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Research Report

The role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape

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WITS School of Governance

PADM7213A 2024

Supervisor Dr R Chikane

2025

DECLARATION

I, [Pamela Nogwili (2772700)], declare that this write-up is my unaided work. Furthermore, I have not submitted this write-up for any purpose other than the '**Research Report (PADM7213A)' module** at the WITS School of Governance.

ABSTRACT

Higher education institutions assume a pivotal role in addressing regional and national challenges by fostering human capital development, promoting innovation, and contributing to socio- economic advancement. Clarifying the role of universities within their regions has become essential, as it is widely acknowledged that universities contribute to regional development by employing graduates, collaborating with local industries, and influencing policy-making, thereby impacting the region's innovation systems. When examining the varying perspectives on the overall function of universities, particularly regarding their role within a specific region, it is essential to consider how the newly established Sol Plaatje University interprets its responsibilities and how it fits into the broader discourse on the evolving roles of universities worldwide. The study aimed to investigate the role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape region.

The study sought to answer three key questions: What challenges has SPU identified that impede the development of the Northern Cape? What specific programs and initiatives has Sol Plaatje University implemented to support development in the Northern Cape? Moreover, how has Sol Plaatje University engaged with local communities to enhance development efforts in the Northern Cape? A qualitative methodological approach, utilising documentary analysis of the university's key strategic documents, was employed to gather data and answer the research questions through a thematic analysis.

The findings show that SPU, through its core institutional role, has effectively addressed challenges related to the quality of teaching, socio-economic conditions, and service delivery in the region. Highlighting these issues as significant barriers to regional development. The university further emphasises key initiatives and programs it has implemented to promote growth in the area, through its core function. This includes engaging with important stakeholders, fostering strategic research and innovation, enhancing academic skills in vital areas, and contributing to infrastructure development. Additionally, the university has demonstrated its commitment to collaborative efforts that stimulate regional development through economic initiatives aimed at equipping entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to engage in the province’s economy. In conclusion, future research should investigate how SPU's policies and initiatives can be optimised to enhance their developmental impact and investigate the university's impact on regional development through counterfactual impact analysis.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

PGDP	Provincial Growth and Development Plan
NCPG	Northern Cape Provincial Government
SPU	Sol Plaatje University
SPLM	Sol Plaatje Local Municpality
PSC	Public Service Commission
NCDEDAT	Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism
CfERI	Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubator
ENACTUS	Entrepreneurship ACTion for others creates a better world for the US.
NDP	National Development Plan

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education institutions assume a pivotal role in addressing regional, national and local challenges by fostering human capital development, promoting innovation, and contributing to socio-economic advancement. The National Development Plan 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011) emphasises the importance of education within long-term development frameworks, particularly in its ability to address the country's persistent poverty, unemployment, and inequality challenges. As a fundamental component of the educational landscape, higher education institutions play a crucial role in producing highly qualified professionals whose expertise can significantly impact organisational development and economic growth by generating new knowledge (Bank et al., 2018). Moreover, these institutions serve as critical junctions for linking innovation and knowledge systems to economic development, with science and technology forming integral components of this relationship. Consequently, universities play a vital role in equipping both the private and public sectors with the necessary expertise and are engaged in exploring novel approaches to existing knowledge (Marginson, 2010; Dudin et al., 2014). Furthermore, they contribute to establishing environments conducive to social justice, mobility, equity, and democratic engagement (Marginson, 2010; National Planning Commission, 2011).

Education has been recognised as a crucial factor influencing quality of life, mainly when it facilitates improvement and progress (Wagner, 2017). It is also thought to enhance individuals' earning potential, thereby contributing to national prosperity through human capital development (Gamede, 2017). In South Africa, approaches to skills development have been mainly shaped by the theory of market failure, which posits that the current high rates of youth unemployment result from a structural deficiency in skills (Habiyaremye et al., 2022). Therefore, skills development is essential for the labour force, as it boosts labour productivity (Panth, 2014). Furthermore, as an integral aspect of human development, education is believed to enhance productivity in the labour market and influence innovation rates and technological advancement (Ranis, 2004).

McGrath (2018) asserts that education is often regarded as a fundamental component of development, playing a crucial role in the growth of individuals, communities, and nations. This viewpoint can sometimes imply that education solely exists to facilitate development. However, it also significantly impacts the psychological, cultural, and social development of both individuals and societies. Higher education, in particular, has been recognised by national governments and international organisations as a vital driver of development, prompting educational systems to evolve

rapidly in response to increasing demand (McCowan, 2016). Olo et al. (2021) conclude that higher education institutions contribute to development through objectives that align with various models of higher education. Their primary objective, teaching, enhances human capital and attracts highly skilled individuals to their regions; the secondary objective, research, advances scientific knowledge and fosters innovative endeavours; and the tertiary objective, community service, bridges research and business through initiatives such as patents, business incubators, and collaboration agreements.

This study aimed to examine the role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in fostering development within the Northern Cape Province. Employing a qualitative research design that utilised document analysis, the investigation explored the various contributions of SPU to regional advancement. The findings offer valuable insights into the university's impact by analysing key thematic areas. Additionally, the study underscores SPU's collaborative initiatives with government agencies, industry stakeholders, and local communities, highlighting the significance of knowledge-driven policy formulation and sustainable capacity-building efforts.

1.1. Research problem statement

Universities are increasingly expected to respond to the needs of their immediate and extended regions by identifying their strengths and cultivating centres of expertise (National Planning Commission, 2011). Gunasekara (2004) notes that historically, universities have been perceived as focusing primarily on two core roles: teaching and research. These roles were often viewed as independent of specific economic and social development imperatives. Similarly, Bank et al. (2018) acknowledge this perspective, emphasising that many students see universities merely as institutions of learning, detached from their surroundings, tasked with meeting educational, accommodation, nutritional, and entertainment needs. Moja & Cloete (1996) characterise this as the "Ivory Tower" mentality, suggesting that the pursuit of knowledge occurs in isolation from the external environment. However, this viewpoint sharply contrasts with the current reality, where universities are increasingly called upon to address South African society's developmental challenges (Bank et al., 2018). Today, there is a growing recognition of universities' crucial role as enablers, and even leaders, in fostering regional economic and social development and innovation systems. This evolving understanding represents the concept of a "third role" for universities, which is essential for navigating the intricate landscape of higher education and regional development, particularly in an era where higher education is acknowledged as vital for enhancing a region's human capital (Adedeji & Campbell, 2013).

Clarifying the role of universities within their regions has become essential, as it is widely acknowledged that universities contribute to the region's development by employing graduates, collaborating with local industries, and influencing policy-making, impacting the region's innovation systems (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019). McGrath (2018) emphasises that education is fundamental to the development of individuals, communities, and nations. It is recognised as a central element of progress, as highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals, specifically Goal 4, Target 4.4, which aims to enhance relevant skills for employment, decent jobs, and entrepreneurship by 2030 (United Nations, 2015).

Higher education institutions play a vital role in fostering the social and cultural development of their surrounding areas (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000) and contribute significantly to capacity building by training the workforce and generating new knowledge (Adedeji & Campbell, 2013; Bank et al., 2018). Moreover, universities play a crucial role in regional economic, social, and cultural development, extending well beyond their traditional functions in education and research. They align national policies with local needs, foster innovation, and enhance both human and social capital. As key hubs for collaboration, universities facilitate partnerships that bolster local economies and tackle regional challenges (Popescu, 2011). Therefore, a well-educated and skilled populace is critical in developing, acquiring, disseminating and effectively using knowledge (Phale et al., 2021). Consequently, higher education is a key driver of a region's economic growth, enhancing workforce productivity and contributing to advancements in technical fields, expertise, and innovative ideas. As a result, higher education institutions are increasingly scrutinised regarding their regional impact. This scrutiny highlights various tensions and challenges, particularly those related to academic labour and research productivity (Rae, 2010).

Furthermore, Schofer et al. (2021) argue that higher education plays a crucial role in shaping contemporary professions and streamlining societal structures. Its international perspective promotes common cultural identities among the elite, facilitating globalisation. Consequently, higher education supports major global initiatives and shifts in sociopolitical issues surrounding human rights, environmental conservation, and cultural solidarity. Lastly, it restructures the economy by generating new revenue-generating activities and reinterpreting non-material production as part of the economic landscape. This situation has underscored the pressing need for a comprehensive understanding of the role universities play as agents of regional development—an aspect that has been largely overlooked by the South African government since 1994 (Bank et al., 2018). When examining the

varying perspectives on the overall function of universities, particularly regarding their role within a specific region, it is essential to consider how a newly established university interprets its responsibilities and how it fits into the broader discourse on the evolving roles of universities worldwide.

The Sol Plaatje University's Strategic Plan for 2019-2024 (Sol Plaatje University, 2019, p. 2) articulates its mission as "producing new knowledge that addresses the region's key challenges." However, the document does not explicitly define what constitutes this 'new knowledge' or specify the key challenges it refers to, leaving ambiguity around their alignment with the issues identified by the region, such as unemployment, inequality, and poverty, as highlighted in the National Development Plan (Bank et al., 2018). This 'new knowledge' may encompass innovative research, academic advancements, and practical solutions. For this study, it is assumed that the region in question is the Northern Cape province.

Chatterton and Goddard (2000) argue that an institution's ability to respond effectively to a region's needs is contingent upon the conditions arising from interactions at various geographic levels, including both local and global contexts, and the historical legacy of the institution and the area it serves. Fongwa (2023) further identifies four key roles universities can assume within their communities. These roles encompass institutional, economic, and infrastructure development, serving as partners in regional growth (Trani & Holsworth, 2010) while also fulfilling public relations and social roles that aim to foster social capital (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). Consequently, it is crucial to determine which of the roles identified by Trani and Holsworth (2010) and Fongwa (2023), and adopted by the university, effectively address the challenges faced by the province and contribute to its development. The underlying problem to be addressed is therefore the role that Sol Plaatje University has in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape Province.

1.2. Research purpose statement

This study explores the role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in the development of its region. With growing recognition of the various functions that universities serve as catalysts for regional social and economic advancement, this research aims to examine how SPU aligns its mission, initiatives, and programs with the specific needs of the surrounding area. According to the National Development Plan, these needs include addressing poverty, unemployment, and inequality (National Planning Commission, 2011). The investigation will focus on SPU's contributions through its core functions in teaching and research, enhancing graduate employability, engagement, collaborating with industry

and community stakeholders, and fostering innovation systems. Additionally, the study will evaluate SPU's role in established frameworks for a university's contribution to regional development, as outlined by Trani and Holsworth (2010) and Fongwa (2021). By clarifying SPU's function in regional development, this study aims to explore how the university positions itself within the broader context of existing literature on universities' roles in regional development, while also offering insights that may guide the university's strategies and policies to support continued development in the Northern Cape.

1.3. Research Objectives

- Understand the role of SPU in fostering development since its establishment in the Northern Cape province.
- Identify and analyse the challenges faced by the Northern Cape that SPU aims to address.
- To determine how the university's engagement with the community has contributed to the development of the Northern Cape.
- Suggest ways SPU can further enhance its contribution to the development of the Northern Cape

For purposes of this study, the concept region will be used interchangeably with the province and the community.

1.4. Research Questions

To gain a deeper understanding of Sol Plaatje University's (SPU) role in the development of the Northern Cape, the following research questions will be explored:

Primary Research Question: How does SPU contribute to the development of the Northern Cape?

Sub-Question 1: What challenges has SPU identified that impede the development of the Northern Cape?

Sub-Question 2: What specific programs and initiatives has Sol Plaatje University implemented to support development in the Northern Cape?

Sub-Question 3: How has Sol Plaatje University engaged with local communities to enhance development efforts in the Northern Cape?

1.5. Overview of the Report

The study is organised into seven chapters. Chapter One has provided a brief introduction, articulating the research problem, research objective and research questions. Chapter Two engages with the literature to conceptualise the study and establishes the theoretical framework. In Chapter Three, a case study is presented focusing on Sol Plaatje University and the Northern Cape province. Chapter Four elaborates on the research approach, including the paradigm, methods, sampling techniques, tools, reliability, and validity, concluding with an examination of the ethical considerations associated with the study. Chapter Five presents the research findings, while Chapter Six provides a detailed discussion of these findings. Finally, Chapter Seven outlines the study's implications, followed by a conclusion and recommendations, ensuring a thorough understanding of SPU's role in the region.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review is a crucial aspect of any academic study, as it enables the researcher to locate their study within the broader body of work and could be helpful in identifying a research gap for the study. This review provides insights into the role of universities within a region and examines the overarching functions of each institution. The review begins by identifying the university's role in a regional context (section 2.1), followed by an analysis of the university's role from a South African perspective (section 2.2). It then addresses the challenges universities face in fulfilling their developmental responsibilities (Section 2.3). With these diverse perspectives, key issues, and ongoing debates in mind, I will present the theoretical framework for this study in Section 2.4.

2.1. Locating the role of universities within a region

In recent years, there has been an increasing emphasis on universities playing a significant role in developing their surrounding regions (Bank et al., 2018). This expected contribution encompasses the local population's economic, social and environmental well-being (Harding, 2007), positioning universities as agents of change within their geographical contexts (Bank et al., 2018).

Popescu (2011) asserts a university's role in regional development as an essential factor in the advancement of regional economic, social, and cultural development, in addition to their conventional functions in education and research.. (Fongwa, 2023) further identifies four dimensions through which universities can act as institutions that enhance regional development. The first dimension, the core institutional role, involves providing education and training, conducting high-quality research, and fostering innovation, while engaging with stakeholders. The second dimension, the economic engine, refers to the university's capacity to serve as a local employer, particularly for minority groups, procure goods and services, attract businesses and investors, and support entrepreneurial initiatives. The third dimension addresses the university's contribution to the public or social good (Fongwa, 2023), encompassing the creation of positive community experiences, the enhancement of public health, the promotion of democratic values, and the facilitation of community engagement. The fourth dimension positions the university as an urban developer, owning significant parcels of land and engaging in real estate development, urban revitalisation, and infrastructure projects. Understanding the university's role in a region requires thoroughly exploring these four dimensions.

2.1.1. The core institutional role

Knowledge generation, or research, and dissemination, or teaching, have long been recognised as the fundamental functions of universities, as highlighted by Jongbloed et al. (2008), Dudin et al. (2014), and Fonseca and Nieth (2021). These functions are central to all spheres of economic and social life (Gretchenko et al., 2018) and form the core mission of higher education institutions. This mission further encompasses the production of a skilled workforce capable of effectively utilising and processing knowledge, thereby enabling organisations to thrive in a knowledge-based economy (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000; Charles, 2003; Evers, 2019).

Education and research play vital roles in the global landscape, serving as the foundation for knowledge creation, technological advancement, and the cultivation of cross-border relationships that address community complexities (Marginson, 2010). Through the process of knowledge production, universities have made significant contributions to policy development in regional contexts, thereby enhancing the innovation systems within their respective areas (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019). Innovation, driven by commercial demand, is essential for industry and economic competitiveness (Marginson, 2009) and emerges as a byproduct of generating new knowledge that enhances existing production, information, and financial technologies (Dudin et al., 2014). In partnership with other research institutions, universities are recognised as critical components of their region's innovation ecosystem (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007).

The knowledge spin-off phenomenon arises from the belief that a relationship exists between universities and their surrounding environment. This notion implies that innovation is contingent upon the expertise of research teams and university students (Lambooy, 2004). Additionally, human capital is crucial for transforming information and knowledge into tangible innovations, leveraging highly qualified specialists' skills, experience and expertise (Gretchenko et al., 2018). Consequently, fostering innovation generates a spillover effect that enhances education and skills development, vital components of economic growth (Phale et al., 2021).

This need for adaptability has prompted universities to reevaluate their core role in relation to local stakeholders, highlighting their resilience and ability to establish a presence in the knowledge-based economy (Jongbloed et al., 2008). As such, universities must consistently advance their innovative capacity and knowledge generation to keep up with technological progress and globalisation (Adedeji & Campbell, 2013). Furthermore, the knowledge economy empowers nations

to develop robust domestic economies while seizing opportunities that extend beyond their borders (Phale et al., 2021).

2.1.2. The university's role as an economic engine

Initially, universities were expected to concentrate solely on research and teaching, without regard to the surrounding regions'economic and social development needs (Gunasekara, 2004; Muriisa, 2014). In this traditional paradigm, state funding predominated, resulting in knowledge generated being regarded as the state's property. However, as universities became more engaged in their developmental responsibilities, they shifted focus toward producing learning outcomes that support regional economic and social progress (Gunasekara, 2006) and cultural development (Department of Education, 1997). This shift primarily emphasises regionalising production and regulation through targeted learning outcomes (Gunasekara, 2006)

The establishment of a close partnership with industries facilitated a communication feedback loop, enabling universities to align their programs with the skills demanded by industries and their research requirements. This collaborative relationship proved mutually beneficial, with the state continuing to provide funding while industries emerged as vital partners (Bazhal, 2015). As a result, this dynamic gave rise to the Triple Helix model, which serves as a framework for devising solutions to the formation of national innovation systems. The Triple Helix model encompasses collaboration among universities, industries and governments to drive innovation and foster economic growth (Dudin et al., 2014). Consequently, the interplay among these three entities can effectively promote the development of strategies aimed at economic growth and social transformation (Ferraris et al., 2020). Within this framework, universities are expected to assume responsibility for cultivating information, skills, and knowledge that address societal and economic needs (Jansen, 2018; Swartz et al., 2019).

Universities thrive by cultivating strong relationships with their local regions, focusing their research and teaching agendas on regional characteristics to produce skills specifically tailored to local needs. In turn, they gain access to local talent, engage in economic activities through infrastructure development and resource sharing, and build social capital within the community by leveraging information, marketing, and promotional opportunities (Garlick, 2003). By collaborating with industry, universities play a key role in regional development, as graduates equipped with relevant skills and expertise find employment within their communities (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019). Developing these skills is crucial for enhancing labour productivity in countries, as it increases the

overall value of the workforce (Panth, 2014). However, this skills development must be demand-driven and aligned with the specific needs of the labour market (Panth, 2014).

The role of universities in equipping students with the skills needed for industry and the labour market is increasingly significant, as these institutions provide training tailored to develop both general and specific competencies essential for success in the contemporary world and for contributing to societal well-being. As a result, graduates are empowered to tackle complex problems and ensure that their acquired knowledge is relevant (Boulton & Lucas, 2011). In this capacity, universities embrace the responsibility of fostering social change while remaining adaptable to regional developments. It is essential to acknowledge that responses to economic development and political demands (Walker et al., 2009) should be dynamically, influenced by prevailing economic conditions during periods of financial crises and recessions (Rae, 2010). Nevertheless, one cannot simply assert that universities can fulfil all expectations, such as influencing macroeconomic policy, combating unemployment through skill training, or addressing societal health and poverty alleviation (Walker et al., 2009).

The concept of a knowledge economy arises from the emergence of new science-based industries and their pivotal role in facilitating social and economic transformation (Powell & Snellman, 2004). This concept posits that knowledge is a fundamental driver of economic growth and wealth creation (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007), rendering universities indispensable players in this landscape (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). Marginson (2009) points out that the production, exchange, and circulation of research, knowledge, and information characterise the knowledge economy. In this model, intellectual capabilities rather than physical inputs or natural resources serve as the cornerstone of a knowledge economy (Powell & Snellman, 2004), underscoring the critical importance of knowledge production within universities.

