evolving consumer preferences. As consumers become more demanding and discerning, retail businesses need to focus on providing exceptional customer service and personalized shopping experiences. This requires employees who are skilled in communication, problem-solving, and relationship building. By investing in workforce preparation in these areas, companies can ensure that their employees have the skills and knowledge needed to meet customer expectations and drive business growth.

- In addition to keeping pace with technology and consumer preferences, workforce preparation for future skills in the retail sector also has a positive impact on employee engagement and retention. When employees feel supported and valued by their employer through training and development opportunities, they are more likely to be motivated, productive, and loyal. This not only benefits the individual employees but also the organisation as a whole by reducing turnover and increasing overall performance.

In this study, *beneficiaries of the W&R SETA were asked to provide feedback on how the company where they were placed is currently preparing its staff for the digital future through skill development and training programs.*

Less than half of the W & R SETA student beneficiaries believed that corporations were preparing employees for future skills through various training and development programmes. The respondents' lack of knowledge of organisational employee readiness for activities was justified by their status as students. The qualitative findings revealed that firms are currently developing their personnel with a future digital skills focus. Employee training and skill development included entry-level digital literacy programs taught through short courses, leadership and strategy development programs, cloud based SAAS solution training, ongoing in-house training, collaborative project work, a focus on job learning, and outsourced external courses from external training providers. Therefore, enforcing organisational change is typically preceded by planning for the change. Consequently, the qualitative responses were consistent in terms of digital skill development at all levels of the business.

Companies were combining in-house training programs, structured on-the-job training, and outsourcing portions of training required by their organisations to skill development providers. Thus, workforce preparation for future skills is essential for the retail sector to stay competitive, meet consumer expectations, and drive business success. By investing in training and development opportunities for employees, companies can ensure that their workforce is equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive in an ever-changing industry. The impact of workforce preparation in the retail sector is profound, leading to increased employee engagement, improved customer satisfaction, and ultimately, business growth (Li, 2022 and Hancock and Kothari, 2021).

20.4. Upskilling of retail professionals

According to Li (2022), upskilling of retail professionals is crucial in today's competitive and constantly evolving retail industry. The retail industry is rapidly changing with advancements in technology and changing consumer preferences. Retail professionals need to stay relevant and adaptable to these changes through continuous learning and upskilling. Upskilling helps retail professionals enhance their product knowledge, communication skills, and problem-solving abilities. This leads to improved customer service and overall customer experience, ultimately driving customer satisfaction, loyalty, and sales. In this study, respondents were asked to share their thoughts by answering to the following question: ***What are the most successful ways or tactics for ensuring that professionals in this area stay ahead in terms of skill development?***

The vast majority (94%) of respondents in the quantitative analysis agreed that employees in the retail sector required to regularly upskill and remain versatile. Respondents interviewed for the qualitative study stated that the most successful technique for keeping staff relevant was to ensure that retail professionals remained ahead in terms of skill acquisition.

Conducting pre and post learning assessments to track skill transfer from the classroom to the workplace was deemed crucial. Furthermore, it was considered that the expense of education was becoming too expensive, and that employees should be given financial incentives to continue courses (lifelong learning) in order to stay current with industry advancements and align their skill acquisition effectively. It was very obvious that both students and businesses believed that professional skills development was critical for future skill needs. Furthermore, people must be skilled, reskilled, and upskilled in order to remain relevant in a dynamic and shifting digital environment. Therefore, upskilling of retail professionals is crucial for staying competitive, adapting to industry changes, improving customer experience, increasing productivity, advancing careers, and retaining top talent. Employers must prioritize and invest in continuous learning and development to ensure a skilled and capable workforce in the retail industry.

20.5. Retail employees and skills to be cultivated

The further above section demonstrated the reasons for upskilling professional in the retail sector. For example, upskilling can equip retail professionals with new skills and techniques to work more efficiently and effectively. This can lead to increased productivity, streamlined operations, and improved overall performance. In addition, upskilling opens up opportunities for retail professionals to take on more challenging roles, advance their careers, and increase their earning potential. It also helps them stay competitive in the job market and stand out from their peers. Therefore, investing in upskilling shows retail professionals that their employer values their development and growth. This can lead to higher employee engagement, job satisfaction, and ultimately, improved employee retention (Hancock and Kothari, 2021 and Li, 2022). By cultivating existing and new skills and attributes, retail employees can help to create a positive and memorable shopping experience for customers, drive sales, and contribute to the overall success of the business.

In this study, the beneficiaries of the W&R SETA were required to express their opinions on the following question: **With the increasing digital transformation, *what digital literacy and technological skills should employees in the wholesale and retail sectors develop or cultivate?***

Interestingly, a great majority of respondents (87.9%) believe that knowledge and skills in data management and application development will be essential in the future and should be developed. This suggests that respondents had a general awareness of how the retail sector is evolving. Employers emphasized that the specific technology skills that employees in the wholesale and retail sectors should develop include Basic computer skills, particularly in programs such as Excel/SAP or comparable. In addition, data mining, data analysis, data interpretation, data-driven decision-making, artificial intelligence, machine learning, information security, and cyber security were also suggested to be developed. Both quantitative and qualitative data demonstrated that data knowledge and proficiency will serve as a professional enabler in a digital landscape. However, companies believed that basic computer application abilities were important and should be cultivated. Retail employees play a crucial role in ensuring the success of a retail business. They are the face of the company and are responsible for providing excellent customer service, driving sales, and maintaining the overall image of the brand. In order to be successful in their role, retail employees need to possess a variety of skills and attributes that will enable them to excel in a fast-paced and customer-centric environment.

20.6. Programmes within the retail sector addressing digital and tech-related skills

In today's increasingly digital world, having strong digital and tech-related skills is vital for success in the retail sector. Retailers must keep up with the fast-paced changes in technology and the ways in which consumers shop in order to remain competitive.

This is where programmes focused on digital and tech-related skills come into play. According to (World Bank, 2020 and Nikou, 2023), programmes within the retail sector addressing digital and tech-related skills may include the following:

- Digital Skills for Retail Programme: This programme is designed to help retail employees develop essential digital skills such as using point-of-sale systems, inventory management software, and online marketing tools.

