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## Dimensions of Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa

### Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the transformation of higher education in South Africa. It does this by reflecting on the different dimensions, and the various outcomes of a transformed higher education system. The social dimension of transformation is one of the dimensions discussed in this paper, and it is underpinned by the provisions of the Constitution of South Africa, specifically the constitutional principles of inclusivity, representativity, human dignity, equality, freedom, non-racialism and non-sexism and the right to further education. In guaranteeing these principles, the Constitution requires the State, through reasonable measures, to progressively ensure that higher education is available and accessible to all deserving South Africans. The transformation of higher education is considered an indicator of social progress. This paper observes that several transformation-oriented initiatives have been implemented in higher education institutions in South Africa. The initiatives are supported by the thoughtful adoption of policies and

regulations aimed at attaining various outcomes of a transformed higher education system, including but not limited to eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequities; widening access to higher education and training opportunities; transformation of the curriculum such that it addresses local and current needs; delivering user-focused services in the face of changing technology, competition, audience needs and behaviour; providing adequate funding for previously disadvantaged students and improving the quality of higher education, training and research. However, there is still a lot of ground to be covered as far as the transformation of the higher education system is concerned.

**Keywords:** Transformation, higher education, planned change, social justice, access

### Introduction

Levy and Merry (1986) define transformation as planned or managed change. They elaborate that

transformation is characterised by deliberate, purposeful and explicit decisions to engage in a programme or process of change, which involves internal and external expertise, and is guided by a strategy of collaboration and power-sharing. They add that transformation is multidimensional, multi-level, quantitative, and radical organisational change that involves a paradigmatic shift. Their perspective of transformation is close to that of Smith (1982) (cited in Clegg *et al.*, 2019) who emphasised that transformation is a form of change that penetrates so deeply into the genetic code of an institution so that all future generations acquire and reflect the change. This view is shared with Badat (n.d.) who argues that transformation should be conceptualised as a movement from one set of undesirable social structural conditions to another set of fundamentally new desirable social structural conditions through purposeful and deliberate social action on the part of social actors. Thus, transformation should be understood as a double process: first as a process of the dissolution of an existing set of social relations and social, economic, political, ideological and cultural institutions, policies and practices; and second, as a process of the re-creation and consolidation of an alternate set of social relations and social, economic, political, ideological and cultural institutions, policies and practices.

The views of Soudien (2010) are apposite to the discourse on transformation of higher education. He argues that there are two main approaches to transformation: the first sees transformation as a demographic intervention around the imbalances of race, class, gender and language; while the

second sees it as about the nature of privilege and power. Positions based on the first viewpoint insist that numbers matter, and this is essentially the representativity approach to transformation. Positions based on the second viewpoint postulate that transformation is an ideological process that has to engage with domination and its attendant forces and discourses. There is a focus on the distribution of political and economic power in society and the processes through which social inclusion and exclusion are effected (Soudien, 2010).

One of the goals of higher education institutions is to be agents of social justice and economic growth (Boulton & Lucas, 2008). Therefore, the discourse on transformation is very important in assessing the extent to which higher education institutions play their role as agents of social justice and economic growth.

The main thesis of this paper is that transformation has different dimensions, all of which are important. It is therefore essential that the discourse on transformation should not be fixated on one or few dimensions only. The paper first discusses the higher education transformation policies since the dawn of democracy. Subsequently, it discusses the different transformation dimensions and their diverse outcomes which need to be taken into consideration when assessing how far the higher education system is transformed. The paper also assesses the achievements and continuing challenge of the higher education system in terms of transformation. Finally, it explores possible

interventions that can be pursued to address the vestiges of the legacy of untransformed higher education in South Africa.

