

Exploring Social Research Capacity Development through Academic-Industry Collaboration: Viewpoints and Standpoints of the Regional Partner Agencies

Railly C. Mitra, LPT^a

^a raillycanilanzamitra@gmail.com / railly.mitra@hcdc.edu.ph

^aMaster of Arts in Education major in Teaching Social Studies,
Holy Cross of Davao College, Sta. Ana Avenue corner C. De Guzman Street,
Brgy. 14-B, Davao City, 8000, Philippines

Abstract

Limited social research capacity in educational institutions hinders academic-industry collaboration. I explored how academic-industry collaboration contributes to the development of social research capacities among regional partner agencies. I used a descriptive qualitative study design and conducted interviews with eighteen participants selected through purposive sampling. Through thematic analysis, I found out that academic-industry collaboration strengthens workforce competence by developing relevant skills, education, and practical training. I recommend academic institutions reexamine their curricula and integrate industry-based challenges, real-world case studies, and collaborative projects. Use the themes as variables and sub-themes as indicators in a quantitative study based on the findings of my research.

Keywords: Exploring social research capacity development; academic-industry collaboration; viewpoints standpoints of the regional partner agencies

1. Introduction

Educational institutions pose a low social research capacity. This lack of capacity, particularly in qualitative data, has been reported by Hammad and Al-Ani (2021). Similarly, Jonbekova et al. (2020) found that limited social research capabilities within academic institutions hinder their ability to contribute effectively to evidence-based policymaking and collaborative development initiatives.

In Kazakhstan, there is a low social research capacity that informs collaborative development (Jonbekova et al., 2020). In Vietnam, the low social research capacity of educational institutions has been identified through the restricted engagement among stakeholders (Nguyen et al., 2024). In Malaysia, there is a low social research capacity of educational institutions between academia and industry (Azman et al., 2019).

In the Philippines, the Department of Trade and Industry (2023) found that academic institutions and industry face low social research capacity in commercializing academics. In Mindanao, Oracion (2020) found that there is a low social research capacity to inform policy and programming. Similarly, Custodio et al. (2023) identified the need to enhance regional research systems to improve higher education's role in local development.

The low social research capacity in higher education institutions is a pressing concern in the academic landscape (Villarino, 2022). There is a limited locally published studies specifically focusing on social research capacity development through academic-industry collaboration. Thus, there is an urgent need

to explore the problem, as the gap in the literature reflects a broader disconnect between educational institutions and the practical knowledge demands of industry sectors, especially in addressing complex social issues. Therefore, this research is pursued.

1.1. Significance of the Study

The significance of my study lies in its contribution to generating much-needed qualitative data on the state of social research capacity among industry partners in Davao Region XI. By uncovering the strengths and gaps in academic-industry collaboration, I aim to establish a foundational understanding that can guide the development of responsive, skills-aligned curricula tailored to the evolving needs of regional industries. My study may also add depth to the theoretical discourse on localized academic-industry engagement, a critical yet underexplored area in existing research.

Beyond academic relevance, my findings may hold practical value for regional and national policymaking. They may inform strategies to enhance industry research capabilities, support innovation-driven growth, and promote data-informed decision-making across sectors. Ultimately, I envision this study as a stepping stone toward sustainable regional development, where academic institutions and industries work hand-in-hand to cultivate a competent, future-ready workforce. In line with Sustainable Development Goal 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), my work underscores the importance of resilient partnerships, inclusive industrialization, and innovation as drivers of long-term economic vitality in the region.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

I aimed to explore how academic-industry collaboration contributes to the development of social research capacities among regional partner agencies by enhancing workforce competence through skills, education, and training grounded in real-world industry needs. To guide this exploration, I addressed the following specific research questions:

1. What specific skills did you develop through academic-industry collaboration?
2. What aspects of your educational experience influenced your ability to meet industry needs?
3. What training did you receive that prepared you for real-world industry challenges?

1.3. Assumptions

In conducting my study, I assumed that the regional industry partners involved recognized the critical importance of strengthening social research capacities as a means to contribute to regional economic development. I also assumed that the data gathered from participants would accurately reflect their current research skills, strengths, and capacity gaps within the context of academic-industry collaboration. Additionally, I presumed that the insights drawn from the study would be sufficient to inform the development of a curriculum centered on social research and workforce alignment with industry needs. Most importantly, guided by the Theory of Human Capital, I believe that when academic-industry partnerships are approached with intention and innovation, they hold the potential to effectively address these gaps through responsive and collaborative strategies.

1.4. Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored in the Theory of Human Capital. Such theory puts forth that the productivity factor of a person can increase with imparting skills, education, training, and gaining of knowledge. The critics of the theory argue that the theory is flawed and overly simplistic. But the significance of Human Capital cannot be overlooked in modern economics and with that in mind, we will jump into studying Human Capital Theory. (Agarwal, 2022).

Paradigm

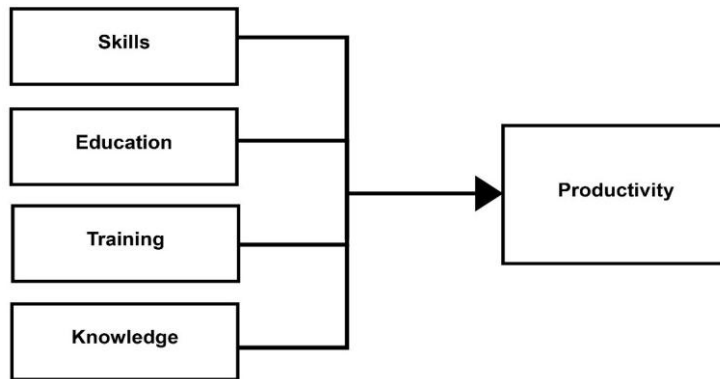


Figure 1: Paradigm of the study through Human Capital Theory by Agarwal 2022

The paradigm of this study is rooted in Human Capital Theory, emphasizing that an individual's productivity is significantly influenced by four core components: skills, education, training and knowledge. As illustrated in Figure 1, these elements serve as inputs in the development of human capital, which subsequently enhances an individual's capacity to contribute productively to the workforce and society. Skills development equips individuals with practical abilities essential for addressing real-world challenges in dynamic industries (Tan, 2014). Education builds foundational knowledge and cognitive competencies that support lifelong learning and innovation (Becker, 1993). Training provides individuals with job-specific expertise and adaptability necessary for sustained workforce performance (Schultz, 1961). Knowledge, as the cumulative result of learning and experience, strengthens critical thinking and informed decision-making, which is vital in knowledge-driven economies (Almendarez, 2011).

2. Method

2.1. Research Design

In conducting my study, I employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the dynamics of social research capacity development through an academic-industry collaboration involving social and regional partners in Davao Region XI. Descriptive qualitative research focuses on presenting a comprehensive summary of specific events experienced by individuals or groups in their natural context (Colorafi & Evans,

2023). I deliberately chose this approach since it enabled me to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the perspectives of the key regional industry partners involved in enhancing social research capabilities.

2.2. Locale of the Study

I conducted my study in Davao City, a dynamic economic and educational hub in the southern Philippines. This locale was chosen since it hosts several partner agencies and a key academic institution actively involved in regional educational development and industry collaboration. The diverse economic landscape provided an ideal context for examining how academic-industry partnerships shape social research capacities. Focusing on this regional setting allowed me to capture the unique interactions, opportunities, and challenges experienced by local stakeholders in advancing research efforts that respond to the specific needs of their community.

