Research Square

Preprints are preliminary reports that have not undergone peer review.
They should not be considered conclusive, used to inform clinical practice,
or referenced by the media as validated information.

Perceived Influence of Community Engagement on University Students' Entrepreneurial Knowledge and Entrepreneurial Intentions: Evidence from Business and Information Management Students in South Africa

Zakhe Sifiso Khuzwayo

21632649@dut4life.ac.za

Durban University of Technology

Smangele Pretty Moyane

Durban University of Technology

Angeline Sibongile Ngcobo

Durban University of Technology

Research Article

Keywords: community engagement, entrepreneurial intention, entrepreneurial knowledge, higher education, South Africa, student perceptions

Posted Date: September 30th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-10996854/v1

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
Read Full License

Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

The aim of the universities in South Africa is to produce graduates who can identify opportunities, solve problems and contribute to economic development in the community, however, the impact of community engagement on this is seldom assessed in discipline specific student groups. This article presents the results of the first objective in a larger convergent mixed methods study, which involved investigating if Business and Information Management (BIM) students at a South African university of technology view community engagement as a source of entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intention. 313 students completed a structured questionnaire and 29 students, who have participated in community engagement activities, were interviewed. In terms of the outcomes of community engagement, the majority of respondents indicated that it had influenced their entrepreneurial knowledge (80.8%) and their entrepreneurial intentions (80.5%), and there was a strong correlation between the entrepreneurial knowledge scale and entrepreneurial intention scale ($r = .843$, $p < .001$). The problems in the community were cited as triggers to opportunity recognition and are a source of confidence in entrepreneurial identity from the interview accounts. As the design is cross-sectional and based on self-report, the results reflect a uniform and consistent student perception and not a proven causal relationship, which is emphasised throughout the discussion and conclusion. The article ends with implications for the curriculum in business programmes and recommendation for the follow-up and comparative studies required to test the perceived relationship.

1. Introduction

South African universities are under a sustained pressure to produce graduates who will do more than get jobs, but will also create jobs, respond to community needs and contribute to community economic development (Etzkowitz, 2008; Perkmann et al., 2013). The continuing problem of youth unemployment and inequality has driven universities of technology and their curricula in particular to emphasize the integration of discipline content and practical experience in the community. Community engagement is one of the ways in which institutions can work towards this agenda and is defined as a 'partnership' between a university and an external community that is beneficial to both parties and involves applied learning and learning for application (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). It's encouraged under the belief that solving community issues will bring about the enhancement of practical and entrepreneurial skills which are not adequately taught in class.

The assumption has been tested more frequently in the context of civic learning, employability and social responsibility, and less frequently entrepreneurship (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006). Attitude and perceived feasibility and social support have been identified as core factors driving entrepreneurial intention (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009), while research about entrepreneurship education has demonstrates that experiential, practice-based learning is more effective at fostering entrepreneurial competence than lecture-based learning (Kolb, 1984; Neck & Greene, 2011). However, few studies have explored the perception of entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intention as a result of the process of community engagement specifically, not just that of experiential learning in general, among

the students in a discipline where entrepreneurship is a core outcome like Business and Information Management (BIM). The literature on community engagement in the South African higher education sphere is both conceptual and empirical in terms of the alleged link between community engagement and entrepreneurial development among students in the various disciplines in higher education.

This article addresses that gap by reporting on the first objective of a broader convergent mixed-methods study of BIM students at a South African university of technology. The objective was to determine students' perceptions of whether community engagement influences their entrepreneurial knowledge and their entrepreneurial intentions. The broader study also examined the factors that shape student participation in community engagement and the role of social capital in that process; those two objectives fall outside the scope of the present article and are reported separately. Restricting the analysis to a single, well-defined objective allows the perception evidence to be examined in depth, together with its evidentiary limits, rather than folded into a broader narrative about mechanism.