### Higher Education Policies for Transformation since 1994

The apartheid higher education landscape was characterised by a hierarchy of racialised higher education institutions, and severe marginalisation of black students. In reviewing its priorities in 1994, the then newly elected democratic government realised that alongside its initiatives in schooling, it also had to give attention to higher education. Its first initiative was to appoint a National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1995, which reported in 1996. Its report, *A policy framework for the transformation higher education*, identified the challenges and opportunities within the existing system and made a number of recommendations. Central amongst these was the proposal that South Africa should seek to establish a single, coordinated, national system of higher education premised on a programme-based definition of higher education (NCHE, 1996). The overarching policy goal of establishing a single, coordinated national higher education system did not necessarily mean a uniform system. On the contrary, as the Education White Paper 3 states: "... important task in planning and managing a single national co-ordinated system is to ensure diversity in its organisational form and the institutional landscape, and offset pressures for homogenisation" (DoE, 1997: 2.37). It identified potential pressures for uniformity resulting from a programme-based definition of higher education

and how they can be avoided. These include recognising the broad function and mission of universities, technikons and colleges as three types of institutions offering higher education programmes; insisting on a rigorous planning and screening process for the approval of publicly-funded programmes, which should serve the mission and goals of the system and rigorous quality control of providers (DHET, 1997).

In conjunction with this recommendation, the NCHE was very clear that, while focusing on the dual objectives of economic growth and social development, the South African higher education system should be structured in such a way that it could cater for the significant increases in the number of people seeking to enter higher education, and should be designed to promote access (ibid). A number of key policy developments came into being, beginning with the Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation published in 1996 and the seminal Education White Paper 3 published in 1997, which led to the adoption of the Higher Education Act (HEA) (Act 101 of 1997 as amended). Both were informed by the NCHE's anticipation that a new phase of massification would occur in the system, leading to increased access. The principles of equity and redress and the imperatives of demography and development required increased participation (massification) in South African higher education. This meant that more students from a broad array of social groups and classes had to be accommodated. Such 'massification' of South African higher education was anticipated to involve different teaching and learning patterns, new

curricula, and more varied modes of delivery (NCHE, 1996).

In confirming the policy objectives for higher education, the Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997 as amended) indicated the intention of restructuring and transforming programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of South Africa; redressing past discrimination; ensuring representativity and equal access; and contributing to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in keeping with international standards of academic quality. The Higher Education Act also proclaimed that it is desirable for higher education institutions 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.

Transformation in South African universities should be reflected in all facets of the institution such as governance, management and leadership, student environment such as reasonable access and academic success, equity in staffing, institutional cultures, progressive and inclusive teaching and learning, research and knowledge systems, institutional equity, and the political economy of higher education funding (SAHRC, 2016). The Education White Paper 3 (WP3) (1997): *A Programme for Transformation of Higher Education* remains one of the most important policy statements of the new government with respect to higher education. It contains the vision of a transformed, democratic,

non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education whose major objectives are to:

- promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequities.
- meet, through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs ... [for] a growing economy operating in a global environment.
- support a democratic ethos and culture of human rights and;
- contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African contexts and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality (DHET, 1997, p.14).

The National Plan for Higher Education (2001) was a policy promulgated to provide a blueprint for the radical transformation of the higher education system in response to a report by the Council on Higher Education's (CHE's) Task Team that was commissioned to advise the then Minister of Education, Prof Kader Asmal, on restructuring the higher education landscape (Jansen, 2004). The key focus of the plan was on the achievement of equity, informed by the Education White Paper 3's vision of promoting "equity of access and fair chances for success", "eradicating unfair

discrimination” and “redressing past inequalities”, to ensure that the staff and student profiles progressively reflect the demographic realities of the South African society and that the race and gender profiles of graduates reflect the profiles of student enrolments.

The intention was that the National Plan would give effect to the ideals embodied in the values of the new democratic state. Prof Asmal, then Minister of Education, described it as “far-reaching and visionary in its attempt to deal with the transformation of the higher education system as a whole” (NPHE, 2001). Underlying the National Plan was the idea that the transformation of the higher education system was essential. The National Plan indicated that bold moves were required. Mindful of the legacy inherited from the past, among other things, it proposed to establish indicative targets for the size and shape of the higher education system, including overall growth and participation rates, institutional and programme mixes and equity and efficiency goals.

The National Plan also proposed that the participation rate in higher education should be increased in the long-term to address both the imperative for equity and the changing human resource and labour needs. It proposed that the participation rate should be increased by recruiting workers, mature students, particularly women and the disabled, and students from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries as part of the SADC Protocol on Education. It was envisaged that these moves would see the reconfiguration and rearrangement

towards a transformed higher education landscape in South Africa.