2.3. Sample and Sampling

For this study, I purposefully selected 18 professionals from various industry sectors, ensuring that each participant had direct experience with collaborative efforts related to research, skills development, and workforce alignment. To capture both current industry needs and the evolving gaps in research capacities, I included participants with varying lengths of professional experience, from early-career individuals to those with over 20 years in the field. This diversity provided a rich range of viewpoints that helped deepen my understanding of the region's capacity landscape and informed the design of more responsive, research-centered academic strategies.

2.4. Interview Guide Questions

In my research, I employed a semi-structured interview guide to gather in-depth insights into the development of social research capacities through academic-industry collaboration among regional industry partners. The focus was on identifying relevant skills, training, and educational experiences gained through this collaboration. These were the questions:

1. Can you provide specific examples of problems in your industry that research could help solve, and explain how these challenges have impacted your business operations or growth?
2. What areas of your industry do you feel are not well understood by academic institutions, and how can academic programs be designed to provide more practical and applicable solutions?
3. What technical or soft skills do fresh graduates struggle with in your industry, and what industry-specific programs or training would you suggest to make them more job-ready?

2.5. Data Gathering Technique

To gather comprehensive data for my study on developing social research capacity, I employed in-depth interviews conducted through Google Forms to capture the dynamics of academic-industry collaboration. First, I sought formal approval from the Head of the Research Office at Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC) to commence the data collection process. Simultaneously, I secured ethical clearance from the SMILE Research Ethics Committee at HCDC to ensure that all ethical protocols were strictly followed throughout the course of the study. After receiving the necessary approvals, I proceeded with purposive

sampling. I selected 18 participants from local industry professionals who had relevant experience with social research collaboration efforts.

Following participant selection, I distributed informed consent letters outlining the study's purpose, procedures, and participants' rights, including voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time without penalty. The consent form also included a section where participants could affirm their willingness to proceed with the interview via Google Forms. Only those who signed the consent form were included in the formal data-gathering phase.

Once consent was obtained, I initiated the data collection by conducting in-depth interviews through Google Forms. This approach allowed participants from regional industry partners in Davao Region 11. To provide thoughtful, reflective responses at their convenience. The interview questions were carefully designed to focus on their personal experiences, challenges, and successes related to participating in research projects and collaborative activities. Using an online format gave participants the flexibility to respond deeply without the constraints of a scheduled in-person interview, resulting in richer and more meaningful data.

To protect participants' confidentiality, I assigned each response a code name in the form of numbers (e.g., P1, P2, P3) and pseudonyms, ensuring that no personally identifiable information was disclosed. By employing this careful and ethical approach, I was able to gather detailed insights into the state of social research capacity in the industry of Davao Region 11. Ultimately, the data collected guided recommendations for strengthening academic-industry collaborations and building robust, research-driven strategies for regional development.

2.6. Data Analysis

To deepen my understanding of my data, I then proceeded to analyze the responses through a thematic analysis to identify key patterns, challenges, opportunities, and strategies highlighted by participants. This process focused on understanding how these themes revealed both the strengths and gaps in the current collaborations between academic institutions and regional industry partners in Davao Region 11. Through iterative comparison and reflection, I extracted themes that directly answered my research questions. By employing a structured and rigorous approach, I aimed to produce reliable conclusions and actionable recommendations to enhance social research capacities in Davao Region 11.

2.7. Trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in qualitative study was essential to ensure the credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability of my findings (Nowell et al., 2023).

Credibility. It refers to the confidence in the truth and accuracy of the data as represented in the study, ensuring that the findings genuinely reflect participants lived experiences (Noble & Heale, 2022). I ensured this by engaging closely with the data and validating participant insights throughout the research. As a token of appreciation, participants who completed the interviews received a stipend of two hundred pesos (₱200.00), which was disclosed to promote transparency and ethical participation.

Transferability. This involves the extent to which research findings can be applied to other contexts or groups (Saunders et al., 2022). I provided detailed descriptions of the setting and participants so others may determine the relevance to their own context.

Dependability. It emphasizes the consistency and reliability of the research process across time and conditions (Lincoln et al., 2023). I addressed this by documenting each step of my process clearly and systematically.

Confirmability. It refers to the degree to which the results of a qualitative study are shaped by the participants and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Dossa & Chowdhury, 2023). In my own words, this means ensuring that the voices of my participants, not my assumptions, guided the direction and conclusions of my study. An audit trail is a transparent and systematic documentation of the research process that helps establish confirmability by allowing others to verify how findings were derived (Zhou & Creswell, 2023). To support this, I used an audit trail to record my data collection, coding decisions, and analytical reflections throughout the study.

3. Results

In this chapter, I presented the results of my study, beginning with the modified paradigm that illustrates how the major results are connected. I then explored the themes and sub-themes in greater detail. I outlined the following: (1) enhancing workforce competence through industry-aligned skills development, (2) strengthening academic foundations to meet evolving industry demands, and (3) building practical competencies through immersive industry training. The flow of the presentation highlights the three major components drawn from my theory of human capital: skills, education, and training.

In my modified paradigm, building upon the Human Capital Theory by Agarwal (2022), I emphasized the evolving interplay of skills, education, training, and knowledge no longer appeared in my results; from my findings, I identified three key themes: (1) enhancing workforce competence through industry-aligned skills development with sub-themes of technical skills development, communication and interpersonal skills, and problem-solving and critical thinking abilities; (2) strengthening academic foundations to meet evolving industry demands with the sub-themes of curriculum relevance to industry needs, research-based learning experiences, and the development of foundational knowledge and innovation; and (3) building practical competencies through immersive industry training with the sub-themes of hands-on industry training programs, adaptability and workforce readiness, and mentorship and on-the-job learning.

The modified paradigm illustrating these finding is presented below:

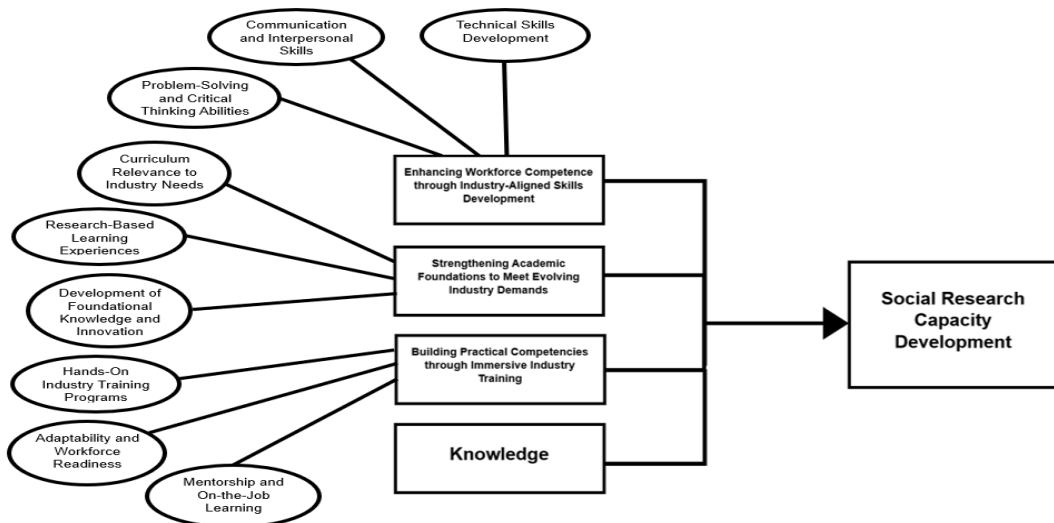


Figure 2: Thematic Analysis Results through the Lens of Human Capital Theory by Agarwal (2022)

Enhancing Workforce Competence through Industry-Aligned Skills Development

When I think about the process of developing workforce competence, like a seed that needs sunlight and rain to grow, I found that bridging the gap between school and industry is what helped learners bloom into professionals. Academic knowledge was the soil, but it was the hands-on experiences and the industry touch that truly nurtured real growth. I witnessed how these collaborations did not just sharpen tools; they built confidence, opened doors, and created a sense of purpose. There was transformation, not only in what the professionals knew but in how they saw themselves. I had identified three (3) key sub-themes: technical skills development, communication and interpersonal abilities, and problem-solving and critical thinking abilities.