Universities have broadened their focus by leveraging research to foster innovation within their respective industries (Gunasekara, 2004). This phenomenon, known as knowledge spillovers, plays a crucial role in advancing the third mission of universities, which encompasses regional economic and social development (Gunasekara, 2004). Innovation emerges through the introduction and application of new ideas (informed by research), processes, technologies, and products derived from fresh knowledge, aimed at enhancing existing technologies (Dudin et al., 2014; Vaivode, 2015). Disciplines such as science and technology, the arts and design, the humanities and creative fields, drive innovation and significantly contribute to a region's economy (Charles, 2003). Primarily, innovation is driven by entrepreneurship (Vaivode, 2015).

Consequently, the knowledge economy is regarded as a key factor in fostering economic growth, wealth creation, and employment across all sectors within a country (Phale et al., 2021). Furthermore, it is viewed as a vital link between labour productivity and technology, where the amount of output is measured in relation to the labour input (Powell & Snellman, 2004).

With the growing emphasis on universities contributing to their regions' innovation systems, it becomes crucial to define their roles within different regional contexts (Gunasekara, 2006). This relationship is not static; it evolves, necessitating adaptability and innovation across diverse regional landscapes (Gunasekara, 2004; Bank et al., 2018). Garlick (2003) further contends that merely having a university in a region does not guarantee advantages for regional development, nor does it ensure that the university's engagement will be beneficial. He elaborates on this notion by asserting that a university's involvement in a local community does not automatically result in improved regional outcomes.

2.1.3. The university's role in public or social good

Maurrasse (2002) contends that universities are uniquely positioned, compared to corporations, to enhance the lives of impoverished communities due to their intrinsic social mission and the historical relationship between teaching, research, and service. Fongwa (2021) elaborates on this public good role, describing the university as a partner or agent in furthering democracy and socio-cultural development. Considering society's increasing income and knowledge disparities, universities have come under mounting pressure to expand their core missions to encompass social innovation (Bayuo et al., 2020). The impact of a university in an urban environment is often assessed through various dimensions, including the spatial footprint of the institution, the economic benefits stemming from its activities, social interactions with local communities, and involvement in policy-making (Fernández-Esquinas & Pinto, 2014). Furthermore, universities are regarded as vital catalysts for social transformation, particularly in areas facing socioeconomic challenges (Fernández-Esquinas & Pinto, 2014).

From a societal perspective, universities are tasked with preparing professionals for the workforce to address community needs and contribute to social progress (Walker et al., 2009). This responsibility encompasses the development of social capital, the provision of healthcare, and collaborations in regional development by engaging with the communities surrounding the university (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). The realisation of this societal role is achieved by establishing mutually beneficial relationships that promote community development, facilitated by the efforts of students,

faculty, and the institution itself as a key employer and developer of real estate in its area (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). Additionally, universities play a vital role in attracting investment from outside the region (Charles, 2003). There is an increasing demand for universities to incorporate social innovation as a fundamental aspect of their mission, particularly in response to the growing income and knowledge disparities within regions (Bayuo et al., 2020). Thus, there is a general agreement on universities' significant cultural contributions to society (Kleinsmith & Horn, 2015).

2.1.4. The university as an urban developer

Universities play a crucial role in revitalising urban communities and rural areas, contributing significantly to the competitive strategies of regions, states, and nations (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). The active participation of faculty and students within a community is expected to foster a mutually beneficial relationship that supports community development, mainly through the university's roles as an employer and real estate developer (Trani & Holsworth, 2010). Consequently, universities act as direct economic participants—functioning as employers, property owners, and taxpayers—while also generating substantial economic and innovative benefits indirectly (Power & Malmberg, 2008; Marginson, 2010)

Furthermore, universities fulfil a stakeholder role in the development of smart cities (Ferraris et al., 2020), as they are considered a fundamental component of the regional innovation system (Charles, 2003; Arbo & Benneworth, 2007). By fostering collaborative relationships between universities, industry, and government, it is possible to devise alternative strategies for economic growth and social transformation that address the needs of multiple stakeholders in urban development (Ferraris et al., 2020). Nevertheless, meeting regional needs is often a complex endeavour, influenced by the institution's historical context and the political and economic structures at both the regional and national levels (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000). As a result, regions continually reassess the role of universities within their development strategies and advocate for investments that extend beyond their geographical boundaries (Charles, 2003).

Boulton and Lucas (2011) highlight several key themes that funding agencies and research councils have developed regarding the role of universities within the European system:

- *Universities are expected to deliver direct benefits that contribute to society's economic prosperity.*

- *There exists a direct correlation between university-applied research and economic growth, facilitated by the dissemination of scientific and technical innovations into the economy.*
- *A strong relationship is observed between prosperity, social well-being, and university research in the fields of science and technology.*
- *Consequently, it is implied that universities have a primary obligation to engage in socially beneficial activities in return for taxpayer support, with research funding being contingent upon its relevance to immediate national interests.*

An illustration of the university's role as an urban developer and a catalyst for transformation can be observed in the United States (Bank et al., 2018). Silicon Valley, linked with Stanford University, and the Boston Innovation District, associated with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, exemplify this trend. In both cases, the advancement of urban development emerges as a powerful symbol of transformation driven by the place-based influence of universities. Furthermore, Perry and Villamizar-Duarte, as referenced in Bank et al. (2018), argue that collective capacity building among various stakeholders, including universities, plays a pivotal role in fostering urban development where consensus exists. However, this impact can also have negative repercussions, as the arrival of a university in a city may lead to increased property prices and gentrification, potentially displacing students and residents due to affordability issues (Kleinsmith & Horn, 2015; Bank et al., 2018). Nonetheless, the connection between universities and their regional role should not be viewed in isolation. It is crucial to avoid taking this relationship for granted, whether from a scientific standpoint in conceptualising regional innovation or from a policy perspective regarding partnership processes (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019).

2.2. Locating the role of Universities in the South African context

The primary functions of a university in South Africa, as identified by Kleinsmith and Horn (2015) and Archer (2017), are teaching and research aimed at generating knowledge and preparing students for the job market (Jansen, 2018; Bank et al., 2018; Swartz et al., 2019). Additionally, universities are believed to play a crucial role in addressing the country's chronic skills shortage through research and innovation (Fisher & Scott, 2011). Walker & Fongwa (2017) further identify universities as spaces for social transformation and development as social beings and global citizens. Cross & Ndofirepi, (2016) further conclude that universities contribute to the generation, enhancement,

acquisition, and sharing of knowledge through research and education; therefore, they serve as incubators for ideas, innovation, progress, and reservoirs of knowledge.

However, as noted by Bank et al. (2018), the apartheid government in South Africa did not perceive universities as isolated entities, either developmentally or spatially, nor as merely traditional and research-focused institutions. Instead, they were viewed as agents of place-based development and change. This perspective was evident in the establishment of universities in former homelands, such as the Bantustan universities in the 1970s, which were strategically located in remote rural areas to support the flawed system of separate development. In contrast, Afrikaans universities were situated in locations that allowed them to directly contribute to development by providing skills for industry and promoting local economic growth, as exemplified by Stellenbosch University (Bank et al., 2018).

In post-apartheid South Africa, the role of universities within society has been largely influenced by their historical and institutional classifications, as the apartheid regime utilised education as a means to categorise and stratify racial groups (Gultig, 2000). During apartheid, resource allocation for education, particularly in higher education, predominantly favoured the White community, followed by the Coloured and Indian communities (Mngomezulu, 2012; Swartz et al., 2019). Historically, universities were divided into two main categories: Historically White Institutions (HWIs), which were well-resourced, and Historically Black Institutions (HBIs), which suffered from limited resources (Gultig, 2000; Essop, 2020). The HWIs were further classified into English Elite Universities, modelled after prestigious institutions and associated with academic excellence and privilege, and Afrikaans Entrepreneurial Universities (Gultig, 2000). Conversely, HBIs were often perceived as Black Political Trouble Spots, facing persistent protests due to inadequate resources and access (Gultig, 2000; Essop, 2020). However, the historical classification of universities has evolved, particularly after the advent of democracy, resulting in a new university configuration of universities through mergers and the establishment of new institutions. The SPU is one of two new universities created by the democratic government.

While the core role of universities in South Africa is clear, there are also emerging expectations shaped by the country's historical context aimed at addressing historical imbalances and complex challenges (Mngomezulu, 2012; Archer, 2017; Jansen, 2018; Masenya, 2023). A notable example is the University of Fort Hare, located in Alice, a rural town in the Eastern Cape, which was established in 1916 as the South African Native College (Thakrar, 2018) and is recognised as a

historically black university. A study by Thakrar (2018) revealed that while academics at the university are involved in community engagement initiatives, this does not equate to genuine engagement with the community itself. Instead, it represents a unidirectional process in which the university engages with the community without reciprocal interaction. This situation highlights the institution's lack of transformational practices, exemplified by the university's separatist strategy, which identifies itself as a centre of economic power without a genuine commitment to its town or region.

In contrast, the University of the Free State was founded in 1904 as an ideological tool of the apartheid regime (Fongwa & Marais, 2016), functioning as a historically white university. Fongwa and Marais (2016) noted that the university often lacked awareness of the challenges facing the region and its industries, in light of the absence of national policy mandates at the time. Similarly, neither the industry nor the government was well- informed about the research priorities within the university's faculties, and there were no effective communication channels for them to express their needs. Consequently, this resulted in a weak absorptive capacity in the region, hampering its ability to attract and retain skills and knowledge compared to other provinces.

Van Schalkwyk and de Lange (as cited in Bank et al., 2018) provide evidence of how a relatively young university has fully utilised its capacity to be anchored and responsive to its region. Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) was established in 2005 through a merger of the University of Port Elizabeth, the Port Elizabeth Technikon and Vista University. NMMU has made significant strides in integrating engagement into its academic core. Proudly positioning itself as an engaged university, NMMU has fostered local partnerships by aligning its academic curriculum and research initiatives with the community's needs. This approach emphasises the generation of knowledge through applied, problem-centred, transdisciplinary, and demand-driven methodologies that are responsive to the external community. The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) has achieved significant progress in its community engagement initiatives, within the national policy guidelines governing universities' interactions with their surrounding communities as contained in the national plan for post-school education.

2.2.1. Addressing historical inequalities

The post-apartheid South African government recognises the role of universities in addressing historical inequalities and fostering societal development by ensuring equal access to educational institutions and the opportunities they provide (Department of Education, 1997);(Council on Higher

Education:, 2000). Additionally, universities are recognised as essential for generating knowledge that facilitates national reconstruction and promotes economic and social development, thereby enhancing global engagement through research, learning, and community service (Council on Higher Education, 2000). The National Development Plan 2030 further emphasises the importance of universities in equipping graduates with the skills and knowledge required to meet the country's societal and economic demands (National Planning Commission, 2011).

Researchers emphasise the significance of time and resources in conducting research and contributing to a global community (Swartz et al., 2019). From the perspectives of communities and governments, universities are seen as pathways out of poverty and institutions through which historical injustices can be rectified. On the other hand, management regards a university as an academic enterprise that relies on its autonomy; however, it increasingly faces pressure to make decisions based on profitability and the neoliberal capture by market and corporate forces (Jansen, 2018; Swartz et al., 2019). Bank et al. (2018), however, argue that the role of universities in urban development has been overlooked since 1994. A major flaw in post-apartheid higher education is the reluctance to establish new universities in urban areas. This has resulted in a crisis, as an expanding system fails to meet the needs of a new generation, particularly those from marginalised backgrounds. Tensions have risen at prestigious institutions like the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University, which struggle to address demands for change while maintaining academic standards. The focus on teaching and learning has limited broader opportunities for higher education.

Scholars assert that universities are pivotal in addressing historical inequalities, poverty, and unemployment (Moloi et al., 2014; Masenya, 2023). This responsibility is a fundamental way through which universities make positive contributions to society (Kleinsmith & Horn, 2015). Nevertheless, universities navigate a complex environment where they must balance various competing, and at times conflicting, priorities (Archer, 2017). These priorities may encompass research excellence, teaching quality, financial viability, and social responsibility (Archer, 2017; Jansen, 2018; Masenya, 2023). In light of these internal challenges, universities must also project a cohesive external image that aligns with public expectations concerning their core mission and purpose (Swartz et al., 2019).

The emergence of the #MustFall movement in 2015, including #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall, sparked intensified public debates regarding the role of universities in addressing historical injustices (Jansen, 2018; Chikane, 2018). These movements highlighted the varying perceptions held by different stakeholders, including students, faculty, and society, regarding the

responsibilities of universities, shaped by their unique lived experiences (Chikane, 2018). From the student's perspective, universities are not merely learning centres but should actively work towards redressing the inequalities stemming from apartheid (Swartz et al., 2019). Students called for greater access to education for marginalised communities, sufficient financial support, and institutional reforms to create a more affordable and inclusive academic environment (Chikane, 2018; Swartz et al., 2019). The protests indicated that, for many students, universities should play a role in promoting social justice and addressing historical grievances (Archer, 2017; Masenya, 2023).

2.2.2. Addressing complex challenges

Institutions of higher education are recognised as vital partners in tackling the intricate challenges faced by South Africa and the broader African continent by, inter alia, generating knowledge and technologies tailored to the continent's issues, of underdevelopment, inequality, and poverty (Council on Higher Education, 2000). Moreover, the capacity of higher education institutions to address the nation's challenges in the 21st century underscores several critical concerns. These concerns include achieving transformation goals, ensuring national coherence, utilising resources efficiently, guaranteeing accountability for public funds, and enhancing the quality of academic programs, teaching, and research (Council on Higher Education, 2000; Ministry of Education, 2001). Furthermore, the African Union Continental Education Strategy (African Union Commission, 2016) advocates for the central placement of tertiary education in the development of a nation as a key determinant of meaningful and sustainable economic growth. Public universities in South Africa frequently exhibit a tendency to prioritize internal objectives, which can sometimes be divergent or conflicting. Concurrently, these institutions strive to articulate a clear and cohesive message concerning their primary purpose in external communications. This dual focus, however, may inadvertently highlight their limitations in effectively addressing the multifaceted challenges confronted by the nation (Swartz et al., 2019).

The academic perspective on the role of universities does not always align with that of the government. While Universities fundamentally aim to provide education and conduct research (Kleinsmith & Horn, 2015), prepare students for the workforce, generate knowledge, and engage them in the global academic community (Swartz et al., 2019), it should be obtained in an unbiased environment (Muriisa, 2014). Additionally, universities are expected to help alleviate the skills shortage within the national context through research and innovation (Fisher & Scott, 2011). Moreover, universities play a vital role in addressing national and global challenges through three

key avenues: educating individuals, conducting research, and engaging with their communities and the wider public (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

Furthermore, universities have become pivotal to development in urban areas, presenting an opportunity for policy reforms in South Africa to transition from a broad engagement strategy to a "place-based" approach that transcends mere local focus (Kleinsmith & Horn, 2015; Fongwa, 2021). However, this significant role is primarily driven by the increased economic expenditure in the region surrounding the university. Additionally, there may be unintended consequences, as the influx of students into neighbourhoods can place undue pressure on local property markets and rental prices and also bring about other social ills such as prostitution, environmental decay and more (Kleinsmith & Horn, 2015).

2.2.3. The engaged university

In South Africa, the White Paper on Higher Education Policy (Department of Education, 1997) mandates community engagement by requiring higher education institutions to demonstrate social responsibility. Additionally, the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001) issued by the Education Department asserts that universities must be responsive to the needs of local, regional, and national communities. While most South African universities recognise the importance of social responsibility and active citizenship, their perspectives on the scope and advancement of these initiatives vary significantly. In recent years, the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013) reinforces the policy directive requiring universities to address the needs of the communities they serve. It calls on universities to conduct research that aligns with the economic and social demands of society and to establish knowledge-sharing collaborations with both public and private sector organisations.

The National Development Plan (National Planning Commission, 2011), envisions an expanding higher education sector by 2030, one that contributes to increased incomes, improved productivity, and a transition toward a more knowledge-based economy. It establishes a clear connection between the role of universities and national development, highlighting three primary functions: the development of high-level skills, the generation and application of knowledge, and the provision of opportunities for social mobility while promoting equity, social justice, and democracy.

Furthermore, the National Plan for the Post-School Education and Training System (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013, 2023), urges universities to strengthen their commitment to community engagement as a fundamental aspect of their mission, promising to support them in this endeavour. Furthermore, the plan indicates that the Council on Higher Education (CHE) will be tasked with providing advice on policy guidelines and reporting frameworks for the assessment and monitoring of community engagement. It will also recommend methods to facilitate the sharing of engagement criteria, guidelines, and practices among institutions at a national level, which may include a potential national awards system and specific funding opportunities.

The Council on Higher Education (2020) asserts that all universities, without exception, have embraced the three-part 'mission' framework for their core functions, with community engagement identified as the 'third mission'. The majority of these institutions contextualise community engagement within the realm of transformation, perceiving it as a fundamental avenue for promoting social responsibility and correcting inequalities. This is further evident in the number of universities that have adopted community engagement policies (Council on Higher Education, 2020). Mohale (2023) asserts that community engagement in higher education is essential for driving the transformation agenda. This study further found that efforts have been made to integrate the community engagement mission in the three universities studied, with activities being coordinated centrally, and there was clear evidence of reporting tools in place. Moreover, Universities South Africa (V4CWebAdmin, 2021) argues that community engagement is globally recognised for its role in transforming civil society, and South African universities understand their responsibility to support local communities. It is, however, concerning that community engagement (CE) is the least monitored and evaluated activity, despite its integral importance to teaching, learning, and research.

2.3. Challenges universities encounter in their developmental role

Like any relationship between two parties, the dynamics between universities and their surrounding regions are not always harmonious. This section examines the challenges universities encounter in fulfilling their regional responsibilities. These challenges encompass autonomy and regional policy issues, disparities in engagement and access, the divide between urban and rural areas, and resource constraints.

2.3.1. Autonomy of universities and regional policy challenges

Universities require autonomy from external influences to maintain an unbiased research agenda and curriculum (Muriisa, 2014). This independence is crucial for ensuring high-quality education and promoting innovation. As highlighted by Aithal and Aithal (2019), granting universities greater autonomy allows them to enhance their services, improve research capabilities, and achieve global excellence. Higher education institutions can pursue innovation more effectively and contribute to societal development when they operate with reduced political and bureaucratic constraints. Autonomy enables universities to think independently while maintaining accountability. However, political and bureaucratic interference in many countries restricts universities' independence, compelling them to adhere to stringent regulations (Aithal & Aithal, 2019). Universities can establish a formidable global presence by leveraging their autonomy for academic, research and technological advancements.

In the context of principal-agent theory, Enders et al. (2013) argue that universities, acting as rational entities, seek to maximise their interests through enhanced autonomy. A significant challenge within this dynamic is the issue of information asymmetry, where universities possess specialised knowledge that the government does not. Additionally, Estermann and Nokkala (2009) identify four essential dimensions of university autonomy: organisational governance, financial autonomy, staffing autonomy, and academic autonomy. Organisational autonomy encompasses the establishment of governance structures, the definition of leadership roles, and the determination of accountability mechanisms. Financial autonomy involves the processes of securing funding, determining tuition fees, and managing financial assets. Staffing autonomy encompasses hiring practices, employment conditions, and salary frameworks. Ultimately, academic autonomy encompasses the development of curricula, the creation of degree programs, and the monitoring of quality assurance.