The *White Paper on Post-School Education and Training* of 2013 provided a strategic framework for all programmes and set out a vision for a fundamentally transformed post-school system. It was a definitive statement of the government’s vision for the post-school system, outlining the main priorities and strategies for achieving them. This vision was an integral part of the government’s policies to develop the country and improve the economic, social and cultural life of its people. Central to these policies is the determination to bring about social justice, overcome the legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, and overcome inequity and injustice whatever its origins (DHET, 2013)

### **Dimensions of Transformation of Higher Education**

Globally higher education institutions are challenged by the need to respond to new demands of an ever-changing world as increasing numbers of secondary school leavers, their families, the general public, and stakeholders from all classes and backgrounds demand access to higher education and expect the States to respond. Universities are required to provide entry for students from low-income families and schools, wealthy families and schools, students with inadequate schooling backgrounds, and those who have a good background, and they have to address all their needs (Hall, 2012). Mathekg (2012) cited in Mzangwa (2019), explains that

widening participation is about attainment and helping more people from under-represented groups, especially those with inadequate schooling backgrounds and from low-income families and schools, to participate successfully in higher education. All these challenges need higher education institutions to fully harness the different dimensions of transformation to be sustainable in the future. There are many dimensions of transformation of higher education, but this paper confines itself to a selected few. The selected dimensions include digital transformation, social transformation, curriculum transformation, leadership, governance and management, research and knowledge production, higher education funding and transformation of institutional environments.

**Digital transformation** is organisational change realised through digital technologies and business processes with the aim to improving an organisation's operational performance (Seres *et al.*, 2018). Categories of organisational business transformations encompass organisational structure, people/staff, business processes, technologies utilised for gathering and managing information, range of products or services, mechanisms for engaging with customers and suppliers. The digital transformation of higher education institutions is a process of technological and organisational changes, primarily attributable to digital technologies (ibid). The principal aim of the digital transformation process in higher education is to redefine educational services and redevelop higher education institutions' operational processes. Seres *et al.* (2018) further

argue that the digital transformation of higher education is about more than just technology. It is also about adopting new ways of working to continue delivering user-focused services in the face of changing technology, competition, audience needs and behaviour. Digital services, digitally-skilled educators and students, and decisions that consider available evidence, are some of the characteristics of a digitally transformed higher education. In conditions of great uncertainty and competition, higher education institutions should move from wondering what the future might hold to predicting the future, making proactive decisions, and taking actions based on that information. Evidence-based, quantitative and predictive decision-making is a reliable way of gaining a competitive advantage.

With the widespread availability of data, higher education institutions could recognise and significantly leverage the power of analytics in the most important decisions affecting them. This is a path that higher education institutions should follow to turn their data into meaningful value. Conventional and unconventional, internal and external data should be used to discover hidden patterns underlying performance in different areas, track admissions, optimise enrolment, manage grants, enhance academic advising, and many more. To gain insights from vast amounts of accumulated data what is even more challenging is to translate these insights into effective business decisions. Higher education institutions have to keep up with big data and data analytics tools and

techniques as fundamental enablers of evidence-based, data-driven predictive decisions (ibid).

**Social transformation** in South Africa is mandated in the Constitution. The social transformation envisaged through the Constitution is multifaceted and multi-dimensional, with the State having the crucial role of setting norms and evolving policies. It lays down the normative principles that override the entire strategy for social change. Its emphasis on constitutional democracy, justice, freedom and equality comprises the fundamental values to which all other processes of social change, like the economic, social and cultural, should be subsidiary (SAHRC, 2016). Nzimande (2015) cited in SAHRC (2016), emphasised that transformation should be institutionalised to create an Afrocentric space; advance the decolonisation of knowledge; advocate for better facilities and more productive practices; promote just pedagogies; broaden opportunities and increase access to higher education and success rates for black students; foster demographic representation on all levels of the academy, and across university structures; stimulate a democratic and non-repressive institutional culture; and ensure accountable governance and management efficiencies.