- Tech Training for Retail Managers: This programme focuses on upskilling retail managers in areas such as data analytics, customer relationship management systems, and e-commerce platforms to help them better manage and grow their retail businesses in a digital age.

- Online Merchandising and Marketing Course: This course helps retail professionals learn how to effectively merchandise products online, optimize product listings for search engines, and use digital marketing tactics to drive sales and increase online visibility.

- Coding Bootcamp for Retail Employees: This intensive coding bootcamp teaches retail employees how to develop and maintain retail websites, create custom software solutions, and leverage data analytics to improve overall business operations.

- Cybersecurity Training for Retail Staff: This programme provides retail employees with the knowledge and skills needed to protect sensitive customer data, prevent online fraud, and secure their retail systems and networks from cyber threats.

- Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality (VR/AR) Retail Training: This training programme introduces retail employees to the latest VR/AR technologies and teaches them how to create immersive shopping experiences, virtual showrooms, and interactive product demonstrations to enhance customer engagement and drive sales.

The W&R SETA beneficiaries were asked to share their thoughts on the following question: Can you share any initiatives or programs in the wholesale and retail sector that address the need for digital and tech-related skills?

Respondents declared that as digitalization gains pace, there is a higher awareness of the importance of learning tech-related skills in order to adapt to changing work environments.

Considering the respondents in the quantitative study were students, they could relate to questions about useful programs for developing digital skills. Respondents categorically stated that taking a technology course was necessary, with 83.9% of respondents recognizing the importance of developing tech-related competencies. In addition, 85.8% of respondents reported that the study material for their particular technology degrees was relevant to the position at hand. A significant majority of respondents (88.9%) acknowledged that their technology studies had prepared and equipped them for the future digital work environment. The quantitative investigation found that businesses were completely unaware of any current programs addressing the demand for digital and tech-related skills. Although industry was rapidly adopting technology, it was surprising that they were unaware of any relevant and acceptable programs to improve digital skills. One likely explanation is that educational institutions were not matched with the pace of digitization, and industry was compelled to upskill as technology was rolled out. The disparity between industry-driven technical innovation and academic institutions' sluggish response was reason for alarm. Digital skill development must be actively encouraged across all levels of an organisation within the wholesale and retail industry. Skills development agencies, such as the W&R SETA, can offer structured financial skills intervention programmes that address the specific skills required by the retail sector.

SECTION D: RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION.

21. RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations in a study are based on the findings. Therefore, findings are important in a study as they contribute to scientific progress, inform decision-making, and advance knowledge in various fields. According to Alex (2023) and Kapuot (2023), generally, recommendations aligned to findings serve as a crucial component of a study, providing a roadmap for action, informing decision-making, driving future research, improving quality, and validating the study's credibility and impact. Therefore, it is essential to acknowledge that recommendations are important in a study for several reasons. Recommendations can also serve as a practical application of strategies or guidelines suggested by the researchers to provide actionable steps that can be implemented based on the findings of the study. They help bridge the gap between theory and practice by suggesting specific actions or strategies to address the issues identified in the study. However, for this study, the following key aspects are pointed out as the main reasons that may support or motivate the W&R SETA to consider suggested recommendations enumerated in this study (Alex, 2023 and Kapuot, 2023):

I. **Decision-making:** Recommendations from this study provide guidance to the W&R SETA (decision-maker) on how to proceed in light of the study's findings.

II. **Quality improvement:** Recommendations help identify areas of improvement or needed changes within the W&R SETA or the SETA's system. They serve as a tool for continuous improvement, guiding efforts to enhance processes, policies, and practices based on the study's findings.

III. **Validation and credibility:** Recommendations add credibility to the study's findings by demonstrating that the research has practical implications and can be applied to real-world scenarios. They show that the study's results are not just theoretical but have practical value and usefulness.

IV. **Future study or research directions:** This study highlights areas for further research or exploration, identify gaps in knowledge or potential avenues for future studies. This study provides new research questions that is expected to advance the wholesale and retail sector in South Africa.

Considering the above description, the next section provides recommendations based on the objectives of the study. This study examined the W&R SETA strategy for managing digital disruption, promoting innovation, and addressing future skill requirements in the South African retail industry. It also assessed the W&R SETA's present strategy framework for skills development to propose a model for navigating digital disruption, promoting innovation, and addressing future skills requirements in the South African retail industry. Therefore, the recommendations that follows are suggested to the W&R SETA for consideration

21.1. The relevant skills required to meet the evolving retail labour market influenced by digital innovation and disruption.

It is crucial to understand that the ability to navigate and excel in the evolving retail labour market requires a combination of technical skills, adaptability, creativity, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and a commitment to lifelong learning. Therefore, the W&R SETA is required to invest efforts and resources to meet the relevant skills required for the evolving retail labour market, which is influenced by digital innovation and disruption. Consequently, it is recommended that the W&R SETA investment on skills for the future should target the following key areas:

- **Technological literacy:** As digital innovation continues to transform the retail industry; workers need to be comfortable using and adapting to various technologies. This includes knowledge of point-of-sale systems, inventory management software, online marketing platforms, and other digital tools.

- **Data analysis**: With the rise of e-commerce and Omni channel retailing, data has become invaluable in understanding customer behaviour and preferences. Retail workers should have basic data analysis skills to interpret and act on customer data, such as analysing sales trends and customer purchase patterns.

- **Customer relationship management:** Digital disruption has led to increased customer expectations and demands. Retail workers must possess strong interpersonal skills to build and maintain customer relationships online and offline. This includes effective communication, empathy, and problem-solving abilities.

- **Adaptability and agility:** The retail industry is constantly evolving, and workers must be adaptable and open to change. Digital disruption often requires rapid learning and adjustment to new technologies, processes, and customer demands. Flexibility and a willingness to embrace new ideas are essential in this fast-paced environment.

