

The Effects of Higher Education Policy on Transformation: Equity, Access and Widening Participation in Post-apartheid South Africa

Shadrack T Mzangwa¹

Abstract: Before 1994, some higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa seem not to value social inclusiveness of various groups in higher education, particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds. As a result, access and widening participation are viewed as problematic and difficult to sustain since it has to involve students from poor and underrepresented social backgrounds. The perception of restricting access from a social justice point of view presupposes the inequalities based on the segregation policies of the apartheid era. Transformation in higher education is considered an indicator of social progress. It relates to a process of absolute overhaul of social thinking and result in meaningful social transition. In 2002, a major policy decision was taken via the National Plan on Education as a means to approach transformation of the higher education system in South Africa. Attempts of amendments in policy on higher education have not translated into material benefits for the majority of previously disadvantaged black people in South African society in terms of access, equity and participation in higher education. This paper aims to provide an overview of the conditions resulting from the policy on transformation in the context of higher education. It draws attention to the significant aspects which had been used in the development of HEIs. The paper concludes that improving access could be achieved through offering equal and standardised educational programmes [curriculum] in all universities. The paper further suggests that a need to introduce one common or dominant language such as English as the only medium of instruction at HEIs could be helpful in eradicating the dominance of a language such as Afrikaans which is replete with negative memories.

Keywords: higher education institutions, transformation, widening participation, equity, access and policy

Introduction

Since 1994, when South Africa became a democratic country, attempts have been made by the democratic government to revisit and amend policy in higher education, yet these amendments in policy have not translated into material benefits for the majority of previously disadvantaged black people in South African society in terms of access, equity and participation in higher education. Instead, the rich continue to afford and gain access to Higher Education whilst the poor majority, consisting mainly of black people, seem not to benefit from the introduction of policies aimed at transforming higher education in South Africa (Bunting, 2004). This is owing to a number of possible reasons, among them, poor implementation of policy and a lack of monitoring in respect of compliance with the current policies, resulting in a decided lack of success in redressing and transforming the higher education system.

¹ Directorate: Academic Enrolments & Administration , University of South Africa

Emails: mzangst@unisa.ac.za ; themba.mzangwa@gmail.com

This paper seeks to analyse policy on higher education in South Africa with specific reference to the implementation and practice of higher education institutions' (HEIs) policy at the national level. The aim is to examine to what extent policy on higher education in South Africa have had an impact on equity, affirmative action, access and widening participation. In an attempt to address some of the issues associated with an analysis of higher education policy on transformation in South Africa, issues of language, culture (transformation) and meritocracy as practised in the higher education sector in South Africa are highlighted as they form part of the debate around the stance and situation of South African HEIs. Throughout the paper, issues around the use of language in higher education are noted because it is not easy to disassociate issues of language from discussions about policy on transformation in a South African context. For this reason, and to provide some perspective, a global dimension is introduced as a point of reference, by briefly looking at the HEI system in such countries as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States of America (USA), Tanzania and Ghana, amongst others.

While the higher education system in South Africa experienced some growth after 1994, concerns regarding student access, participation rates and issues of equity (affirmation action) have been at the core of urgent debate (Odendaal & Deacon, 2009; Mathekgga 2012; Cloete, 2014). In an attempt to address these issues and to look into the effects of policy on transformation in higher education, the paper will be arranged as follows: An introduction is presented in Section 1. Section 2 provides a discourse on the higher education system and transformation from a global perspective. Section 3 elaborates discussion on a policy analysis approach in higher education. A conceptual framework and synthesis of the policy on higher education is presented in section 4. Section 5 will provide a discussion on the transformation of HEIs in South Africa. Then higher education policy in the South African context, looking at the past and present, is discussed under section 6. Implications and effects of the higher education policy on transformation in post-apartheid South Africa will be explained under Section 7, while Section 8 provides a conclusion and further recommendations.