Estermann and Nokkala (2009) highlight that autonomy should not be pursued in isolation; but must be understood within the broader socio-political and legal framework. Furthermore, autonomy does not imply absolute independence; it should be paired with accountability (Department of Education, 1997). Given that each country has its educational traditions, there is no one-size-fits-all model of autonomy. Instead, fundamental principles must be tailored to fit the unique characteristics of each higher education system. Effective governance reforms necessitate collaboration between universities and public authorities to enhance institutional capacity, management efficiency, and leadership expertise (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009). While granting autonomy empowers universities by enabling self-regulation and risk management, it also presents

challenges such as opportunistic behaviour. To address these risks, governments establish control mechanisms, including performance monitoring, specific regulations, and competitive frameworks. Regulatory autonomy helps align universities with governmental objectives while redefining their organisational independence. This transformation positions universities as strategic entities that must balance self-governance with external oversight (Enders et al., 2013).

However, this situation presents a challenge, as universities are expected to align their course offerings with the priorities identified by regional sectors (Taylor et al., 2021). Additionally, universities face limitations on their autonomy, as they are viewed as having a primary responsibility to respond to societal needs through engagement in activities and research deemed beneficial for both the region and the nation in return for financial support from state resources (Arbo & Benneworth, 2007; Boulton & Lucas, 2011). Furthermore, universities must strategically adapt to these evolving environments through their governance structures to effectively address the demands placed upon them by regional stakeholders (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000). This need arises from the gradual imposition of policies that assume a predictable future and a static society (Boulton & Lucas, 2011). Addressing a region's needs is not a straightforward task, as responses are often shaped by the region's historical context, political-economic framework, and national circumstances (Chatterton & Goddard, 2000). Consequently, a concerted effort must be made to engage with the government and stakeholders within the region through governance structures (Fonseca & Nieth, 2021).

Universities are increasingly expected to adapt their strategies to meet the social needs of their regions (Muriisa, 2014). These expectations arise from both local communities and the government, primarily through a concept known as the regionalisation of universities. This regionalisation is based on the premise that university campuses should be financially sustainable and provide a return on taxpayers' investments (Garlick, 2003; Muriisa, 2014), all while maintaining competitiveness (Garlick, 2003). Furthermore, the regionalisation of university campuses highlights concerns regarding managing human, financial, and physical resources (Garlick, 2003). Questions continue to emerge about how universities, funded by public resources, contribute to their communities and keep pace with the knowledge-based economy, thereby supporting the viability of their regions' strategic plans (Garlick, 2003). While university autonomy is crucial for fostering academic excellence and innovation, the extent and nature of that autonomy can vary significantly between countries, influenced by governance structures, state policies, and institutional capacities. Although autonomy

empowers universities to formulate their strategies, it must be balanced with accountability mechanisms to ensure efficient operation and alignment with national educational objectives.

2.3.2. Urban vs rural divide

Universities are increasingly expected to address the evolving development needs of urban and regional landscapes, which arise from the ongoing transformation of labour markets, shifts in industrial sectors, and the emergence of new economic fields (Charles, 2003) through their education and research functions (Bank et al., 2018). As knowledge- based economies gain prominence, universities are recognised as pivotal players in fostering regional innovation and competitiveness. They contribute by tackling local economic challenges through research and development, workforce training, and partnerships with industry. However, aligning academic programs and research initiatives with regional economic demands is often complex, as historical, political, and socio-economic structures can significantly influence how universities engage with their surrounding regions. Political decisions regarding funding, governance, and policy frameworks play a crucial role in shaping how effectively universities respond to regional needs (Trani & Holsworth, 2010).

The location of a university has long been a politically sensitive topic, often associated with the expectation of enhancing regional economic activity through increased public spending, job creation, and infrastructure improvements. Policymakers and regional planners frequently advocate for establishing universities in economically disadvantaged areas, hoping they will act as catalysts for development. However, research indicates that improving a region's knowledge-based environment does not necessarily yield the expected economic returns (Garlick, 2003). This has led to an underappreciation of the university's role in generating new knowledge and the region's potential to compete in a globalised economy. In some instances, universities may struggle to integrate with their local economies due to a mismatch in skill development, weak industry-academic connections, or inadequate government support. Furthermore, the mere existence of a university does not automatically result in regional economic growth; its impact is contingent upon the broader economic and policy landscape, and its ability to engage effectively with local stakeholders (Garlick, 2003).

As universities are increasingly acknowledged as drivers of economic transformation, their influence hinges on their ability to effectively navigate political frameworks, funding sources, and partnerships with industry. A strategic and cohesive approach is essential to guarantee that higher

education institutions make a meaningful contribution to regional development and enhance global competitiveness.

2.3.3. Resource limitations

Resource constraints refer to the limitations in the availability of essential inputs, such as funding, infrastructure, human capital, and technological resources, which affect an institution's ability to operate effectively (Schick, 1998). In higher education, universities frequently face resource constraints that hinder their ability to deliver quality education, conduct innovative research, and maintain their infrastructure. These constraints can stem from inadequate government funding, restrictive financial policies, or limited access to alternative revenue sources, such as private investments, research grants, and tuition fees (Johnstone, 2004).

Operating in a resource-constrained environment, universities have faced increased regulatory and financial pressures, leading to heightened expectations and competition among public authorities (Rae, 2010). With dwindling state funding and escalating operational costs, universities have sought alternative strategies, including the concept of entrepreneurial universities, to drive institutional transformation (Estermann & Nokkala, 2009; Swartz et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial universities emphasise income generation through commercialised research, industry partnerships, and innovative academic programs (Gultig, 2000; Essop, 2020). However, these approaches may also result in increased regulatory oversight from governments and further influence state funding models (Rae, 2010).

Due to mounting pressures, universities are increasingly resorting to aggressive marketing strategies to attract students and secure funding. However, this shift has exacerbated historical inequalities in South Africa, where disparities in institutional resources and funding models have hindered certain universities from competing on a global scale (Gultig, 2000). Institutions with limited financial resources struggle to invest in infrastructure, technology, and high-quality research, exacerbating socioeconomic divisions in higher education and widening the inequality gap (Gultig, 2000).

Moreover, if these trends continue, universities will likely encounter intensified competition from various research entities, including private research institutions, non- governmental organisations (NGOs), science councils, and government departments (National Planning Commission, 2011; Muriisa, 2014). The dominance that universities once held over knowledge

production is steadily diminishing as alternative research organisations become increasingly influential in shaping innovation and policy. To remain competitive, universities must secure adequate funding and reassess their strategic roles in knowledge creation, industry engagement, and global education networks. Their ability to effectively navigate these resource constraints will ultimately determine their sustainability, influence in the global academic arena, and overall contributions to societal and economic development.

2.4. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study is grounded in regional development theory. McGrath (2018) posits that education plays a crucial role in development, influencing individuals, communities, and nations' psychological, cultural and social growth. Development can be defined as the systematic engagement in community issues based on a standard for improvement that aims at modernization and involves multiscalar public action.(Pieterse, 2010). The concept of development is a contentious issue, often linked to the modernisation of society. Modern society is typically understood through Western metrics, encompassing social and economic experiences such as industrialisation, urbanisation, and technological advancements. This era, often referred to as the Enlightenment, began in Western Europe and was characterised by the imposition of the development concept on other parts of the world (Escobar, 1999; Mkandawire, 2011; Sen, 1988).

According to McGrath (2018), the discussion regarding education and development is characterised by various ideological, conceptual, and methodological disagreements. Education is frequently regarded as essential to development, a notion evident in both past and present global development frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals. Typically, education is perceived as a crucial element in the growth of individuals, communities, and nations. This viewpoint can lead to the perception that education primarily exists to promote development, which is termed "education for development" (McGrath, 2018). Nevertheless, this issue can be further examined from a more critical perspective that questions the underlying assumptions related to both education and development, as well as the intricate connections between these two concepts. These connections are mutual; education plays a vital role in the psychological, cultural, and social advancement of individuals and societies.

2.4.1. Regional Development Theory

Dawkins (2003) defines a region as a population connected to a specific spatial location due to historical factors (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009; Capello, 2011). Regional development is a multifaceted and evolving process encompassing welfare's geographical transformation over time (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). This field of study is significant across various academic disciplines, including economic geography, regional economics, regional science, and theories of economic growth (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). The concept is not static; but reflects the complex space-time dynamics and interdependencies particular to different regions (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009).

Theoretical discussions surrounding regional development have emerged from diverse intellectual traditions. Neoclassical trade and growth theories provide a fundamental framework for analysing whether regional economies tend to converge or diverge over time (Dawkins, 2003). The spatial aspect of contemporary regional growth theory draws from multiple sources, notably location theorists, who highlight the importance of transportation costs in shaping regional economic patterns (Dawkins, 2003). Furthermore, while regional growth theory engages with macroeconomic principles, it emphasises territorial characteristics, thereby distinguishing itself from traditional macroeconomic perspectives in political economy (Capello, 2011).

Measuring regional development is essential due to the ongoing disparities between regions or nations in terms of welfare, which often result in significant variations in living standards (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). The theoretical possibility of interregional convergence— where regions become more alike in terms of economic development—holds substantial implications for development policies. For example, trade and investment may contribute to wage equalisation across regions, resulting in comparable earnings for workers in different areas. However, this does not automatically lead to the equalisation of per capita income, which is also influenced by other variables, such as population skill levels and labour force participation rates (Dawkins, 2003).

Regional development is inherently multidimensional and influenced by a variety of factors. These encompass natural resource endowments, the quality and availability of labour, access to capital, infrastructure, sectoral composition, technological advancements, and government support systems (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). The scholarly discourse on regional development has primarily concentrated on two critical issues: enhancing regional welfare and addressing interregional welfare disparities (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009).

Regional and local development theories can be categorised into two main groups: those rooted in neoclassical economics and those based on Keynesian principles (Dawkins, 2003). Neoclassical models posit that market mechanisms can reduce regional disparities over time, provided minimal government intervention exists. These models emphasise the accumulation of physical, human, and technological capital as pivotal drivers of economic development (Sachs & McCord, 2008), as noted in the works of Faggian and McCann (2009) and Stanowicka (2020). Traditional neoclassical models operate under the assumptions of constant internal and external returns to scale, uniform technologies and preferences, and perfectly competitive markets. Keynesian principles are, however, mainly concerned with stabilising the economy in the short term rather than promoting long-term growth (Ahn & Juraev, 2023). Under these conditions, regional convergence is anticipated only in particular circumstances.

In contrast, emerging theories concerning trade and endogenous regional growth incorporate increasing returns to scale and endogenous growth factors, resulting in a broad spectrum of predictions ranging from absolute convergence to divergence processes (Dawkins, 2003). Despite the differences among these various theories, no single framework can fully account for the factors that either stimulate or impede economic growth. Instead, each theory highlights distinct determinants of development while also acknowledging the importance of factors emphasised in other models (Stanowicka, 2020).

Human capital has increasingly become a key focus in national and regional development discussions over the past few decades. This shift is primarily due to the rise of the 'knowledge- based economy,' an economic framework in which production and services are rooted in knowledge-intensive activities. In this context, tertiary-level human capital plays a pivotal role in driving economic growth (Faggian & McCann, 2009). However, the relationship between human capital and economic development varies on national and regional scales. On one hand, human capital boosts regional productivity through positive externalities. Conversely, it may lead to the spatial reallocation of economic resources, potentially exacerbating regional disparities. When these dynamics work in harmony, regions prosper; when they do not, economic challenges may arise. This discrepancy occurs because knowledge spillovers and labour mobility do not always function in tandem (Faggian & McCann, 2009).

As a result, regional development policies have increasingly shifted towards strategies centered on knowledge and innovation (Dawkins, 2003; Etzkowitz & Klofsten, 2005; Nijkamp &

Abreu, 2009). The importance of innovative entrepreneurship for long-term regional welfare, and the vital roles of governance and leadership highlights the forward-thinking and progressive aspects of regional development (Faggian & McCann, 2009). Knowledge distribution and spillover effects are now recognised as critical factors in determining regional success within an open and competitive economy. Therefore, understanding the geographical patterns of knowledge diffusion and addressing barriers to knowledge access is essential for contemporary regional development (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). Knowledge diffusion refers to the process by which information, innovation, or ideas spread through a population or system over time, often through direct contact, hierarchical pathways, or the migration of individuals carrying knowledge (Lind & Ramondo, 2022). The advancement of information and communication technologies (ICT) further emphasises the significance of knowledge policies in promoting regional welfare (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). Moreover, localised learning processes generate positive externalities, such as industrial innovation and enhancements in the business environment, which further contribute to regional development (Dawkins, 2003).

2.4.2. Key Concepts of Regional Development Theory

2.4.2.1. Growth Pole Theory

A growth pole occurs when an industry stimulates the development and expansion of related industries by generating goods and income. This phenomenon is known as technical polarisation (Fongwa & Wangenge-Ouma, 2015). Introduced by Perroux in 1955, this theory aims to elucidate the processes underlying long-term regional economic growth and structural change (Thomas, 1975). Moreover, growth poles are considered the most dynamic components of economic development, as they play a crucial role in fostering integration across various dimensions: economic, technological, ideological, moral, and spiritual development at regional, continental, and global levels (Dobrescu & Dobre, 2014). Universities can serve as these growth poles by attracting talent, businesses, and investments to their surrounding areas. The theory also underscores that the interactions between society, universities, and industries are not always intentional or guided by policy (Fongwa & Wangenge-Ouma, 2015).

According to Todes and Watson as cited in (‘Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa’, 1984), a "growth pole": is an urban industrial zone that aims to achieve self-sustained growth independently and extend advantages to the neighbouring region. Furthermore, Varela-Vázquez & De Francisco (2024), growth pole strategies emphasise the importance of urban centres in fostering regional development; as a result, these strategies typically

focus on concentrating infrastructure and other resources in the prominent cities of underdeveloped areas. The core tenets of this theory is found in forward and backward linkages between the university and its region, in which there is a demand for inputs from supplier industries and a provision of outputs that stimulate downstream industries (Reinert et al., 2016). Todes and Watson further conclude that there are three components to a growth pole; a) the ability of a growth pole to attract propulsive industries. b) the ability of firms to benefit from economies of agglomeration. c) the form of the incentive package ('Second Carnegie Inquiry into Poverty and Development in Southern Africa', 1984)

2.4.2.2. Human Capital Theory

The Human Capital Theory, proposed by Schultz (1972), posits that individuals invest in their capital to support domestic industries. The Human Capital Theory further suggests that individuals and society derive economic benefits from investments in people, which tends to control population growth and to increase overall quality of life (Sweetland, 1996). Becker, as noted by Reder (1967), emphasised the critical role of education in driving economic development. Furthermore, Romer's (1989) research established a correlation between the level of human capital, specifically education and scientific research, and the growth rate of income per capita as well as the overall output associated with investments in physical capital. This theory aligns with the neoclassical school of economic thought, which views individuals as motivated by economic self-interest when investing in education and training, anticipating a higher income in return (Tan, 2014). Similarly, the human capital within a region influences the aggregate productivity of its economy through associated externalities (Faggian & McCann, 2009).

A university plays a crucial role in enhancing the skills and employability of the local population, thereby reducing unemployment and poverty levels (Etzkowitz & Klofsten, 2005; Faggian & McCann, 2009). It serves as a hub of innovation, benefiting from a dynamic flow of human capital in the form of students, who represent a valuable source of potential inventors and innovators. Furthermore, a university serves as a natural incubator, supporting educators and students in launching various types of initiatives, intellectual, political, commercial, or collaborative. In addition, universities can function as fertile grounds for the development of emerging interdisciplinary scientific fields and industrial sectors, each positively influencing the other (Etzkowitz & Klofsten, 2005). Tertiary-level human capital is essential for driving economic growth (Faggian & McCann,

2009). While both economic drivers and quality of life issues shape the influence of human capital on regional development, current evidence indicates that economic factors are now the predominant influence (Faggian & McCann, 2009).

2.4.2.3. Innovation and Knowledge Spillover

Universities function as vital centers for research, technological progress, and the dissemination of knowledge (Gunasekara, 2006; Jongbloed et al., 2008; Muriisa, 2014; Dudin et al., 2014; Fonseca & Nieth, 2021). Knowledge, being a multifaceted good, enhances productivity and fosters innovation from an economic standpoint (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). In today's competitive and evolving economy, innovation has become a pivotal factor for survival, significantly influencing the direction and pace of regional development (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). Consequently, the significance of knowledge in driving innovation and entrepreneurship is increasingly acknowledged. The spatial distribution of knowledge and its spillover effects are recognised as crucial success factors for regional development within an open and competitive economic system (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009).

Regional development policy is progressively aligning with knowledge and innovation policy (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). Localised learning generates positive externalities, such as innovations in related industries and enhancements in the regional business climate (Dawkins, 2003). The triple helix model emphasises the enhanced role of universities in innovation, positioning them alongside industry and government in a knowledge-driven society. Furthermore, there is a growing trend towards collaborative relationships among these three key institutional spheres, where innovation policy increasingly emerges from interaction rather than being strictly mandated by the government (Etzkowitz & Klofsten, 2005). As such, universities serve as hubs for innovation, benefiting from a steady influx of human capital in the form of students, who represent a fertile source of potential inventors (Etzkowitz & Klofsten, 2005).

2.4.3. Justification for Using Regional Development Theory

Sol Plaatje University (SPU) is situated in the Northern Cape, a province characterised by its small population yet vast land area, contributing only 2.2% to the national Gross Domestic Product (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024). As of the third quarter of 2023, the province faced an unemployment rate of 26.9% and primarily depends on the community and social services sectors for job opportunities. In 2022, 55.1% of the population lived in poverty, and the province's Human Development Index stood at 0.66, reflecting a slight improvement since 2013, which indicated some

progress in the region. Historically, the Northern Cape has been underdeveloped, with limited industrial activity outside of mining and agriculture, resulting in a modest economy, as reflected in its relatively small contribution to the national GDP.

Employing the Regional Development Theory as a framework enables researchers to examine how SPU's policy to regional development, its contributions to addressing regional challenges, including poverty, inequality, and unemployment. This theory provides a valuable lens through which to examine SPU's contributions to economic growth and the enhancement of local capacity, its links with local industries, how it supports active citizenry and responds to skills development in the Northern Cape province. The study is further underscored by the necessity to understand the spatial and economic dynamics that impact the effectiveness of SPU's in fostering regional development.

2.4.4. Relationship to Existing Literature and Problem Statement

The role of universities in regional development has been extensively examined. In South Africa, Garlick (2003) cautions that although universities are expected to spearhead local development, their impact is frequently underestimated due to political and historical constraints. Charles (2003) emphasises the significance of universities in shaping local economies by providing skilled labour, stimulating research, and encouraging entrepreneurship. Harding (2007) asserts that universities contribute to the regions' economic, social, and environmental well-being. At the same time, Trani and Holsworth (2010) contend that for universities to be truly transformative, they must align their strategies with regional development goals.