The DHET (2015) recommends that higher education in South Africa needs to play a fundamental and critical role in expressing the rights and values in the South African Constitution's Bill of Rights. The apartheid regime had used higher education to advance white privilege. Now there is a need to create a system

that would promote the dignity of all people irrespective of sexuality, disability, race, class, and gender. This responsibility for constructing a new system rests with all stakeholders in the sector.

**Curriculum transformation** is part of a worldwide challenge that higher education institutions currently have to address (Watson *et al.*, 2011 cited in Mendy & Madiope, 2018) to tackle inequality and oppression; and for professional development. Curriculum transformation involves continuously rethinking and re-evaluating how teaching and learning are done. This includes responsiveness to, and training in new pedagogical methodologies and approaches within disciplines (University of Pretoria, 2016). It is founded on relevance and purpose within a specific social, economic, environmental, intellectual, political and legal context. It further entails retrieving and foregrounding historically and presently marginalised narratives and an acknowledgement of indigenous knowledge systems hitherto repressed in the South African context; positioning local knowledge systems not as sites of immutable truths, but as sites of contestation; critically examining the role of race, class, gender, sexuality, culture and other categories of identification and disadvantage within disciplines; prioritising social transformation by focusing on the ways in which disciplines can contribute to the development of society and realisation of a dignified and sustainable life for all South Africans (op.cit).

The South African higher education transformation embraces the empowerment of academics to

develop teaching and learning curricula that contribute to society's development and the realisation of a dignified, sustainable life for all Africans. This often entails decolonising the curriculum such that it addresses local and current needs of staff whilst simultaneously aligning to and resolving the economic and socio-political challenges facing universities and their students (Mendy & Madiope, 2018). Curriculum transformation should primarily be responsive to contemporary and future communities' needs and the changing global market the universities serve (Atkinson, Morten & Sue, 1998).

**Transformation of leadership, governance and management** is also underpinned by constitutional imperatives. The Constitution and the Higher Education Act provide a sound and clear framework for the leadership, governance and management of public higher education institutions as another dimension of transformation. Sound governance, strong management and accountable leadership are essential requirements for the transformation of the post-school education and training sector as envisioned in the Education White Paper 3. The transformation of the structures, values and culture of leadership, governance and management is necessary for South African higher education. Higher education institutions are vital participants in the massive changes that society is undergoing and the intellectual, economic, and cultural challenges. Therefore, a fundamental policy commitment for the higher education sector is achieving completely transformed leadership and governance arrangements that are needed to

chart and steer the development of a single, integrated national system of higher education (DoE, 1997).

According to DHET (2015) transformation needs to be radically re-appropriated. This requires leadership and management of higher education institutions that can put in place institutional interventions that will increase the pace of the different dimensions of transformation, including but not limited to curriculum, quality of student and staff life, institutional environments, research and engagement, and student access and success. During the apartheid regime, black students and staff were confronted with enduring barriers to their full participation in universities, and black students constantly had to defend their positions in higher education institutions. In contrast, the experience of white students was different.

Low throughput rates remain a key challenge to transformation. Therefore, that calls for leadership and management in higher education institutions to focus on student success through the creation of conducive and stimulating environments involving a spectrum of developments such as academic support, more flexible learning paths and academic structures, as well as the creation of stability in universities with the most vulnerable groups (SAHRC, 2016).

**Transformation of research and knowledge production** extends far beyond the achievement of an equitable demographic composition of the student body in terms of access and success, the achievement of equity in the staff body,



improvement in research outputs, and the production of high-level skills for the economy, much as all these are vitally important (DoE, 1997). To be truly transformed, the higher education system needs to play a significant role in helping to build an open, democratic, post-apartheid society and an informed, critical, and socially aware citizenry. This is where the transformation of research and knowledge generation is crucial. Research is critical in exploring means for addressing the legacy of inequality, the wealth gap, and increasing polarity in our society by exploring avenues that will take us towards greater equity. A transformed higher education system will be one in which deserving students have a range of higher education and other post-school opportunities to access education. The Education White Paper 3 canvasses this point sharply in that these opportunities would include ones that are more directly vocational, to those that prepare students for professional practice, or that lead to socio-economic development.