- **Creativity and innovation:** As digital innovation continues to reshape the retail landscape; workers must be able to think creatively and come up with innovative solutions to meet changing customer needs. This could involve developing new marketing strategies, redesigning store layouts, or creating engaging online content.

- **Cross-functional collaboration:** Digital disruption often blurs the boundaries between different retail functions, such as marketing, sales, and supply chain. Workers need to collaborate across departments and possess a basic understanding of these different functions to ensure smooth incorporation of digital tools and processes.

- **Emotional intelligence:** With the increasing use of technology, there is a growing need for retail workers who can provide personalized and empathetic customer experiences. Emotional intelligence, including empathy, active listening, and the ability to understand and adapt to customer emotions, can help build stronger connections with customers.

- **Continuous learning (Lifelong learning):** The retail industry is in a state of constant change, driven by digital innovation. Workers need to have a growth mind-set and be committed to continuous learning to stay updated with new technologies, industry trends, and customer preferences.

Considering the above suggestions, the W&R SETA needs to make investments in creating and training skills for the rising retail workforce, driven by digital innovation and disruption.

21.2. The strategies to be used or implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

The Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority (W&R SETA) in South Africa has implemented various strategies to address the future skills requirements in the retail sector. Table 7 illustrates key areas where the W&R SETA will improvement in order to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. Table 7 also includes recommendations related to the strategies to be used or implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

Table 13: Key approaches necessary for the improvement of strategies to be implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector

KEY APPROACHES IN AREAS THAT REQUIRED IMPROVEMENT	STRATEGIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED BY THE W&R SETA TO ADDRESS THE FUTURE SKILLS REQUIREMENTS IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN RETAIL SECTOR.
1. Skills planning: The W&R SETA will have to support and/ or conduct extensive research and analysis to identify current and future skills needs in the retail sector. This helps in recognizing the emerging job roles and skills gaps. **2. Learnerships and apprenticeships: The W&R SETA will have to improve mechanism or structures that facilitate the implementation of learnerships and apprenticeship programs in collaboration with retail businesses. Programs that provide practical on-the-job training and theoretical knowledge to equip individuals with the necessary skills required in the future need to be revised and improved.** **3. Workplace skills plans and annual training reports: The W&R SETA will have to improve and facilitate the processes or mechanism that require retail employers to submit Workplace Skills Plans (WSPs) and Annual Training Reports (ATRs). These reports must include detail of the training needs and plans of each employer, enabling the W&R SETA to prioritize and align its training interventions accordingly. Taking into consideration emerging technologies and trends, as well as digital transformation in the retail industry.** **4. Recognition of prior learning (RPL): The W&R SETA will have to encourage and promote the recognition of prior learning for individuals who have acquired skills and experience through informal or non-formal means. This will enable them to receive formal recognition and access further training opportunities.** **5. Skills programs and qualifications development: The W&R SETA will have to continually work closely with industry stakeholders, including employers and training providers (academic institutions: Universities and colleges), to develop new skills programs and qualifications that are aligned with the future needs of the retail sector. This will ensure that training is relevant and up to date.**	**1. Conducting a skill needs analysis:** The W&R SETA should undertake a comprehensive study to constantly identify the future skills requirements of the South African retail sector. This analysis should consider technological advancements, changing consumer preferences, and emerging trends in the industry. **2. Developing new training programs:** Based on the skills needs analysis, the W&R SETA can design and implement new training programs that address the identified gaps. These programs should focus on areas such as e-commerce, digital marketing, data analytics, customer service, and retail operations management. **3. Promoting collaboration with industry stakeholders:** The W&R SETA should actively engage with employers, industry associations, and trade unions to understand their perspectives and collaboratively develop strategies to address future skills requirements. This collaboration can help ensure that the training programs are relevant and aligned with industry needs. **4. Enhancing technical and vocational education:** The W&R SETA should promote technical and vocational education and encourage more young people to pursue careers in the retail sector. This can be achieved by partnering with schools, colleges, and universities to develop curriculum that incorporates practical training and relevant industry skills. **5. Encouraging continuous learning and upskilling:** The W&R SETA should create awareness about the importance of continuous learning and upskilling within the retail sector. This can be done through campaigns, workshops, and training incentives to encourage retail workers to enhance their skills and adapt to the changing demands of the industry. **6. Facilitating apprenticeships and internships:** The W&R SETA should work closely with retailers to develop and promote apprenticeship and internship programs. These programs can provide

6. Sector-specific training interventions: The W&R SETA must continue to organize and support various sector-specific training interventions, such as workshops, seminars, and conferences. These events may provide a platform for industry players to share best practices, knowledge, and insights on addressing future skills requirements. **7. Partnership with higher education institutions: The W&R SETA collaborates with universities and other higher education institutions to develop and offer customized retail management programs. These programs enhance the skills of current and future retail managers, enabling them to navigate the evolving industry landscape successfully.**	practical on-the-job training and mentorship opportunities for students and young professionals, helping them gain relevant skills and industry experience. **7. Emphasizing digital literacy and technology skills:** Given the increasing role of technology in the retail sector, the W&R SETA should prioritize digital literacy and technology skills in its training programs. This includes providing training on using e-commerce platforms, data analytics tools, inventory management systems, and other digital technologies relevant to the retail industry. **8. Supporting entrepreneurship and small businesses:** The W&R SETA can provide support and resources to aspiring entrepreneurs and small businesses in the retail sector. This can include training on business management, financial literacy, and marketing skills to help them succeed and contribute to the growth of the sector. **9. Monitoring and evaluation:** The W&R SETA should regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its strategies. This includes conducting follow-up studies to ensure that the skills development initiatives are meeting the needs of the retail sector and making necessary adjustments to improve outcomes. **10. Engaging with international best practices:** The W&R SETA should stay updated with international best practices in the retail sector and adapt them to the South African context. This can involve benchmarking against countries with advanced retail industries and leveraging global partnerships for knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Source: Sel-generated by researchers

Table 7 illustrates Key strategies areas required for improvement and the strategies to be implemented by the W&R SETA to address the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. Without giving specific priority to one or another strategy, it is important that all aspects enumerated in table 7 need consideration by the W&R SETA. However, a particular attention should be emphasised on Monitoring and Evaluation. The W&R SETA should regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of its strategies. This includes conducting follow-up studies to ensure that the skills development initiatives are meeting the needs of the retail sector and making necessary adjustments to improve outcomes.