Higher education system and transformation in a global perspective

Higher education refers to educational institutions which offer and award advanced qualifications such as diplomas or degrees in a specific field or discipline (Benjamin & Dunrong, 2010). According to the World Bank report, for a number of decades, ministers and clergy taught in HEIs, and, later, the leaders in civil society began to have a say in what was taught (World Bank, 2009). It was in this shift from clerical leadership to lay leadership that self-made men influenced and shaped higher education's existence and purpose. Issues of equity and access are tied to the ideological and philosophical streams that define the values reflected in the educational system. Mkude (2011) is of the view that, worldwide, HEIs have in one way or another contributed to the development of society and thus played a major part in promoting social inclusiveness in the development of the nation. Mkude (2011) further argues that amongst other areas of concern regarding nation-building and development played by HEIs is the

matter of equity which forms part of defining or measuring development. In HEIs, the advocacy of equity as a measure of development entails encouraging wider participation, inclusiveness of previously disadvantaged groups in society, and a shared allocation of resources relating mainly to access (World Bank, 2006).

While the affirmative action issue will be discussed extensively in section 4 of this paper, it is appropriate to point to Modisha's (2008) view that, at this stage, equity and affirmative action in countries such as South Africa were aimed at decolonising or attempting to deal with colonised principles such as the exclusion of black people from the better labour market jobs, education and investment through active policy. Policies in the colonised system were meant for whites only, at least in African countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria and Uganda. In South Africa, affirmative action was aimed at recognising participation and advancing education and professional skills in the black majority which had been neglected during the years of apartheid (Bentley & Habib, 2008). Although the discussion in this paper focuses primarily on the South African situation, examples from countries such as the UK, the USA, Ghana and Tanzania have been cited in reference to issues of access, equity and participation (Te Velde, 2005; Watts, 2011; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2012).

Table 1: The stance of higher education in selected countries

Stance of higher education in selected countries				
Aspects/ factors	Access	Equity	Language	Participation
Country				
United Kingdom	selective	Inequality exist	English dominant	Selective and average
United States of America	selective	Inequality exist	English dominant	Selective and average
South Africa	selective	Inequality exist	Multilingual and selective	Low
Tanzania	Selective	Inequality exist	English dominant and selective	low
Ghana	selective	Inequality exist	English dominant and selective	Selective and low

Source: Author's own comparison table

A report compiled by Morley et al. (2010), on 'Widening Participation in Higher Education in Ghana and Tanzania' reveals a complex relationship between higher education institutions and issues of equity in Ghana and Tanzania, both developing countries. Tanzania was among other African countries in the 1960s and 1970s which began transforming its HEIs according to an African policy agenda which

sought to make HEIs Afrocentric and which took into account issues supposedly having more appeal for Africans (Makhanya, 2017). Makhanya (2017) further states that, complex as it is, transformation of HEIs entails institutional change with specific reforms such as culture, equity inclusiveness [access] and language, amongst other aspects. The aspect of equity is in many instances an item connected to the issue of economic growth and standard of living in many African countries, as argued by scholars such as Odendaal & Deacon (2009) as well as Mkude (2011) who agrees that economic growth, development and equity are the determining factors for a well-educated and well-governed stable society.

Countries such as Tanzania had social policies which since the 1960s and 1970s were mainly inclined towards its development, growth and equity. This implies therefore that the social status of Tanzania was unequal and policies had to be developed to balance or to maintain equity (Planning Commission, 2000). As part of developing Tanzania and bringing about equity standards based on the *Tanzania Development Vision 2025* as contained in the Planning Commission (2000), Tanzania aimed to be a well-educated society, with good governance and a competitive economy capable of producing sustainable growth. Just as in the case of South Africa, equity and transformation of HEIs were firmly established by government in an attempt to address the issue of access by all or many, widening participation and equity of opportunity in higher education. Commissions and statutory bodies in South Africa such as the Higher Education Quality Committee and the Council on Higher Education (Odendaal & Deacon, 2009) were formed to closely monitor and oversee implementation of policy priorities. In Ghana, Tanzania and South Africa, Commissions on Higher Education have been formed to address aspects related to higher education access and equity amongst which the policy associated with the transformation of HEIs was the key agenda (Morley et al., 2010; Akoojee & Nkomo, 2011; Mkude, 2011). And in the US, according to Weber (2002), issues of racial discrimination form a widely debated argument. Weber (2002) maintains that in the USA in the 1990s, black people were not expected to progress or complete their educational levels comparative to their white peers. There are obvious correlations here between some states in the US and the apartheid regime. Mkude (2011) elaborates that in developing countries, HEIs are not only important instrumental institutions to uplift social mobility but, more so, these institutions form part of building economic prosperity.