On Technical Skills Development. In my research, technical skills felt like the compass that gave professionals direction in a world filled with complex maps. Many of them started unsure, but gradually, they learned to navigate software and systems like captains steering through fog. The industry did not just train their hands. It lit up their sense of ability and worth. As Alex shared:

"In school, we learned the basic IT concepts, but when I started working, I had no idea how to use the actual systems. I had to learn ticketing tools and remote troubleshooting on the job. It would have helped if we had used real software during college." – IDI, ALEX, R1.

His experience brought me back to the early days of my own career, where I faced similar challenges. In college, I learned the theory behind the tools and systems I would eventually use, but when it came to real-world application, I was unprepared. I remember feeling lost trying to navigate through actual systems, much like Alex described, and having to learn through trial and error. It was a steep learning curve, and I found that no amount of theoretical knowledge could truly prepare me for the hands-on tasks I encountered. If I had worked with real tools or software during my studies, it would have made the transition much smoother and less overwhelming. This experience taught me how important it is to bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical application. Similarly, Carlo captured this transformation:

"We had lessons in Excel, but not the kind that I need now. I use formulas, dashboards, and forecasting tools every day, and I didn't learn those in school. If we were trained on these real tasks, I wouldn't have struggled so much at the start." – IDI, CARLO, R1.

Carlo's experience really resonated with me because I, too, found myself in a similar position. In my early career, I had learned the basics of Excel in school, but when I entered the workforce, I quickly realized that the tools I needed were far more advanced. I remember struggling to grasp the more complex functions, like formulas and data analysis tools, that were crucial to my role. If I had been trained on these practical tasks during my studies, the learning curve would have been much less steep, and I would have felt more confident from the start. It became clear to me that education must evolve alongside the tools and skills needed in today's workplace to ensure smoother transitions and more effective learning. Jasmine's experience also reflected this important shift:

"Most of our training focused on speaking, but my job is mostly typing and using different systems at once. I wasn't ready for that kind of multitasking. We needed more practice with real tools and actual work setups before graduating." – IDI, JASMINE, R1.

Jasmine's insight brought me back to my early career, where I, too, found myself unprepared for the multitasking demands of the job. While much of our training focused on speaking and theoretical knowledge,

my work quickly required a different set of skills: typing quickly, managing multiple systems at once, and staying organized under pressure. I remember the initial struggle to balance it all, wishing I had been given more hands-on practice with the tools and systems I would actually use. If schools had provided more opportunities to work with real-world setups before graduation, it would have helped me transition more smoothly and perform with greater ease from the very start. Karen offered a similar perspective:

"I thought I was ready because I finished all my IT subjects, but when I got hired, I couldn't keep up with the systems we were using. Everything was fast-paced and full of shortcuts and tools I never saw before. If we had real system training in college, it would've made my first months a lot easier." – IDI, KAREN, R1.

Her experience reminded me so much of my first months on the job when I realized that completing my IT subjects had not fully prepared me for the actual pace and complexity of the workplace. I remember feeling overwhelmed by unfamiliar tools, endless shortcuts, and systems that operated much faster than anything I'd practiced in school. It felt like being tossed into a race without ever having trained on the real track. If only we had been exposed to real system environments during college, I believe the transition would have been far less jarring and I would've stepped in with more confidence and readiness.

On Communication and Interpersonal Skills. When I think about the journey of developing communication and interpersonal skills, it feels like learning to play a beautiful piece of music, each word, each gesture, carefully tuned to create harmony with others. In my study, I realized that technical skills might open doors, but it is communication that invites others in and builds the relationships needed to succeed. Just like a bridge connecting two distant shores, strong communication links people, ideas, and possibilities into something far greater than what could ever be achieved alone. Mia put it into perspective when she said:

"We had speech classes in college, but they didn't prepare me for real conversations with angry or emotional customers. It's different when you're on the phone and someone is shouting. I wish we had role-plays based on real situations to practice handling that." – IDI, MIA, R1.

Mia's words brought me back to those nerve-racking first calls I handled when no speech class could have prepared me for the raw emotion of a frustrated customer on the other end of the line. I remember freezing the first time someone raised their voice, unsure of how to respond without sounding defensive or dismissive. It was in those moments that I realized real communication is not just about pronunciation or grammar; it is about empathy, control, and quick thinking under pressure. If we had practiced real-life role-plays in school, I would have felt more equipped to handle those emotionally charged moments with calm and confidence. Sophie's experience echoed this realization:

"I knew how to speak English, but I didn't know how to stay calm and polite under pressure. The calls can be stressful, and I struggled at first. We needed more training on soft skills like empathy and active listening." – IDI, SOPHIE, R1.

"I knew how to speak English, but I didn't know how to stay calm and polite under pressure." These words echo a truth I had to learn the hard way. I thought fluency was enough until I found myself flustered in heated conversations, scrambling not just for words but for the right tone, the right pause, and the right response. The stress of real-time interaction tested more than my language skills; it tested my patience, my emotional balance, and my ability to listen deeply. If we had been trained to practice empathy and active listening as much as grammar and vocabulary, I believe I would have felt more prepared to face those intense

moments. It is those soft skills, often overlooked, that make the hardest conversations manageable. Lara further illustrated this point:

"Writing professional emails is different from writing essays in school. In my job, we need to be fast, clear, and polite all the time. I hope schools teach more practical writing styles that match how we actually communicate at work." – IDI, LARA, R1.

I clearly remember the confusion I felt during my early days as a teacher, trying to compose professional emails that did not sound like school essays. "Writing professional emails is different from writing essays in school," those words perfectly capture the gap I had to bridge. The shift from academic writing to clear, concise, and respectful communication with parents, colleagues, and school administrators was a learning curve I had not expected. I had to quickly adapt, realizing that professionalism in writing was not just about correctness but about tone, purpose, and efficiency. That experience made me wish our college training had included more practical writing lessons that truly reflect the communication style needed in real-world professions like teaching. Similarly, Bianca's story resonated with that:

"I noticed that new hires can speak well, but they don't know how to work with a team or resolve conflicts. Communication is not just talking; it's also about understanding others. That's something I only learned after being in the job for a while." – IDI, BIANCA, R1.

I saw this truth unfold during my first months in the teaching profession when collaboration was not just encouraged; it was necessary. "I noticed that new hires can speak well, but they don't know how to work with a team or resolve conflicts," this insight mirrors what I experienced firsthand. It became clear that effective communication goes far beyond speaking clearly; it is about listening with empathy, managing emotions, and building harmony in the midst of differing opinions. These were not lessons I fully grasped in school but ones I learned through difficult conversations in faculty rooms and team meetings. Looking back, I believe that if our training had focused more on interpersonal dynamics and real-life teamwork, we would have stepped into our roles with greater confidence and clarity. Grace also reflected on this profound change:

"A lot of applicants speak English, but they lack confidence and people skills. These things are important when dealing with clients or interviews. If students had more exposure to real interactions, they'd be more confident facing people." – IDI, GRACE, R1.

