Journal of Modern Education Review, ISSN 2155-7993, USA
September 2017, Volume 7, No. 9, pp. 624–637
Doi: 10.15341/jmer(2155-7993)/09.07.2017/003

http://www.academicstar.us

Access for Success: Ensuring Social Justice in South African Higher Education

Naziema Jappie
(Centre for Educational Testing for Access & Placement, University of Cape Town, South Africa)

Abstract: 1948 was the year that white supremacy, the Nationalist Party consolidated power in South Africa and very systematically abolished Black participation in the political system. Under this system education was segregated along ethnic, racial and geographical lines.

In South Africa, social inequalities were embedded and reflected in all spheres of social life, as a product of the systemic exclusion of blacks. The higher education system was no exception. Given this, South Africa's new democratic government committed itself in 1994 to transforming higher education as well as the inherited apartheid social and economic structure and institutionalizing a new social order. These included redefining of the purposes and goals of higher education policy formulation, governance, funding, academic structure and major restructuring and reconfiguration of the higher education institutional landscape. Issues of access and success, critical to this process, are multifaceted and contested and deliberated. Access is a twofold concept. The first aspect is access with participation. The second aspect is access with success which is essential for economic growth.

This paper aims to contribute to existing work drawing on various documents and reports to highlight the following areas:

(1) The rationale for increasing access to higher education;

(2) The transition process and challenges;

(3) Interventions to ensure success — what has been achieved?

Key words: transformation, social justice equity**,** access and success

1. Introduction

Africa as a continent is the cradle of modern education. The history of education dates back to early institutions of learning in Alexandria and Timbuktu with their fine libraries. Despite this fact, Africa today lags behind in all the fields of formal education. Primary education has not been fully met, secondary education is limited to a few and university education is at a critical cross-road between producing quality university graduates and low quality, ill equipped university graduates. It is accepted that a well-educated citizenry is the foundation of social equity, cohesion and successful participation in the global knowledge economy. As a result, most countries have set goals to increase participation in higher education or broaden access to higher education for individuals

Naziema Jappie, Master of Social Science, Centre for Educational Testing for Access & Placement, University of Cape Town; research areas/interests: social justice leadership in higher education. E-mail: naziema.jappie@uct.ac.za.

that are under-represented because of their socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, disability or location.

As a general rule, countries with low rates of participation in higher education seek to expand access by increasing the number of opportunities available. South Africa was no different. It adopted principles and recommendations to ensure equitable access and successful participation in higher education, with some urgency.

2. The South African Context

Access to higher education is a significant public policy issue. The demand for higher education is increasing as the society becomes more diverse and economies become more intricate. Consequently, the role of higher education is even more crucial because people see it as pathways for economic success.

Ensuring equity of access must be complemented by a concern for equity of outcomes. Increased access must not lead to a "revolving door" syndrome for students, with high failure and dropout rates (DOE, 1997, p. 22). Although a concern for social justice is evident as a dominant theme of post-apartheid higher education policy, there is a growing focus on the efficiency of the system — in particular on equity of outcomes, as measured by retention and throughput.

The cornerstone South African higher education policy document that clearly states the transformation imperatives facing the sector, inherited from colonialism and apartheid, has been the White Paper on Higher Education Transformation (WPHET) of 1997. The WPHET calls for a new system of higher education based on:

- equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realize their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;
- meeting, through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- supporting a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order; and
- contributing to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular addressing the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African and African contexts, and upholding rigorous standards of academic quality (DHET, 1997).

South Africa's National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) was released in 2001. This document sets out to examine and address the key challenges facing higher education. Most significantly, the issue of redressing past equalities and transforming higher education. This National Plan (2001, p. 12) addressed five important goals and objectives:

- To provide increased access to higher education irrespective of race, class, age, creed, disability or gender and to produce graduates with the skills and competencies necessary to meet the human resource needs of the country.
- To promote equity of access and to redress past inequalities through ensuring that all staff and student profiles in higher education progressively reflect the demographics of South African society.
- To ensure diversity in the organizational form and institutional landscape of the higher education system through mission and programme differentiation, thus enabling the addressing of regional and national needs

in social and economic development.