The article is relevant to three audiences. For entrepreneurship education researchers, it offers evidence on whether students in a business-related programme actually perceive community-facing activity as entrepreneurially formative, rather than assuming this from theory alone. For programme designers and community engagement offices at universities of technology, it offers descriptive evidence that can inform decisions about whether and how to formalise community engagement as an entrepreneurship pedagogy. Methodologically, the article also illustrates how a perception-based, cross-sectional finding should be reported: as a description of a strong and consistent pattern in student self-report, not as proof that community engagement caused the reported gains. The remainder of the article reviews the relevant theoretical and empirical literature, describes the mixed-methods design used to collect the perception evidence, reports the quantitative and qualitative results for this objective, and discusses their meaning, their limits and their implications for practice and future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Community engagement as a site of entrepreneurial learning

Community engagement in higher education typically consists of a mutually enriching, two-way interaction between the university and the outside world that brings some form of social benefit, and links teaching, research and service to need (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). The South African context also has a conscious transformation mandate in that the university's response to unemployment, poverty and inequality cannot be a sideline but must be addressed through the activity (O'Meara & Jaeger, 2006). For students in business-related programmes, community engagement offers a setting in which abstract business concepts, such as opportunity identification, resource constraint and value creation, can be observed in a live, resource-limited context rather than discussed only in a lecture theatre. This is the premise on which the present study rests: that community engagement functions, at least potentially, as

a form of applied entrepreneurship education, additional to and distinct from generic civic or employability learning.

2.2 Theoretical background

The perception objective discussed below has three sources of theory. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB, Ajzen, 1991) suggests that attitude toward the behaviour, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence the formation of entrepreneurial intention; while in the context of entrepreneurship, strong attitudes toward entrepreneurial activity and self-confidence in the ability to carry out entrepreneurial activity are found to influence the entrepreneurial intention of students (Liñán & Chen, 2009). This theory suggests that students' perception of influence, not just the actual behavioural result, should be studied as a theoretically valid unit of analysis because it is the perceived feasibility and favourable attitude that are each the immediate cause for a student's intention according to this theory. According to Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984), the process of learning by reflecting on concrete experiences is likely to trigger this type of learning change because learning is theorised in several stages, namely concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, of which the active experimentation stage is likely to develop entrepreneurial competence, in addition to the concrete experience stage (Neck & Greene, 2011). Whereas, Social Capital Theory (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000) provides a complementary explanation on how relationships with others in the community, with peers, and among community members and institutional actors can contribute to expanding the resources, information, and legitimacy that can be mobilised to help a student identify and/or pursue an opportunity. Together, these three perspectives provide a plausible account of why community engagement could shape entrepreneurial knowledge and intention; they do not, on their own, establish that it does, which is the question the present objective was designed to test empirically, at the level of student perception.

2.3 Empirical literature and the research question

Empirical research on community engagement in South African higher education has documented its contribution to civic learning, social responsibility and graduate employability (Bhagwan, 2020; Chetty & Bhagwan, 2023). A separate literature on entrepreneurial intention has established the attitudinal and social predictors of intention among students generally (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009), and entrepreneurship education research has argued for practice-based pedagogy over classroom instruction alone (Neck & Greene, 2011). These two literatures rarely intersect: studies of community engagement seldom measure entrepreneurial outcomes specifically, and studies of entrepreneurial intention seldom examine community engagement as a distinct antecedent, separate from generic work-integrated learning or internships. Among Business and Information Management students at South African universities of technology, where the curriculum already combines business content with a community engagement requirement, no published study appears to have asked students directly whether they perceive their community engagement experience as having shaped their entrepreneurial knowledge and their entrepreneurial intention.

Objective 1 of the broader study was formulated to close this specific gap, guided by the following research question: how do Business and Information Management students perceive the influence of community engagement on their entrepreneurial knowledge and their entrepreneurial intentions? Given the theoretical convergence described above, and consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour's treatment of knowledge and intention as related but conceptually distinct outcomes of the same attitudinal and experiential process, the quantitative strand additionally examined the association between the two constructs, with the expectation of a positive and statistically significant correlation between students' reported entrepreneurial knowledge and their reported entrepreneurial intentions.