In my early days as a teacher, I saw how knowing the right words was not enough when I had to stand in front of a class or speak during meetings. "A lot of applicants speak English, but they lack confidence and people skills," this echoed the silent battles I faced when I was just starting out. Despite being equipped with grammar and vocabulary, I often found myself stumbling in moments that called for poise, presence, and connection. It was only through repeated exposure to real interactions, parent-teacher conferences, student consultations, and collaborative planning that I gradually built the confidence I now carry. I have come to realize that education must stretch beyond the four corners of language instruction; it must help students discover their voice and use it with assurance in the real world.

On Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Abilities. As I delved deeper into my study, I realized that problem-solving and critical thinking were less like skills you simply learn and more like muscles you stretch and strengthen through repeated trial and error. It felt like being handed a toolkit without instructions and learning, through patience and grit, how each tool could fix, create, or transform when used thoughtfully. In the real-world arena, survival did not come from memorization but from daring to assess, adapt, and act wisely in the face of constant pressure and change. As Ella shared:

"In school, we answered written problems with fixed answers. But at work, every customer issue is different. I had to learn how to think fast and find solutions on my own, which we didn't really practice in college." – IDI, ELLA, R1.

Back when I was preparing to become a teacher, I remember how much of our training focused on structured lesson plans and scripted responses. But stepping into the actual classroom, I quickly learned that real-life situations rarely followed a fixed pattern. Every student had a different need, every class dynamic was unpredictable, and I had to think on my feet, adjusting in real-time. That kind of flexibility and independent problem-solving was not something I mastered in college; it was something I had to build through experience. Looking back, I see how important it is for education to include training that mirrors the unpredictability of real-world challenges. Angela similarly captured this transformation:

"I was used to following instructions in school, but in the BPO, I had to make quick decisions when scripts didn't work. There were times I froze because I wasn't trained to think on the spot. More real-life case studies in college would've helped." – IDI, ANGELA, R1.

During my early teaching days, I realized that simply following a lesson plan was not always enough. As Angela shared, *"I was used to following instructions in school, but in the BPO, I had to make quick decisions when scripts didn't work."* That struck a chord with me. There were countless times I had to quickly adjust my approach when a classroom activity failed or when a student's reaction caught me off guard. It taught me that effective teaching and any professional role really require more than just preparation; it calls for the ability to think critically and respond confidently in real-time. I often wished our college training had included more case-based scenarios to help us build that kind of quick, adaptive thinking. Leo's experience deepened this understanding:

"Customers often ask questions we weren't trained to answer. I had to figure things out by myself, searching through resources while chatting. It made me realize we didn't practice enough independent thinking in school." – IDI, LEO, R1.

His reflection reminded me of my early days as a teacher, where I often found myself facing questions or situations that textbooks had not prepared me for. Just like him, I had to rely on my resourcefulness, searching for answers at the moment, learning to think on my feet and adapt quickly. It was in those moments when I had to dig deep for a solution that I realized how crucial independent thinking is in the real world. In college, we often practiced theoretical responses, but the real challenge comes when you're thrust into the unknown with no script to follow. If only we had more opportunities to practice this kind of independent problem-solving in our training, I believe we would have been better equipped to handle the unpredictability of real-life situations. Ethan's reflection added yet another dimension to this realization:

"Every case I handle needs a different approach. You can't just apply the same solution every time. I wish we had more situational exercises in college to help us learn how to analyse and adapt." – IDI, ETHAN, R1.

This statement brought me back to my own experiences as a teacher, where I quickly realized that each student, each lesson, required a different approach. No matter how much I prepared, I had to be ready to adapt, adjusting my methods to the needs of the moment. Just as in the classroom, every challenge in the workplace requires critical thinking and flexibility. In college, we were often taught fixed approaches to problems, but real-life situations demand a higher level of adaptability. If we had more situational exercises or opportunities to practice handling diverse scenarios, it would have better equipped us for the unexpected

challenges that come with any profession. Hanna, too, highlighted this intricate process:

"As a QA, I need to understand why problems happen and how to prevent them. That means looking deeper, not just following rules. I didn't develop that kind of thinking in college; it all came after I started working." – IDI, HANNA, R1.

This reflection made me think of my own journey as a teacher, where I was often expected to follow certain teaching methods or lesson plans without questioning their effectiveness. It was not until I was in the classroom, facing real-time challenges with students, that I began to realize the importance of deeper reflection and understanding the "why" behind my teaching strategies. Much like a QA professional, I had to go beyond the surface level, constantly evaluating what was working and what was not. The college had prepared me with foundational knowledge, but the true depth of critical thinking and problem-solving came only when I was able to apply those concepts in real-world situations. The skill of digging deeper to understand the root causes of issues is something that grows through experience and reflection, not simply by following a set of rules. Daniel further illuminated this evolution:

"Billing issues can be complicated, and clients don't always explain clearly. I had to learn how to ask the right questions and connect the dots. These are things I only picked up on the job, not in school." – IDI, DANIEL, R1.

His insight took me back to my early days of teaching when I found myself navigating complex student concerns that did not have clear-cut solutions. In the classroom, much like in billing, I had to learn how to ask the right questions, dig deeper into what my students were really struggling with, and then figure out how to connect the dots between their needs and the lessons I was teaching. It was not something I could have learned in a textbook or classroom environment; it was only by engaging directly with the students and their unique challenges that I truly developed the skills to adapt and find solutions. Just as Daniel mentioned, real learning happens when you face the complexities of the job firsthand, forcing you to think critically and creatively in order to solve problems.

Strengthening Academic Foundations to Meet Evolving Industry Demands

I have come to realize that the classroom is not just a place for lectures; it is a starting line where the race to meet the industry's changing rhythm begins. In my study, I saw how education, when tuned to real-world needs, becomes more than theory; it becomes a toolbox for survival and success. It felt like professionals were not just filling their minds; they were forging something sharper, something that cuts through the fog of workplace uncertainty. Their stories made me reflect deeply on how the right kind of academic preparation plants seeds that bloom later in boardrooms and fieldwork. I had identified three (3) key sub-themes: curriculum relevance to industry needs, research-based learning experiences, and the development of foundational knowledge and innovation.

On Curriculum Relevance to Industry Needs. Building a strong academic foundation felt like preparing the soil before the storm, fortifying it to endure not just gentle rain but unpredictable floods and droughts. Through my study, it became clear that solid fundamentals served as anchors, keeping them grounded even as industries shifted tides. Strength was not just in what we knew but in how deeply our roots ran. This was vividly captured when Alex reflected:

"What we studied in school was too general. It didn't match the actual tasks we do in the BPO. If the subjects were more aligned with the real job, we wouldn't have to struggle so

much during training." – IDI, ALEX, R2.

This statement resonates deeply with my own experience as a teacher. I remember how, early on, I felt that the content I had studied in school did not always directly connect to the practical realities of the classroom. Just as Alex shared, there were moments when what I had learned in theory did not quite align with the actual challenges I faced with my students. It became clear to me that education needs to be grounded in real-world applications. If what we taught and learned in school reflected the realities of the job, just like Alex suggested, we would not struggle as much when transitioning into our roles, and we would be more confident in applying our knowledge effectively. A similar realization was shared by Carlo:

"I learned theories about communication, but I never used them directly at work. What I really needed was training on reports, tools, and actual processes. The school should update the curriculum to reflect what industries really require." – IDI, CARLO, R2.

I can relate to this, especially during my early years as a teacher. While I had learned various educational theories, I found myself not immediately applying them in real classroom settings. Instead, I needed more practical skills, like managing student data, using educational tools, and understanding real-world classroom processes. Much like Carlo's experience, I realized that what we learned in school was not always enough to prepare us for the immediate demands of the job. Education must adapt, reflecting the current needs and challenges of the workplace. When schools align their curricula with the practical realities of the profession, it allows future educators to transition more smoothly and confidently into their roles. Mark's experience further brought this to life:

"Some subjects felt outdated. We were studying old concepts, but the job uses modern tools and fast processes. I think schools need to work with companies to make sure what they teach still applies today." – IDI, MARK, R2.