- To build high-level research capacity to address the research and knowledge need of South Africa.
- To build new institutional and organizational forms and new institutional identities through regional collaboration between institutions.

3. Transitional Challenges in South African Higher Education

To transform higher education and ensure that social justice is achieved is no small task. South Africa had to bridge the divide between its apartheid past and a rapidly developing knowledge economy for the future. The pursuit of fairness in access to higher education must come from the political governance and then it can be implemented at institutional level. Studies in the United States done by Berger and Kostal (2002) indicate that "any changes in state appropriations for education or an increase in tuition could affect access to higher education". Financial resource is one of the key barriers to students obtaining access to higher education in South Africa. Hence the student protests — Fees Must Fall — in 2015 and 2016 which caused the higher education sector to rethink the funding and teaching model. Although numerous policies have been put forth to increase access in higher education, implementation continues to be a challenge for South African universities. Transformation by definition is a set of social changes at various internal states of transition along a continuum. Extensive research on policy implementation and the challenges involved in improving access to higher education for previously disadvantaged communities was done. The previous committee of Vice Chancellors (SAUVCA, 2002) wrote a position paper as a contribution to sectoral coherence, in response to the Minister of Education's restructuring proposals gazetted on 24 June 2002 highlighted areas of concern:

(1) Change coordination-The government has invested much time and money to set up a legal framework for transformation. However, the challenge has been how each institution deals with changes in its own campus population, curricula, and funding. Affluent institutions like the UCT, WITS & University of Pretoria have invested huge amounts to attract Black students, especially into previously White majors such as actuarial science, veterinary science, climatology, palaeontology and engineering. Special budgets and sponsorships are available for these students. However, some other institutions do not have similar resources. So this is a serious problem. How does transformation manifest itself in institutions without resources?

(2) Constraints on change coordination-The system operates under certain constraints. For example, universities continue to receive applications from students who are ill-prepared for higher education, forcing the institutions to lower their standards/entry requirements or invest more money to train the students in computer literacy or basic academic disciplines. There is also a critical shortage of experienced lecturers to help these students. Coordination and investment are necessary if institutions are to retain and nurture their best staff, as well as the graduate students who will make up the next generation of academics.

(3) Access, efficiency, and quality-Institutions are faced with the task of increasing the number of previously disadvantaged students they accept, making better use of available resources, and enhancing the quality of outputs, particularly graduates' knowledge and skills, and their ability to create new knowledge. Success in these areas will help address the issues of equity and meet the human resource needs of the labour force. However, students from impoverished families are less likely to pursue postgraduate studies because of pressure on them to become income earners.

(4) The knowledge economy and the drive for innovation — The knowledge economy — an economy in

which applied information is used in all sectors to improve productivity and seek competitive advantage through innovation — has had a fundamental impact on universities as producers of knowledge. An important issue in higher education is the disparity among institutions — some can afford the highest technology, while others cannot.

(5) Quality assurance — the higher education sector supported the establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee as the national agency for quality assurance. This measure was considered to be necessary to keep opening the access gates from compromising quality in institutions. It is essential to improve capacity-building in institutions and ensure that they maintain high standards.

(6) National Qualifications Framework — Because of the disparities among institutions, some degrees and certificates are regarded more highly by employers than others. For example, study at a Technikon (now known as University of Technology) is less highly regarded than study at a traditional university. At the same time, employers want people with practical experience, so universities are struggling to introduce more practical classes to maintain the marketability of their degrees. The National Qualifications Framework helps with the assessment of qualifications.