Kirst (2007) strongly argues that the socioeconomic background is a determining factor in students' access and participation in higher education. Students from poor social background in African countries such as South Africa are often from a particular race, mainly black, and find it difficult to gain access to some HEIs. The few students who manage to gain access find it difficult to participate up to an acceptable level since they are usually ill-prepared as the result of poor high school education and the less resourced background from which they come. This then raises the question of the quality of education received by students from poor social backgrounds versus those who are from a well-resourced and good social background. Naidoo (1998: 374) therefore citing from the NCHE (1996) is of the view that the pursuit of quality relies on 'maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of minimum expectations and requirements that should be complied with,

and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be striven for'. Amongst other challenges which hinder access and participation of students from poor social backgrounds is the fact that there is a skewed 'standardisation' of languages applied across HEIs while meritocracy remains highly intact in South Africa (Mathekga, 2012).

Policy analysis approach in higher education

According to Weber (2002) policies are formulated and implemented mainly to provide some level of benefit to society, particularly to redress inequalities in the disadvantaged group to avoid further discrimination. This is applicable in policies which are formulated for fundamental human and equal rights in society. In democratic states such as the USA, Ghana, Tanzania, South Africa and other countries which practise democracy, the rules governing social and public institutions such as educational institutions are expected to be fair and not favour only one side. In fact, impoverished societies in terms of living and social standards are deemed to benefit the most from non-discrimination. Policies are mainly formulated and implemented to address these types of issues.

By definition, policy analysis may literally be defined as a theoretical and procedural terrain aimed to give methodological and professional support for the production of relevant information (Secchi, 2016). In applied sciences or human sciences, policy analysis is used to recommend solutions to social or economic problems and is often normative or multidisciplinary in form. There is a variety of policy analysis approaches such as narrative policy analysis, participatory policy analysis, interpretive policy analysis and critical policy analysis which mainly emanate from the post-positivist approach. The traditional practice which derives from economic principles applies tools such as cost-effective analysis and cost-benefit analysis which are rooted in the positivist approach also known as the rationalist policy analysis (Secchi, 2016).

Deliberative or argumentative policy analysis is a type of policy analysis approach consisting of a set of processes and techniques for recommending and endorsing a particular policy which aims to address and tackle social problems resulting from public participation and deliberations (Fischer, 2007; Fischer & Gottweis, 2012). Scholars such as Fischer and Gottweis (2012), as well as Secchi (2016), are of the view that there is no particular process or technique which remains independent from other factors. Secchi (2016: 98) contends that 'argumentative policy analysis borrows qualitative methods from social sciences, ethnography and linguistics to build and convey conflicting narratives, argument maps and use deliberation among political actors'. Furthermore, in argumentative policy analysis, collective wisdom from particular experts in a certain discipline or field may be used to recommend a policy with little specific requirement to prove evidence other than valid arguments (Secchi, 2016). In this paper a narrative policy analysis approach will be followed since it describes and defines policy within the context of how it is applied in a specific country or environment. Policy analysis could be explained as a prescriptive activity applied in the public fraternity or as a recommended approach to tackle social problems as determined by decision makers.

As Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argue, social class is one of the 'causes' of educational inequality. Apart from the fact that family background can influence choices of young adults to enroll or not to enroll at one of the HEIs, the social context and social policies in a country is a major influence in the determination to attend or not to attend university, as research reports suggest (Diane et al., 2001). Educational policies form distinctions between rich, poor and middle class (Lane, 2013). Based on this argument, most students who happen to gain access to HEIs are from the middle class and/or elite group. Most of those from a poor background are unable to reach university level due to social class background and/or the types of schools attended (in the case of South Africa, these could be of poor quality and lower class status). When the debate of inequality in HEIs, particularly in developing countries, takes place, issues of access and participation take a lead and are always cited as the main cause of educational inequalities (Atuahene & Owusu-Ansah, 2013).

Following Barbieri's (2015) analytical approach of policy analysis whereupon a narrative-interaction approach is applied, the conceptual framework and synthesis of policy in higher education should be discussed with reference to the global perspective. Abbot (1992) elucidates the narrative-interactionist approach in policy analysis as explaining the need and causes which led to the inception or process of a particular policy. Furthermore, this approach explains the events which may have influenced the process of transforming the policy into practice. It is mainly on this basis that the approach is referred to as a narrative-interactionist approach (Barbieri, 2015). In analysing policy on transformation of higher education, debates will revolve around the key factors namely, equity, access and widening participation in the HEIs, focusing on South Africa.