I can understand his frustration, as it reminds me of how my own training as a teacher sometimes felt disconnected from the real-world challenges I faced in the classroom. While the foundational theories were important, they often did not reflect the evolving educational technologies or the fast-paced nature of modern teaching. I began to realize that it was not enough to know the theories and concepts; I also needed practical experience with the tools that were actually being used in schools today. Mark's point about schools partnering with companies to ensure up-to-date training is crucial, as it ensures that students are equipped with the most relevant skills for their future careers.

On Research-Based Learning Experiences. Research experiences emerged in my study like lanterns carried into the fog, lighting the way through unknown territory. They taught professionals not just to walk paths laid by others but to carve new ones, questioning and discovering as they moved. Research became a mindset of curiosity and resilience, preparing them for the winding roads ahead. Ella beautifully conveyed this when she noted:

"In school, we did some research projects, but they weren't connected to real industry challenges. If we had done research based on actual problems faced by companies, we would have learned how to solve real-world issues better." – IDI, ELLA, R2.

Her reflection resonates deeply with me, especially in my own teaching experiences, where I had to bridge the gap between theory and real-world application. While research projects were a regular part of our curriculum, I often felt that the challenges we tackled were abstract and disconnected from the real issues that

professionals face every day. I, too, realized the immense value of aligning academic exercises with practical, industry-based problems. If our education had mirrored the real-world scenarios students would encounter, we could have learned to think critically and solve problems with tangible impact, preparing us for the complexities of our future careers. Angela's journey reinforced this realization:

"Our research assignments were more about theory than application. We rarely got to explore real business cases or data that companies actually use. If schools had partnered with industries for research, it would've given us more insight into what we would face on the job."

– IDI, ANGELA, R2.

Her perspective brings me back to my own experiences with academic research, where theory often seemed to outpace the practical application, I would later encounter in my career. In my own preparation as an educator, I found that while I was taught many foundational concepts, the connection to real-world issues was sometimes too abstract. Just as Angela suggests, if schools had collaborated with industries, providing access to real data and business cases, it would have offered a clearer insight into the challenges we would face in our professional roles. Such partnerships could have equipped us with the skills to navigate the complexities of the job market, allowing us to bridge the gap between what we learned in school and what we were actually expected to do on the job. Jasmine's experience echoed this deeper transformation:

"The research we did in school felt disconnected from the work I do now. It would have been so much better if we could have tackled industry-based research, where we could study how businesses actually solve problems in real-time." – IDI, JASMINE, R2.

This reflection reminds me of my own academic journey, where the research I engaged in felt somewhat disconnected from the practical applications I now face as a teacher. In the classroom, we often studied theories and concepts, but the direct connection to real-world challenges was not always clear. If, as Jasmine mentions, we had been exposed to industry-based research or real-time problem-solving scenarios, it would have made the transition into professional settings smoother. Tackling such challenges during our studies would have given us not only the theoretical foundation but also the hands-on experience to face the complexities of the workplace with greater confidence.

On Development of Foundational Knowledge and Innovation. Foundational knowledge in my study was not a rigid structure but more like a springboard, solid enough to support weight but flexible enough to launch dreams into the unknown. True education seemed to nourish both the roots of understanding and the wings of creativity. Without innovation, knowledge remained caged; with it, knowledge took flight. Lara captured this spirit when she reflected:

"We were taught the basics, but we didn't really learn how to innovate or improve processes. In my job, we often have to come up with new ways to handle tasks. If school had encouraged more creative thinking and problem-solving, I would have felt more ready to contribute from the start." – IDI, LARA, R2.

This statement brings to mind my own experience as an educator, where I, too, learned foundational concepts but was rarely pushed to think creatively or innovate. While the basics are essential, I often found myself in situations where I had to come up with new solutions on the spot, whether in teaching methods or in solving classroom challenges. Had there been more emphasis on encouraging creative thinking and problem-solving during my training, I would have felt better equipped to adapt and contribute from the very beginning. Innovation is about moving beyond what is taught and finding new ways to apply knowledge, and this kind of

mindset is something that can truly shape how we approach professional roles. Hanna's experience also gave weight to this realization:

"We learned foundational concepts, but no one really challenged us to think outside the box or find better ways to do things. Now in my role, I'm constantly looking for ways to improve team performance, but I didn't get that mindset in school." – IDI, HANNA, R2.

Reflecting on my own educational experience, I can relate to the gap between foundational knowledge and the ability to think critically about improving processes. Like Hanna, I was taught the essentials, but there was little focus on challenging the norms or finding creative solutions. Now, in my role as a teacher, I am often faced with the challenge of improving team dynamics and student engagement, and I realize how much more effective I could have been had I been encouraged to think outside the box during my training. Developing a mindset that pushes boundaries is not just about learning the basics; it is about having the freedom and encouragement to question, adapt, and improve. Leo's reflection brought this full circle:

"The knowledge we gained was solid, but it wasn't focused on pushing boundaries or finding innovative solutions. More emphasis on critical thinking and applying knowledge to solve real problems would have helped me feel more confident in my role when I started." – IDI, LEO, R2.

I understand the importance of not just gaining solid knowledge but also developing the ability to think critically and solve real-world problems. Like Leo, I was taught foundational concepts, but it was not until I started working that I realized how essential it is to apply that knowledge in innovative ways. If more emphasis had been placed on critical thinking and problem-solving during my studies, I would have entered my profession with greater confidence and a clearer understanding of how to handle the complexities that came with it. It is not just about what we learn but about learning how to use that knowledge to create meaningful solutions.

Building Practical Competencies through Immersive Industry Training

Industry training felt like learning to swim in real waters after practicing in a pool. In the structured chaos of the workplace, I saw how knowledge turned into action and how pressure bred precision. There was a different kind of growth that only came from being exposed to deadlines, deliverables, and dynamic teams. No textbook could have taught me how to navigate the unpredictability of real-life operations. This section explores the three key sub-themes: hands-on industry training programs, adaptability and workforce readiness, and mentorship and on-the-job learning. I had identified three (3) key sub-themes: hands-on industry training programs, adaptability and workforce readiness, and mentorship and on-the-job learning.

On Hands-On Industry Training Programs. Developing competencies through immersive training felt like learning to swim not in calm pools but in rivers with strong currents. In my study, professionals who faced real-world challenges early were able to build muscles of resilience and quick thinking that no classroom could replicate. It was through navigating those rougher waters that true confidence emerged, preparing them for storms they had yet to see. In the words of Alex:

"I wish we had more hands-on training while we were in school. The real experience, like taking live calls or using real systems, was something I only got once I started working. More practical exposure would have made a huge difference." – IDI, ALEX, R3.

Looking back, I can relate to Alex's sentiment about the lack of hands-on training during school. While I gained theoretical knowledge, it was not until I entered the workforce that I truly understood the power of real-world experience. The practical skills, such as using live systems or handling real calls, were things I only learned on the job. Had I been given more opportunities for practical exposure in school; I would have felt much more prepared for the challenges that awaited me. It is clear to me now that real experience is not just a supplement; it is an essential part of learning. As Leo recounted:

"College was all about theories and concepts. When I started in the BPO, I had no idea how to handle real customer issues or use the software. If we had some hands-on training with the tools we use in the industry, it would've been a smoother transition." – IDI, LEO, R3.