Despite real growth of only 2% between 1994 and 2011, in participation in higher education, South Africa still lags considerably behind OECD participation rates in most OECD countries, and is some way behind the projected target of 20% set by the National Development Plan (NDP) for 2020. At the same time, increased enrolments for much of the same period have not been mirrored by comparable rates of student academic success, particularly among black students, if measured by throughput, success, graduation and drop-out rates. There are also shortcomings and constraints among the postgraduate student enrolments and outputs which remain low in relation to national economic and social development needs, and between 1995 and 2010 there was a marginal increase of 1.8% in the size of the postgraduate student body.

Although it became apparent that there was indeed broadened access to higher education to ensure diversity, it was also proving failure in terms of securing success rates for students. Emphasis on research around policy formulation and institutional strategic plans were put in place, but not much was done to ensure retention, particularly for students coming from the rural schools who were unprepared for a traditional university life experience. So in order for higher education access to be meaningful, those who attain access must have reasonable opportunity to also attain a degree. It is clear that the goals of access are poorly served if large numbers of students do not complete their degree in a reasonable time.

It is widely agreed that this scenario of an expanded higher education system marked by ‘a lack of growth, low participation, high attrition, low completion and variable quality’ needs to be urgently and decisively turned around. Its causes are typically multi-fold and multi-dimensional. This includes, inter alia:

- significant parts of the academic systems across all universities that have not fully adapted to being more responsive to the realities of highly segmented, socially diverse and cognitively differentiated learning communities; and many institutions where student support systems are weak, under-resourced and unable to provide high-quality, holistic student life experiences
- Inadequate student financial support to ensure the costs of study (tuition, accommodation, books, transport, meals and subsistence) for particularly poor and working class students, are fully covered via an optimal, effective and well-governed. Financial aid dispensation; and with this, weak national and institutional support systems that are often unable to provide the necessary infrastructure, facilities and services to underpin a better student funding model;

- Unacceptably, and unsustainably high student: lecturer ratios at many institutions across the system, reducing the ability of lecturers to effectively attend to student needs;
- Unevenly spread high-quality teaching and learning infrastructure, including optimised teaching venues, able to provide equity of access to students, and
- The ability to harness complementary social technologies such as blended learning; curriculum structures at undergraduate degree levels, typically designed for highly compressed learning experiences favouring a smaller segment of the student population, not accommodating multiple temporal tracks, and not making sufficient provision for differentiated forms of teaching and learning support;
- Historically low perceived status of learning, and learning as scholarship and praxis, in contrast to the disproportionate importance and ideological status conferred on the "research" mission of university by leaderships, media and ranking systems.
- A nationally-coherent system of student academic development to cope with diverse learning communities, supported equitably across the system with high-quality teaching and learning and social support.

4. Access to Higher Education Post 1994 — What Has Been Achieved?

The National Working Group (NWG) was established by the Minister of Education in April 2001 to give advice on restructuring the institutional landscape of higher education, as outlined in the National Plan for Higher Education, which was released in March 2001.

The NWG took as its point of departure the emphasis in the National Plan on the need to ensure the "fitness for purpose" of the higher education system, that is, the extent to which the elements constituting the structures and operations of the system are suited and well-equipped to fulfil effectively those functions which are its raison d'être, thus enhancing the quality of the higher education system (Ministers Report, 2002).

Today, 23 years after the demise of the apartheid system, higher education has shifted, in its structural characteristics, from a fragmented and structurally racialized system of 36 public pre 1994 and more than 300 private institutions to a relatively (at least formally) more integrated system of 26 public universities (traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology) and 95 private higher education institutions in 2015 (Blom, 2015). Approximately 990,000 students are currently enrolled in the public higher education sector, and 120 000 in private institutions in the same sector, according to the 2013 statistics (DHET, 2013). Between 1995 and 2014, the sector grew from 480,000 to 980,000. The National Development Plan of 2013 highlights that the enrolments should increase to 1.62 million by 2030.