Conceptual framework and synthesis of policy on higher education

Literature, documents, and social media reports show that South Africa is a diverse and stratified society with mainly four racial groups (white, black, Indian and coloured people) which are diverse in their socio-economic status (Bunting, 2004; Naidoo, 2004; Kubler & Sayers, 2010; Hill, 2016). As a response to the country's divisive history, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) was assigned by the then Minister of Education, Professor Kadar Asmal, in 1999, to assess and restructure the HEIs according to a more just and accurate representation of the majority of South Africans. According to the findings of the CHE, South African HEIs were too great in number and 'divisive' in terms of race and geographic design with differing levels of administration resulting in a high level of unequal standards (CHE, 2000). This finding by the CHE led to the programme for the transformation of higher education and policy which aimed to bring about developments and changes to the HEIs in South Africa, meeting socioeconomic needs, access and equity (Gibbon & Kabaki, 2004).

One of the functions of HEIs (universities) is to be 'agents of social justice and mobility' (Boulton & Lucas, 2008: 4). In tackling the issue of widening access, two principal ways have often been used by HEIs in many parts of the world. One approach is to provide financial aid to students from families of low economic status. The second approach is to manipulate admissions policies and selection criteria, that is, to be sensitive to a student's socio-economic background. This is sometimes referred to as

affirmative action. 'Although affirmative action programmes are rather contentious, even from the legal point of view, they seem to work well in contexts where they are used to put an end to legislated inequalities' (Mkude, 2011: 367).

Equity and affirmative action

HEIs are perceived by various groups in society as centres of knowledge. Thus, part of their major role in society is to engage, lead and implement transformation. The value of HEIs is to bring about positive change in society such as visionary leadership, and accessibility of all social classes and races to education should be led by universities beginning with their admission and enrolment criteria (Mkude, 2011 and Makhanya, 2017). In a South African context, Ndlelentyana (2008) defines affirmative action as a constitutional right supported by the Labour Relations Act (Act 66 of 1995) as fair discrimination applied to previously disadvantaged groups. Affirmative action in Ghana and Tanzania, for instance, as black race-dominated countries, inclined more to gender than race, as has been the case in South Africa (Effah, 2011).

Amongst other widely debated issues in North America, affirmative action is understood to be dominant and aimed at enhancing previously disadvantaged groups simply because its common purpose is to address social inequalities (Lane, 2013). Zamani and Brown (2003) suggest that affirmative action specifically 'sets out procedures and guidelines so that eligible and interested citizens receive equal opportunity to participate' in social activities which uplift their standard in social life. Similar to the South African context, affirmative action in the United States of America was primarily about addressing discriminative principles against the vulnerable and racially segregated society through policies of access and participation in HEIs (Lane, 2013).

As a driving principle, equity/affirmative action is often justified on the basis of redressing imbalances of the past (Mkude, 2011). Equity aims to do justice to a previously disadvantaged group in society and to address appropriate measurable standards which advocate for equal distribution of 'resources' considering differences in social background, class, race and even gender in some instances (Weber, 2002). Mathekga (2012) is of the view that it is a myth that equity should be viewed as a hindrance to academic excellence and that it drags higher education to a lower standard of performance. Attached to this myth is the view that the practice of affirmative action measures to uplift levels of access of students from disadvantaged social backgrounds into HEIs forms part of degrading standards. Following this argument, one could draw on Woodrow's (1999) argument that as a way of discouraging widening participation in HEIs, the internal policies of these institutions discourage measures to widen access since these are deemed non-viable in economic terms.

The issue of equity is aimed at redress and mainly serves to benefit historically disadvantaged groups in South Africa under the apartheid regime. Naidoo (1998) maintains that the intended purpose of the Commission on Higher Education in 2000 was to look at the issue of transformation in South African HEIs. Weber (2002) holds to the view that equity is associated with the introduction and implementation

of alternative principles and standardised measures to allow a large number of people in society to have access, engage, participate and be treated in the same way when conducting social activities, including use of language, resources and culture.