Conversely, the National Development Plan 2030 (National Planning Commission, 2011) highlights education as a crucial factor in long-term development planning, particularly in addressing the country's triple challenges: poverty, unemployment, and inequality. Additionally, universities are considered vital to a nation's progress by generating new knowledge and exploring innovative approaches to existing concepts (Marginson, 2010; Dudin et al., 2014). Furthermore, Fongwa (2021) outlines four ways universities can enhance regional development.

2.5. Conclusion

This chapter presents a literature review of the study, synthesising and summarising the role of universities across various contexts. The presentation began with an overview of the university's role, based on Fongwa's (2023) four dimensions, and provided a detailed breakdown of each dimension at

the international level. Next, the chapter examined the literature on the role of universities within the South African context, providing a deeper understanding of their function. The subsequent section addressed the challenges that universities face in fulfilling their developmental roles.

The next chapter provides the context of the study, delving into the overview of the Northern Cape province and further provides an outline of the establishment and educational framework of Sol Plaatje University.

3. CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This section delineates the foundational context of the study by providing an overview of the Northern Cape province, including the analysis of its demographic composition, economic landscape and prevailing challenges. This is then followed by outlining the establishment and educational framework of Sol Plaatje University. This contextualisation aims to underscore the significance of the university's contributions within the broader socio-economic milieu of the region.

3.1. Background to the Northern Cape

An investigation into Sol Plaatje University's contribution to the development of the Northern Cape should offer insight into the immediate region surrounding the university, particularly in comparison to the broader context of South Africa. Below is an overview of the province's socioeconomic status, highlighting indicators related to the triple challenges of poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

3.1.1. Demographics

The Northern Cape is the largest province in South Africa, encompassing a land area of 372,889 square kilometres but having the smallest population of approximately 1.3 million (Statistics, 2024a), which accounts for only 2.2% of the country’s total population (Statistics, 2024b). The three most populated provinces Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape have populations of 16 million, 12.4 million and 7.5 million respectively.

The province is divided into five districts as follows:

- Frances Baard District - This is the most populous district, accounting for 32% of the province's total population, and is home to Sol Plaatje University, situated in the Sol Plaatje Local Municipality.
- Zolile Fatman Mgcawu District - This district has the second-largest population, accounting for 21.3% of the overall population, and is situated approximately 450 kilometers west of the capital city.
- John Taolo Gaetsewe District - Located north of the capital city, this area is predominantly rural and makes up 19.2% of the province's population.
- Pixley ka Seme District - Positioned southwest of the capital, this district accounts for 16.5% of the population.

- Namakwa District - Found in the far southwest, it comprises 10.5% of the province's total population (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024).

The province is home to 371,000 households (Statistics, 2024b). The largest demographic group is Black Africans, making up 48.9% of the population, followed by the coloured population at 37.3%, and white residents at 9.1%. The Northern Cape features a higher proportion of young people, with children aged 0 to 14 the largest cohort, while older individuals aged 70 to 74 are the smallest demographic.

3.1.2. Economy

In 2023, the province contributed 2.3% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Statistics, 2024a), with mining accounting for 17%, followed by personal services at 16%, finance at 13%, and trade at 11% to the province's economy. The Frances Baard district emerged as the most significant contributor to the provincial GDP, accounting for 35.2%, followed by the Zolile Fatman Mgcawu district, which contributed 26.4% (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024). The primary contributors to the province's economy was the tertiary sector, which accounted for 60.5% of the total contribution. The primary sector was the second-largest contributor, accounting for 30.8% of the provincial economy. Overall, the Frances Baard district led in economic contributions, followed closely by the ZF Mgcawu district.

The renewable energy sector has been recognised as a significant driver of economic growth in the Northern Cape province (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2019), thanks to its abundant renewable energy resources, including gas, wind, solar, and hydrogen. In 2017, a total of 59 projects were identified within this sector. The Northern Cape is positioning itself as a prospective leader in the producing and exporting green hydrogen (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2021), with a significant project planned at the Boegoebaai port in the Namakwa district. Green hydrogen has the potential to facilitate the industrialisation of the Northern Cape and contribute to the country's reindustrialisation. As a result, the province has emerged as the preferred destination for investment in renewable energy, including solar, wind, and green hydrogen, across the nation (Setlhabi, 2022).

3.1.3. Labour Market

The province's labour force was 462,000 in quarter one of 2024, comprising 331,000 employed individuals and an unemployment rate of 28.3%, which is comparable to the national unemployment rate of 32.9% (Statistics, 2024c). The community and social services sector was the largest employer

in the province, responsible for 96,000 jobs. It was followed by agriculture, which created 54,000 jobs, and trade, which created 49,000 jobs. Mining 42,00 and finance contributing 28,000 jobs.

The Provincial Growth and Development Plan (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2019) identifies key issues in job creation in the province, such as skills drainage, socio-economic transformation, social cohesion, information and communication technologies, education, and unemployment.

3.1.4. Human Development

Poverty levels in the province increased from 2013 to 2022, with the proportion of the population living in poverty rising from 50.4% in 2013 to 55.1% in 2022. In terms of district-specific data, the Frances Baard district reported the highest poverty rate in 2022, at 63.4%, followed closely by the John Taolo Gaetsewe district, which had a poverty rate of 61.9%. In contrast, the Namakwa district recorded the lowest poverty rate at 38.2% (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024).

The Human Development Index (HDI) for the province has seen a slight improvement, rising from 0.61 in 2013 to 0.66 in 2022 (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024). This indicates some development within the province. Only the provinces of Gauteng and Western Cape recorded higher HDI scores than the Northern Cape. Notably, the Namakwa district achieved the highest HDI in both 2013 and 2022, registering scores of 0.64 and 0.68, respectively. In contrast, the John Taolo Gaetsewe district had the lowest HDI, with scores of 0.58 in 2013 and 0.63 in 2022.

In terms of income distribution for 2022, most households earned between R192,000 and R360,000 annually, with salaries, wages, or commissions as the primary sources of income. The Gini Coefficient stood at 0.59 (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024). More than half (55.1%) of the population in the Northern Cape lives in poverty, compared to the national average of 60.1%. Additionally, there is a significant reliance on social grants, with 38.7% of the population dependent on them and 58.5% of households benefiting from such grants. The black population constitutes the largest group of social grant recipients in the province (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024).

3.1.5. Access to Services

In terms of education, only 11.8% of individuals aged 20 and older held a post-school qualification, compared to the national average of 15.9% (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024). Most of this age group achieved an upper secondary education (23.4%), followed by those with a lower

secondary education (16.5%). As of 2022, the percentage of individuals without any formal schooling in the Northern Cape was 3.8%, slightly higher than the national average of 3.3%. Notably, the unemployment rate is the highest among those with no formal education nationally (Statistics, 2024c). When examining district-specific data, the Frances Baard district reported the highest number of individuals aged 20 and older with a post-school education, followed closely by the John Taolo Gaetsewe district. However, Frances Baard also had the highest number of people without schooling in the province, followed by the Pixley ka Seme District (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024).

The majority of households in the province, 83.6%, reside in formal dwellings, outpacing the national average of 83.2% (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024). Although there has been a decline in households with access to piped or tap water, from 96% in 2014 to 92% in 2022, this remains above the national average, where access dropped from 90.1% in 2014 to 88.5% in 2022. In 2022, 68.9% of households had access to flush toilets, compared to the national norm of 65.8%. Notably, 6% of households lacked access to any form of sanitation, while 8.5% relied on pit latrines. Electricity is the primary source of energy for cooking for 78.8% of households in the province, compared to the national average of 76.5%. Additionally, 5.8% of households used wood as their cooking energy source. Refuse removal services are more prevalent in urban areas, with 79.7% of households in the Northern Cape utilising this service, in contrast to the national average of 84.9% (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024).

3.1.6. Socio-Economic Challenges

The Provincial Growth and Development Plan for 2019 (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2019) highlights that the province continues to struggle with systemic issues, including poverty, unemployment, inadequate infrastructure, and various socio-economic challenges. These struggles persist despite significant progress made in creating an equitable and sustainable living environment for residents. It further highlights opportunities for development in infrastructure upgrades, including water, electricity, job creation, and skills development.

3.2. Sol Plaatje University in Context

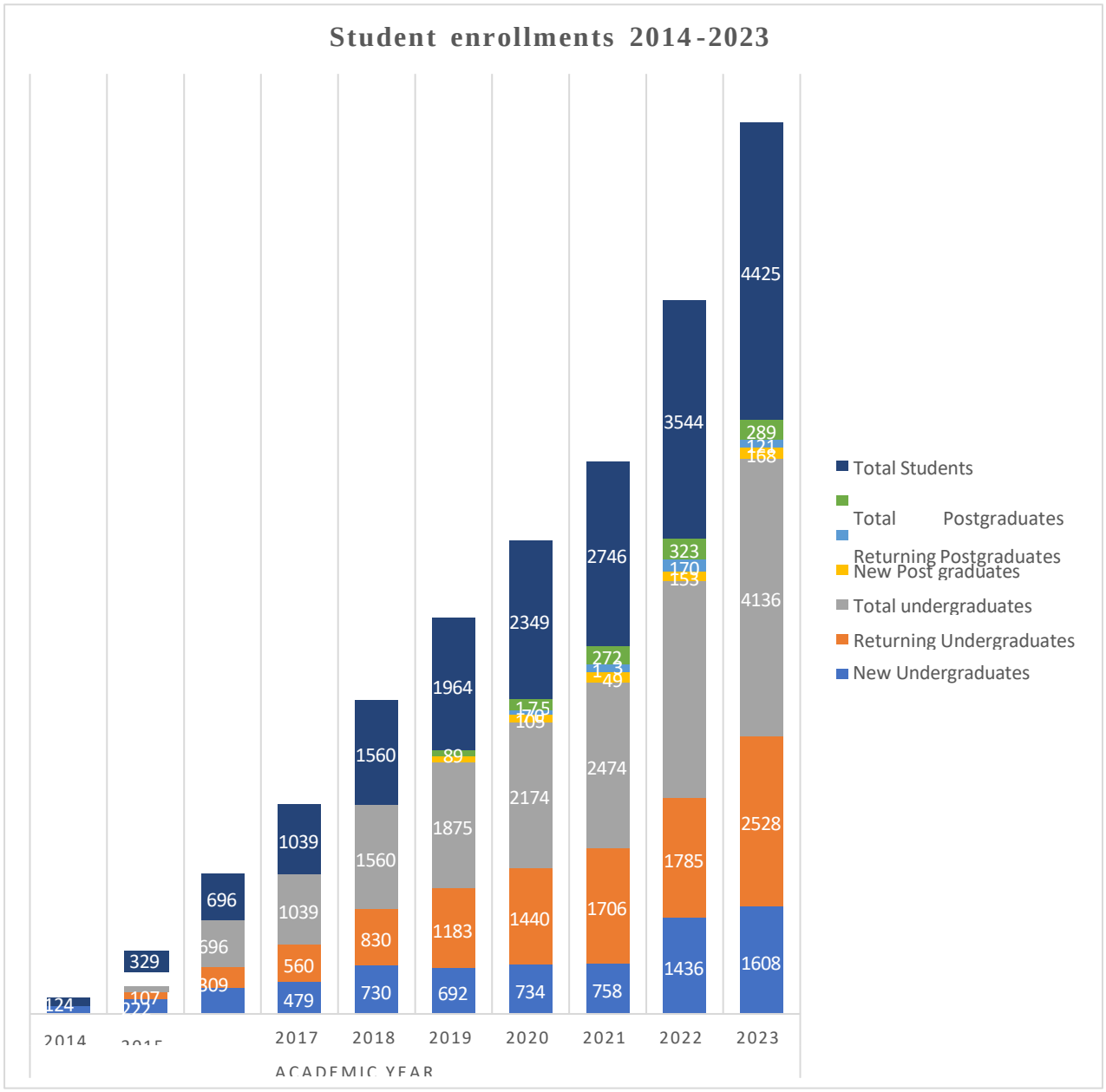
Sol Plaatje University was founded in 2013 under the leadership of the then Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr. Blade Nzimande (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013).

As a relatively new institution and one of only two universities created in post-apartheid democratic South Africa, it was strategically positioned to address various educational, socio-economic, and developmental challenges in the Northern Cape region. The university succeeded the National Institute for Higher Education, which was established in 2006 to provide essential administrative and governance functions, ensuring that higher education meets the needs of the region (Asmal, 2002)

The establishment of the university aimed to tackle key challenges within the country's higher education sector. These included a shortage of graduates, skill deficits, low participation rates in higher education compared to those in middle-income countries, and the inability of existing institutions to accommodate more students (Department of Higher Education And Training, 2011). Additionally, it was recommended that the university offer academic programs that are both unique and relevant to the socio-economic needs of the region, as well as aligned with national priorities (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2011). It was anticipated that the university would provide specialised academic offerings to contribute significantly to the country's knowledge economy (South African Government, 2013).

The initial enrollment of students took place in 2014, with 124 individuals registered; of these, 63.7% pursued undergraduate diplomas and certificates, while 36.3% opted for undergraduate degrees. Among the enrolled students, 39 sought a diploma in Information and Communication Technology (ICT), 40 focused on retail business management, and others pursued a Bachelor of Education degree (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2016). Over the past decade, the university has significantly expanded its course offerings. It transitioned from four schools—the School of Education, the School of Humanities, the School of Natural and Applied Sciences, and the School of Economic Management Sciences—to four faculties by 2023. Currently, the combined course offerings across these faculties include 13 undergraduate programs and 30 postgraduate courses.

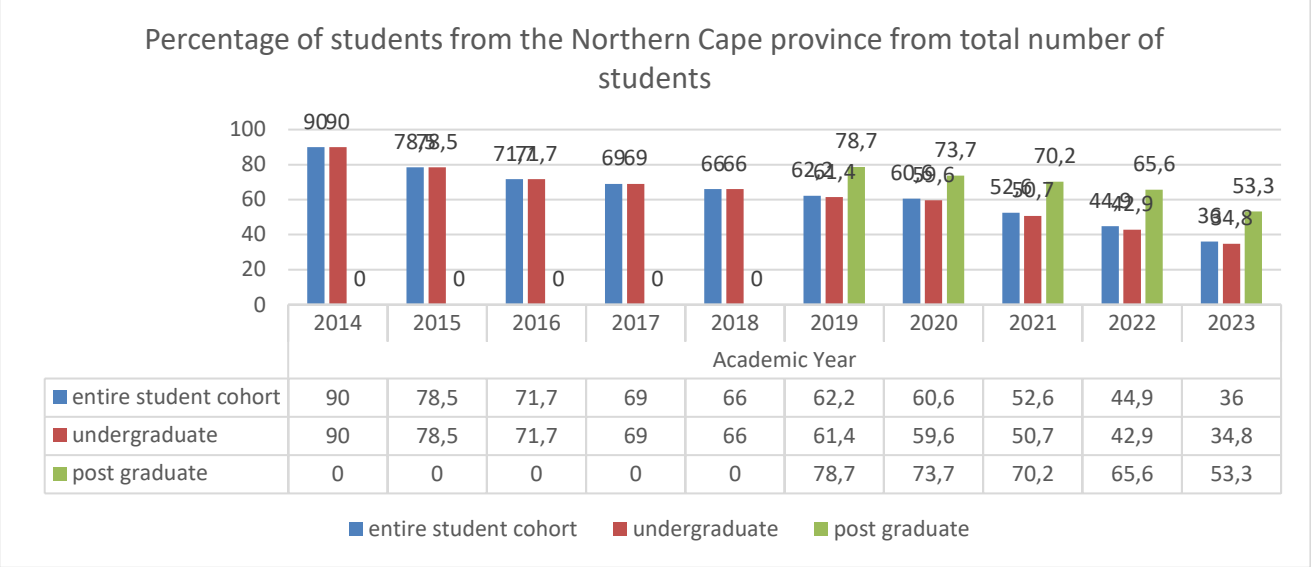
Figure 1: Sol Plaatje University Student Enrollment 2014-2023



Sol Plaatje University, 2024)

The figure above presents key data on student enrollment at SPU during its first decade, from 2014 to 2023. This information is significant as it reveals a steady increase in student numbers each year, including both new and returning students starting in 2015. Notably, 2019 marked the inaugural intake of postgraduate students, followed by a return of postgraduate students in 2020. By 2023, SPU had reached a total of 4,136 undergraduate students and 289 postgraduate students.

Figure 2: Sol Plaatje University Percentage of students from the Northern Cape province

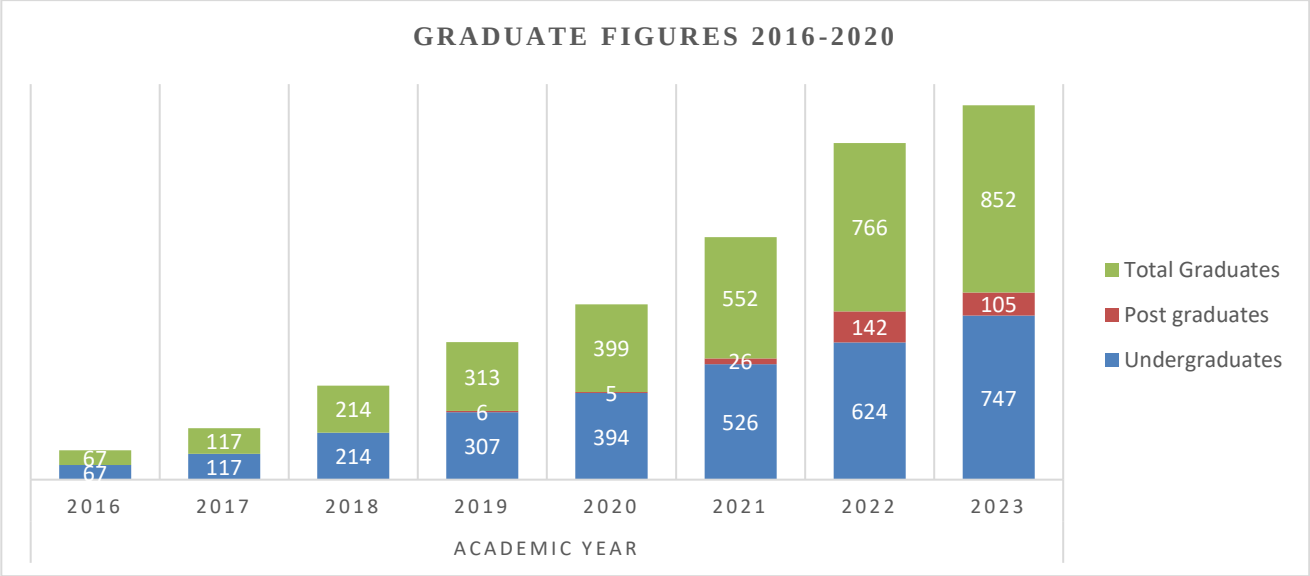


	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
entire student cohort	90	78,5	71,7	69	66	62,2	60,6	52,6	44,9	36
undergraduate	90	78,5	71,7	69	66	61,4	59,6	50,7	42,9	34,8
post graduate	0	0	0	0	0	78,7	73,7	70,2	65,6	53,3

(Sol Plaatje University, 2015a, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019a, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024)

Initially, a significant portion of the student body, comprising 90% of the first intake in 2014, originated from the Northern Cape province. However, over the years, this proportion has notably decreased, with only 36% of the total student population in 2023 hailing from the Northern Cape. This trend indicates a shifting demographic composition within the institution, warranting further examination of the factors contributing to this decline. Although there has been a notable decline in student numbers from the province, this may be attributed to increased access, appeal and course offerings that have become attractive to students from outside the province. It, however remains evident that the university's student body is predominantly comprised of residents. To address this decline, SPU continues to implement a targeted recruitment strategy aimed at attracting students from the Northern Cape, thereby fostering regional development (Sol Plaatje University, 2024).