I can deeply resonate with his experience of transitioning from theory-heavy college lessons to the fast-paced, hands-on demands of the BPO industry. In school, we were often immersed in theories and concepts, but the practical skills we needed, like using specific software or solving real customer problems, were not part of the curriculum. When I first started working, I, too, found myself scrambling to adapt to the real tools and systems that were critical to the job. If we had received more hands-on training during college, it would have made the shift much smoother and less overwhelming. This experience highlighted for me how essential it is to balance theory with practice to prepare for the complexities of the workplace. Similarly, Jasmine reflected:

"We did internships, but they didn't really teach us how the industry works day-to-day. More hands-on training in actual office environments, where we could practice what we learned, would have prepared us better for the job." – IDI, JASMINE, R3.

Her reflection on internships strikes a chord with me, as I, too, recall how my own internship experiences often left me disconnected from the true rhythm of the industry. While internships offered exposure, they didn't fully immerse us in the day-to-day operations or give us the chance to apply our learning in real-world settings. I now realize that what was missing was more practical, hands-on training in actual office environments, where we could engage with the tasks and systems that we would later use in our jobs. Had I experienced that level of training, I would have felt much better prepared for the demands and expectations of the workplace. Angela likewise noted:

"I learned a lot in school, but until I was actually working with a team and handling real cases, I didn't know what to expect. More immersive training during our courses, working with real-time systems and live situations, could have helped me adjust quicker." – IDI, ANGELA, R3.

I can relate to her experience resonates with me, especially in my own journey when the classroom learning seemed worlds apart from the realities of the job. Though I absorbed knowledge in school, it was not until I found myself immersed in a team and faced with real-world challenges that the true complexity of the work hit me. What I now recognize is the value of more immersive training opportunities to work with live systems and navigate real-time situations during our courses. Such exposure would have given me a smoother transition, helping me adjust more quickly to the expectations and dynamics of the workplace. As Sophie shared:

"When I first started working, I wasn't ready for how fast-paced everything was. The job demands flexibility, shifting from one task to another quickly, and we didn't practice that in school. More real-world simulations could've helped me adapt faster." – IDI, SOPHIE, R3.

Her experience reflects a reality I can deeply relate to; when I first entered the workforce, the rapid pace and constant shift between tasks were overwhelming. The classroom prepared me with theories, but it did not teach me the agility needed to handle multiple responsibilities on the fly. I now realize that incorporating real-world simulations during school, where we could experience the fast-paced nature of work, would have helped me adapt more smoothly. Having practiced flexibility and quick transitions in a controlled setting would have made the jump into the professional world far less daunting. Lara also emphasized:

"In college, we were taught a lot of theory, but we didn't learn how to handle unexpected situations on the job. I had to adjust quickly to new tools and processes at work. If we had more training on flexibility and change in school, it would've been easier to transition." – IDI, LARA, R3.

The experience of having to quickly adapt to new tools and processes at work is something I can certainly relate to. In college, we were immersed in theory, but the real challenge came when those theoretical lessons did not directly translate to the unexpected, ever-changing demands of the job. Looking back, I now understand the importance of training that encourages flexibility and adaptability. If such training had been integrated into our coursework, it would have made the transition from school to work much smoother, preparing us for the unpredictable nature of professional environments. Faith's experience reinforced this:

"We were prepared for the basics, but not for the constant changes in the BPO industry. Adapting to new systems, technologies, and client demands took me by surprise. Schools could help by teaching us how to embrace change and be flexible in the workplace." – IDI, FAITH, R3.

Her experience reflects a reality many of us face when transitioning from school to the workplace. While we were prepared with the basics, the fast-paced and constantly evolving nature of the BPO industry caught me off guard as well. Adapting to new systems technologies and shifting client demands felt like navigating an unfamiliar terrain. If schools had incorporated lessons on embracing change and building flexibility into the curriculum, we would have been better equipped to adjust swiftly and with confidence to the demands of our roles.

On Mentorship and On-the-Job Learning. Mentorship in my study emerged like a lighthouse on a rocky coast, steady, guiding lights that kept professionals from crashing into unseen obstacles. On-the-job learning was the tide that carried s closer to the realities of professional life, sometimes gently, sometimes with a jolt. Together, they transformed learning from a solitary pursuit into a communal journey of discovery. Carlo's insights brought this to life:

"When I started, I didn't have much guidance. I was just thrown into the job and expected to learn on my own. Having a mentor or more structured on-the-job training would have made a huge difference in getting up to speed faster." – IDI, CARLO, R3.

I remember how overwhelming those first days felt, especially with little support to ease the transition. *"When I started, I didn't have much guidance. I was just thrown into the job and expected to learn on my own."* That experience reminded me how vital mentorship and structured training is in helping new hires adjust quickly and confidently. If there had been someone to guide me through the ropes or a clearer system to follow, I could have avoided many of the early missteps. It became clear to me that the gap between classroom preparation and job readiness could be bridged by meaningful mentorship and hands-on guidance. Grace similarly conveyed:

"It was great to have hands-on experience, but it felt overwhelming without someone to guide me. A mentor who could help me navigate the processes and answer my questions would have made the learning curve less steep." – IDI, GRACE, R3.

"It was great to have hands-on experience, but it felt overwhelming without someone to guide me." That line hit me hard because I lived through the same weight of uncertainty. I remember the moments when I was eager to learn, but the absence of a guiding hand left me fumbling through trial and error. Having a mentor would have been like holding a flashlight in a dark tunnel, someone to show me the turns, explain the signs and help me understand the bigger picture. That experience taught me that mentorship is not a luxury but a necessity in truly meaningful workplace training. Mark's narrative supported this view:

"I learned a lot from my colleagues, but it was mostly trial and error. I think schools should collaborate with companies to offer a mentorship program, where we can learn directly from experienced professionals during our internships." – IDI, MARK, R3.

I learned so much from my colleagues, but it often felt like I was walking a maze blindfolded, figuring things out through trial and error. The guidance I needed was not always available, and I had to rely on scattered advice and my own instincts. Looking back, I truly believe schools and companies should work together to establish mentorship programs during internships. Having access to experienced professionals during that critical transition would have given me both direction and confidence. It is not just about learning the job; it is about learning how to grow within it.

Viewpoints and Standpoints

As, I view the reflections shared by the industry professional workers in this study as grounded in their lived realities within fast-paced and evolving workplaces. Their insights reveal how deeply their professional growth was tied to the development of industry-aligned technical, communication, and critical thinking skills. These goals were not imagined or imposed but rather emerged from their daily navigation of operational pressures, client demands, and the need to constantly adapt, making their pursuit of competence an ongoing and necessary journey shaped by the workplace itself.

In terms of strategies, the participants emphasized the importance of responsive academic preparation, hands-on exposure, and mentorship as key pathways toward career readiness. They expressed a strong need for curricula that mirror current industry practices alongside immersive training that bridges theory with application. Many shared how real-world simulations, exposure to live systems, and supportive guidance from experienced mentors shaped their confidence and performance. These interventions were not abstract ideals, and they were drawn from their firsthand experiences of being unprepared, adapting on the job, and learning through doing.

From my standpoint, the participants' experiences highlighted three critical areas: enhancing workforce competence through industry-aligned skills development, strengthening academic foundations to meet evolving industry demands, and building practical competencies through immersive industry training. These themes collectively reveal how vital it is for educational systems to align more closely with industry needs and how hands-on exposure and mentorship play a key role in preparing workers for real-world challenges. As a researcher, I saw my role as capturing these insights to highlight actionable paths for improving workforce development and ensuring that training is as responsive and immersive as the industries it serves.