Access and widening participation

Several HEIs in the United Kingdom have attempted to widen participation, focusing particularly on students from low socioeconomic backgrounds (DfES, 2006 and David, 2009). According to Mathekga (2012), the shift in educational policy in Britain refers to access as widening participation beyond mere entry to higher education by increasing the spread of enrolments across the spectrum of different academic programmes, particularly those which lack a diversified student population. Mathekga (2012: 36) claims that 'widening participation is therefore about attainment, and about helping more people from under-represented groups, especially those from low socioeconomic groups, to participate successfully in higher education'. In this regard equity is associated with equality, claiming equity to be in line with access to HEIs in other terms.

In Ghana and Tanzania, as argued by Mkude (2011), there has been reluctance towards inclusive and wide participation of the disadvantaged groups in HEIs, as revealed by research on the relationship between HEIs and equity measures. Effah (2011) further argues that when aiming to address inequalities in HE systems by allowing widening participation this could be challenging because elements of compromised quality could emerge. In this regard, an expansion of academic infrastructure, experienced and well qualified academic staff, including appropriate facilities, must be supplied. It therefore requires the role and involvement of government to intervene for the supply and demand of additional resources and extra required funding.

Before 1994, some HEIs seem not to value social inclusiveness of various groups in higher education, particularly people from disadvantaged backgrounds, as in the case of South Africa. As a result, access and widening participation were viewed as problematic and difficult to sustain since it had to involve students from poor and underrepresented social backgrounds (Woodrow, 1999). The South African population statistics show that whites at 17% were dominant in gaining access to universities against a figure of 69% representing blacks, Indians and coloureds who were denied university access even during the 1990s (Naidoo, 2004). In an attempt to bring about ethical standards and uplift the diverse sociocultural value of HEIs, recruitment of students from various social backgrounds is beneficial for socioeconomic development. While access is important to functionalists, it is selective access that dominates how society is conceptualised and the manner in which it functions, since it apparently functions effectively if there are differences in rewards (a merit based argument). Therefore, work done by various groups such as the medical professions, carpenters, scientists and others is rewarded differently and on the basis of the quality of their contribution (Te Velde, 2005). Certainly, people's success in life depends primarily on their talents, abilities, and efforts which implies meritocracy as a social system (Mathekga, 2012). Issues of meritocracy and language play significant roles in the discourse of HEIs and transformation.

Language and meritocracy

By definition, meritocracy is a social system in which people's success in life depends primarily on their talents, abilities, and efforts (Mathekga, 2012). The idea of a meritocracy has served as an ideology through the argument that social inequality results from unequal merit rather than prejudice or discrimination. The selection criteria for admission at HEIs are mainly based on meritocracy. In South Africa, the criteria for university admission differ from one university to the other. This is mainly informed by the apartheid legacy where former white universities used meritocracy and historically disadvantaged institutions applied affirmative action - the latter perform relatively poorly while the former have far better performance rates, but this is a form of access and participation that is driven by social background.

According to the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004), merit could mean admitting applicants or students who achieved the highest examination scores above the average mark, or it could mean comparing applicants' achievements and rewarding the potential of the best achievers. The issue of meritocracy in this regard then becomes highly contentious in instances where some HEIs could apply meritocratic principle while others could apply affirmative principles based on social background and class distinctions between students. Although the majority might agree on the application of meritocracy as a principle by which to make a selection of those qualifying to be placed at a certain level in terms of high or low performance, when one takes into account a higher education system which, in the past, deliberately discriminated against particular classes, races or social backgrounds, and which in the present, lends itself to privileging certain classes, races and social backgrounds, meritocracy as a determining factor for access may hinder access for entry into some HEIs to some students particularly those from the historically disadvantaged poor economic backgrounds.

Among other tensions of economic and political interest within society, culture is understood to be an aspect which may stimulate collective mobilisation (Barbieri, 2015). In this regard, culture and religion cannot easily be separated when it comes to how a society is identified (World Bank, 2009). White Afrikaners in South Africa are an example of this. When the Afrikaners took power and controlled larger parts of South Africa including the years of the formation of the African Union in 1910, perpetuation of apartheid principles gained power (Bunting, 2004). The Apartheid regime used power to discriminate against black people, forming a very strong racial boundary embedded in culture and language. Culture and language are the most significant aspects which affect higher education and those concerned with equity and access must pay attention to determinants of students' access and equity that are tied to these aspects (World Bank, 2009).