Figure 3: SPU Graduate figures 2016-2023



(Sol Plaatje University, 2024)

The figure above presents data regarding graduate numbers at Sol Plaatje University (SPU) from the 2015 academic year through to 2023. Of the initial 124 students who enrolled in 2014 (Sol Plaatje University, 2015a), 67 successfully graduated by the end of 2016 (Sol Plaatje University, 2017). Among the 89 postgraduate students who enrolled in 2019, only six (6) graduated by the conclusion of the 2019 academic year (Sol Plaatje University, 2020), with an additional five (5) graduating by the end of the 2020 academic year (Sol Plaatje University, 2021). The inaugural cohort of postgraduates in 2019 earned qualifications in Science (Honours) and Data Science (Honours) from Sol Plaatje University in 2020. Furthermore, the first two Master's students were capped in May 2023, having completed their Master's degrees in Sociology.

The university's staff component has experienced remarkable growth, increasing from 33 members in 2014 to 561 members by 2023. Of this staff, 146 individuals, or 26%, comprise the full-time academic staff, underscoring the university's commitment to academic excellence and student support. In terms of qualifications, 63.7% of the academic staff hold a PhD as their highest degree, while 30% possess a Master's qualification. To remain competitive and sustainable, the university has made substantial investments in staff development initiatives, ensuring that employees possess the skills and attributes necessary to meet the strategic goals and objectives of Sol Plaatje University (Sol Plaatje University, 2024).

Initially, the university operated under an Interim Council in 2013, led by Ms. Jennifer Glennie, with Prof. Yunus. Ballim appointed as Interim Head (Sol Plaatje University, 2014). The first chairperson of the full council was Judge Yvonne Mokgoro, who took office in August 2014. Prof. Ballim later became the vice-chancellor and principal of Sol Plaatje University in 2015. This transition in leadership represented a significant milestone in the university's development. Prof. Ballim was succeeded by Prof. Andrew Crouch in 2020, while Judge Mokgoro served as chairperson until 2021, when Judge Mathebe Phatsoane replaced her. These leadership changes underscore the university's commitment to adaptability and growth.

Since its inception, Sol Plaatje University (SPU) has been guided by a clear vision: to address the demand for competent and skilled graduates, produce knowledge that tackles the region's critical challenges, and engage with communities to establish pathways for development (Sol Plaatje University, 2015). The initial five years were dedicated to infrastructure development and laying the groundwork for academic programs, resulting in a steady increase in enrolments each year. The following five years focused on refining niche areas of the curriculum, expanding course offerings, and planning for the university’s long-term sustainability. These accomplishments, and strategic planning for the future, highlight SPU's growth and potential.

The university has implemented a strategy to enhance its presence in the province and serve as a regional educational hub by actively recruiting students from local schools and communities. This has been achieved through outreach initiatives including career fairs and open days. Additionally, further steps to solidify its role as a leading institution in the region included efforts to stimulate the local economy by employing local residents, supporting small businesses through targeted procurement, and developing the skills of local entrepreneurs via business development programs (Sol Plaatje University, 2024).

Since its establishment in 2014, Sol Plaatje University (SPU) has experienced significant infrastructure development carried out in three phases. This development encompassed the construction of teaching, administrative, student accommodation, and sports facilities to support the university's goal of enrolling 8,400 students by 2028 (Sol Plaatje University, 2020). SPU expanded its facilities through a combination of building donations, leasing spaces, and acquiring various plots of land within the city for new construction. The expansion initiative was implemented through a phased approach across three stages.

In Phase One of the infrastructure development at Sol Plaatje University (Sol Plaatje University, 2015), which commenced in 2014, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) appointed the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University) Infrastructure Development and the New Universities Project Management Team to oversee the initial physical planning and development. This arrangement allowed for funding for infrastructure development to be allocated to Wits, while the New Universities Project Management Team oversaw the distribution of those funds towards SPU projects.

During Phase Two (Sol Plaatje University, 2018), Wits transferred this responsibility to SPU in 2016, marking the point at which SPU became solely accountable to the DHET for completing infrastructure projects in a cost-effective and timely manner. In this phase, an agreement was also established with Wits (Sol Plaatje University, 2019a) to second a Senior Infrastructure Development Manager to SPU, dedicating 50% of his time to assist with infrastructure projects. Phase Three commenced in 2021.

3.3. Conclusion

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the rationale behind the establishment of Sol Plaatje University in 2013, along with a review of its management and governance structures from inception. It details the growth in student enrollment from an initial 124 undergraduates in 2014 to a total of 4,425 undergraduates and postgraduates by 2023. Additionally, the chapter outlines the increase in graduates, noting that the first cohort of 67 graduates in 2016 has grown to 852 by 2023. Further discussion includes the expansion of the campus through various infrastructure initiatives aimed at providing administrative, educational, and student accommodation, as well as sports facilities for the increasingly vibrant university community.

4. METHODOLOGY

This section examines the research methodology used to investigate Sol Plaatje University's role in contributing to the regional development. It outlines the methods utilised to answer the research question: How does SPU contribute to the development of the Northern Cape? The section further details their application and the techniques for data collection. Additionally, it elaborates on the approach taken for data analysis and the researcher's positionality. Finally, the section concludes with a discussion of the study's ethical considerations and its limitations.

4.1. Research Design

The various research designs must be outlined to justify the selection of the appropriate methodology for investigating the role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in addressing the key challenges facing the Northern Cape. The quantitative research design is often employed to test theories by examining the relationships between variables. This deductive approach typically involves measuring variables using instruments that yield numerical data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Conversely, the mixed-method research design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to enhance the robustness of a study, allowing for either triangulation or cross- analysis of data gathered from both research designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The qualitative research design, in contrast, is explorative and aims to gain a deeper understanding of issues through narrative data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

This research study adopted a qualitative research design to explore and clarify the role of SPU in the region. This design is inductive, explorative, and interpretive, allowing for a bottom-up understanding that is interpreted from the researcher's perspective (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research also captures the contextual conditions in which the university operates, providing insight into its role within the region (Yin, 2011). The study operates under the assumption that there is limited existing data on this topic, particularly within the context of Sol Plaatje University. Consequently, the researcher engaged with relevant information to gain an understanding of the university's contributions to the development of the Northern Cape.

4.2. Research Paradigm

A research paradigm outlines a fundamental belief system and theoretical framework that shapes the interpretation of research data. It encompasses the complex beliefs and principles through which a researcher comprehends the world, their reality, and interprets their findings (Rehman & Alharthi,

2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Various paradigms offer different perspectives on research; the positivist paradigm, for instance, is rooted in scientific methods of investigation and posits that reality exists independently of human perception. This paradigm employs deductive reasoning, maintains an objective epistemology, and adopts a realistic ontology (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

In contrast, the research is grounded in the interpretive paradigm, representing a second research approach. This paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding the subjective nature of individuals' experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It rejects the notion that a singular reality exists outside of our perceptions (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Furthermore, it seeks to unravel socially constructed realities (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) within their specific contexts (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Interpretivist epistemology is seen as subjective, as knowledge is shaped by human perception, while its ontology supports an anti-foundationalist view based on socially constructed realities (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016; Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). This study aims to explore and understand the role of universities within the context of Sol Plaatje University.

4.3. Data Collection Methods

The study employed documentary analysis to gather data on SPU's role in contributing to regional development. This approach necessitated a thorough examination and interpretation of the data to derive insights, enhance understanding, and cultivate empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis offered a framework and context within which the university's documents (which included policy documents (Strategic Plans, Annual Performance Plans and Annual Reports) as well as newsletters and portfolio committee minutes) could be analysed to identify relevant policies, priorities, and initiatives undertaken by the institution, as well as their implications for the development of the Northern Cape region. The decision to prioritise document analysis over other qualitative data collection methods—such as interviews, focus group discussions, and observations—was influenced by several factors: document analysis may be the preferred data source for research within an interpretive paradigm, is generally more cost-effective, it remains unaffected by the researcher's presence, it is unobtrusive, most documents are publicly accessible, and it mitigates the ethical concerns prevalent in other qualitative approaches (Bowen, 2009; Morgan, 2022).

There are however limitations in using document analysis as sole data collection method and these include: a narrowed view of data as documents provide insufficient detail and have an inherent biased selectivity (Bowen, 2009). Furthermore, document analysis may also circumvent the

fundamental issues of power dynamics. Additionally, it may inadvertently divert attention from the tangible relationships that exist on the ground, in this case, the key stakeholders of the university, which include students, management, academics, civil society, and provincial and local government. Consequently, there is a risk of overemphasising the significance of document analysis while underestimating the complexities inherent in the actual social interactions and power relations at play (Pieterse, 2010)

4.4. Sampling

The setting for this study is the Northern Cape, which will be referred to as the region from this point forward. Purposive non-random sampling was employed to analyse documents that provided the most relevant and abundant data regarding the university's role in the region (Yin, 2011). Emphasis was placed on quality and depth rather than quantity, ensuring that only documents capable of offering insights pertinent to the research questions were included. Consequently, the selected documents, which were appropriate for addressing the research questions, comprised the university's policy documents, newsletters, and monitoring reports from the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education, the oversight body.

Data collection commenced in August 2024 and involved sourcing various documents from the university's official website. This included Strategic Plans for 2014-2019 and 2020- 2024, Annual Performance Reports from 2013 to 2023, and monthly editions of the university newsletters from November 2018 to December 2019. Additionally, quarterly newsletters spanning June 2020 to November 2022 were also obtained. A formal request for access to supplementary documents, including the minutes of SPU council meetings related to the university's regional role and the annual performance plans for 2013 to 2023, was submitted to the university on July 9, 2024.

After considerable back and forth, the SPU responded on November 14, granting access to the requested documents, although these were not available on the university website. Further engagement was necessary, and on December 12, 2024, the documents, which included the Annual Reports for 2021-2023 and the Annual Performance Plans for 2020-2024, were received in hard copy via courier. Following additional discussions, the remaining documents, including the Annual Performance Plans for 2017-2019, were delivered electronically in January 2025. However, SPU stated that access to Council meeting minutes was restricted and could not be shared.

In November 2024, the SPU oversight reports from the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training were accessed from the Parliamentary Monitoring Group's website. The search strategy for these documents involved using key terms such as "Sol Plaatje University," with a primary focus on Portfolio Committee meetings where university- related issues were discussed. This search yielded nine (9) documents from meetings held between November 2013 and November 2022 that included SPU as an agenda item.

Following the preliminary review of the documents, a more rigorous selection process was undertaken to ascertain their eligibility for inclusion or exclusion from the data analysis. This determination was made in accordance with the established criteria outlined below.

Table 1: Document Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	**Exclusion Criteria**
Documents that referred to the role of the university as set out in the literature review	Documents that did not make any reference to strategies that are linked to the research questions
Documents that clearly state the university's vision, mission and strategic goals and objectives	Documents that did not provide any in-depth reference to SPU and its role in the region
Documents that provided insights into strategies that respond to the research questions	Documents that did not provide any insights into the initiatives the university engages in the region
Documents that refer to initiatives the university engages in the region	

4.4.1. Final Document Selection

The initial search and submission of documents resulted in the identification of 48 documents. These documents were carefully reviewed and assessed for their relevance to the research questions based on the established inclusion criteria. Ultimately, 31 documents that fulfilled these criteria were selected and deemed most pertinent to the analysis. The final selection includes the following:

- SPU Strategic Plan 2014-2019
- SPU Strategic Plan 2020-2024
- SPU Annual Performance Plans 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023
- SPU Annual Performance Reports 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023
- SPU E-brief newsletters (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022, in total ten editions)
- SPU Alumni News (December 2022, two editions)

- Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training Minutes (August 2019)

These documents provided valuable insights into the university's role within the region. However, the minutes from the Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training for the years 2013, 2014, 2020, and 2022, along with the Alumni Newsletter from April 2022, referenced SPU but lacked the in-depth narrative necessary for inclusion in the data analysis.

4.5. Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the documents and assess the role of SPU in the development of the Northern Cape region. This method of data analysis is commonly used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns, thereby deriving meanings referred to as themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2015). It adopts a reflexive approach to documents that is not confined to specific theoretical frameworks, but provides a structure for organising, analysing, and reporting on the researcher's analytical insights (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2015; Morgan, 2022). Essentially, it is a form of pattern recognition within qualitative data (Bowen, 2009) that involves a careful review and analysis of the data, followed by the interpretation of patterns to extract meaning and insight. Grant (2018) suggests that the process begins with reading the various documents to establish a coding framework. Thematic analysis can be approached in two ways: the inductive approach allows themes to emerge organically from the data, while the deductive approach relies on pre-determined themes based on the researcher’s expectations of what might surface (Braun & Clarke, 2015).

The study employed a deductive approach guided by the research questions, the literature review on the universities’ role, and the theoretical framework of regional development theory. Initially, the documents from Sol Plaatje University (SPU) were analysed through a process of thorough reading to extract meaning, enhance understanding, and cultivate empirical knowledge in

alignment with the research questions (Bowen, 2009). A systematic thematic analysis process, as outlined by Christou (2022), was implemented and is described below:

4.5.1. Step 1: Familiarisation

This step involved an immersive reading experience and an initial familiarisation with the data by thoroughly reading and re-reading each document (Bowen, 2009; Braun & Clarke, 2015; Christou, 2022). Each of the 31 documents was meticulously reviewed to identify and extract data pertinent to the research question. Relevant phrases were selected, highlighted, and organised into an Excel spreadsheet for easy reference, thereby creating a code book as recommended by Grant (2018).

4.5.2. Step 2: Selection of phrases

The second step involved identifying similar phrases by analysing the keywords used across each document. Each phrase was accompanied by its respective source in an Excel spreadsheet. From there, phrases that shared commonalities were grouped. These grouped phrases were subsequently exported into a Word document.

4.5.3. Step 3: Assigning Codes

The phrases were imported into ATLAS. ti and designated with the project name “Data Analysis SPU Role Contributing to Development.” Subsequently, AI-intentional coding was chosen as the preferred method for coding, accompanied by a description of the study's purpose and research questions, as descriptive coding was deemed the most suitable approach. The transcripts were then imported into ATLAS. Ti, where AI-intentional coding was utilised to allow the researcher to review and refine the generated codes, maintaining control over the selection and assignment of the final codes.

The next step required the researcher to articulate the study's purpose and research questions. Once this was completed, the generate button was activated. This process generated 119 familiar quotations and a total of 414 codes. These codes were later exported to an Excel spreadsheet to facilitate the identification of similarities and to streamline the review and refinement of the codes. Ultimately, the final code count was established at 119, distributed across the three research questions: Research Question 1 contained 16 codes, Research Question 2 had 70 codes, and Research Question 3 included 33 codes.

4.5.4. Step 4: Development of Themes

Step four involved creating a Word document that included tables, each featuring a research question as the heading. The codes sharing similar patterns, meanings, and relationships (Naeem et al., 2023) were organised into themes, resulting in three themes for Research Question 1, four themes for Research Question 2, and three themes for Research Question 3. Each theme was represented by concise phrases that encapsulated the codes. In total, ten themes were developed, and a brief description for each theme was crafted based on the characteristics of the codes associated with it.

Research Sub-Question 1: What challenges known to SPU hinder the development of the Northern Cape?

Table 2: List of Themes and Codes Research Question 1

Educational Challenges	**Socio-economic Challenges**	**Service Delivery Challenges**
• Curriculum development • Discrepancies in language • Educational needs • Lack of skills • Quality of Teaching	• Economic development challenges • Environmental challenges • Growth of small and medium enterprises • Social Issues • Sustainable agriculture • Historical challenges	• Infrastructure • Public institution performance • Technical Capacity • Implementation challenges • Water conservation

Research Sub-Question 2: What specific programs and initiatives have SPU implemented to support the development of the NC?

Table 3: List of themes and codes Research Question 2

Stakeholder Engagement	**Strategic Research and Innovation**	**Academic Skills Development**	**Infrastructure Development**
• Local skills development • Local Capacity Building • Collaboration with academic institutions, UFS & Wits • Collaboration with the government • Community Engagement • Collaboration with PSC • Collaboration with Stakeholders • Construction Supplier Incubation • Entrepreneurship Development (SMMEs and emerging contractors) • Critical engagement	• Applied research • Broad Research Plan • Enhancing Research Capabilities • Mobilise Research Expertise • Peer-reviewed publications • Producing new knowledge • Research and Innovation Environment • Research on Service Delivery • Hosting NCIF • Identify top learners • Nurturing learners • New Knowledge Production • Policy and Programme development • Knowledge economy leader	• Academic programmes development • Academic excellence • Agriculture knowledge training • Centre for Continuous Professional Development • Centre for Entrepreneurship • Curriculum development • Data Science Capacity Development • High-level intellectual capacity • Intellectual Capacity development • Knowledge dissemination • Knowledge-based partnerships • Research and teaching programs	• Strategic infrastructure planning • Campus expansion • Academic buildings • Student accommodation • Sports facilities • Construction projects • Institutional growth • Employment opportunities • Local skills development • Collaboration • Smart campus initiatives • Sustainability and innovation

• Economic Development Commitment • Infrastructure Development • Involvement with schools • Knowledge-based partnerships • Leadership Development • Local employment • Outreach programs • Partnership establishment • Support for local SMMEs • Town and Gown Agreement	• Mathematics Training Centre • Niche exploration and development • Rapid incubator • Research Collaboration • Research Capability programs • SPU Talent Pipeline Project • SPU Knowledge Hub • Strategic Research Partnership	• Scientific writing training • Supporting Science Education • Teacher development programs • Teaching and Research activities	

Research Sub-Question 3: How has SPU collaborated with local communities to enhance development efforts in the Northern Cape?

Table 4: List of themes and codes Research Question 3

Entrepreneurship Development	**Regional Collaboration**	**Community-Centred Skills and Capacity Development**
• Development projects • Entrepreneurship promotion • Equitable development • Future building • Human development • Innovation hubs • Knowledge economy leader • Local business support • Local employment • Urban and Rural Development (Regional Development) • Vibrant Entrepreneurial Ecosystem • Enhanced capabilities • Funding support	• Critical engagement • Outreach Programs • Partnerships • Relationship building • Stakeholder collaboration • Town and Gown Initiative	• Black Skills targets • Capacity enhancements • Community development • Community involvement • Community participation • Knowledge partnerships • New Knowledge • Preparing Learners • Public Institution Performance • Enhancement • Research Capacity Enhancement • Science for Future program • Talent development • Teacher development

4.6. Trustworthiness

Reliability in this study was rigorously addressed through comprehensive documentation of the research process, spanning from the initial stages to the culmination of the final report. This was achieved by establishing a detailed protocol and creating a robust database for the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Furthermore, the coding framework utilised for data interpretation was thoroughly articulated to enhance reliability, elucidating the meanings associated with the codes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Validity was fortified through the provision of extensive, or "thick," descriptions designed to convey the findings (Yin, 2011) effectively. This approach also involved critically examining potential researcher biases and the explicit presentation of negative and discrepant themes that contravene the primary themes and coding established within the reliability framework, as outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2017). By integrating these methodologies, the study sought to uphold high standards of reliability and validity in its findings.