In addition, the W&R SETA will have to continually work closely with industry stakeholders, including employers and training providers (academic institutions: Universities and colleges), to develop new skills programs and qualifications that are aligned with the future needs of the retail sector. This will ensure that training (skills programs and qualifications development) is relevant and up to date. Furthermore, concerning the sector-specific training interventions, the W&R SETA will have to continue to organize and support various sector-specific training interventions, such as workshops, seminars, and conferences. These events may provide a platform for industry players to share best practices, knowledge, and insights on addressing future skills requirements. By implementing these strategies, the W&R SETA will constantly ensure that the retail sector in South Africa has a competent and skilled workforce capable of meeting the demands of the future.

21.3. Addressing the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to promote the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector.

There may be several factors that could contribute to the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA (Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority) to promote the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. In order to address the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the W&R SETA to promote the future skills requirements in the South African retail sector, it is crucial that the following factors must be taken into consideration:

- **Collaboration with industry stakeholders:** The W&R SETA should actively collaborate with industry stakeholders such as retailers, trade unions, and professional associations to understand the specific skills requirements of the sector and develop strategies that align with the industry needs.

- **Conducting comprehensive skills needs assessments:** The W&R SETA should regularly conduct skills needs assessments to identify the current and future skills gaps in the retail sector. This will ensure that the strategies implemented address the specific skill requirements of the industry.

- **Developing relevant and industry-aligned training programs:** Based on the skills needs assessments, the W&R SETA should develop training programs that are relevant to the retail sector and align with industry standards. These programs should be designed to equip individuals with the necessary skills and competencies required in the future retail industry.

- **Providing financial incentives and support:** The W&R SETA should improve, without delay, mechanism of offering financial incentives and support to retailers that participate in training programs. There has to a balance between funding allocated via institutions for entry level graduates in the skills for the future without negating the upskilling and reskilling employed individuals who could become irrelevant with their current skills. The timeframes for funding allocations for industry needs to be revised or reconsidered as the laggard approach to grant or tranche payments is a deterrent amongst employers in the acceptance for bursaries and other allocations. Providing tax incentives for investing in future skills development is strongly encouraged for shorter programmes and not only be confined to learnerships.

- **Emphasizing lifelong learning and upskilling:** The W&R SETA should promote the culture of lifelong learning and upskilling within the retail sector. This can be achieved through the development of continuous professional development programs, recognition of prior learning, and promoting opportunities for career advancement within the sector.

- **Providing accessible and quality training facilities:** Especially in the rural areas, the W&R SETA should ensure that training facilities and resources are easily accessible to retailers and learners in the retail sector. This could involve establishing training centers, partnering with existing training institutions, or leveraging e-learning platforms to provide flexible and convenient training options.

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** The W&R SETA should regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies implemented to promote future skills requirements in the retail sector. This evaluation should include measuring the outcomes and impact of the training programs, **collecting feedback from retailers and learners**, and making necessary adjustments to improve the effectiveness of the strategies.

By considering or taking these aspects into account, the W&R SETA may improve the effectiveness of policies designed to promote future skills requirements in the South African retail sector, ensuring that the industry remains competitive and meets the expectations of a fast-changing retail landscape. Considering the above, it is also important to acknowledge that the W&R SETA (Wholesale and Retail Sector Education and Training Authority) has implemented several strategies to promote future skills requirements in the South African retail sector. These strategies have been effective to a certain extent in addressing the skills gap and equipping workers and students with the necessary skills for the industry's evolving needs. One of the key strategies implemented by W&R SETA is the development and implementation of sector-specific training programs. These programs aim to improve the skills and knowledge of retail workers in areas such as customer service, merchandising, sales techniques, and management. By providing training opportunities tailored to the specific needs of the retail sector, W&R SETA has successfully upskilled many workers and improved their prospects for career advancement. Another strategy employed by W&R SETA is the promotion of apprenticeships and learnerships in the retail sector.

These programs provide on-the-job training and formal education to individuals, allowing them to acquire the skills needed to succeed in the industry. By incentivizing employers to participate in apprenticeship and learnership programs, W&R SETA has encouraged the transfer of skills from experienced workers to the next generation, ensuring the sustainability of the sector. Furthermore, the W&R SETA has established partnerships with industry stakeholders, including employers, trade unions, and educational institutions. These partnerships help to identify current and future skills requirements, ensuring that the training programs offered by W&R SETA are aligned with industry needs. Collaborating with various stakeholders also allows for the sharing of knowledge and best practices, further strengthening the effectiveness of the strategies employed by W&R SETA. However, despite these positive efforts, there are still challenges that hinder the full effectiveness of the W&R SETA's strategies. One major challenge is the limited reach of these programs, particularly in rural areas.

There is a need for increased accessibility to training opportunities for workers in remote locations, as they often face additional barriers when it comes to accessing education and training. Another challenge is the rapid pace of technological advancements in the retail sector. While W&R SETA has made efforts to address digital skills through training programs, ensuring that workers are equipped with the necessary digital literacy and technological skills remains an ongoing challenge. Continuous adaptation and updating of training programs are required to keep up with the fast-changing demands of the industry. Spires, Paul and Kerkhoff (2017) spoke of the evolving nature of digital literacy bringing attention to three categories that were previously introduced by Spires and Bartlett (2012), namely, (a) locating and consuming digital content, (b) creating digital content, and (c) communicating digital content. Thus, the strategies implemented by W&R SETA to address future skills requirements in the South African retail sector have been largely effective in upskilling workers and fostering career advancement. However, challenges such as limited reach and the need to constantly update training programs to incorporate digital skills with respect to the three categories still need to be addressed.