Du Plessis (2006) points out that in a context of multilingualism and the South African government's appropriate stance and clear standpoint on the issue of languages as a medium of instruction at university level, the use of Afrikaans in some former or traditionally Afrikaans-medium HEIs is an

inappropriate compromise between accepting and implementing English entirely or being bilingual through adopting Afrikaans as a medium of instruction and research writing (Du Plessis, 2006). This favourably predisposes Afrikaans-speaking whites who also benefitted from apartheid as opposed to the previously disadvantaged back majority for whom Afrikaans may be at best a third language. Moreover, it entirely neglects the other nine official languages used in South Africa. On fighting the battle to introduce one common language in the education system, it took young black South African students to confront the apartheid school system as they rioted in 1976 to abolish Afrikaans as a medium of instruction at school level. This suggests that language is not just a barrier but could also be deemed an oppressive tool particularly if such language usage is compulsory in the education system (Weber, 2002).

In the USA and the UK where English remains the dominant language, the language used as a medium of instruction is not a major factor which derails the offering of teaching and learning as is the case in South Africa where a minority of white Afrikaners are of the view that Afrikaans is not only a language suited to teaching but advice that it must be used as medium of instruction at those HEIs where it is not a common language widely used as English is (Alexander, 2000; Van der Merwe, 2014; Phaahla, 2015). Thus the English language, since it is commonly used by all races and the larger part of society in South Africa, is a more practical way for use in teaching and learning in the South African education context and as a common language to be used at HEIs. As Phaahla (2015) argues: 'only a few indigenous people make use of their indigenous African language in their essential daily transactions'. For this reason, English as a common language is a rational option rather than multilingualism which is largely unaffordable.

This is a complex issue in South Africa with its eleven official languages. Other African countries such as Zimbabwe and Malawi have an easier choice. In Zimbabwe, Shona is the official language of teaching and in Malawi, Kiswahili is the chosen language particularly for basic education. More globally, China and Germany use Mandarin and German respectively across the country and apply these languages for teaching particularly at the HEIs. These languages are used by the majority of the country's population at 90% or more. Such is the case with the larger parts of the USA and the UK where English is used nationally at the HEIs. This is not the case in South Africa where 42% of South Africans speak Nguni language (Statistics South Africa, 2011) as their first or home language with isiZulu at 23% of the total enrolled university students, as reported in 2000. One could concur with Taylor's (2006) view that mother-tongue language should be mainly used as a medium of instruction only at basic or primary education level. After that, one commonly used language should be instituted at the HEIs, such as English in the case of South Africa. The use of one common language could help ease access and a more equal application of standards applied in the HEIs thereby supporting transformation programme in the HEIs.

The transformation of HEIs in South Africa

The perception of restricting access from a social justice point of view presupposes the inequalities based on the segregation policies of the apartheid era. According to Nkomo, Akoojee & Motlhanke (2005), transformation in higher education is considered an indicator of social progress. It refers to a process of absolute overhaul of social thinking and results in meaningful social transition (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2011). Transformation in the South African context refers to the need to ensure that the barriers to access are completely removed so that the higher education system becomes more inclusive, achieving widening access, improved throughput rates and participatory outcomes. The new democratic government led by the African National Congress (ANC) through the Government of National Unity (GNU) disbanded the structure of tertiary education which used to have universities separated from technikons, colleges and technical colleges (Mathekga, 2012). Both the technikons and the technical colleges absorbed a lot of South African matriculants especially those who had an interest in studying skills-related courses as opposed to enrolling at universities. It appears that the new government has failed to figure out the actual problem of students' access to higher education but has rather confused the matter of student access with the disparities in the manner in which higher education institutions were structured and managed by the apartheid government before 1994.

The merging of HEIs which have taken place since 2002 and the establishment of Universities and Universities of Technology was an attempt by the South African democratic government to bridge the gap between racial and territory-based HEIs and to make these institutions accessible, inclusive and reach certain standards of equity (Chetty, 2010). The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (Department of Education, 2001) articulating the vision of the Education White Paper 3 (1997) identified the Ministry of Education's main aim which was 'to promote equity, access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress of past inequalities' (Mathekga, 2012: 49). The government authorities seem not to have seen the danger of limiting choices for those students who would have preferred to study at the former technical colleges and former technikons. The likelihood is that, with the existence of a variety of HEIs such as technical colleges and technikons, as was the case in the South African system before 2002, students would have had chosen skills careers at their competency level and better access to higher education would have been achieved overall, as opposed to the current situation which relies solely on university structured education.