4.7. Ethical Considerations

As a method of data collection, document analysis posed no risk to either the researcher or the documents involved, thereby addressing some ethical concerns typically associated with other qualitative approaches (Morgan, 2022). Consequently, an application for a waiver of ethical approval was submitted and subsequently granted. Nevertheless, the ethical principles of honesty, objectivity, integrity, meticulousness, openness, and transparency were diligently upheld throughout the process (Resnik, 2020).

4.8. Reflexivity and Positionality

Qualitative research inherently positions the researcher as a central instrument in the data collection process. Consequently, it is reasonable to acknowledge that the researcher’s perceptions—shaped by their experiences, belief systems, and background—serve as significant variables that can influence the research process (Bourke, 2014). Reflexivity a term first coined by Gouldner (1974), involves the critical examination of the researcher's role within the research framework, the selection of research instruments, and the data collection methods employed (Macbeth, 2001). Therefore, recognising the existence of multiple realities is essential for affirming the rigor and trustworthiness of the qualitative research endeavor. Additionally, this reflexive process has led to a transformed understanding of the role

of universities, as it necessitates the learning and unlearning of various realities (Palaganas et al., 2017).

Positionality necessitates that researchers recognise their role as research instruments, acknowledging how their subjectivity may influence both the research project and the presentation of findings (Bourke, 2014). It is crucial to reflect on the assumptions made during the selection of the research topic, particularly when approaching it as an outsider, and to consider how my insider interactions during the data collection process influenced the research on universities (Bourke, 2014). As a monitoring and evaluation practitioner, reflexivity compels me to recognise my oversight role in coordination and accountability. My prior engagement with the university as an outsider on various stakeholder platforms within the provincial government could have introduced bias or preconceived notions about the institution. Nevertheless, since the university reports to the National Department of Higher Education, no bias was identified regarding reporting lines. It is essential to recognise that my work experiences, beliefs, political views, socioeconomic status, and cultural background may all influence the research process.

4.9. Limitations and Delimitations

Acknowledging that any research process may encounter limitations and delimitations beyond the researcher's control is imperative. These limitations may include the theoretical framework of choice, study design, access to data, data collection and analysis and many more aspects of the research process. It is, therefore, important to acknowledge this to safeguard the credibility of the research (Patton, 2015; Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The limitations of document analysis as a research method included insufficient detail, low retrievability of data, and depth of the data, which could have been enhanced by interaction with the decision makers (interviews) (Bowen, 2009; Pieterse, 2010; Braun & Clarke, 2015; Morgan, 2022), Data collection processes were delayed due to slow responses from the university and in some instances not all requested data was provided causing further delays. The use of Atlas.ti (qualitative data analysis software), compared to other data analysis software, was limited to the knowledge and experience of the researcher

4.10. Conclusion

This chapter outlines and justifies the methodology employed in the study. It further explains the rationale for selecting a qualitative research design and an interpretive/constructivist research paradigm, with a focus on understanding the university as the subject of investigation. The

chapter highlights the data collection process through document analysis and details how the data was analysed using thematic analysis, emphasising why these methods were most suitable for the study. Additionally, it provides a comprehensive overview of the documents analysed, along with the number of codes and themes generated. The chapter also discusses the techniques used to ensure accuracy and consistency throughout data collection and analysis. Finally, the study's ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations are addressed.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents the study's findings, which sought to examine Sol Plaatje University's contributions to the development of the Northern Cape through data that responded to the research sub-questions. The subsequent sections detail the key attributes of the analysed documents, accompanied by a comprehensive description of the analysis process. Following this, the findings are presented, culminating in a summary of the entire chapter.

5.1. Findings

The following themes were developed according to the research sub-questions they responded to:

5.1.1. Sub-Question 1: What challenges has SPU identified that impede the development of the Northern Cape?

This research sub-question aimed to identify the critical challenges faced by the region, as suggested by the SPU's mission statement and drawn from the Strategic Plans for 2014-2019 and 2020- 2024. However, the university documents did not provide empirical evidence to delineate the challenges that impede development in the region; instead, they made only vague references to the region's challenges within the three themes outlined below.

Theme 1: Educational Challenges

In this theme, SPU focuses on addressing challenges related to skills development for the NC, enabling graduates and citizens to become competent and effectively address skills shortages in the public and private sectors within the region. The theme further highlights SPU's struggle to source skills for its infrastructure projects within the province, hence the development and implementation of incubation programmes. This theme represents five (5) codes and contributes equally to answering the research question. The theme was derived from the codes extracted from the narrative related to research questions two and three.

The analysed documents did not explicitly highlight the educational challenges experienced in the province. However, they referred to interventions aimed at addressing the levels and quality of teaching and teacher development in rural areas. The quotation is taken from the SPU Annual Report for 2017. Further, it refers to SPU's need to understand the magnitude of the challenge concerning teacher development and the consideration of responses to these needs,

without highlighting the actual challenges with teacher development or the need for the university to address them.

> *Partnerships with the Northern Cape Department of Education in programmes that aim to improve the level and quality of teaching at schools were deepened in 2017, characterised by structured school visits in outlying towns to develop relationships, understand the extent of the need for teacher development and consider possible SPU responses to such needs (Annual Report, 2017)*

The following quotation further elucidates the initiatives aimed at capacity-building in the field of science, explicitly highlighting the collaborative efforts with Sasol to enhance science education within primary and secondary schools as presented below:

> *SPU's Inzalo Project is an outreach initiative to Northern Cape schools, promoting science education and sponsored by Sasol. It aims to identify and interact with schools that require support and build capacity in the field of science education. Four high schools and one primary school were selected. The focus of the 2018 project was on Grade 10 Physical Science and Life Sciences and Grade 6 Natural Science- Intermediate phase (Newsletter November 2018)*

This quotation was extracted from the November 2018 SPU newsletter. It references the need for support and capacity building in education, specifically in the sciences. This focus on science education can be assumed to be based on the identified national challenges. However, it does not specify the basis or evidence of the specific challenges in the province.

Theme 2: Socio-Economic Challenges

The theme highlights the factors that lead to the province's triple challenges: poverty, unemployment, and inequality. These are primarily driven by historical injustices that have led to social ills, further hindering the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. The theme encompasses six codes and contributes equally to answering the research question, while being interlinked with research questions two and three. The data refers to efforts with key stakeholders to address socio-economic challenges of the province, while not outlining these specific socio- economic challenges as quoted below:

> *SPU, together with NCDEDAT NOCCI, BMF, Mine Managers Forum, Renewable Energy Entrepreneurs Forum, NCTA and SPM, have formed the Northern Cape Innovation Forum, aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the NC socio-economic environment and unleashing the innovation potential of the NC (News Letter November 2020)*

This quotation, taken from the SPU newsletter for November 2020, highlights the establishment of a forum for innovation to address the challenges faced by the province by bringing together different stakeholders from provincial and local governments, and the private sector. It further highlights the expected benefits of innovation in addressing the socio-economic environment but stops short of outlining the challenges referred to. This trend is further seen in the following quotation from the SPU Strategic Plan:

> *An important strategic challenge for an emerging SPU will be the need to positively respond to the key international trends in higher education in the context of the social and economic conditions prevailing in the country, in such a way as to take advantage of the opportunities and avoid the threats, while at the same time building on strengths and minimising weaknesses (Strategic Plan 2015-2019)*

The quotation from the SPU Strategic Plan 2015-2019, noted in transcript 6, highlights the university's intention to respond to important strategic challenges in higher education in the context of social and economic conditions prevailing in the country.

Theme 3: Service Delivery Challenges

This theme highlights the challenges identified by SPU regarding service provision in the Northern Cape. It addresses the performance of public institutions that hinder effective service delivery in the province. This theme encompasses five codes that contribute equally to addressing the research question and connect with research questions two and three. Additionally, it aims to present the insights gathered from SPU data concerning its efforts in addressing the service delivery challenges of the province. The university details its efforts to tackle these issues through commitment in its policy documents the strategic Plans for 2014-2019 and 2020-2024, through the mission statement and broad positioning points. The SPU further highlights partnerships with the Public Service Commission (PSC) in its November 2018 newsletter, as follows:

> *An engaged social participant - giving expression to democratic practice, seized with the challenges facing society, and enabling participation in social, cultural and economic life; (Strategic Plan 2014-2019)*
>
> *To become an institution of higher learning uniquely positioned to: graduate citizens competent and capable of realising the aspirations of society; produce new knowledge impacting on key challenges of the region and engage critically with communities of discourse and communities*

of people to search out pathways to equitable development (Strategic Plan 2014-2019 and 2020-2024)

SPU is committed to working with the PSC on deepening research on service delivery challenges in the province and enhancing debates on the performance of public institutions for more effective and responsive delivery and impact (Newsletter November 2018)

This quotation highlights SPU's commitment to addressing service delivery challenges through conducting research that aims to understand the challenges of service delivery within the province and enhance the performance of both provincial and local governments. Additionally, it underscores the importance of evidence in informing and enriching discussions regarding service delivery in the region.

5.1.2. Sub-Question 2: What specific programs and initiatives have SPU implemented to support the development of the Northern Cape?

The objective was to identify the role that SPU has assumed in addressing the challenges facing the region and, in doing so, to foster development in the Northern Cape. From the 58 generated codes, three key themes emerged. These themes were significant in effectively responding to the study's aims and objectives and are associated with research questions one and three.

Theme 1: Stakeholder Engagement:

Stakeholder and community engagement is defined as the relationship between a university and its surrounding community, characterised by a mutual understanding of the shared goals and objectives that benefit both parties through collaborative efforts (Thakrar, 2018). This theme underscores SPU's strong commitment to intertwining community engagement with its academic mission. SPU aims to tackle societal challenges, encourage civic engagement, and promote regional development by forging partnerships with government entities, institutions, and local stakeholders. The emphasis on community-led research, sustainability, and social responsibility underscores the university’s pivotal role as an agent of meaningful change. Initiatives such as talent development programs and strategic planning demonstrate SPU's commitment to cultivating human capital and strengthening its connections with both the local and broader communities.

This theme encompasses 20 codes, making it the second highest in code count for this research question, and contributing equally to the overall inquiry. It is also linked to the third research question, as it addresses programs and initiatives that involve collaboration with local communities. The quotations that follow highlight the university’s commitment to its role as a vital partner in the region

through its academic and intellectual initiatives through its policy documents and further evidenced in newsletters:

> *Community engagement and social responsiveness – we value that our University would structure and facilitate community engagement and social responsiveness as a functional ethic and strategic aspect of our institutional life. Our approach to knowledge will be cognizant at all times of opportunities for productive social engagement, and beneficial community engagements will be guaranteed in terms of our operational style of work (Strategic Plans 2015-2019 and 2020-2024)*
>
> *The sustainability of the university requires that it serve its community by expressing an ongoing critical academic and intellectual public voice and that SPU develops as an important partner in the social, economic and intellectual development of the region, its environment and its stakeholders (Annual Report, 2020)*

Physical Planning and Infrastructure department, in consultation with NCPG departments and Small Development Agencies, to set a Stakeholder Engagement Forum for the Incubation Project (Annual Report, 2018

These quotations from the SPU Strategic Plans for 2015-2019 and 2020-2024 as well as annual reports for 2018 and 2020 highlight the university's commitment to serving the community by leveraging its academic and intellectual resources to foster collaborative partnerships in the province's development. Additionally, the university showcases its organised engagement initiatives by creating a stakeholder engagement forum to propel the incubation project forward. The significance of stakeholder engagement is further emphasised in the following quotations:

> *Community engagement remained a pivotal aspect of SPU's mission, with numerous initiatives aimed at weaving the university into the local and regional communities' fabric (Annual Report, 2023)*
>
> *SPU has successfully sustained its approach to community engagement partnerships, which inform and draw upon its teaching and research activities. This has been achieved since 2017 through the development of our Bokomoso Street Kids project, the Knowledge Partnership Agreement with NCDEDAT, and ICT programmes in the School of Natural and Applied Sciences. (Annual Performance Plan 2018)*

The quotation above, sourced from the SPU annual report for 2023, highlights the importance of community engagement as a core component of the university's mission and its dedication to collaborating with the local and regional community. Additionally, it illustrates how stakeholder engagement is structured and shaped by the university's teaching and research, as indicated in the quotation from the 2018 Annual Performance Plan.

Theme 2: Strategic Research and Innovation:

This theme encapsulates SPU's strategic emphasis on utilising research as a pivotal driver of innovation, capacity building, and regional impact. SPU positions itself as a vital knowledge hub that addresses local, national and global challenges by fostering collaborations, enhancing infrastructure, and aligning research with sustainability objectives. Its focus on community and industry engagement, along with a commitment to policy-making and practical solutions, highlights its contribution to the development of human capital and socio-economic growth in the Northern Cape.

The theme encompasses 22 codes, making it the most prominent in terms of code count for this research question. It is connected to the third research question and primarily reflects one of the university's fundamental functions: generating new knowledge through research activities that influence innovation in the province. Additionally, the quotations underscore research endeavors in specialised areas, particularly renewable energy, as outlined below:

> *Academic programmes and research initiatives are aligned with sustainability goals. We encourage research in renewable energy, water conservation and sustainable agriculture. These efforts are crucial for developing local and global solutions that address pressing environmental challenges (Annual Report, 2023)*

This quote from the 2023 annual report highlights how academic programs and research initiatives align with the Sustainable Development Goals. Given that research in renewable energy has been recognised as a key driver of economic growth in the Northern Cape Province (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2021), and considering that agriculture is a vital sector for economic activity in the region, the university's vision is well-aligned with provincial strategies. Additionally, the SPU newsletter from November 2019 outlines further initiatives and programs focused on research and strategic innovation:

SPU, together with the Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism, Northern Cape Chamber of Commerce and Industry (NOCCI), Black Management Forum (BMF), Mine Managers Forum, Renewable Energy Entrepreneurs Forum, NCTA and SPM, have formed the Northern Cape Innovation Forum, aimed at addressing the challenges faced by the NC socio-economic environment and unleash the innovation potential of the SPU (News Letter November 2019)

In the quotation above, the SPU describes how the university is actively pursuing sustainability initiatives. It emphasises key areas of implementation, such as establishing an innovation forum that includes essential stakeholders to address regional challenges. Additionally, the university underscores the contributions of its academics to significant research projects, which enhance its scholarly focus by engaging the local community in pioneering studies on non-communicable diseases, as illustrated in the quote below:

Humanities anthropology lecturer Carina Truyts is part of a team that applied for and won a $1 million IDRC research grant for a three-year project titled "Nourishing Spaces," which investigates the link between non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, and food systems in six African cities, including Kimberley, South Africa. It is aimed at creating links between communities, the university and other stakeholders such as the provincial health department (News Letter November 2018)

The excerpt referenced above, sourced from the SPU newsletter of November 2018, effectively illustrates the initiatives designed to connect the university with the local and global communities through research endeavours.

Theme 3: Academic Skills Development:

This theme underscores SPU's dedication to enhancing the professional capabilities of both the region and its students. Through various initiatives, including incubation projects and professional development centers, SPU addresses skill gaps, particularly in key sectors such as construction and entrepreneurship. The emphasis is on creating a sustainable ecosystem that nurtures and retains local talent.

The theme is informed by 17 codes that, while contributing to the research question to a lesser extent, connect to the other themes within this section. Additionally, it relates to themes under research questions one (1) and three (3), as it emphasises the key role of the university in academic development.

The data in this theme suggest SPU's forward-thinking curricular contributions aimed at equipping students with the expertise required by the province's industries, as stated in the SPU Strategic Plan.

> *The primary motivation for the establishment of the SPU is to significantly contribute to the acceleration and expansion of access to university education in SA, in addition to building additional academic capacity in niche disciplines and specialisations (Strategic Plan 2015-2029)*

This further includes the skills necessary for the Square Kilometer Array (SKA) project. This project is based in Carnarvon, a rural town in the Pixley ka Seme District. The following quotation, drawn from the SPU annual report for 2015, highlights the initiative concerning the SKA:

> *Introduction to the BSc in Data Science, our partnership with the Square Kilometer Array (SKA) project has been more focused on the high-level intellectual capacity required by the project, which is expected to be fully functional by 2025. SKA assisted by securing funding for our students on the programme and hosted them at a career event in Cape Town (Annual Report, 2015)*

The quotation above underscores the SPU's commitment to a specialised undergraduate program, the B.Sc. in Data Science, designed to meet the emerging skill requirements for the SKA project. Additionally, the connection between this theme and research question three (3) is illustrated by the emphasis on data science funding provided by a key stakeholder, ABSA Bank. This financial support is crucial for ensuring that both students and academics have access to the necessary resources to advance program development in this specialised area, as highlighted in the 2018 annual report.

> *SPU agreed with the ABSA group to support the development of academic programmes in Data Science to the tune of R1.5 million for 3 years. This entails support students and enhance the research capacity of academic staff in the discipline (Annual Report, 2018)*

The academic programmes of the university are also aimed at providing expertise in entrepreneurship by providing entrepreneurial skills to grow the economy of the province

through the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Development, as captured in the Alumnus newsletter for December 2022, as follows:

> *The Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and Research is aimed at creating a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem intended to contribute positively to the Northern Cape economy by*

focusing on three objectives: pedagogy, entrepreneurship development and research (Alumni Newsletter December 2022)

This quotation highlights the university's commitment to promoting economic growth in the province by actively addressing the demand for entrepreneurial skills, particularly in light of the persistently high unemployment rate nationwide. This objective is pursued through strategic curriculum development and targeted research initiatives.

Theme 4: Infrastructure Development

This theme emphasises the infrastructure developed since the university's establishment and its contribution to the growth of both the city and the province. The university supports institutional advancement through strategic infrastructure planning, which has led to the expansion of student residences and academic buildings.

The theme is based on 12 codes that contribute, albeit to a lesser degree, to the research question and is linked to Theme 1 of Research Question 3. The university has acquired some of its infrastructure through donations and engagement with key provincial stakeholders. Moreover, this theme is interconnected with other themes under research question three, as it underscores infrastructure development by promoting entrepreneurship, fostering strategic partnerships and collaboration, and enhancing skills and capacity development. The university articulates its infrastructure initiatives through strategic planning that aligns with the expansion of its facilities since its inception in 2013, as evidenced by a quotation from the university policy documents as entrenched in the Annual Report for that year and further the Strategic Plan for 2020-2024:

Acknowledging the likelihood that SPU would attract a more significant proportion of its students from outside of Kimberley, it was also important that facilities and space be prepared for students' residences. With the appropriate permission from the Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and funding allocation via the New Universities Project Management Team, SPU commenced the purchasing of two new buildings, both within 400m of the North Campus (Annual Report, 2013)

The delivery of this strategy must ensure that quality infrastructure is delivered and facilities are maintained to provide supportive learning spaces and living environments (Strategic Plan 2020-2024).

The university has also endeavoured to enhance its spatial footprint by acquiring various buildings and parcels of land within the inner city, achieved through key stakeholders' generosity and philanthropic contributions.