The institutional restructuring of higher education with a new landscape was intended to "lay the foundation for an equitable, sustainable and productive higher education system that will be of high quality and contribute effectively and efficiently to the human resource, skills, knowledge and research needs of South Africa" (Ministers report, 2002). Badat (2009) emphasized that while institutional restructuring is a *necessary* condition of the transformation of South African higher education it is not a *sufficient* condition.

There has been some movement towards the White Paper's goal of ensuring that the racial profile of the student body reflects the racial composition of the population, but we are not yet there. The proportion of African students in the public higher education system as a whole increased from 49% in 1995 to 61% by 2004 and this trend continued during the period under review. By 2007, African students made up 63% of the total enrolment in public higher education (DHET, 1997). While the continued increase is positive, there is still some way to go,

considering that this is some 16% less than the estimated 79% of African people in the country's population. Coloured students, who made up 6% of the student body in 2007, are also underrepresented in public higher education, by some 3%. The proportion of white students in the student body decreased from 39% in 1995 to 25% in 2004 and showed a slight decrease to 24% by 2007. White students continue to be overrepresented in the system, relative to their proportion of the population, as do students classified Indian. Table 1 illustrates this clearly.

Table 1 Participation by Race in 2007

Race	20-24 year old in the country	Number in Higher Education	Percentage
African	3,918,890	476,768	12
Coloured	416,355	49,069	12
Indian	122,412	52,596	43
White	334,150	180,463	54
Total	4,791,807	759,896	16

One way of viewing the racial profile of students is to consider the participation rates of the four race groups as shown in Figure 1. This perspective reinforces the view that white students are overrepresented in the higher education system. The participation rate for white students is 54%, for Indian students it is 43%, while for African and Coloured students, it sits at 12% (CHE Monitor, p. 8).

The target participation rate was set at 20% in the National Plan. The plan also made it clear that equity would not be achieved at the expense of white students (Ministry of Education, 2001). So these numbers do not reflect a need to decrease the number of white and Indian students, but rather the need to increase the participation of African and coloured students. Indeed the steady decrease in the absolute number of white students enrolling, from 188 687 in 2004 to 184 668 in 2007, and the further decrease in 2013, is a serious cause for concern (CHE Monitor, p. 8).

The racial imbalance in enrolments is more noticeable when viewed by institutional type. Looking back to when there were two institutional types, technikons were enrolling African students in larger proportions than universities. African enrolments at universities grew from 50% in 1995 to 53% in 2003, while at technikons, African enrolments grew from 47% in 1995 to 77% in 2003. White student enrolments at universities in South Africa decreased from 38% to 32% between 1995 and 2003, while at technikons enrolments of white students decreased from 41% to 14% for the same period. The flight of white students from institutions was an alarming factor. The participation rate, which was 15% in 2001, has only increased by 1% by 2008, which has negative consequences for economic and social development.

However, Table 2 below shows a definite increase beyond 2008 which was in line with what the NPHE has set out as the target.

Table 2 Headcount Enrolments in Public Higher Education by Race (HEMIS)

Race	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Population 2013
African	515 058	547 686	595 963	640 442	662 123	689 503	42 284 132
Coloured	51 647	55 101	58 219	59 312	58 692	61 034	4 766 172
Indian	52 401	53 629	54 537	54 698	52 296	53 787	1 329 302
White	178 140	179 232	178 346	177 365	172 654	171 927	4 602 389
Total	799 490	837 779	892 200	938 200	953 373	983 698	52 981 991

Table 3 Headcount Enrolments by Race from 2010 to 2015 (Vital Stats 2015)

Race	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
African	595 963	640 442	662 123	689 503	679 800	696 320
Coloured	58 219	59 312	58 692	61 034	60 716	62 186
Indian	54 537	54 698	52 296	53 787	53 611	53 378
White	178 346	177 365	172 654	171 927	166 172	161 739
Unknown	5 858	6 383	7 608	7 447	8 855	11 589
Total	892 943	938 200	953 373	983 698	969 154	985 212