When the new government took over in South Africa in 1994 a decade prior to the incorporation and merging of other HEIs in 2004, the impression made in terms of administration of higher institutions was that a changed (transformed) HE environment would effectively displace social disorders in the South African socioeconomic and educational system (Badsha & Cloete, 2011). An assumption was made by a number of people and communities that the triple challenges of inequality, poverty and unemployment could be reduced by investing on a better and equal standard higher education system (Subotzky, 2005). However, this was not the case as later evidenced by the fact that even after introducing policy aimed at transforming HEIs, not a lot has changed for the better (Cloete, 2002). A lot more pragmatic

action still needs to take place to overcome imbalances in terms of access, wider participation and language margins created in the past (Lundall, 1998 and Muller, 2005).

A university's level of access is managed through enrolment planning determined by the university and the government based on a three-year plan which spells out the projected numbers of students envisaged to enroll in a particular university or Universities of Technology. The previously disadvantaged groups in South Africa are then victims since their performance might be poor due to the poor schooling they have received and are thus unprepared to study at university level (high schools, being feeders for HEIs, are implicated). This defeats the purpose of the White Paper on transformation (White Paper, 3 1997) as the founding document drafted by the CHE to guide and execute implementation of transforming higher education policy. The Commission's report puts emphasis on the fact that academic standards are incorporated under the concept of quality, yet the practice of 'quality' may be applied in different forms depending on the group and probably race where services or education are being granted (NCHE, 1996).

Higher education policy in the South African context: past and present

The history of apartheid reveals its highly discriminative principles whereby universities and technikons were segregated and where white universities were well-resourced and black institutions were deliberately limited, kept remotely from wealth and far from well-supported centres. Teaching and learning, two of the major functions of a university, were less resourced in historically black institutions than the more advanced white institutions (Morrow, 2008). As a result of the apartheid legacy, the HEI system in South Africa was structured according to a highly stratified 'dual' system informed by racial segregation (Naidoo, 1998). Based on this history, therefore, South Africa is a country with a legacy of divided social orders based on race, class, gender and location which are major challenges and a contributing factor to social inequalities (Deacon et al., 2010).

At the present time, higher education institutions in South Africa are regulated and monitored by legislative principle and procedure as contained in the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997) which states that: 'It is desirable for the HEIs to enjoy freedom and autonomy in their relationship with the state within the context of public accountability and the national need for advanced skills and scientific knowledge'. While autonomy is granted, the government, through the Ministry of Education, monitors, support and regulates processes and policies applied in the HEIs since such policies must be in compliance with the administrative governance of the state (National Plan, 2001).

Currently, there seems to be a lack of clear standpoint by government in South Africa regarding the use of language in the HEIs and whether a 'common' official language must be used as opposed to the use of nine, three or only two official languages (Unterhalter, 2003; Cele, 2004). Universities are at liberty to apply their own policies in respect of which language to select for teaching purposes, and depending on the geographical area in which they are located, but even with this choice, African languages are used minimally since no subject, module or course other than an African language course, is taught in

the local languages at these universities. All subjects are offered in English while Afrikaans is used as an alternative (DuPlessis, 2006). The reality is that claims to offer any of the other South African official languages at university level appears to be mere rhetoric or a way of gaining political ground (Unterhalter, 2003 and Cele, 2004)

Despite the views of scholars such as Alexander (2000) and Van der Merwe (2014) that the use of home languages could help South Africans to cope better in schools, this does not automatically translate to a successful transition to using indigenous languages nationally, or at HEIs in South Africa. By the same token, not everyone could be taught in all eleven languages at the HEIs so one common language has to be used, and logically that should be English, since it is not only a nationally but also an internationally recognised language.

The implications and effects of higher education policy on transformation in post-apartheid South Africa

In 2002, a major policy decision was taken via the National Plan on Education as a means to approach transformation of the higher education system when the then Minister of Higher Education, Kader Asmal, embarked on a series of mergers and closures of higher education institutions, reducing them from 36 to 26, a figure that includes three newly established universities since 2013 (Kubler & Sayers, 2010). In hindsight, this seems to have been a mistake in that the decision to decrease the number of HEIs as informed by the policy on transformation of HEI in South Africa did not adequately address the problem of access, participation and equity in its full sense but rather spoke to a political motive to redress racial imbalances while neglecting other factors. Certainly, if the policy had been better conceived, a feasibility search could have been done, as was the case in countries such as Ghana and Tanzania.