Overall, W&R SETA's efforts have been instrumental in narrowing the skills gap and promoting the development of a highly skilled retail workforce in South Africa. More efforts and resources will still be required to continually narrowing the skills gap and promoting the development of future highly skilled retail workforce in South Africa.

21.4. The suggested approach/Model that could contribute to the development of future skills required in the retail sector, aligned to technological innovation and disruption.

Models that could contribute to the development of future skills required in the retail sector, aligned to technological innovation and disruption may be many. For this study, two approaches, which are interdependent to each other are suggested to the W&R SETA for future skills development in the retail sector. The blended learning approach and the ecosystem model are developed and suggested in this study for future skills development within the retail sector. Blended learning combines traditional classroom learning with online and digital resources. It allows retail professionals to access education and training materials anytime, anywhere, using technology platforms such as online courses, webinars, instructional videos, and interactive simulations. Figure 19 explains the blended learning approach for future skills development in line with technological innovation and disruption in the retail sector.

Figure 48: Blended learning approach for the development of future skills required in the retail sector, aligned to technological innovation and disruption

Source: Self-generated by the researchers.

Figure 19 illustrates the blended learning approach for the development of future skills required in the retail sector, aligned to technological innovation and disruption. This model could contribute to the development of future skills required in the retail sector, aligned to technological innovation and disruption, is a blended learning approach. Blended learning combines traditional classroom learning with online and digital resources. It allows retail professionals to access education and training materials anytime, anywhere, using technology platforms such as online courses, webinars, instructional videos, and interactive simulations. This blended learning model offers the following benefits for developing future skills:

I. **Flexibility:** Retail employees can learn at their own pace and according to their schedules. This flexibility also enables them to balance their work commitments with upskilling.

II. **Personalization**: Blended learning can be tailored to individual needs and learning styles. Through online assessments or surveys, employees can receive personalized learning recommendations and resources, focusing on areas where their skills need improvement.

III. **Accessibility:** Technology makes learning resources readily available to all retail employees, regardless of their location or time constraints. This means that remote workers or those in remote areas can access the same training opportunities as their counterparts in urban areas.

IV. **Practicality:** Blended learning allows for the integration of practical, hands-on experiences alongside theoretical knowledge. Virtual reality or augmented reality simulations can be used to provide real-life scenarios for employees to practice their skills, such as customer service or inventory management.

V. **Collaboration:** Online platforms facilitate collaboration and knowledge-sharing among retail employees. Discussion forums, online group projects, or peer-to-peer mentoring can enhance problem-solving and critical thinking skills, while also fostering a sense of community and engagement.

VI. **Continuous Learning:** Technological advancements and retail disruptions require employees to continuously update their skills. Blended learning provides an ongoing framework for employees to stay updated, as they can access new modules, courses, or resources as they become available.

The implementation of this blended learning model in the retail sector can ensure that the workforce is prepared for the challenges and opportunities presented by technological innovation and disruption. This approach helps bridge the skills gap and empowers employees to adapt to changing technologies, customer behaviours, and industry trends. However, Figure 10 illustrates an ecosystem approach to skills for the future.