It can be seen that overall the student enrolments increased by 23% from 2008 to 2013. The African student compliment in particular increased by 34% from 515,058 in 2008 to 689,503 in 2013. African enrollments increased from 64% of all enrolments in 2008 to 70% in 2013. This increase in the African student enrolment was due to the change in admissions criteria and policy for transformation at universities. This was a positive step forward in terms of access but the research done by Bunting and Cloete (2010) show that the success rates of students were not good. In fact, many students dropped out in first year and other did not even graduate, whilst many students took more than the allocated time to complete a degree. Tables 4 and 5 show student data by qualification type.

Table 4 Headcount of Undergraduate Enrolment by Race for 2010 and 2015 (Vital Stats, 2015)

	2010					2015				
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
Dip/Cert	244244	15 358	7 000	18787	287494	233694	13541	6881	14546	270090
Degrees	256469	32 204	36406	114170	440935	345293	37966	35165	106119	528145
Total	500713	47562	43406	132957	728429	578987	51507	42046	120665	798235

Table 5 Headcount of Undergraduate Qualifications Awarded by Race for 2010 and 2015 (Vital Stats, 2015)

	2010					2015				
	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total	African	Coloured	Indian	White	Total
Dip/Cert	43814	3129	1135	3466	52432	44247	2820	1267	3382	52418
Degrees	31386	4366	4690	20456	61232	54631	5914	5690	20925	87717
Total	75200	7495	5825	23922	113664	98878	8734	6957	24307	140135

Both tables show that even though the enrolments per qualification increased by 69806 students over a 5 year period, the qualifications awarded overall were minimal a 15.60% success rate for 2010 and 17.55% success rate for 2015. For African students in particular it was 15% success rates in 2010 and 17% in 2015, this was in line with the norm. In examining these numbers it is evident that the throughput rates are very low in South African higher education.

5. Equitable Access and Ensuring Success — Is It a Win-win Situation?

In order for South Africa to secure a sustainable, globally competitive economy and to achieve the growth in the numbers of people with high level skills which will make the country world class, we must encourage participation from students from sections of society which have not traditionally benefitted from higher education. That is an impressive accomplishment, but it is also a very practical recognition that no country can possibly

move ahead, nor economic development be sustained, without an educated population capable of embracing the relentless march of technology and of meeting the competitive pressures of an increasingly sophisticated world.

Future social cohesion and economic success will require the efforts of all of our people. To deny opportunities to talented people simply because their personal circumstances or social background has created educational disadvantage, seems very difficult to understand or justify. At the same time, to achieve the highest possible standards, we must ensure that our higher education institutions have access to the very best pools of talent available across all of the community.

Higher education institutions in South Africa are committed to promoting the twin goals of equitable access to, and successful participation in higher education for all members of society, young and old through recognition of prior learning. The higher education sector believes that equitable access to quality learning contributes significantly to the development of national human resources, promotes social justice and cohesion, enhances personal development, employability and, in general, facilitates sustainable development.

According to International Association of Universities (2008) it is important that higher education institutions and government decision-makers at all levels adopt the following principles and recommendations on equitable access and successful participation in higher education and to act, with some urgency, on their implementation.

5.1 Key Principles

- Access to higher learning should be made possible to all regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, economic or social class, age, language, religion, location or [dis]abilities.
- The goal of access policies should be successful participation in higher education, as access without a reasonable chance of success is an empty promise.
- Equitable access and academic excellence are essential and compatible aspects of a quality higher education.
- To improve access to higher education, admission criteria must move away from a primary focus on each learner's achievements and entry qualifications towards the recognition of his/her potential, without the latter becoming the sole criterion for admission.