The central focus of the South African Commission on Higher Education when introducing the policy on transformation appears to be on scrapping most of what the apartheid government introduced in higher education. In the process, the principles applied during the apartheid era were not only discouraged but were eradicated without considering those that could have benefitted society in the new dispensation. A clear example would be the dissolution of teacher training colleges which previously had imparted the necessary training for teaching at secondary education levels. In this regard, instead of introducing, implementing and monitoring policy to transform HEIs, certain derailing factors took the lead, mainly in the political arena, which militated against tackling real issues such as opening access, widening participation and applying equity. The policy on transformation of HEIs remains a good initiative, but implementation and monitoring did not yield the hoped for developments. Indeed, even after two decades of democracy, the hostility and conflict on how the HEIs operate and how are these institutions managed, is still rife. The enrolment and/or access system applied at historically white universities does not adequately accommodate students from poor or low social backgrounds. Concomitantly, the access system and participation in the historically black universities has not improved to meet that of the historically white universities (Bunting, 2004). Despite the restructuring of the HEIs brought about by

the policy on transformation, issues of race, class and access still weigh down the discourse on HEIs to date. The debate is ongoing and the task of the government is to determine how the system should be restructured to accommodate previously disadvantaged students, a task that has not as yet been realised as is evident from the failure of policies such as the Draft Green Paper from the DHET (2012).

It is an undisputed fact that the social disparities and segregation at higher education institutions in South Africa had to be addressed, but not by using a blanket approach to disband existing universities and technikons and restructure them as universities and universities of technology. Disbanding and restructuring of higher education through the eradication of technikons and technical colleges as higher education institutions did not yield the expected results as huge numbers of school-leavers were left without appropriate institutions in which to enroll. Moreover, Asmal's actions did not add value by increasing capacity nor did they help to bring about a balanced equity in terms of race and affirmative action standards in the country.

With this in mind, if the National Plan on Education has as its intention to cater for future enrolments and broaden access for previously disadvantaged groups (blacks, coloureds and Indians), having more rather than fewer institutions could have worked to advance the needs of the previously disadvantaged students. Instead, the government through its Ministry of Education chose to cut the number of institutions in the hope that its monitoring capacity would be improved, while enforcing new legislation or policy on higher education to eradicate segregation and high levels of stratification at the HEIs in South Africa. It was a noble aim but it was flawed.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of the conditions resulting from the policy on transformation in the context of higher education. The intention was to draw attention to the most significant aspects which could be used in the development of HEIs. Thus, issues relating to access, equity and widening participation carry a lot of weight and are closely linked to transformation in HEIs in South Africa (Bunting, 2004 and Boulton & Lucas 2008). Past regimes, such as the apartheid system in South Africa, used discriminative principles which did not advance the social living standards for all in the country. This perpetuated racial divisions and marginalisation amongst people in society. And since higher education forms part of the uplifting of social standards as well as the development of the nation, higher education institutions can be used for the advancement or regression of a society.

Looking at the present and to the future, university access has to be managed through enrolment planning as suggested in the White Paper on transformation (White Paper, 3 1997). Normalisation of student and staff performance at the universities could help improve access and induce wider participation since the standard of performance of students and academics is measured by the quality of teaching and learning. Improving access could be achieved through offering equal and standardised educational programmes [curriculum] in all universities within a particular country by implementing

global educational standards. People from different social backgrounds should benefit from an inclusive higher education environment, irrespective of their race and living standards since they form part of a developing society. The use of language and the medium of instruction at university plays a significant role and must be based on the dominant language understood by the larger part of society.

The paper further suggests that a need to introduce one dominant language such as English as the medium of instruction at higher education institutions could be helpful in eradicating the dominance of a language like Afrikaans which is replete with negative memories. Further, the use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education could have reduced unwanted costs by avoiding the oversubscription of study materials in both languages (English and Afrikaans) and teaching staff who must do double duty by teaching in English and also in Afrikaans. The use of various teaching languages (of choice) and English could best serve at the basic education level until grade twelve. This could help prepare each pupil for entry to higher education thus stimulating improved access, participation and greater levels of equity. In this way transformation in higher education has a better chance of being realised in South Africa.

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