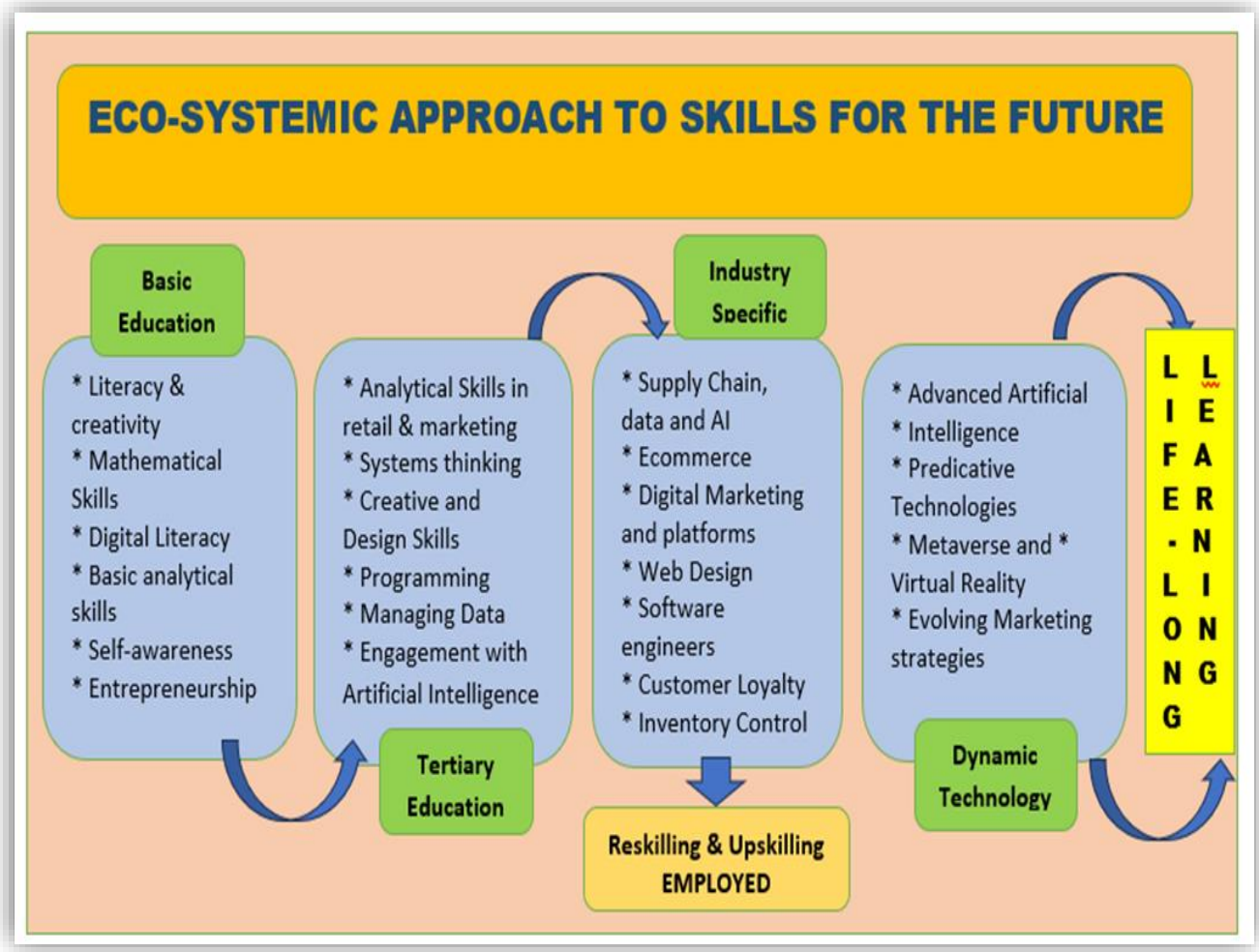


Figure 49: An Eco-systemic approach to skills for the future

Source: Self-generated by researchers

The ecosystem approach to skills for the future suggests that future skills development should not only consider the reskilling and upskilling of employed and unemployed people.

But the future skills development should take into consideration elements displayed in figure 10, which include the development of future skills at the basic education level, the development of future skills at tertiary education level, the reskilling and upskilling employed people within the industry and maintain a culture of lifelong learning, as technology continue be dynamic and influence in a regular basis the world of work. Based on figure 10 above, the following recommendations are addressed to the W&R SETA:

❖ RECOMMENDATIONS ALIGNED TO THE VALUE CHAIN OF SKILLS DEVELOPMENT:

- It is essential that the W&R SETA should look at the value chain of skills development by considering the scope beyond technological change to also open discourse on the labour-market influence of a multiple of simultaneous trends, including the green energy transitions and macroeconomic factors to guide plausible options to respond to disruptions. This inclusivity considers the manifold variables which have to be considered in responding to the skills required for the future breaking down a siloed approach to responding to wider socio-economic and environmental conundrums.

- Skills development cannot be seen as compartmentalised, but it must be seen as part of an ecosystem. Each point of delivery feeding into the next and the consumers of skills (industry) playing an integral role in terms of designing the skill set required. All entities should play a meaningful and collaborative role in configuring the supply, demand, and delivery of fit for purpose skills required for the future. It must be noted that due to the rapid rate of digital evolution, it makes skills required a moving target and a lethargic approach of content output will render static content irrelevant.

Therefore, adaptability on the move of disruptive technology requires the W&R SETA to consider the following:

- **Assessing and Identifying Skills Gaps:** Use assessments and evaluations to understand the current skills gaps within an organisation or community. This can help identify areas where skills development is needed and ensure that the right training programs are put in place.

- **Designing Targeted Training Programs:** Develop training programs that specifically address the identified skills gaps. These programs should be aligned with the specific needs and goals of the organisation or community and should focus on building the necessary skills.

- **Providing Accessible and Affordable Training:** Ensure that training programs are accessible to all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic background. This can be done by providing scholarships, subsidies, or online learning platforms that are affordable and flexible.

- **Delivering High-Quality Training**: Ensure that the training programs are delivered by qualified instructors or trainers who have relevant expertise in the subject area. The training should be practical, hands-on, and offer real-world examples and scenarios.

- **Monitoring and Evaluating Training Effectiveness:** Regularly monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the training programs to ensure that they are meeting the intended outcomes. This can be done through surveys, assessments, and feedback from participants.

❖ RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT ALIGNED TO THE BASIC EDUCATION AS THE ROOT OF THE VALUE CHAIN

- As per figures 11a and 11b below, the ten leading skills identified by the World Economic Forum (WEF), which were required in 2023 include analytical thinking, creative thinking, agility, self-awareness, curiosity and technological literacy amongst others other skills. These skills are developed at foundational level at various Department of Basic Education grades. Foundational skills in language literacy, mathematical literacy, and basic computer (technological) literacy are introduced, developed, and nurtured to entrench a sound foundation. Such as displayed in figure 10 above, the W&R SETA should also manage efforts and resources to promote future skills development at the basic education level to make the education ecosystem more effective and efficient at all levels.

- Analytical skills could be developed in the study of mathematics and the study language development and articulation. Creative skills could be developed in the study of coding and robotics, physical sciences and self-awareness skills could be developed in the study of life sciences and life orientation.

At the Basic Education level, efforts and resources from the W&R SETA and other SETAs will be required to develop the following skills:

- **Critical Thinking and Problem Solving:** This skill is essential for students to develop their ability to analyse, evaluate, and solve problems. It teaches them to think logically, consider multiple perspectives, and make informed decisions.

- **Communication Skills:** Effective communication is crucial in today's interconnected world. Students should be trained in both verbal and written communication to express themselves clearly and confidently. This includes skills like public speaking, presentations, writing, and active listening.

- **Digital Literacy:** With the increasing use of technology in almost every aspect of life, it is essential for students to be proficient in using digital tools and platforms. They need to be able to navigate the internet safely, evaluate the reliability of online information, and use various software applications.

- **Collaboration and Teamwork:** In the professional world, collaborative skills are highly valued. Students should be encouraged to work in teams, learn how to cooperate, share responsibilities, and resolve conflicts. This will help them develop their social and interpersonal skills.

- **Creativity and Innovation:** As the world becomes more complex, students need to develop their creative thinking abilities. They should be encouraged to think outside the box, come up with innovative solutions, and apply their knowledge in new and unexpected ways.

- **Emotional Intelligence:** Emotional intelligence involves understanding and managing one's own emotions, as well as recognizing and empathizing with the emotions of others. It helps students develop skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, empathy, and social skills.

- **Cultural Competency:** In today's diverse society, students need to develop cultural competency. They should be aware of and appreciative of different cultures, beliefs, and traditions. This skill promotes tolerance, respect for others, and global understanding.

- **Financial Literacy:** It is important for students to acquire knowledge and skills related to money management, budgeting, saving, and investing. This will help them make informed financial decisions in their personal and professional lives.

- **Lifelong Learning:** As the world is constantly evolving, students need to develop a love for learning and adaptability. They should be taught how to learn independently, set goals, and seek knowledge beyond the classroom.