3. Methodology

3.1 Paradigm and design

The study was set in a post-positivist paradigm, where the social reality exists as an objective out there, but only can be grasped in a partial and provisional way through measurement and interpretation (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). This paradigm was chosen because it uses a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) where quantitative and qualitative data were gathered at the same time, analysed separately, and then merged at interpretation. The convergent design was preferred over a sequential alternative because the study did not require qualitative data to explain an unexpected quantitative result, nor quantitative data to test an instrument built from prior qualitative findings; both strands were instead needed simultaneously to answer the same question about students' perceptions, with one strand supplying the extent of agreement across a large sample and the other supplying the reasoning behind it.

3.2 Population, sampling and participants

The target population was the 1,141 students registered in the Business and Information Management programme at a university of technology in Durban, South Africa. A minimum sample of 288 respondents was calculated for the quantitative strand using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error; simple random sampling was used so that every registered student had an equal probability of selection, and 313 usable questionnaires were returned, a response rate of 27.4% that exceeded the calculated minimum. For the qualitative strand, 29 students who had previously taken part in a community engagement activity were purposively selected and interviewed, with recruitment continuing until additional interviews were no longer producing new analytic content, a point conventionally described as data saturation (Saunders et al., 2018). Purposive sampling was used here in place of random sampling because the qualitative strand required participants who could speak from direct experience of community engagement, a criterion that random sampling of the full student population could not guarantee.

3.3 Measures

The quantitative instrument was a structured, self-administered questionnaire. Two of its four constructs are reported in this article: entrepreneurial knowledge (seven items) and entrepreneurial intentions (seven items), each rated on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree and each adapted from items previously used in the entrepreneurship and community engagement literature to preserve content and construct validity (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Two additional single items, asking respondents directly whether they believed community engagement had influenced their entrepreneurial knowledge and their entrepreneurial intentions, with response options of yes, maybe or no, were used to obtain a direct summary of overall perception before the more granular Likert items were examined. The qualitative instrument was a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions organised around the study's three objectives; for the purposes of this article, only questions concerning students' perceived entrepreneurial knowledge and intention gains are drawn upon. Probing questions allowed participants to explain and illustrate their responses. Both instruments were piloted with students who shared the target population's characteristics but were excluded from the main study, and minor wording changes were made to the questionnaire following the pilot.

3.4 Procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the university's Institutional Research Ethics Committee, and gatekeeper permission was obtained from the relevant programme authorities before data collection began. The questionnaires were administered in regular school lessons, and if necessary, e-mailed to the participants after they received an information letter and signed an informed consent form, and the completed questionnaires were reviewed for completeness; questionnaires that were missing too much information were discarded prior to analysis. Interviews were conducted on campus at a private location, in each case with the permission of the interviewee, lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The two waves of data collection were conducted simultaneously in order to maximize the degree of comparability between the two datasets at the time of their integration, as the responses to the surveys and interviews were collected at the same institutional context and time.

3.5 Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed in IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29). Descriptive statistics, comprising means, standard deviations and percentage agreement, summarised responses to the entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions scales and to the two direct perception items. All scales were evaluated for internal consistency by Cronbach's alpha, which was considered a minimum acceptable value of .70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The expectation from the theoretical framework that entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions would be positively and significantly correlated with each other was tested through Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient with a significance level of $p < .05$, as is common practice with this correlation coefficient (Field, 2018). No factor-analytic or mediation procedures were performed, a choice discussed further in section 5.3. Interview transcripts were analysed using the six-phase thematic analysis procedure described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2022): familiarisation with the data, generation of initial codes, identification of candidate themes, review of themes against the full dataset, definition and naming of final themes, and production of the analytic

account. Coding focused on passages describing entrepreneurial knowledge, opportunity recognition, confidence and future entrepreneurial intent; the theme reported in this article, community engagement enhances entrepreneurial awareness and intention, was one of three themes generated across the broader study.