An important stride by government to transform research can be observed through the work of the National Research Foundation (NRF), which aims to transform the research environment to enable an increase in the number of doctoral students, ISI publications, PhD graduates per annum, proportion of global ISI outputs, number of women rated researchers, black rated researchers, global research impact, and annual increase in bursary allocations (DHET, 2015). These initiatives emphasise the need for a collective approach to recompose the demographic profile of the

professoriate and the next generation of academics. The aim is to avoid a race to the bottom in a war of attrition in which universities compete for a small pool of academics at the system's peril. Hence the argument has been on the need to focus on growing the quantum and quality of the talent pool. These targets can only be achieved if support is provided to the next generation of researchers, focusing on investment in emerging scholars, established researchers, and strategic investments. This is, however, a complex and dynamic process involving support for the decisions that people make at each point of the researcher's life cycle. At the heart of transformation imperatives, there is the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP), which is a programme that aims to achieve transformation imperatives in the higher education sector. It particularly focuses on areas such as student development, staff development and curriculum development. The UCDP seeks to establish a pipeline that enables the recruitment, retention and progression of academics (op.cit).

**Transformation of the higher education funding system** is vital to the realisation of other transformation objectives in the post-apartheid South Africa, mainly with regard to adequate funding for the university system, especially for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds (Wangenge-Ouma & Carpentier, 2018). The Higher Education Act provided for the establishment, governance and funding of public higher education institutions. The Ministry of Education (MoE, 2004) highlighted the key goals of public funding for universities in South Africa as

the production of graduates needed for social and economic development; promotion of equity in the South African higher education system; promotion of diversity in the composition of students and staff; sustaining and promoting research; and restructuring the institutional landscape of the higher education system. Funding serves as a steering mechanism for attaining these goals, together with enrolment planning, quality assurance and the programme approval process. The DHET (2015) reinforced that funding was crucial to the ability to increase the pace of transformation and that transformation should be contextualised in the general transformation of the economy. This supports the intention of the NPHE (2001) to achieve transformation through institutional steering (using planning, funding and quality) to bridge the apartheid's divide of historically advantaged institutions and historically disadvantaged institutions, which was a defining feature of higher education in South Africa. Through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), the government plays a critical and strategic role in making funding available to students, especially poor black students. However, the rising costs of running institutions have eroded the value of the state subsidy provided to universities, and this has contributed to fee increases to offset the decline in funding (DHET, 2015).

#### **Transformation of institutional environments:**

The higher education system in South Africa experienced some growth, including growth in participation rates after 1994. However, concerns regarding students' access, participation rates,

and equity issues remain at the core of urgent debate (Mathekga, 2012). The government firmly established equity and transformation of higher education institutions to address the issues of access by 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 established to closely monitor and oversee the implementation of policy priorities associated with the transformation of higher education institutions (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007).

#### **Transformation-oriented achievements of the higher education system post-1994**

Some of the achievements of the higher education system post-1994 include:

- i) Laying the foundations for a new higher education landscape constituted by a single, co-ordinated and differentiated system encompassing universities, universities of technology, comprehensive institutions, contact and distance institutions and various colleges (Badat, 2010).
- ii) Defining policy framework for higher education, as explicated in various policy documents (op.cit).
- iii) Increased participation within higher education to advance social equity and meet economic and social development needs. It has been observed that student enrolments grew

from 473 000 in 1993 to some 799 388 (40% increase) in 2008 (DHET, 2016), and by 2018 student enrolments had grown to 1 085 568 (DHET, 2019). The 2001 NPHE's target of 20% gross participation rate by 2016 was achieved and currently stands at 22% (CHE, 2020a); however, the participation rate of black Africans and coloureds increased to only 19% and 15% respectively in 2018 (from 9% and 13% in 1993), as compared to 55% for white students (CHE, 2020a).

- iv) Overall, and at many institutions, there was also an extensive de-racialisation of the student body. Whereas in 1993 African students constituted 40% (191 000), and black students 52% of the student body (CHE, 2004), in 2008 they made up 64.4% (514 370) and over 75% respectively of overall enrolments (DHET, 2019).
- v) There has also been commendable progress in terms of gender equity. Whereas women students made up 43% of enrolments in 1993 (CHE, 2004), by 2008 they constituted 56.3 % of the student body and had grown to 58.3% in 2018 (CHE, 2019a).
- vi) According to Badat (2010), a national quality assurance framework and infrastructure was established, and policies, mechanisms, and initiatives regarding institutional audit, programme accreditation, and quality

promotion and capacity development have been implemented since 2004.