Even though access has increased over the past two decades, it is evident that the gap still remains in terms of those who graduate. Research done by Nettles, Perna and Millet (1998) into access trends in the United States of America showed that 62% of all high school pupils enrolled in some form of postsecondary education, with only 46% completing their degrees in five years. Access is a complex issue and there are many challenges faced by Universities.

One major area of focus for the South African Higher Education institutions was the National Senior Certificate (NSC), a school-leaving certificate which was unreliable as an indicator of university preparedness especially for learners coming from inadequate schooling background with issues of language differences. Griesel (2003) pointed out that a common view is that the senior certificate fails to serve its various purposes successfully: a school-leaving certificate qualification is not attained by the majority of learners; is inadequate preparation for majority who seek entry into higher education, and the world of work. According to Cliff (2003) when the conventional school-leaving certificate is used as the sole criterion for selection to higher education, there is a serious possibility of excluding some talented students who have not had adequate opportunities to demonstrate their potential for higher education study on the basis of school-leaving results alone.

It was noted that the predictive validity of the NSC can only be seen once the first cohort of learners have

completed higher education studies. This posed a dilemma for higher education and the question around university readiness became a vital point of discussion. Thus the reasons for introducing an assessment for entry to higher education became evident. It is clear that good access assessment can be positive in determining whether a student will be academically successful or not and if not what kind of intervention is needed. Henceforth, The National Benchmark Test (NBT) was introduced in 2008. It must be noted, however, that all institutions have admissions policies but all do not have specific entrance assessments. For example at the University of Cape Town (UCT) they administered a test called the Alternate Admissions Research Project (AARP). According to Yeld (2001a), students who have gained access to UCT from the AARP tests, who would not otherwise have been admitted to the institution on the basis of their school-leaving results; had a substantially higher retention and graduation rate than that of their comparable students who were accepted on the strength of their school results.

5.2 The National Benchmark Test (NBT)

Higher Education South Africa (HESA) started the National Benchmark Tests project (NBT) in 2009. The NBT is a response to the difficulties in identifying the educational needs of students entering university and interpreting the new National Senior Certificate results (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2009). According to HESA, the project primarily detects ways in which universities can respond to the needs of entering students by identifying their core knowledge and skills in three areas — maths, quantitative literacy and academic literacy. The information from the tests is used at both individual and group level (Parliamentary Monitoring Group — PMG, 2009). Curriculum structure and teaching within universities do not adequately respond to the academic needs of first-time entering students. In the absence of fundamental change in the schooling system, universities must adapt curricula and teaching methods to cater for the majority of students in the system (CHE, 2013a).

Concerns have been raised that the NBT project creates an additional barrier to access for poor students, as some universities have it as an admission requirement. This results in additional costs for students (Kelto, 2013). Another concern is that the NBT is used to “gate-keep” universities and block students from admission, as well as to cast doubt on the quality of schooling provision and assessment standards (PMG, 2009). Whatever the criticisms, the results provide another set of indicators of student preparedness for higher education and can assist universities in properly placing and supporting students once they achieve access (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014).

The National Benchmark Tests are written by learners who are in Grade 12 at school for the purposes of selection and placement at institutions that require the test and is designed so that it provides additional not alternate information. This is one of two national assessments in South Africa.

The four objectives of the National Benchmark Tests (NBT) project are:

- to assess entry level proficiency of students (in academic literacy, quantitative literacy and mathematics);
- to assess the relationship between Higher Education (HE) entry level requirements and school-level exit outcomes;
- to provide a service to Higher Education institutions requiring additional information to assist in admission (selection and placement) of students in appropriate curricular routes (regular, extended, augmented, or any other routes); and
- to assist with curriculum development, particularly in relation to foundation and augmented courses.