- **Ethics and Responsible Citizenship:** It is crucial for students to understand ethical principles, develop a sense of social responsibility, and become active, informed citizens. They should be taught about values such as integrity, honesty, and respect for others.

These programmes should be aligned to skills for the future in an interactive manner towards economic engagement. Funding should be made available for the preparation of a relevant curriculum, educator upskilling and reskilling to meet the skills of the future. The curriculum, teaching and learning must evolve as per the skills set required by the economy. Figures 50 and 51 illustrates the tertiary education as the conduit to industry.

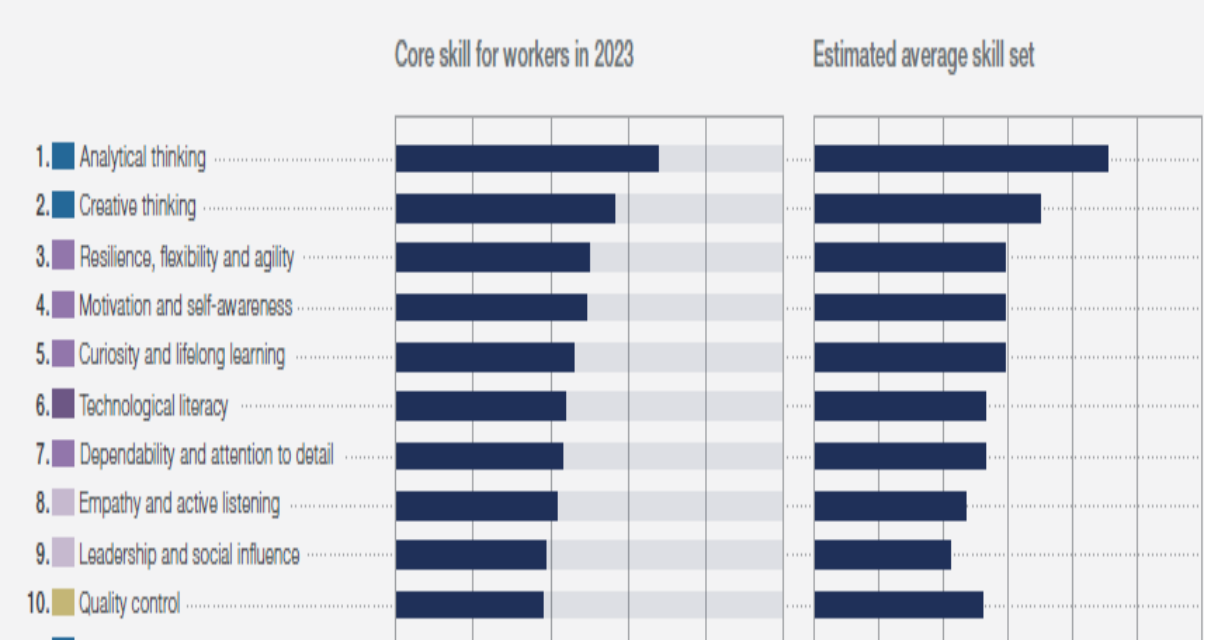


Figure 50: Tertiary education as the conduit to industry

The skills gained at basic education are subsequently harnessed, honed and further developed at tertiary level. Therefore, figures 50 above and 51 below highlight the importance of a multi-layered approach of skills developed as more deep lining, higher order and application skills, which have to be developed. However, the W&R SETA, particularly, and the SETAs in general will have manage efforts and resources to promote skills like:

- Systems thinking, artificial intelligence, understanding big data, design and user experience, multilingualism and programming skills, which can be developed at institutions of higher learning.

- To gain access effectively and successfully to the labour learning programmes, employees have to be linked to internships and work integrated learning, making skills development relevant to industry and seamless absorption.

- Funding models for Tertiary, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and universities has to be linked to bursaries for specific learning skills for the future interventions in consultation with industry.

- Funding agencies, like the SETA's and NSFAS should clinically screen and be selective on what programmes are funded so as to ease the flow to industry and employability.

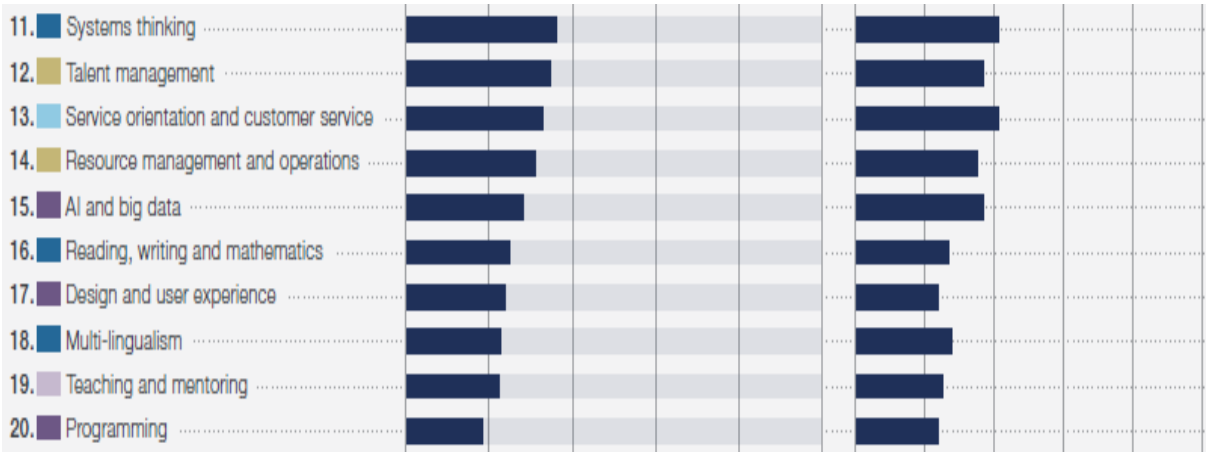


Figure 51: Tertiary education as the conduit to industry

It would be myopic to focus on funding models at tertiary level only as a panacea to addressing skills for the future. There are no quick-fixes as quick-fixes lack sustainability and merely address short-term symptoms. A collaborative, interdisciplinary and a structured response needs to be crafted. Basic education programmes and educators need to be capacitated to delivery accordingly. This further brings to fore the conversation around the value-chain of employability with different layers of education playing a fundamental role in employability. There has to be a distinct link and continued learning pathway from basic education on the skills for the future, grounded in continued and life-long learning as graduation from tertiary learning is not the destination but part of the process of ongoing upskilling to meet evolving technologies.