3.6 Validity, reliability and ethical considerations

Content and construct validity of the quantitative instrument rested on adapting previously used items and on review by supervisors experienced in the field, while trustworthiness of the qualitative strand was pursued through verbatim transcription, an audit trail of coding decisions, and extensive use of participants' own words in reporting findings, consistent with established criteria for qualitative rigour. All participants gave informed consent, were told that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw without penalty, and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity in reporting; interview participants gave separate consent for audio recording. Data were stored securely and are reported here without identifying detail beyond an anonymised participant number.

4. Results

4.1 Sample

The 313 respondents were predominantly female (55.3%), African (96.8%) and aged 21 to 24 years (54.6%), with the largest single group enrolled in the third year of the diploma (30.7%). This demographic profile is consistent with the composition of the BIM programme from which the sample was drawn and provides context for interpreting the perception data that follow, without altering their interpretation.

4.2 Reliability of the scales used in this objective

The entrepreneurial knowledge scale (7 items) returned a Cronbach's alpha of .942, and the entrepreneurial intentions scale (7 items) returned an alpha of .945; both exceed the conventional threshold for acceptable internal consistency and indicate that respondents answered the items within each scale in a highly consistent manner (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Because these coefficients, along with those for the study's other two scales, cluster at the upper end of the acceptable range, they should be read as evidence of internal consistency rather than as independent confirmation that the two constructs are empirically distinct; no exploratory or confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to test this distinctiveness, a limitation returned to in the discussion.

4.3 Students' overall perception of influence

Asked directly whether community engagement had influenced their entrepreneurial knowledge and their entrepreneurial intentions, 80.8% of respondents answered yes for entrepreneurial knowledge and 80.5% answered yes for entrepreneurial intentions; a further 18.2% and 18.8% respectively answered maybe, and only 1.0% and 0.6% answered no (Table 1). The pattern is strongly and consistently positive across both outcomes, with almost no outright disagreement.

Table 1
Students' overall perception of the influence of community engagement (n = 313)

Survey item	Yes	Maybe	No
Influence on entrepreneurial knowledge	253 (80.8%)	57 (18.2%)	3 (1.0%)
Influence on entrepreneurial intentions	252 (80.5%)	59 (18.8%)	2 (0.6%)

4.4 Entrepreneurial knowledge

Item-level responses on the entrepreneurial knowledge scale produced a mean of 4.24 (SD = 0.58) across the seven items, indicating agreement, on average, that community engagement had contributed to entrepreneurial knowledge (Table 2). The items with the highest agreement concerned improved problem-solving and innovation skills (90.4% agree or strongly agree) and improved understanding of real-world business challenges (90.1%); agreement was also high for linking classroom learning to practical application (89.5%) and for identifying potential business opportunities (87.5%).

Table 2
Community engagement and entrepreneurial knowledge (n = 313)

Entrepreneurial knowledge item	M	SD	Agree/ Strongly agree
Understand real-world business challenges	4.27	0.65	90.1%
Improve problem-solving and innovation skills	4.29	0.66	90.4%
Identify potential business opportunities	4.24	0.68	87.5%
Learn teamwork, leadership and adaptability	4.26	0.71	87.5%
Increase confidence in applying entrepreneurial knowledge	4.20	0.70	85.6%
Influence development as a future entrepreneur	4.17	0.68	86.6%
Link classroom learning to practical application	4.20	0.63	89.5%

Interview accounts offered a consistent explanation for these figures. Several participants described community problems as the starting point for entrepreneurial thinking rather than an afterthought. One participant explained that opportunity recognition depended on encountering a genuine problem first: “Before you even come up with an idea, you have to first find a problem to solve before you produce a product or be an entrepreneur in a specific field” (Participant 1). Others described the experience as changing their sense of what they were capable of: one participant said that engagement “made me see myself as more than a student, but someone who's really capable” (Participant 17), while another reported that entrepreneurship “felt accessible and necessary rather than inspirational and distant” once framed by a real community need (Participant 22). A further participant summarised a shift from a resource-based to a capability-based view of entrepreneurship: “I used to think entrepreneurship means having capital... but being part of the organisation showed me that if you want to help someone, you can start with what you have” (Participant 28).