UCT as an example, is among other leading South African universities that use the NBT to supplement the information from an applicant’s performance on the National Senior Certificate, some institutions’ use this test for diagnostic purposes whilst others use it for placing students in an extended curriculum. In this way they are able to

detect early barriers to learning and provide support to the students who are lacking certain learning abilities which may result in slow progress in their degree or diploma programmes. As educators, we certainly believe that there is a need for a student centered approach with tailored support mechanisms which recognized the importance of pre and post-recruitment activities to ensure successful retention and progression. It must be noted, that the use of the test is not consistently throughout the higher education sector.

6. Improvement and Interventions

In tackling the challenges of both improving the rates of participation and enrolment to match the development needs of South Africa and drastically refining the quality and equity of academic success across the system, several interventions have to be implemented in order to go forward. Factors influencing success are complex and diverse. No single intervention is likely to shift the current poor success rates. It is incumbent upon institutions on having integrated structures that provide psycho-social and academic support. Furthermore the university programmes must concentrate on transition, admission and the first-year experience.

Targeted strategies and policies designed specifically to elicit the students' full potential are required so as to increase access to, and success in higher education by individuals who are traditionally under represented because of their social background, economic status, gender, ethnic origins, [dis]abilities, low quality of prior schooling or for other reasons.

Higher education that responds to the challenges of equitable access and successful participation requires sound policies and adequate public funding for institutions and students. Such policies must be sensitive to local conditions; borrowing policy solutions from other countries that have different problems and priorities may not be the best solution. Equitable access to and broader participation in higher education require active linkages between higher education and primary and secondary education and seamless, educational pathways beginning with early childhood and continuing throughout life, and aided by career guidance and counselling services when appropriate.

Furthermore, responding to the varied needs of learners and of society requires a differentiated but coherent higher education system reflected in a transparent qualifications framework; a system in which institutions are assessed according to their specific mission and goals. To promote access and student success, different institutional models, flexible programmes' of study as well as a variety of delivery modes must be available to allow individuals at all stages of life to move through higher education in a manner that suits their needs. National and International mobility, exchanges and cross-border education activities must integrate the twin goals of increased access and equitable participation.

The politics of disadvantage is a strong theme in the discourses and debates about student access and success, given the widely accepted understanding that inequalities within the schooling system affect the academic preparedness of students for higher education study. This has led to an "attribution of deficit", particularly to black students and students from poor socio-economic backgrounds. The concept of deficit also extends to the associated stigma of special educational interventions designed to bring poorly prepared students to a level at which they can participate effectively in academic programmes. Formally, at least, these debates were abandoned when the focus moved away from the "academic support" discourses, requiring students to bridge the academic gap between school and university. In its place has evolved the notion of Academic Development (AD), which requires institutions to adapt their offerings to accommodate a greater diversity of educational preparedness

among students (Volbrecht & Boughey, 2004; Boughey, 2007; Scott, 2009).

Lewin and Mawoyo (2014) reported that access and success programmes are not limited to purely academic initiatives. They include a range of other forms of student support, such as mentoring, counselling and career development programmes, partnerships between universities and schools (partnerships between universities and colleges are also emerging), and student funding initiatives, in particular the National Student Financial Aid Scheme. Institutions are increasingly looking at student development in holistic and systemic ways. Understanding is improving of what it takes to provide meaningful access to university education for a diversity of students while responding to their multiple needs, in order for students and universities to jointly achieve "success". The interventions in Academic Development (AD) units to improve student success are characterized by both student support services and academic support. Most of the student support services are geared at addressing the articulation gap and psychosocial challenges that first generation students may experience, some of who stay far from home.