- vii) A new more goal-oriented, performance-related funding framework was instituted, and a National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has been successfully established and expanded as a means of effecting social redress for poor students.
- viii) Following the constitutional provision for private higher education institutions and certain conditions, the private higher education sector emerged. Conditions included that they did not discriminate on the grounds of race, they were registered with the state, and maintained standards that were not inferior to those at comparable public institutions. Criteria that private institutions need to meet to achieve university status are still in place (op.cit).
- ix) 'With respect to teaching and learning, research and community engagement, institutions offer academic programmes that produce high quality graduates with knowledge, competencies and skills to practice occupations and professions locally and elsewhere in the world' (Badat, 2010, p6).

### **Transformation-oriented issues and challenges that continue to confront the state and higher education institutions and possible interventions to address them**

The higher education system before 1994 in South Africa was not responsive to the needs of a democratic State. It was embedded in social inequalities as a product of the systemic exclusion of blacks and women under colonialism and apartheid, like all other spheres of social life. Social, political and economic discrimination and inequalities of class, race, gender, institutional and spatial nature profoundly shaped and continue to shape the South African higher education. These challenges had forced South Africa's new democratic government to commit itself in 1994 to transforming higher education and the inherited apartheid social and economic structure and institutionalising a new social order (Badat, 2010).

Post-1994, many transformation-oriented initiatives sought to effect institutional changes. The initiatives included redefining the purposes and goals of higher education; policy formulation, adoption, and implementation in the areas of governance, funding, academic structure and programmes and quality assurance; the enactment of new laws and regulations; and major restructuring and reconfiguration of the higher education institutional landscape and institutions. The initiatives were supported by adopting policies and regulations aimed at overcoming unfair discrimination, expanding access to higher education and training opportunities, and improving the quality of higher education, training

and research (SAHRC, 2016). They were grounded on Constitutional principles of human dignity, equality, freedom, non-racialism and non-sexism and the right to further education which requires the State, through reasonable measures, to ensure that it is available and accessible to all progressively.

The CHE (2016) had also imagined that a transformed higher education system would break the inequalities of the apartheid past, and play a critical role in an emerging, non-racial, progressive democracy, in producing critical, independent, skilled and socially committed graduates who would be capable of contributing to social and economic development, and help to build an open, democratic society and an informed, critical, and socially aware citizenry. Despite the many transformation initiatives in the higher education sector since the dawn of democracy, institutions of higher learning have not sufficiently transformed with regard to race, gender, culture, language, disability, and sexual orientation. Accordingly, inequalities, patterns of systematic exclusion, marginalization and subtle forms of discrimination persist in South African higher education institutions (SAHRC, 2016).

Herbaut and Geven (2019) explain that equity in higher education emerged as a central political issue in many countries, and policy makers have been increasingly seeking policy instruments to support disadvantaged students in their access to, and success in their higher education studies. 'Equity cannot be achieved without purposeful or even aggressive and direct strategies, which are

designed deliberately to dismantle the core of historical privilege, disparities in wealth, incomes and capital stock' (Motala, 2003, p7).

Finally, this paper presents some interventions to break the cycle of inequalities in higher education that seem to persist despite the already provided legislative and policy frameworks. These interventions can be learned from elsewhere and adjusted according to the context of where they are applied. Some have been tried even in South Africa, but lessons can be learned on how some have been implemented but were unsuccessful and some improvements can be proposed. Kallaway *et al.*, (1997) stress the value of looking at what has been tried elsewhere, provided that full attention is paid to the context to the differing purposes, resources and values of differing conditions. The first of the interventions is outreach interventions which should be targeted at students in high school or recent high school graduates. It seemed relatively cost-effective tool to address inequalities in access to higher education, as long as the interventions go beyond providing general information about higher education and go as far as providing personalised counselling and simplification of the tasks of applying for admission to universities, especially where counsellors actively reach out to targeted students to ensure their participation (Herbaut & Geven, 2019).