> *The beginning of a new university must entail significant investment in land, buildings and related infrastructure. The city of Kimberley generously allocated land in the inner city for SPU use. These included the Old Legislature Building and the Old William Pescod School, both of which were used by the National Institute of Higher Education-Northern Cape (NIHE-NC) for its administrative and teaching needs. During this phase, a significant portion of the infrastructure development process involved refurbishing spaces to meet SPU's administrative and teaching needs as tenants vacated them. (Annual Report 2013)*

The quotation from the 2013 annual report highlights the essential relationships formed since the university's founding, which have been crucial for providing the facilities necessary to fulfill its mission. Additionally, the university has generated employment opportunities and enhanced local skills by significantly expanding its infrastructure projects. This initiative aims to establish three distinct campuses in the city, following a phased approach divided into three stages:

> *The focus of the new 5-year plan is a threefold strategy: commence development of the second piece of land making up the Central Campus; increase student accommodation and student life on the South Campus; and use the North Campus to strengthen the University's integration into the city fabric by supporting the urban regeneration project at the core of the Kimberley Central Business District (CBD). (Annual Performance Plan 2021)*

The excerpt from the 2021 Annual Performance Plan underscores the university's pivotal role in the regeneration project of Kimberley. It emphasises the institution's collaborative initiatives aimed at addressing the increasing demand for infrastructure within the region.

5.1.3. Sub-Question 3: How has SPU collaborated with local communities to enhance development efforts in the Northern Cape?

This research question aimed to investigate the university's relationships with key local stakeholders, including government entities, the private sector, and community organisations. It recognises that achieving development necessitates a multifaceted approach and cannot be accomplished in isolation. Engagement with local stakeholders is crucial, particularly since SPU, a newcomer to the region, may not yet be fully aware of the key issues that either hinder or promote development in the Northern Cape.

Three interrelated themes emerged from the analysis of 33 codes. These themes connect with the responses and subsequent themes related to research questions one and two, while also providing a more in-depth examination of the university's role in fostering regional development through community involvement.

Theme 1: Entrepreneurship development:

This theme highlights SPU's commitment to fostering an entrepreneurial ecosystem in the Northern Cape, aimed at driving economic growth through the establishment of innovation hubs, incubation initiatives, centres dedicated to entrepreneurship development, local employment programs, skills enhancement, and the empowerment of emerging contractors and small businesses. SPU catalyses local economic diversification and innovation, promoting entrepreneurship across various sectors. Key strategies include advocating for local procurement, enhancing the capabilities of local organisations, and prioritising skills development for black individuals within the construction and entrepreneurial fields.

The theme encompasses 13 codes derived from relevant quotes and represents the second- largest contribution to the research question. It further aims to illustrate how SPU supports regional development through its entrepreneurial focus. The university has emphasised its collaboration with the local community since its founding, mainly through the intentional recruitment and employment of local individuals to enhance employment opportunities and bolster local economic development, as detailed in the 2014 annual report.

> *The focus was on local employment and procurement, as well as the demonstrable skills development of local employees on the projects. (Annual Report 2014)*

The university's commitment to fostering the development of small and medium enterprises has been evident in its key infrastructure projects since their inception. This commitment is highlighted in its documentation, particularly concerning the emerging contractor's program and an incubation initiative designed to equip local contractors with the skills needed to compete effectively with their counterparts nationwide, as exemplified by the quote from the 2017 annual report below:

> *The university is committed to the economic development of local Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and emerging contractors in South Africa, with a special focus on the Northern Cape, through its construction development targets (Annual Report, 2021).*

SPU also manages a construction supplier/subcontractor Incubation Project (CSIP) (Annual Report, 2017).

In its efforts to address community needs through entrepreneurship upskilling, the university references pilot projects aimed at fostering entrepreneurship amid the country's and region's significant unemployment rates. This initiative is detailed in the summer 2022 newsletter and the December 2022 Alumni newsletter, as follows:

SPU Pilots ground-breaking economic activation office to promote entrepreneurship across the Northern Cape. (Newsletter Summer 2022).

The Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and Research aimed to create a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that would contribute positively to the Northern Cape's economy by focusing on three key objectives: pedagogy, entrepreneurship development, and research (Alumni Newsletter, December 2022).

The university's ongoing commitment to formalising the development of entrepreneurs and promoting entrepreneurship is exemplified by its strategic acquisition of the Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubator (CfERI) from the Vaal University of Technology (VUT). This initiative was highlighted in the December 2022 Alumni newsletter, which detailed the importance of this development.

The SPU Centre for Entrepreneurship and Rapid Incubator (CfERI) was established in 2017 to promote entrepreneurial development among youth, the unemployed, and women. It is funded by the Department of Small Business Development (DSBD) and the Small Enterprise Development Agency (SEDA). It was initially located within the Vaal University of Technology satellite operation in Upington. On 1 June 2021, CfERI was transferred to SPU. The SPU-CfERI offers business support services throughout the ZF Mgcawu District Municipality, aiming to enhance economic development and reduce unemployment in the district, while also expanding the University's presence in the region. The SPU-CfERI is developing a Maker Space featuring new technology and innovation to assist entrepreneurs with prototyping and manufacturing their products. The signed lease agreement provides stability for the SPU-CfERI to grow unhindered in a space that enables it to enhance technology and develop innovative methods for SMMEs to start and scale their businesses (Alumni Newsletter, December 2022).

Further collaboration with local communities through the promotion of entrepreneurship is exemplified by the student entrepreneurship initiative, which engages with international stakeholders. This initiative was highlighted in the eBrief Newsletter of November 2022.

> *Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in partnership with Entrepreneurship ACTion for others creates a better world for US (ENACTUS) launched its student entrepreneurial initiative on 17 August 2022 on Central Campus. Along with the launch, a campus activation programme was also held. ENACTUS is an international organisation active in 37 countries, with 72,000 students joining annually. It is the world's largest experiential learning platform dedicated to creating a better world while developing the next generation*
>
> *of entrepreneurial leaders and social innovators. The ENACTUS network of global business, academic and student leaders is unified by the vision of creating a better and more sustainable world (EBrief Newsletter November 2022).*

In this quotation, the university articulates how its collaborations with other academic institutions contribute to the advancement of its entrepreneurship and social innovation initiatives.

Theme 2: Regional Collaboration:

SPU strategically cultivates partnerships with governmental entities, educational institutions, and private sector stakeholders to bolster regional development. These collaborations enable joint initiatives in skills development, entrepreneurship, and resource management, highlighting SPU's proactive role as a pivotal contributor to sustainable regional growth. The theme arises from six codes that played a lesser role in addressing the research question. It encompasses the partnerships the university pursues to enhance the province's development through collaborative efforts with key stakeholders.

The university's documents reference its collaboration with the Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism (NCDEDAT) in developing academic programs aimed at fostering the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. They also mention formal agreements that establish knowledge-based partnerships, which influence policy-making and subsequent program development. This underscores the importance of evidence-based policies in the province, as noted in the 2014 annual report.

SPU has initiated a project with the Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism to consider research and teaching programmes that will contribute to the growth of small and medium enterprises in the region (Annual Report, 2014)

A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism for a knowledge-based partnership with SPU that would provide the evidence base for policy and programme development that supports economic well-being in the Northern Cape (Annual Report, 2017)

Additionally, the 2017 annual report highlights the relationship with key stakeholders, particularly in documenting discussions and agreements with the Public Service Commission (PSC) aimed at exploring challenges in service delivery. The province also seeks to collaborate with the PSC on research pertaining to the performance of its public institutions.

The Human Sciences Research Council and SPU have signed a Memorandum of Understanding that will focus on the higher education and development nexus of SPU in Kimberley and the Northern Cape. With an initial focus on four themes: urban and regional development and higher education as a growth pole, community engagement, linking popular culture industry, higher education well-being, student experience, public understanding of science and innovation and the SKA (News Letter March 2019)

As outlined in its strategic documents, the university emphasises its collaboration with the local government through engagement with the Sol Plaatje Local Municipality, particularly via the Town and Gown Initiative. This initiative refers to agreements established with the Sol Plaatje Local Municipality on key issues, as detailed in the 2021 annual report.

The VC and management team met with the Mayor of SPM and his mayoral committee on two occasions in June 2021 to discuss the signing of a Town and Gown Agreement between SPU and SPLM, which contained the following undertakings:

- *SPU will provide HR capacity development opportunities for SPLM*
- *they will enter into a shared agreement on safety and security, considering their location*
- *SPU wants to create opportunities through the Department of Tourism in respect of events arranged by SPU by involving SPLM and the city*

- *SPLM will ensure that processes associated with the current infrastructure projects at SPU are afforded the required attention*
- *SPU wants to explore the opportunities for alignment with all future development in the city, especially as it may relate to student entertainment (Annual Report, 2021)*

The Town and Gown model, as articulated by Bank et al. (2018), underscores the significance of the relationship between a university and its surrounding community. This framework emphasises the importance of mutual recognition and understanding of substantive structural issues affecting both entities.

Theme 3: Community-Centered Skills and Capacity Development:

SPU emphasises its role as an institution deeply committed to community engagement. Through initiatives such as the Construction Supplier Incubation Program and economic activation offices, SPU integrates practical skills and real-world experiences into its educational mission. The aim is to ensure that academic programs and research are closely tied to addressing local challenges. The theme is derived from 14 key codes that significantly contributed to the formulation of the research question. It focuses on the skills needed within the community, which

the university seeks to enhance through collaborative efforts. Additionally, it highlights various quotes from university documents that reference, among other points, a commitment to skills development specifically targeting the Black community to address historical injustices. This initiative underscores SPU's commitment to rectifying past wrongs and fostering social equality, as highlighted in the 2018 annual report.

> *The focus is on local skills development through the new infrastructure construction programme, which targets the development of black skills and participation in construction work (Annual Report, 2018).*
>
> *SPU staff continued to serve on the Provincial Human Resource Development Council, which allows dialogue around mutual support for responding to the human knowledge and skills needs of the region (Annual Report, 2017)*

The quotation from the 2017 annual report offers further insight into SPU’s collaborative initiatives aimed at addressing the region's human capital needs. Additionally, this theme emphasises the university's partnership efforts in fostering specific skills development for its infrastructure projects and contributing to the province's economic growth, as detailed in the 2020 annual report:

Growing targets are the increasing availability of organisations with required skills and profiles in Kimberley and NC due to SPU's incubation and contribution to the development of local capacity (Annual Report, 2020).

The university is committed to the economic development of local Small, Medium, and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) and emerging contractors in South Africa, with a special focus on the Northern Cape, through its construction development targets (Annual Report, 2021).

The university's commitment to fostering talent within the province is articulated through an initiative aimed at students in grades 10 to 12, designed to prepare them for post-secondary education. This initiative is detailed in the September 2020 newsletter, which underscores the institution's strategic focus on enhancing educational outcomes for prospective learners.

The SPU Pipeline Talent Project is a programme through which we identify the top ten learners in grades 10, 11 and 12 from a broad range of schools for deep immersion in areas such as mathematics, Scientific Thinking, Science, Literacies (Computer language), Life Skills, Critical Diversity, Forensics, economics, Law and International Relations. For learners to enter university and positively impact their communities (News Letter September 2020).

The university's collaborative initiatives encompass a broad spectrum of stakeholders, extending well beyond local boundaries to engage with representatives from various regions, including international entities and other academic institutions.

5.2. Conclusion

The thematic analysis sought to address the main research question: How does SPU contribute to the development of the Northern Cape? The objective was to evaluate the university's contribution to the region's development. This inquiry yielded three overarching themes: educational challenges, socio-economic challenges, and service delivery challenges. These themes demonstrate the university’s commitment to addressing the region's identified issues. The theme of educational challenges highlights the university's significant efforts, particularly through partnerships with the provincial education department, aimed at addressing perceived inadequacies in science, technology, and mathematics education through outreach programs in targeted schools.

The socio-economic challenges theme highlights the university's initiatives to confront these issues through collaboration with key stakeholders, resulting in the establishment of an innovation forum dedicated to addressing socio-economic hurdles. Additionally, the university emphasises its

commitment to improving service delivery in the region through joint initiatives with the Public Service Commission (PSC), aimed at enhancing the governance of public institutions. This collaborative effort with the PSC has been realised through research projects designed to improve public service efficiency and infrastructure development.

The analysis of the university's documents revealed four prominent themes in response to the second research question: What specific programs and initiatives has SPU implemented to foster the development of the Northern Cape? These themes are stakeholder engagement, strategic research and innovation, academic skills development, and infrastructure development. The theme of stakeholder engagement encompasses the university's collaborative efforts to connect with key regional stakeholders, including provincial and local governments, local businesses, and non-profit organisations, to promote regional development and advancement. Notable initiatives include the Knowledge Partnership Project, a collaboration with the provincial Department of Economic Development and Tourism (NCDEDAT). The strategic research and innovation theme underscores the university's significant initiatives in these areas, featuring the establishment of the Northern Cape Innovation Forum, as well as research endeavors focused on renewable energy, water conservation, and sustainable agriculture.

For research question three: How has Sol Plaatje University (SPU) collaborated with local communities to enhance development efforts in the Northern Cape? The analysis of SPU documents revealed three key themes: entrepreneurship development, regional collaboration, and community-centred skills and capacity development. The theme of entrepreneurship development highlights SPU's efforts to foster a culture of entrepreneurship through various development initiatives. A prime example is the establishment of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and Research, which centers on a curriculum focused on business development and research. Under the theme of strategic partnerships and regional collaboration, SPU demonstrates its commitment to collaborating with regional and national stakeholders, including government entities, the private sector, and other higher education institutions, to address local challenges and promote regional development. Finally, the skills and capacity development theme underscores SPU's commitment to enhancing the local workforce and supporting businesses through training initiatives targeting educators, agricultural officers, and minor construction enterprises, thereby driving regional growth.

6. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The study aimed to investigate the role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape region. The university's mission statement emphasises its commitment to "produce new knowledge that impacts key regional challenges and engage critically with communities of discourse and communities of people to explore pathways to equitable development" (Sol Plaatje University, 2015b; Sol Plaatje University, 2019b). To address the research questions, critical information was extracted and analysed through a review of various university documents, including strategic plans, annual performance plans, annual reports, and newsletters. A thematic approach was employed to interpret the information gathered from these documents. The previous chapter presented findings from this thematic analysis, which identified ten key themes in response to the three research questions. This section presents the main findings, providing an interpretation of the findings while connecting them to the literature review and theoretical framework.

6.1. Interpretation of Findings and connection to literature

The ten themes associated with the three research questions are not discrete entities; but interconnected and interdependent. This interconnectedness is a result of the university's comprehensive programs and initiatives, which aim to address the region's challenges and promote regional development.

6.1.1. Gaps in the identification of regional challenges

The findings reveal that the university frequently references regional challenges in exploring answers to the first research question through a thematic analysis of the documents. While the university acknowledges its efforts to tackle these challenges by enhancing education quality, addressing socioeconomic issues through collaborative initiatives, and improving service delivery via research, it is evident that there is a lack of clarity regarding the criteria used to identify these specific challenges. This is evident despite the mission of SPU (Sol Plaatje University, 2015b, 2019b) stating the university’s intention to become an institution uniquely positioned to graduate citizens capable of realising the aspirations of society, producing new knowledge that impacts key challenges of the region and engaging with communities to search out pathways to equitable development. The university does not explicitly outline or enumerate the regional challenges referred to, nor does it reference the national triple challenges as highlighted in the National Development Plan 2030, such as poverty, inequality, and unemployment (National Planning Commission, 2011).

Furthermore, the university fails to provide empirical evidence supporting its identification of these challenges or to reference provincial documents that enumerate specific regional issues, as mentioned in the provincial Growth and Development Plan (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2019), or to leverage insights from the provincial socioeconomic reviews conducted in 2023 (Northern Cape Provincial Government, 2024).

It can be argued that the university's emphasis on addressing the challenges highlighted by these issues stems from the historical injustices prevalent in the country, where education was often used as a tool of division along racial lines, as noted by Gultig (2000). Bank et al. (2018) further elaborate on the criticism that a significant shortcoming of the post-apartheid higher education strategy has been its reluctance to establish new universities, particularly in major urban centres. The persisting crisis in this sector largely stems from the mass expansion of a system that fails to adequately meet the needs of a new generation, particularly those from historically marginalised backgrounds. Consequently, the focus on teaching and learning has limited the potential for a more expansive and outward-looking approach to higher education.

Essop (2020) further supports this assertion, emphasising that higher education institutions do not operate in isolation; instead, they serve as a reflection of the fundamental social and economic inequalities that must be addressed to rectify historical injustices. These inequalities, inherited from the apartheid government, continue to undermine the principles of social justice established in the wake of democracy (Essop, 2020). Therefore, the university's initiatives aimed at addressing regional challenges must be informed by a thorough identification of these issues, allowing for a holistic response grounded in empirical evidence, as advised by Bank et al. (2018).

The university's commitment to addressing the educational challenges faced by the province aligns with national literature that highlights the role of universities in equipping individuals with skills to escape poverty (National Planning Commission, 2011) and serving as institutions that address historical injustices (Jansen, 2018; Swartz et al., 2019). This alignment is further reinforced by the need to respond to the region's growing income and knowledge disparities by prioritising social innovation as a fundamental aspect of its mission (Bayuo et al., 2020). Furthermore, existing literature highlights that universities play a crucial role in driving social transformation in areas facing socioeconomic challenges (Fernández-Esquinas & Pinto, 2014). Therefore, the university's initiatives aimed at addressing socioeconomic challenges through innovation reflect its dedication to confronting the educational and economic issues within the region.

6.1.2. The core institutional role and academic skills development

In addressing the three research questions, the fundamental institutional role of universities in teaching, knowledge generation (research) and dissemination, as articulated by Gunasekara (2004), Jongbloed et al. (2008), Dudin et al. (2014), Muriisa (2014), and Fonseca and Nieth (2021), is highlighted. The data about this core role is emphasised within the themes that answer questions one, two, and three, thereby creating a cohesive link among these responses. Consequently, the findings underscore the university's pivotal role in fostering the region's development. This is particularly evident in the three themes of the first research question, which highlight the identification of regional challenges. These challenges are addressed through various initiatives and programs targeting educational issues (teacher development and capacity building), socio-economic factors (training for agricultural officials), and service delivery challenges (research focused on service delivery issues) through research and teaching. The findings related to the second research sub-question indicate that SPU emphasises programs focused on stakeholder engagement, strategic research and innovation, as well as the enhancement of academic skills and infrastructure. In response to the third sub-question, it has been identified that the university collaborates with communities through initiatives aimed at entrepreneurship development, regional partnerships, and the advancement of skills and capacity at community centers. The evidence above aligns with the assertions by Jansen (2018) and Swartz et al. (2019) that universities must take responsibility for cultivating the skills and knowledge necessary to meet societal and economic needs.

Across all four themes addressing research question two, the SPU illustrates how its initiatives and programs aimed at fostering regional development are realised through its core institutional role. The stakeholder engagement theme emphasises the university's commitment to community engagement partnerships, which both inform and are informed by its teaching and research activities. The knowledge partnerships with the NCDEDAT exemplify this. Such efforts align with Jongbloed et al's 2008) perspective, which emphasises that the university highlights its fundamental role in demonstrating resilience and securing its position within the knowledge- based economy alongside regional stakeholders.