4.5 Entrepreneurial intentions

The entrepreneurial intentions scale produced a mean of 4.20 (SD = 0.58) across its seven items (Table 3), with the highest agreement recorded for improved ability to identify real-life business opportunities (90.1%), exposure to unmet needs that could become business opportunities (88.5%), and influence on entrepreneurial mindset or future plans (87.9%).

Table 3
Community engagement and entrepreneurial intentions (n = 313)

Entrepreneurial intention item	M	SD	Agree/ Strongly agree
Motivated to consider starting a business or social enterprise	4.21	0.67	87.9%
Exposed to unmet needs that could become business opportunities	4.21	0.65	88.5%
Strengthened desire to pursue entrepreneurship after graduation	4.15	0.69	84.0%
Enhanced confidence in becoming an entrepreneur	4.19	0.65	86.3%
Influenced long-term entrepreneurial goals	4.18	0.68	86.3%
Influenced entrepreneurial mindset or future goals	4.21	0.68	87.9%
Improved ability to identify real-life business opportunities	4.23	0.62	90.1%

Participants linked this pattern to a broadened definition of entrepreneurship itself, moving from a narrowly commercial view toward one centred on solving a genuine problem. One participant stated that “entrepreneurship is not only about making profits but also about solving real-life problems” (Participant 25), and another described community engagement as reframing an entire career orientation: “Before I thought of a career just as a job, but now I see it as a way to help my community” (Participant 16). A further participant connected this reframing directly to future intention, noting that engagement “made entrepreneurship feel necessary, not just an aspiration” (Participant 23).

4.6 Association between entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions

As predicted in section 2.3, the entrepreneurial knowledge scales were found to be highly and positively correlated with the entrepreneurial intentions scales ($r = .843$, $p < .001$), which suggests that the more positive the gains in entrepreneurial knowledge, the stronger the entrepreneurial intentions of students. This is a single cross sectional correlation of the two self-reported constructs and does not imply that knowledge gains cause intention, the latter of which is discussed later.

5. Discussion

5.1 Interpreting the perception evidence

Both the quantitative and qualitative findings support a single description: from the students' perspectives, their experience in the community has helped them acquire entrepreneurial knowledge and increase their entrepreneurial intentions and they explain this acquisition in terms that are familiar from the Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 1984) and the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The concrete community problem was mentioned by interview participants several times, reflecting Kolb's interpretation of concrete experience as the beginning of a learning cycle, and a few of the interviewees mentioned increased confidence in their own, consistent with the perceived behavioural control component, which is a near cause of intention (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009). The Pearson correlation of the two scales is .843, which is in line with the theoretical expectation that entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intention are related measures of the same underlying experience as opposed to independent measures.

5.2 What the design does and does not support

This convergence is a description of perception, not a demonstration of effect, and the distinction matters for how the finding should be used. Because the design is cross-sectional and relies entirely on self-report, it cannot rule out self-selection: students who already had an entrepreneurial interest or a positive disposition toward community-facing work may have been more likely to participate actively in engagement activities, to volunteer for the interviews, or to rate the Likert items favourably, independent of any change that the activity itself produced. The near-uniform positivity of the direct yes/maybe/no items, over 80% yes on both outcomes and under 1.5% no, is also consistent with acquiescence or socially desirable responding, given that the items asked respondents to evaluate a socially valued university activity in relation to a personally desirable outcome. The absence of a comparison group of non-participants, and of any pre-engagement baseline measure, means the study cannot separate the influence of the activity from the characteristics of the students who chose, or were positioned, to take part in it.