4. Discussions

In this chapter, I discussed the findings of my study based on in-depth interviews with selected professional workers responses. I organized the discussion around key themes and sub-themes that capture the core insights of the participants: (1) enhancing workforce competence through industry-aligned skills development, (2) strengthening academic foundations to meet evolving industry demands, and (3) building practical competencies through immersive industry training. I also highlight the implications of these findings for practice and suggest future directions for further exploration and deeper understanding.

Enhancing Workforce Competence through Industry-Aligned Skills Development

The importance of developing workforce competencies that are directly aligned with industry demands. Participants emphasized that technical skills, communication and interpersonal abilities, and problem-solving and critical thinking skills are critical for success in today's rapidly evolving job market. These competencies enable individuals to contribute effectively to their teams, adapt to new challenges, and innovate within their industries. I had identified three (3) key sub-themes: technical skills development, communication and interpersonal abilities, and problem-solving and critical thinking abilities.

Technical Skills Development. The participants in my study underscored that technical skills remain the cornerstone of workforce competence. They emphasized that proficiency in operating specialized tools, systems, and technologies specific to their industry is vital for effectively meeting job expectations. Many shared that practical, hands-on experience is prioritized by employers over theoretical knowledge, as it directly contributes to day-to-day efficiency, innovation, and meeting organizational goals. Their insights revealed that technical mastery is not just a desirable trait; it is a non-negotiable requirement in modern industry environments shaped by fast-paced advancements.

This finding affirms the study of Smith et al. (2020), which highlighted the growing importance of aligning technical skills with industry-specific demands in today's labor market. Their research emphasized that training programs tailored to real-world applications significantly enhance both employability and job performance.

Similarly, insights shared by participants in my study revealed that those who engaged in hands-on technical tasks, such as troubleshooting equipment, using specialized software, or performing job-specific functions, gained a stronger grasp of their roles and felt more competent in performing their duties. These real-world applications allowed them to transition from passive learning to active contribution, highlighting how experiential training fosters both skill mastery and confidence. This finding supports the study of Brown and Adams (2019), which emphasized the need for academic programs to bridge the gap between theoretical instruction and practical industry demands. Their research indicates that individuals who undergo training aligned with real workplace contexts are better prepared to meet employer expectations and deliver meaningful contributions in their respective fields.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills. The study's findings highlight that communication and interpersonal skills are fundamental in enhancing workforce competence. Based on what the participants shared, the ability to engage clearly with team members, collaborate across departments, and communicate effectively with clients and supervisors plays a significant role in maintaining a harmonious and productive workplace. These skills, both verbal and non-verbal, were viewed as necessary not only for teamwork but also for navigating leadership responsibilities and managing workplace dynamics.

This finding aligns with the study of Johnson and Lee (2018), who identified communication skills as a key driver of professional success in dynamic work environments. Their research found that employees with strong interpersonal abilities often excel in team-based projects and are more likely to assume leadership

roles.

Likewise, my study revealed that when participants engaged in practical training scenarios, such as coordinating with team members, giving presentations, or participating in collaborative decision-making, their confidence in expressing ideas and handling workplace interactions improved significantly. This supports the study of Green and Mitchell (2017), which emphasized the value of embedding soft-skill development into educational programs. Their findings indicate that organizations not only prioritize technical know-how but also rely heavily on employees' ability to communicate, connect, and cooperate in diverse professional settings.

Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking Abilities. The findings of my study continue to underscore the significance of problem-solving and critical thinking in enhancing workforce competence. Based on what the participants shared, the ability to handle complex situations, examine issues from various angles, and come up with practical solutions was crucial to their performance in real-world settings. These competencies were seen as key to navigating the ever-changing nature of modern industries, especially when faced with time-sensitive or high-stakes decisions.

This finding affirms the study of Carter et al. (2021), who emphasized that critical thinking and problem-solving are among the most valued competencies in the contemporary workforce, particularly in sectors experiencing rapid technological transformation. Their research highlighted that employees who exhibit these abilities tend to drive innovation and lead initiatives effectively.

Also, my participants recalled how their immersion in live operational environments demanded quick thinking, independent decision-making, and the capacity to resolve unanticipated challenges. These experiences, ranging from managing real client concerns to coordinating across departments and responding to pressure, enhanced their analytical skills and overall confidence. This supports the study of Parker and Ross (2019), which stressed that workers with strong critical thinking capacities are more adaptive and better equipped to contribute to organizational growth and resilience in evolving professional landscapes.

Strengthening Academic Foundations to Meet Evolving Industry Demands

The need for academic foundations that are both relevant and adaptable to the changing needs of the industry. The participants indicated that an evolving curriculum, research-based learning experiences, and a solid foundation in knowledge and innovation are essential in preparing graduates to thrive in their careers. Academic institutions must prioritize integrating real-world relevance into their programs to ensure graduates are equipped with the skills and mindsets that align with industry expectations. I had identified three (3) key sub-themes: curriculum relevance to industry needs, research-based learning experiences, and the development of foundational knowledge and innovation.

Curriculum Relevance to Industry Needs. The findings of my study revealed that curriculum relevance remains a central pillar in bridging academic preparation with industry realities. Participants shared that academic programs must be intentionally crafted based on up-to-date industry practices, emerging technologies, and actual workforce demands. Many emphasized that institutions should continuously recalibrate their curricula to ensure graduates are not just knowledgeable but industry-ready and employable.

This finding aligns with the study of Anderson and Clark (2018), which emphasized the need for academic curricula to evolve in response to changing industry landscapes. Their study found that curricula that integrate real-world industry need to improve the employability of graduates and foster smoother transitions into the workforce.

Furthermore, participants in my study mentioned the significance of involving industry professionals in both curriculum review and classroom instruction. Their involvement was seen as a way to enrich academic content with relevance, grounding lessons in actual practice. This supports the findings of Thomas and Baker

(2019), who argued that industry-academic collaboration in curriculum development equips students with practical competencies and deepens institutional ties with the world of work.

Research-Based Learning Experiences. The findings of my study highlight the critical role of research-based learning experiences in enhancing academic foundations. Participants emphasized that research not only deepens students' understanding of core concepts but also nurtures essential skills such as critical thinking and problem-solving. They indicated that incorporating research projects into academic programs helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and its practical application in the workforce.

This finding supports the study of Lee et al. (2020), who identified research-based learning as a powerful tool for allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world contexts. Their study showed that research opportunities allow students to gain a more in-depth understanding of industry-specific challenges, enhancing both their academic and professional growth.

Additionally, my study found that participants viewed research as a space where creativity was actively encouraged, especially when their research outcomes contributed to improving work processes or service delivery. This supports the work of Harrison and Thompson (2018), who noted that research fosters innovation and creativity among students. Their study emphasized how research-based education not only equips students with critical thinking skills but also empowers them to explore new ideas and technologies, preparing them for the dynamic and evolving demands of the workforce.

Development of Foundational Knowledge and Innovation. The findings of my study underscore the importance of establishing a strong foundational knowledge base while simultaneously fostering innovation. Participants emphasized that a deep understanding of core concepts within their fields is critical, as it provides the foundation for innovative thinking and effective problem-solving in the workplace. They suggested that academic programs should focus on not only delivering theoretical knowledge but also nurturing creative solutions to real-world challenges.

This finding supports the study of Wright and Johnson (2019), who noted that a solid foundation in core subjects is essential for encouraging innovation. Their research revealed that students with a robust grasp of their discipline are better equipped to engage in creative problem-solving and contribute to innovation within their professional roles.