❖ RECOMMENDATIONS IN TERMS OF DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR FUTURE SKILLS DEVELOPMENT OF EMPLOYED INDIVIDUALS

A critical factor and of concern should be the funding of the cohort of employed individuals who may be at risk of becoming irrelevant due to skill set mismatch impacted by evolving technologies. These employees had contributed to organisational growth and organisations will have a desire to retain their experience and skilling these employees will increase the demand for upskilling and reskilling. Therefore, the funding models should develop a strategy to address the development of skills required and not negate the training and development of employed individuals (as classified by the South African Skills Development Act of 97 of 1998: 18.1 learners). The onus rests on the custodians of skills development promoters and sponsors, like the W & R SETA, to adopt a holistic skill for the future development strategy rather than merely focusing on pre-set skills development. Thus, developing a strategy for skills development of employed individuals should consider the aspects described in Table 8.

Table 14: Aspects for developing a strategy for future skills development of employed individuals

1. Conduct a Skills Gap Analysis: Start by assessing the current skills of the employed individuals and identify any gaps between their existing skills and the skills required for future roles or advancements. This analysis will help to tailor the strategy and prioritize skill development areas.
2. Align with Company Goals: Ensure that the skills development strategy aligns with the organisation's overall objectives and future requirements. This will help to ensure that the skills being developed are relevant and beneficial for both the individual and the company.
3. Offer Continuous Learning Opportunities: Provide various learning resources and opportunities for employees to enhance their skills. This can include workshops, webinars, online courses, mentoring programs, or on-the-job training. Offering a range of options will cater to different learning preferences and levels of expertise.
4. Encourage Personal Development Plans: Support employees in creating individual development plans that align with their career aspirations. This will help them take ownership of their own skills development and identify areas they want to focus on. Regularly review and update these plans to track progress and adapt to changing needs.

5. Foster a Learning Culture: Create an environment that promotes a continuous learning mindset. Encourage knowledge-sharing, collaboration, and feedback among employees. Recognize and reward those who actively engage in skill development and share their knowledge with others.
6. Embrace Emerging Technologies: Stay updated with emerging technologies and potential skill gaps they might create. Provide training and resources to help employees adapt to these new technologies and future-proof their skill set.
7. Collaboration with External Partners: Collaborate with external organisations, such as universities, training providers, or industry associations, to access specialized resources and expertise. This can involve partnerships for specific training programs, guest lectures, or access to research and industry insights.
8. Regularly Evaluate and Measure Progress: Establish metrics and evaluation methods to track the effectiveness of the skills development strategy. Measure the impact on employee performance, engagement, career progression, and overall organisational success. Use this data to refine and improve the strategy as needed.
9. Support Career Advancement Opportunities: Offer opportunities for employees to apply their newly developed skills in challenging assignments and projects. Provide mentorship, sponsorship, or networking opportunities to help them advance their careers internally or externally.
10. Implement Recognition and Rewards: Recognize and reward employees who actively engage in skills development and apply their learnings in their roles. This can be done through performance evaluations, promotions, bonuses, or additional responsibilities.

22. CONCLUSION

This study investigated required future skills necessary to boost the wholesale and retail industry. It highlights the significance of developing and enhancing skills in the wholesale and retail sector in order to keep up with the rapidly changing business landscape. The study emphasises the need for continuous training and upskilling of employees to ensure they have the necessary competencies to thrive in the future. It also suggests strategies for organisations to invest in their workforce and cultivate a culture of learning and innovation to stay competitive in the industry. Ultimately, the study highlights the critical role of skill development in shaping the future of the wholesale and retail sector. A model for managing digital disruption, encouraging innovation, and satisfying future skill requirements in the South African retail industry is proposed in this report, which also support the W&R SETA's present strategic framework on skills development. However, improving and adapting the W&R SETA's strategies in line with the evolving workplace—along with training interventions is highly recommended.

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APPENDIX

Research Instrument

Skills for the future and the retail sector

Dear Colleague

This short questionnaire will take 7-10 minutes to complete, and we value your responses. Kindly answer the questions below. We look forward to your kind responses.

A. Overview

1. Can you briefly describe your position and your role within the organisation?
_____
_____

2. How do you envision the retail sector evolving in the next decade, and what are the implications thereof?
_____
_____

3. In what way is your organisation embracing and adapting to digitalization and innovation?
_____
_____

B. Anticipated Future Skills and Preparation of the workforce

1. What emerging technologies or trends that you think will significantly impact the retail sector, and if so, what are they?

_____
_____

2. What specific skills and competencies do you believe will be most crucial for employees in your company in the coming years?

_____

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3. How is your company currently preparing its workforce for the digital future in terms of skills development and training programs?

_____

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4. In your opinion, what are the most effective methods or strategies for ensuring that professionals in this sector stay ahead in terms of skills acquisition?

_____
_____

5. Digital Transformation and Technology

1. With the ongoing digital transformation, what are the digital literacy and technological skills that employees in the wholesale and retail sector should cultivate?

2. Can you share any initiatives or programs within the sector that are addressing the need for digital and tech-related skills?

_____
_____
_____

C. General

1. In your opinion how is the wholesale and retail sector promoting adaptability and a culture of lifelong learning to help professionals keep pace with changes in the industry?

_____
_____
_____

2. What feedback mechanisms are in place to continuously assess the effectiveness of skills development initiatives within your company and how is this feedback used for improvement?
_____
_____

3. Is there anything else you would like to add or share regarding the future of skills development in the wholesale and retail sector?

_____
_____