Based on a study done by Wilson-Strydom (2015), the following recommendations for what universities could do to improve access and success have emerged:

- Forge meaningful, long term partnerships with schools to create more easily visible access pathways from high school into university and to assist with decision making about courses of study much earlier than at the point of application or registration.
- Adopt educationally intentional approaches to marketing at schools — focusing less on selling the given university and more on raising awareness about the range of capabilities underpinning readiness and providing substantive information about what it means to study at university — so confronting the gap between eligibility and readiness.
- Embrace a more comprehensive and multi-dimensional understanding of access and readiness: this understanding ought to infuse the ways in which universities work — at all levels (administratively, academically and outside of the formal curriculum).
- Assist first-year students to understand the complexity of university readiness (as opposed to eligibility), and to see that they are not alone when they are confused and scared or lack confidence in their ability as a university student.
- Integrate across the curriculum opportunities to learn the required academic behaviours and learning approaches, including language competence and, importantly, confidence.
- Create more flexible learning pathways through higher education and multiple opportunities to develop university readiness capabilities to accommodate the diverse personal, social and environmental factors that impact on students' lives, and hence, their success.

7. Conclusion: Change the Game

The political discourse about who gains access to university continues to be controversial, given the persistence of the idea of the "deficit" student (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014). Debates about the extent to which the structures and cultures of institutions need to transform will continue in the policy environment and within institutions themselves. If so many students are not succeeding — which makes student attrition a mainstream issue — the real question is: what will it take to make curriculum change and the improvement of teaching and learning mainstream issues?

New approaches to improvement of education in South Africa should be a first priority at both school and tertiary level. The Kresge report (Lewin & Mawoyo, 2014) states the following: “A number of issues identified in the literature support the above findings, and confirm that the desired initiative must be at both the level of national policy and of institutional strategy and practice. Consequently, there are multiple points of possible and necessary intervention. Among these are substantial systemic issues, such as the needs for effective pathways from school into post-school educational opportunities and for addressing the weaknesses of the Technical & Vocational Educational &Training (TVET) sector. These include institutional goals such as:

- Mainstreaming student success through leadership, focused effort and dedicated funding;
- Addressing the under preparedness of institutions for the diversity of students (Jones et al., 2008; Dhunpath et al., 2012);
- Addressing curriculum design and teaching approaches (Scott, 2012a, 2012b);
- Building teaching capacity and reward systems to support teaching development (Scott, 2012a, 2012b; Boughey, 2010)
- Growing collaborative work in the system to pool the available expertise and professionalize the AD field (Boughey, 2010)”.

In order for us to promote education in the next decade, we must have in place an educational system that would promote a thorough analysis of our culture, environment, technological and industrial capacities and needs, and an economic policy that would create work and employment. In this respect, more emphasis will have to be placed in sciences and math.

Higher education must cultivate the knowledge, competencies and skills that enable graduates to contribute to economic development, since such development can facilitate initiatives geared towards greater social equality and social development. In many cases there is also a need for extensive restructuring of qualifications and programmes to make curricula more congruent with the knowledge, expertise and skills needs of a changing economy.

However, it cannot be assumed that if a country produces high quality graduates, especially, in the natural science, engineering and technology fields this will automatically have a profound effect on the economy. The formation of professionals through higher education is a necessary condition for economic growth and development, innovation and global competitiveness, but is not a sufficient condition. The contribution of graduates is also dependent on the institutional economic environment outside of higher education–in particular, industrial policy, the availability of investment capital and venture capital and the openness and receptivity of state enterprises and the business sector. There should also be no pretence that, in terms of a higher education response to labour market needs, it is a simple matter to establish the knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes that are required by the economy and society generally and by its different constituent parts specifically (Badat, 2004).

What would it mean for institutions to take student success seriously? And what would it mean if the object of our concern were low-income students? Among other things, it would mean that institutions would stop tinkering at the margins of institutional life and make enhancing student success the cornerstone about which they organize their activities. They would move beyond the provision of add-on services, creating unnecessary bureaucracies and establish those educational conditions within the institution that promote the success of all, not just some, students. In this way the concerns around stigmatization of students will be alleviated. To be serious about student success, institutions would recognize that the roots of attrition lie not only in their students and the situations they face, but also in the very character and culture of the educational environment, now assumed to be natural to higher education, in which they ask students to learn.

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