Furthermore, my study findings showed that participants valued learning environments that encouraged them to challenge existing norms and apply foundational knowledge to devise improvements in workflow and service delivery. This aligns with the research of Garcia and Roberts (2020), which emphasized the need for academic institutions to strike a balance between foundational knowledge and the development of innovative skills. Their study found that when students are taught to think critically and innovatively while grounded in strong academic principles, they are more likely to thrive in dynamic and competitive industries.

Building Practical Competencies through Immersive Industry Training

This reveals that immersive industry training programs play a crucial role in developing practical competencies in the workforce. Participants emphasized the value of hands-on learning experiences, adaptability, and mentorship as key drivers in preparing workers to succeed in fast-paced, dynamic industries. By engaging in on-the-job learning and receiving mentorship from industry professionals, individuals are better equipped to navigate real-world challenges and thrive in their careers. I had identified three (3) key sub-themes: Hands-On Industry Training Programs, Adaptability and Workforce Readiness, and Mentorship and On-the-Job Learning.

Hands-On Industry Training Programs. The importance of hands-on industry training programs in enhancing workforce competence. Participants emphasized that real-world training opportunities provide

students and workers with the practical skills and experience needed to succeed in their respective fields. Many noted that hands-on programs help bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and the skills required in the workplace, making them a vital component of workforce preparation.

This finding agrees the study of Miller and Thomas (2019), which highlighted that hands-on training programs are integral in preparing workers for the challenges they will face in the industry. Their study demonstrated that such programs lead to improved job performance and higher rates of employment, as they equip participants with the skills that employers demand.

Furthermore, the findings of my study revealed that participants who underwent hands-on industry training developed not only technical proficiency but also a stronger sense of responsibility, improved time management, and resilience under pressure. Several shared that these real-world experiences boosted their confidence and better prepared them for the fast-paced demands of their respective fields. This finding supports the study of Wright and Anderson (2020), which found that industry-based training programs are essential for fostering industry-relevant competencies. Their research showed that such programs help participants become more adaptable and capable of meeting the evolving challenges of the modern workplace.

Adaptability and Workforce Readiness. The critical role of adaptability in ensuring workforce readiness. Participants noted that being able to quickly adjust to new tools, processes, and environments is key to thriving in dynamic industries. They emphasized that adaptability, along with technical proficiency, is essential for navigating the ever-evolving landscape of modern workforces.

This finding agrees the study of Carter et al. (2018), who found that adaptability is one of the most important attributes that employers look for in employees. Their study revealed that workers who are adaptable tend to excel in industries that undergo rapid technological advancements and shifting market conditions.

Also, the findings of my study revealed that participants who engaged in adaptability-focused training, such as role reversals, cross-departmental rotations, and real-time problem-solving scenarios, developed greater confidence and readiness for workplace challenges. They shared that these experiences helped them remain composed under pressure, respond constructively to unexpected situations, and embrace continuous learning in fast-paced environments. This finding aligns the study of Davidson and Harris (2021), which highlighted that adaptability is closely tied to overall workforce readiness. Their research emphasized that preparing individuals to be flexible and open to change significantly enhances their ability to navigate emerging demands in dynamic professional settings.

Mentorship and On-the-Job Learning. These highlight the importance of mentorship and on-the-job learning in building practical competencies. Participants reported that having access to mentors within the industry helps them gain invaluable insights and guidance, enabling them to apply their skills in real-world situations. On-the-job learning was also noted as crucial for refining skills and adapting to industry-specific practices.

This finding supports the study of Wilson and Carter (2020), who emphasized that mentorship programs are vital in developing the skills and confidence necessary for career progression. Their study found that employees who receive mentorship are more likely to develop leadership skills and have better career outcomes.

Moreover, my study findings revealed that participants who received mentorship from experienced professionals reported enhanced learning through real-time feedback, allowing them to refine their skills and avoid common mistakes. Several participants shared that mentorship played a pivotal role in their early transition into the industry, providing both guidance and emotional support. They emphasized that on-the-job learning not only clarified their understanding of industry-specific practices but also boosted their confidence and readiness to take on more significant responsibilities. This finding aligns with the study of Ellis and Dawson (2019), who concluded that mentorship and experiential learning are key to developing higher

competency levels and fostering job satisfaction, supporting the idea that these real-world experiences are critical for career growth and professional development.

Implications for Practice

Workforce competence refers to the ability of individuals to apply relevant skills, knowledge, and behaviours effectively within real industry contexts (World Bank, 2020). In this light, enhancing workforce competence requires aligning academic strategies with actual industry demands, focusing not only on technical proficiency but also on transferable skills such as communication, adaptability, and critical thinking. When academic programs are disconnected from workplace realities, graduates often struggle to meet job expectations or require costly retraining by employers. Therefore, academic institutions must reexamine their curricula and integrate industry-based challenges, real-world case studies, and collaborative projects to help learners bridge the gap between theory and application for a smoother transition into the workforce.

To deepen the impact of academic-industry collaboration, institutions should actively involve industry practitioners in curriculum design, guest lectures, and applied research. Industry representatives bring critical insight into emerging trends, workplace tools, and evolving skill requirements, ensuring academic content remains timely and relevant. Establishing mechanisms for continuous dialogue, such as consultative councils or co-led training programs, can help both sectors collaboratively design learning outcomes that serve the needs of students, workers, and the broader economy. These partnerships can also lead to shared resources, innovation hubs, and internship pipelines that foster long-term career readiness.

On a personal level, this study reminded me, as an educator, of the urgency of reconnecting classroom teaching with the realities of the workplace. The insights of industry professionals made me realize that effective teaching must go beyond textbooks and case theories to embrace the actual challenges faced in the field. It has inspired me to redesign my lessons, to begin with the real-world problems professionals face, guiding students to think critically through them using their academic grounding. I aimed not only to build skills but also to cultivate confidence that what students learn in the classroom carries the power to contribute meaningfully to their future workplaces and communities.

Finally, ongoing training and mentorship must be woven into the academic experience. Institutions should invest in immersive opportunities such as industry placements, faculty externships, and on-the-job shadowing to deepen the understanding of professional settings for both students and educators. Structured mentorship from industry leaders can help students refine practical workplace behaviours, problem-solving abilities, and emotional intelligence, skills often underdeveloped in academic environments. By nurturing a culture of applied learning, continuous feedback, and reflection, academic institutions can graduate professionals who are not only knowledgeable but also competent, agile, and equipped to lead in complex, real-world roles.

Future Direction

Based on the qualitative insights from my study, future quantitative research could build on the identified themes by using them as variables, with the corresponding sub-themes serving as indicators. For instance, variables such as "Competency Development for Workforce Success," "Educational Adaptation to Industry Demands," and "Training for Real-World Industry Readiness" could be operationalized, with indicators like communication skills, adaptability, mentorship experiences, and curriculum relevance being mapped accordingly. Surveys or questionnaires could then be designed and statistically validated using methods such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), which would provide a reliable measurement tool to evaluate the impact of academic interventions on workforce preparedness.

Future research can also adopt Human Capital Theory to explore how academic-industry collaboration enhances the development of skills, education, and training competencies among professionals,

ultimately increasing their market value. This theoretical framework underscores the importance of education and training as strategic investments that not only boost productivity but also enhance long-term employability. It can further inform the creation of curriculum models that prioritize industry-relevant, hands-on learning experiences, ensuring academic programs meaningfully contribute to workforce development and foster economic growth.

In conclusion, I suggest that future research should prioritize mixed-methods approaches to capture both measurable outcomes and insights of industry partners and educational stakeholders. By combining theory-based frameworks with empirical tools, future studies can help build evidence-based strategies that make academic-industry collaboration more impactful, sustainable, and responsive to the changing demands of the workforce.

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