The strategic research and innovation theme emphasises the alignment of academic programs and research initiatives with the university's sustainability objectives. Phale et al. (2021) support this

argument, suggesting that fostering innovation has a positive ripple effect on education and skills development, which are vital for economic growth. The academic skills development theme further underscores the university's essential role through initiatives that address the developmental needs of the province, such as the introduction of the B.Sc. in Data Sciences program. This program is designed to equip students with the critical skills necessary for the successful implementation of the Square Kilometer Array in Carnarvon. Additionally, this aligns with Bennewoth and Fijtar's (2019) assertion that knowledge production is central to shaping policies that contribute to regional development. The university also demonstrates its commitment to stakeholder engagement and strategic research innovation through its partnership with ABSA Bank, which aims to enhance research capacity within the field of data sciences. Finally, the infrastructure development theme highlights the university's core role through incubation and capacity-building initiatives that equip emerging contractors with the skills necessary to compete for university infrastructure contracts. This perspective is echoed by Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff (2000), Charles (2003), and Evers, (2019), who argue that nurturing a skilled workforce enables effective utilisation of knowledge, allowing organisations to thrive in a knowledge-based economy.

The findings related to research sub-question three, which highlight the three themes on entrepreneurship development, regional collaboration and community-centred skills and capacity development, further highlight how the university's collaboration with local communities to enhance development efforts aligns with its core mission of research and education. This is exemplified by the economic development theme, where the university aims to emerge as a leader in the knowledge economy by establishing the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and Research. This centre is designed to foster a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem and have a positive impact on the province's economy. The university's goal of becoming a leader in the knowledge economy resonates with the literature by Phale et al. (2021), which demonstrates that the knowledge economy plays a crucial role in driving economic growth both domestically and beyond the region's borders.

The regional collaboration theme emphasises initiatives aimed at enhancing regional development through the university's pivotal role in its partnership project with NCDEDAT in developing academic programs aimed at fostering the growth of small and medium-sized enterprises. In this collaboration, SPU aims to provide a robust evidence base for policy and program development through dedicated research efforts. The partnership project to develop academic program aimed at growing small and medium enterprises, aligns with the perspectives of Benneworth and Fijtar (2019),

which highlight how knowledge production empowers universities to contribute to regional policy-making. Additionally, the Community-Centered Skills and Capacity Development theme illustrates how the university's core role is embedded in its various activities, mainly through the SPU Talent Pipeline Project. This initiative equips learners with essential skills in specific subjects by immersing them in teaching experiences. Collaborating with the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits University), the program prepares learners for further advancement. It underscores the importance of partnerships with other research institutions and universities in fostering regional innovation, as noted by Arbo and Benneworth (2007).

The regional development theory offers a framework for understanding the university's role within the province. It posits that geographical patterns of knowledge diffusion and the barriers to accessing that knowledge are essential factors influencing regional development . The regional development theory aligns with the university's fundamental mission of knowledge production and dissemination. Additionally, human capital theory plays a crucial role in regional development. It asserts that human capital, particularly in the form of tertiary education, makes a significant contribution to the economic growth of cities (Faggian & McCann, 2009). Human capital plays a crucial role in enhancing economic productivity, leading to a substantial reallocation of resources across space. This theory emphasises that education and training represent the most valuable investments in human capital, with higher and tertiary education having a markedly influential effect on an individual's earning potential (Welch, 1975). Moreover, education and human capital are considered pivotal components of modern economies (Fleischhauer, 2007). SPU's core institutional role and the first part of its mission statement (Sol Plaatje University, 2015b, 2019b)*graduate citizens competent and capable of realising the aspirations of society,* align with the human capital theory, as it is strategically positioned to drive socio-economic transformation in an underdeveloped region.

This concept is intricately connected to the innovation and knowledge spillover aspect of regional development theory. It posits that the university, serving as a hub for research, technological advancement, and knowledge dissemination (Gunasekara, 2006; Jongbloed et al., 2008; Muriisa, 2014; Dudin et al., 2014; Fonseca & Nieth, 2021), generates knowledge that enhances productivity and fosters innovation (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). The innovation and knowledge spillover concept is further illustrated through the themes of academic skills and strategic research and innovation, where the university outlines its initiatives in the region aimed at improving the skills of students in programs that

not only address their developmental needs but also contribute to the well-being of their communities, as indicated in the annual reports for 2016 and referenced in transcript three.

6.1.3. The SPU as an Economic and Social Driver

The analysis of the data gathered to address research questions two and three offers valuable insights into the university's function as both an economic and social catalyst. The themes identified from this data are interconnected with those related to infrastructure and economic development, underpinning the university's role as an economic driver. Conversely, themes surrounding stakeholder engagement and regional collaboration establish the foundation for its role as a social driver.

The themes of infrastructure and economic development encompass the university's initiatives and programs aimed at providing essential facilities for academic, administrative, student housing, and sports purposes. These initiatives include significant expansions to accommodate the growing number of course offerings and students since the university's establishment in 2013. The university has invested billions into the regional economy through extensive infrastructure projects within the city and its surroundings, positioning itself as a key player in the area in its roles as an employer, real estate developer, and taxpayer. This substantial investment is further evident through the university's focused incubation project and extension of vendor database of local suppliers and subcontractors, in an effort to ensure preferential employment and procurement of local contractors and labourers (Sol Plaatje University, 2018), which demonstrates the university's intentional investment efforts. This theme aligns with Fongwa's (2023) fourth dimension of a university's contribution to regional development, emphasising land ownership, real estate development, urban revitalisation, and infrastructure enhancement. Additionally, research by Power & Malmberg, (2008), Marginson (2010), and Kleinsmith and Horn (2015) supports the notion that these efforts enable the university to generate substantial economic and innovative benefits indirectly.

Moreover, the themes of stakeholder engagement and regional collaboration are interconnected, as the university illustrates through data the projects, programs, and initiatives it is undertaking to fulfil its social responsibilities. The university emphasises its commitment to regional skills development by participating in a stakeholder engagement forum focused on an incubation project for small and medium enterprises within the construction industry. Additionally, the university's involvement in the Town and Gown initiative with the Sol Plaatje municipality exemplifies how both entities will benefit from their strategic collaboration in terms of capacity development and infrastructure projects. Through the Town and Gown approach (Bank et al., 2018), the university highlights that a mutual understanding

and acknowledgement of significant structural challenges characterise its relationship with the community. Trani and Holsworth (2010) support this perspective, stating that universities fulfil their societal role through mutually beneficial relationships with regional stakeholders, thereby promoting community development. Further reinforcing this notion, Fernández-Esquinas & Pinto (2014) argue that universities serve as essential drivers of social transformation within their local areas. Meanwhile, Kleinsmith and Horn (2015) underscore the universities' fundamental role in contributing to society through initiatives aimed at addressing historical inequalities.

Regional development theory posits that development is inherently multidimensional and influenced by various factors, including the quality and availability of labour, access to capital, infrastructure, sectoral composition, technological advancement, and government support systems (Nijkamp & Abreu, 2009). The role of universities as economic and social drivers aligns with these premises of regional development theory. Additionally, the theory's emphasis on enhancing regional welfare and addressing interregional disparities, as articulated by Nijkamp and Abreu (2009), places the economic and social role of SPU at the forefront of this framework. Conversely, the growth pole theory, a crucial concept within regional development theory, suggests that an industry, such as SPU, can catalyse the development and growth of related industries (Fongwa & Wangenge-Ouma, 2015) through linkages with other industries within the region. SPU facilitates this process through the flow of goods generated by its infrastructure projects, among other avenues, as well as the income it derives from student fees, which are particularly relevant to the theme of infrastructure development.

6.1.4. Community-centered initiatives of the SPU

There are notable similarities between the themes of community-centered skills and capacity development, as well as economic development, as presented in Research Question Three and the academic skills development theme addressed in Research Question Two. These similarities highlight initiatives and programs that underscore the university's commitment to the economic development of local small, medium, and micro enterprises, as well as emerging contractors, as noted in the 2019 Annual Report. This aligns with the efforts of the Centre for Entrepreneurship Development and Research, which seeks to foster a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem that positively impacts the Northern Cape economy, as mentioned in the December 2022 Annual Newsletter. In both instances, the emphasis is on enhancing the capacity of local entrepreneurs, enabling them to compete for university contracts, participate in the local economy, and contribute to the region's overall development.

Further similarities can be identified between the strategic partnership and regional collaboration theme of this research question and the stakeholder engagement theme of Research Question 2. In both themes, evidence highlights how the university forges partnerships and collaborates with regional stakeholders. This is illustrated in the findings of Research Question Two, where Theme One references the efforts of the Physical Planning and Infrastructure department to establish a Stakeholder Engagement Forum for the Incubation Project as contained in the Annual Report for 2018. Additionally, evidence from research question three reinforces this connection by mentioning the memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the university and the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). This MoU signifies a commitment from both parties to concentrate on the development nexus within the region, with a particular emphasis on community engagement.

The community-centered initiatives of the university align with the perspectives of Power and Malmberg (2008), who highlight the significance of collaboration with public and private stakeholders as a vital aspect of university excellence. Trani and Holsworth (2010) further assert that the university's societal role is realised through the cultivation of mutually beneficial relationships aimed at fostering regional community development. They emphasise that the university serves as a crucial partner in regional development, playing an essential role in revitalising urban communities to enhance their competitiveness. Additionally, Boulton and Lucas (2011) identify public engagement as a fundamental component of a university's contribution to regional development, which is achieved through collaboration with industry (Benneworth & Fitjar, 2019). Kleinsmith and Horn (2015) underscore the essential role of universities in addressing historical inequalities through various initiatives. Lastly, Fonseca & Nieth (2021) advocate for a well-coordinated alignment between universities and regional stakeholders.

The Triple Helix Model (Etzkowitz & Klofsten, 2005) emphasises the interconnectedness of universities, industries, and government in fostering regional development. It highlights the collaboration among these three entities as a crucial driver of innovation and economic growth (Dudin et al., 2014). As such, the synergy between universities, industries, and government can be instrumental in crafting strategies for economic advancement and social transformation (Ferraris et al., 2020). This collaboration is particularly evident in the theme of strategic partnerships and regional cooperation, which highlights the strategic relationships that the SPU is forming with provincial government local government and its entities, as indicated by the data.

6.2. Conclusion

This chapter presents a discussion of the study's findings on the role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape. The data provided identified ten themes related to SPU's initiatives aimed at addressing regional challenges. Although the university recognises local socioeconomic issues, the data revealed a gap in identifying these challenges and linking them to the region. Therefore, a more empirical approach to problem identification is necessary, aligning with the National Development Plan 2030 and regional policies, to address the challenges that impede the region's development, which may include poverty, inequality, and unemployment.

SPU's commitment to foster the development of the region is evident in its core function. Through knowledge creation and dissemination, its educational programs and collaborations, such as the B.Sc. in Data Sciences and partnerships with ABSA Bank, foster innovation-driven

economic transformation. Engagement in community initiatives, such as the Town and Gown project, further highlights its relationship with key stakeholders and aligns with theories of regional development. In conclusion, SPU plays a crucial role in alleviating regional disparities and promoting socioeconomic development. Strengthening its alignment with national development frameworks and adopting an evidence-based approach will enhance its transformative role in the region.

The data presented, however, is limited as it solely reflects perspectives from the policy documents and newsletters of SPU. Engaging with key stakeholders—such as institutional management, academics, civil society, and officials from national, provincial, and local governments—could have offered additional insights into the role of SPU in addressing the challenges faced by the province.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the study, wherein the research findings effectively address the questions articulated in the introduction of this report. It also explains the significance and implications of the findings, the contribution the study has made to the body of knowledge, and the study's limitations and recommendations.

A documentary analysis of Sol Plaatje University's key strategic documents was conducted to gather data and answer the research questions through a thematic analysis. The SPU, through its core institutional role, has effectively addressed challenges related to the quality of teaching, socio-economic conditions, and service delivery in the region. This highlights these issues as significant barriers to regional development. However, the SPU does not specify how it identified these challenges or whether they are priority issues affecting the region's development. The university further emphasises key initiatives and programs it has implemented to promote growth in the area, which include engaging with important stakeholders, fostering strategic research and innovation, enhancing academic skills in vital areas, and contributing to infrastructure development. Additionally, the university has demonstrated its commitment to collaborative efforts that stimulate regional development through economic initiatives aimed at equipping entrepreneurs with the necessary skills to engage in the province’s economy. Through targeted engagement and outreach initiatives, the university continues to work closely with communities to support the region's development.

Through its commitment to teaching and research, the SPU is well-positioned to enhance the quality of education in the province and elevate skill levels, thereby promoting regional development. This, in turn, can improve the economic opportunities available to its graduates and may help reduce unemployment in the area. Moreover, this focus can enhance the employability of university graduates. SPU’s emphasis on capacity building in entrepreneurship equips students with the skills for self-employment, lessening their dependence on the traditional job market and potentially decreasing the overall unemployment rate in the province.

Additionally, the university’s research on service delivery can inform policy formulation and strengthen regional governance, ultimately leading to improved government planning and more effective responses to service delivery challenges. Increased research output within the region’s industries may attract further funding, enhancing the province's sustainability. The knowledge

generated from these targeted research efforts has the potential to foster innovation that addresses the socio-economic challenges faced by the region

To glean insights from the experiences of the Universities of Fort Hare, Free State, and Nelson Mandela Metro, it is essential to solidify and strengthen relationships with regional stakeholders. A coordinated approach will enhance the relevance of training, enable knowledge exchange, and promote innovation, ensuring that industries are prepared to integrate graduates. Through structured and well-informed collaborations with both industry and government, SPU can facilitate knowledge spillover, where research findings benefit local businesses, increase productivity, and drive innovation-led regional development. It is important to acknowledge that a university's contribution to regional development may extend beyond its fundamental roles of teaching and research. This influence can manifest inadvertently, primarily due to the institution's mere presence in a given region (Fongwa & Wangenge-Ouma, 2015). Consequently, universities can substantially contribute to regional development only when they actively engage in the developmental processes in collaboration with relevant local stakeholders (Strauf & Scherer, 2008).

The study has contributed to the body of knowledge by clarifying the role of SPU in promoting regional development. The study was limited to the examination of university documents, which constrained the opportunity for a deeper exploration that other qualitative research methods, such as key informant interviews, typically provide. In this context, key informants would include community members, students, government stakeholders, and private sector partners. Consequently, it was challenging to evaluate the effectiveness of the programs and initiatives in the region’s development, as well as the value generated from the university's collaborative efforts.

Future research should investigate how SPU's policies and initiatives can be optimised to enhance their developmental impact. Additionally, future studies should investigate the university's impact on regional development through counterfactual impact analysis. Policymakers and stakeholders should explore ways to further the region's growth by fostering closer, structured, and formalised relationships with the university. A comprehensive understanding of the contradictions, inequalities, and challenges of urban development is necessary, as universities should respond to these issues holistically. Without some form of regulation or a social contract with the broader stakeholder structures in the region, it becomes challenging to mitigate the negative tendencies associated with the neoliberal model of city- campus development.

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APPENDIX 1: ETHICS CLEARANCE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE ETHICS COMMITTEE

CONSTITUTED UNDER THE UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE: WSG-2024-26

PROJECT TITLE: The role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in addressing the challenges of the Northern Cape

INVESTIGATOR	Pamela Nogwili
SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT OF INVESTIGATOR	School of Governance
DATE CONSIDERED	20 August 2024
DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE	Approved unconditionally
RISK LEVEL	No Risk
EXPIRY DATE	Date of submission of the Research Report

ISSUE DATE OF CERTIFICATE 21 August 2024 **CHAIRPERSON** Rekgotsofetse Chikane

cc: Supervisor: Dr Rekgotsofetse Chikane

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Chairperson of the School/Department ethics committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature **Date** 22/08/2024

APPENDIX 2: PERMISSION LETTER

SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY

OFFICE OF THE UNIVERSITY REGISTRAR

(+27) 53 491 0000

registrar@spu.ac.za

Private Bag X5008
North Campus
Chapel Street
Kimberley
8300

Thursday, 14 November 2024

Ms P Nogwili
University of the Witwatersrand

E-mail: 2772700@students.wits.ac.za

Reference Number: SREC 0239/2024h

Dear Ms Nogwili

RESEARCH PROJECT: *The role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in addressing the challenges of the Northern Cape.*

The Senate Research Ethics Committee (SREC), at its meeting on 6 November 2024, **approved** the above application for **gatekeeper's permission,** which will expire on **30 November 2025.**

Please note the following standard requirements for gatekeeper clearance:

1. Approval will be for a period of twelve months. At the end of this period, if the project has been completed, abandoned, discontinued, or not commenced for any reason, you are required to inform the University Registrar. If you complete the work earlier than you had planned, you must inform the University Registrar as soon as the work is completed.
2. Please note that the University must be notified of any alteration to the project.
3. You must notify the University Registrar immediately in the event of any adverse effects on participants or of any unforeseen events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project.
4. At all times, you are responsible for the ethical conduct of your research.
5. Participation of Sol Plaatje University staff and students in the research is voluntary, and they are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason, and this will not affect legal rights.
6. Any personal information collected during the study will be anonymised and remain confidential.
7. The research must conform to the Protection of Personal Information Act, Act 4 of 2013.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jody P. Cedras
University Registrar

APPENDIX 3: TITLE APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND JOHANNESBURG

Private Bag 3 Wits, 2050
Fax:
Tel:

Reference: Ms Jennifer Mgolodela
E-mail: jennifer.mgolodela@wits.ac.za

06 February 2025
Person No: 2772700
PAG

Ms PN Nogwili
Hillcrest Manor
28 Slegg Street
Hillcrest
8301
South Africa

Dear Ms Pamela Nogwili

Master of Management: Approval of Title

We have pleasure in advising that your proposal entitled *The role of Sol Plaatje University in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape* has been approved. Please note that any amendments to this title have to be endorsed by the Faculty's higher degrees committee and formally approved.

Yours sincerely

Mrs Marike Bosman
Faculty Registrar
Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management

APPENDIX 4: CHANGE OF TITLE APPROVAL

WITS SCHOOL OF GOVERNANCE

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

Change of Title for Approval

Name of Student:

Student number: 2772700 Panel Date:

Degree: Submission Date:

Supervisor: Dr R Chikane

ORIGINAL TITLE	The role of Sol Plaatje University (SPU) in addressing the challenges of the Northern Cape
AMENDED TITLE	The role of Sol Plaatje University in contributing to the development of the Northern Cape

Change of title was recommended by:

PANEL	
PGSC	
GSC	
Other (specify)	Faculty Registrar

Note:
WSG will submit this document to Faculty with your Panel Feedback form, Proposal Revisions and Final Proposal. They will be presented for approval to the Postgraduate Studies Committee (PGSC). The MM 100% research and the PhD proposals will then be presented to the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) with the recommendations of the PGSC. Once approved by PGSC and GSC (for pure research degrees), your amended title is captured onto the Student Information Management System (SIMS) by Faculty.

STUDENT		SUPERVISOR	
Name:	PN Nogwili	Name:	Dr Rekgotsofetse Chikane
Signature:		Signature:	