Secondly, the lack of accurate information about higher education among disadvantaged students is another plausible barrier highlighted in the literature, that needs to be addressed. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds may

underestimate the returns of higher education and overestimate the costs of enrolment, leading them to underestimate the net returns of a higher education degree. Herbaut and Geven believe that a problem related to this is the lack of information on how to access financial aid. Financial aid and its application processes are often deemed as complex.

Thirdly, a lack of academic preparation has been cited as a major barrier to disadvantaged students' educational attainment (Carneiro & Heckman, 2002). Many of these students may drop out from school, even those eligible for higher education because of the lack academic preparation and low performance. For example, Greene and Forster (2003) estimate that in the public high school class of 2001 in the U.S., half of all black and Hispanic students graduated from high school but only 20% and 16% of them, respectively, had the minimum qualifications for applying to four-year colleges. This lack of academic preparation clearly limits students' options in terms of accessing selective forms of higher education (for instance, highly ranked universities). In the South African context, Jansen (2008) confirmed that there is considerable evidence that preparation at schools is inadequate in securing a successful transition from high school to higher education. Most of the students find the transition difficult or simply lack the necessary skills and motivation to succeed in higher education. Intervention programmes should target learners early on in their high school careers and inform them about the requirements of higher education enrolment (Herbaut & Geven, 2019).

Financial barriers are often at the core of the concerns about higher education opportunities for disadvantaged students who are eligible for it. The total financial costs of higher education studies which include both direct and indirect costs in some countries including South Africa, have risen dramatically over the previous years and have raised public concern about affordability. Financial aid is expensive, and the evidence on its effectiveness for disadvantaged students varies largely depending on the type of aid. The evidence on need-based grants suggests that most grant schemes only lead to limited improvements in enrolment rates, unless they provide substantial amounts of money. It is possible that enrolment as a response to aid follows a threshold effect and that need-based aid is only effective when it covers a significant part of unmet financial need. Interventions that offer very generous subsidies were found to have positive effects on enrolment (op.cit).

It also seems that an early commitment of financial aid, while students are still in high school, leads to much larger impact on higher education access. Merit-based financial aid is rarely effective in tackling inequalities in higher education, except when it includes a need-based component to specifically support disadvantaged students. Conversely, merit-based aid based only on academic results, without any assessment of students' financial needs, seems to have no effect, and was even found to exacerbate inequality. Regarding attainment, only need-based grants specifically designed to support disadvantaged

students were found to increase success rates of disadvantaged students quite consistently (Herbaut & Geven, 2019).

Finally, Kromydas (2017) argues that the current focus on the labour market driven policies in higher education has led to an ever-growing competition, thus transforming this social institution to an ordinary market-place, where attainment and degrees are seen as the currency that can be converted into a labour market value. As a result, higher education became very expensive and even if policies are directed towards openness, in practice, just a few individuals have the money to afford it. Governments need to shift toward a hybrid dimension, where the intrinsic purpose of higher education is equally acknowledged along with its instrumental purpose in order to create educational systems that are more inclusive and just and produce societies that are more knowledgeable.

## Conclusion

The current South African higher education sector is profoundly different from the one inherited from the apartheid government. However, it has some distance to travel before it can be declared that the imbalances of the past have been eradicated and transformation goals have been fully achieved. Higher education can and should be a major catalyst for development in all its dimensions and the wider transformation of the South African society. To date, a number of transformation-oriented initiatives seeking to effect institutional change in higher education institutions have been

observed. There have been several recognisable changes since the publication of the Education White Paper 3. These initiatives were supported by adopting policies and regulations aimed at overcoming unfair discrimination, expanding access to higher education and training opportunities, and improving the quality of higher education, training and research (SAHRC, 2016).

Policies on their own do not transform societies. It is the implementation of the policies that would bring the realisation of the desired transformed higher education system. More still needs to be done to implement policies and to evaluate policy implementation. Some parts of South African higher education system have been strengthened and promise to contribute to social equity, economic and social development and democracy, and to the development needs of the Southern African region and the African continent (Badat, 2010). A transformed higher education system will be one in which deserving students have a range of higher education and other post-school education opportunities to access education.

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