5.3 Measurement considerations

The very high internal consistency of both scales (α = .942 and .945) and their strong mutual correlation should also be read alongside the absence of factor-analytic validation. High reliability confirms that respondents answered items within each scale consistently; it does not, on its own, confirm that entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intention were measured as empirically distinct constructs rather than as two closely worded expressions of a single positive disposition toward the community engagement experience. Common-method variance is a plausible alternative, or partial, explanation for the strength of the correlation reported in section 4.6, since both scales were completed by the same respondents, in the same session, using the same response format. Distinguishing between a genuine relationship among constructs and an artefact of shared method would require exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, which fell outside the scope of the present objective and is recommended for future work.

5.4 Relation to existing literature

These findings extend, rather than simply repeat, the existing literature. Prior South African research on community engagement has documented its contribution to civic learning and graduate employability (Bhagwan, 2020; Chetty & Bhagwan, 2023) but has not, to the same extent, examined its perceived contribution to entrepreneurial knowledge and intention among a discipline-specific cohort for whom entrepreneurship is an explicit curricular outcome. The entrepreneurial intention literature has established attitude and perceived feasibility as central predictors of intention (Ajzen, 1991; Liñán & Chen, 2009) without typically testing community engagement, specifically, as an antecedent experience. The present findings suggest that, at the level of student perception, community engagement functions as one plausible route by which those attitudinal and self-efficacy antecedents are built, a proposition consistent with, but not yet independently confirmed beyond, the theoretical account offered by Experiential Learning Theory and Social Capital Theory.

5.5 Limitations

Four related limitations qualify these findings. First, the cross-sectional, single-wave design cannot establish temporal order between community engagement and the reported gains in knowledge or intention. Second, reliance on retrospective self-report introduces the possibility of recall bias, in addition to the acquiescence and social-desirability concerns already noted. Third, participants in both the survey and the interviews were drawn from students already exposed to community engagement, so the study offers no comparison against a similar group of non-participants, which limits any inference about the counterfactual case of not engaging. Fourth, the absence of factor-analytic testing of the entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions scales means the strength of their observed correlation should be treated as suggestive of association rather than as confirmation of two independently validated constructs. Together, these limitations support a conclusion about strong, convergent student perception, and do not support a causal claim about the effect of community engagement on entrepreneurial development.

6. Conclusion

This article aimed at addressing one specific objective of a larger mixed methods study, which aimed to find out the perception of South African university of technology, Business and Information Management students regarding the impact of community engagement upon entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions. Responses from 313 questionnaires as well as interviews with 29 respondents were consistent across both strands. Agreement was over 85% on both scales for more than four in five students and the two scales were strongly correlated ($r = .843$, $p < .001$); community engagement had influenced entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions. This sequence is consistent with planned behaviour and experiential learning, with the problem being a real issue in their community serving as an initial source of opportunity recognition and first-hand exposure to the problem

leading to a feeling of capability that the participants related to the future plans of their entrepreneurial activity.

Perceptual level answers to the above question are therefore reasonably concrete, that is, students in this sample can explain what they perceive as contributing to their entrepreneurial knowledge and intentions, and they can do so in specific, theoretically consistent language instead of vague or generic language. The study cannot conclude, because of its cross-sectional and self-report design, that the gains were due to community engagement per se rather than to characteristics of the students participating in community engagement, nor that entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intention were measured as separate constructs. The contribution of the article lies in supplying focused, discipline-specific evidence, gathered through a design suited to the descriptive question it set out to answer, at a point in the literature where such evidence has largely been assumed from theory rather than tested directly among business students.

For curriculum design, the findings offer a reasonable basis for treating community engagement as a deliberate, rather than incidental, component of entrepreneurship education within business programmes, provided that this decision is accompanied by ongoing evaluation rather than presented as an established effect. For research, the logical next step is a design capable of separating selection from influence: a longitudinal study with a pre-engagement baseline, or a comparison between participating and non-participating students matched on prior entrepreneurial interest, combined with factor-analytic validation of the entrepreneurial knowledge and entrepreneurial intentions scales. Such a design would allow the strong perception documented here to be tested as an effect, rather than reported, as it is in this article, as a well-evidenced but bounded description of what students believe community engagement has done for them.

Declarations

Conflict of interest

All authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest.

Generative AI statement

The authors declare that generative Cloude AI was used in a limited, clearly bounded capacity: to help edit and refine the language of the manuscript, to assist with formatting the manuscript structure. Grammarly was also used to check grammatical errors. Generative AI was not used to design the study, collect or analyse data, interpret findings, or generate the conceptual content of the proposed framework; these intellectual contributions, critical analyses, and decisions were made solely by the authors.

Publisher's note

Authors make all claims articulated in this article and do not reflect the views or opinions of their organisations or affiliates, publisher, or reviewers.

Funding statement

The authors confirm that no financial support was received for this research paper.

Author Contribution

Z.S.K- Conceptualisation and writing of the original draft.S.P.M - Review and editingA.S.N - Review and editingAll authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Data Availability

The data generated and analysed during this study are not publicly available due to ethical and confidentiality considerations but may be available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to approval by the relevant ethics committee.

References

1. Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *50*(2), 179–211. https://doi.org/10.1016/0749-5978(91)90020-T
2. hagwan, R. (2020). Towards the institutionalisation of community engagement in higher education in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*, *38*(2), 36–55. https://doi.org/10.38140/pie.v38i2.4384
3. Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. G. Richardson (Ed.), Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education (pp. 241–258). Greenwood.
4. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
5. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.
6. Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (1996). Implementing service learning in higher education. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *67*(2), 221–239. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.1996.11780257
7. Chetty, K., & Bhagwan, R. (2023). Student volunteerism as a thread of community engagement: Its salience to social work education. *Social Work Education*, *42*(8), 1307–1326. https://doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2021.2021172
8. Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American Journal of Sociology*, *94*, S95–S120. https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

9. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2018). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.
10. Etzkowitz, H. (2008). *The triple helix: University-industry-government innovation in action*. Routledge.
11. Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS Statistics* (5th ed.). Sage.
12. Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice Hall.
13. Liñán, F., & Chen, Y. W. (2009). Development and cross-cultural application of a specific instrument to measure entrepreneurial intentions. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, *33*(3), 593–617. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6520.2009.00318.x
14. Neck, H. M., & Greene, P. G. (2011). Entrepreneurship education: Known worlds and new frontiers. *Journal of Small Business Management*, *49*(1), 55–70. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-627X.2010.00314.x
15. Nunnally, J. C., & Bernstein, I. H. (1994). *Psychometric theory* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill.
16. O'Meara, K., & Jaeger, A. J. (2006). Preparing future faculty for community engagement: Barriers, facilitators, models, and recommendations. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, *11*(4), 3–26.
17. Perkmann, M., Tartari, V., McKelvey, M., Autio, E., Broström, A., D'Este, P., Fini, R., Geuna, A., Grimaldi, R., Hughes, A., Krabel, S., Kitson, M., Llerena, P., Lissoni, F., Salter, A., & Sobrero, M. (2013). Academic engagement and commercialisation: A review of the literature on university-industry relations. *Research Policy*, *42*(2), 423–442. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.respol.2012.09.007
18. Phillips, D. C., & Burbules, N. C. (2000). *Postpositivism and educational research*. Rowman & Littlefield.
19. Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*. Simon & Schuster.
20. Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., Burroughs, H., & Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualisation and operationalisation. *Quality & Quantity*, *52*(4), 1893–1907. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8