The Problem of Access, Quality and Equity in South African Higher Education and Strategies for Revitalisation

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ABSTRACT The assumption that higher education (HE) is the engine behind social and economic development as well as an agent for human emancipation has led to massive investment in HE development. Consequently, nation states, policy makers, and educational planners have made the equitable provision and delivery of HE their top agenda and vision. In the South African context, this gave rise to the enactment of a number of policy initiatives at both government and institutional level so as to translate this vision into reality. While significant milestones were achieved in the quantitative aspects of equity as encapsulated in widened access to higher education, there are persistent challenges that threaten the overall quality and performance of the HE system. These include but are not limited to issues such as student funding, student level of unpreparedness, academic development programmes, pedagogy and the language issue. If these and other challenges are not addressed, they may render the equity vision elusive, however well-intentioned. This paper sought to explore critical challenges experienced by HE institutions in South Africa in their efforts to embrace the equity imperative. The focus of the paper transcend mere exploration by articulating strategies that are meant to revitalise the HE system so as to make it more responsive and relevant to a massified student population.

INTRODUCTION

The view that education in general and higher education in particular, is an instrument for social and economic development has prompted governments, educational planners and political leaders to invest heavily in the development of education. This has been particularly true in developing countries of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Further to its attested role in socio-economic development, higher education is widely believed to confer significant individual benefits in terms of personal development, social status, career possibilities and lifetime earnings (Clarke 2007). In the same vein, Clarke et al. (2004) add that Higher Education is often regarded as the means to develop and accentuate depth and breadth of character as well as to develop and perfect the full potential of the human personality. Thus, the ultimate aim of higher education is to develop the human being as an end in itself, the total human personality as the supreme value of life. Thus, a balanced higher education system should be seen to fulfil both economic imperatives as well as obligations relating to individual human fulfilment. If HE is to succeed in this mandate, then issues of quality, accessibility and equitability should be central to HE delivery and provision. This simply means that HE of superior quality and standard should be made accessible to all citizens in a fairly equitable manner.

This article therefore seeks to examine the problem of access, quality and equity in the provision of HE in South Africa as well as proposing strategies for revitalization. The purpose of the paper is more to provoke thought than to present definite prescriptions. The research is on the main analytic and reflective and it draws on data collected from reviews of studies, national and international documents on HE.

CONCEPTUAL ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR EQUITY

While conceding that defining equity is not an easy matter, Allen (2005), Austin and Oseguera (2004) have isolated five ingredients that seem to characterise an equity-informed HE system as follows:

(a) Individuals who have the ability to attend university should be afforded that opportunity
(b) Barriers to access university education should be kept to the minimum.
(c) Individuals should have a fair opportunity to develop their talents
(d) Merit should be the key determinant for selection to university studies

(e) Selection to university should not be based on any known form of discrimination

The concept of equity, access and equality revolve around the issue of equality of opportunity, potential and fairness (Cassim 2005). Viewed in this light, the need to improve the participation of disadvantaged groups and individuals in HE seems not only moral but also essential for a cohesive and a more economically successful society. Together with quality and efficiency, equity is one of the three fundamental measures used the world over to gauge the effectiveness of any public higher education system (Clark et al. 2004; Allen 2005; Coates and Krause 2005). Bitzer (2010) expands on this view by adding that equity touches the hopes and aspirations of many social groups particularly in societies characterised by racial and social diversity.

In the South African context, just as is the case with most post-colonial education systems in Africa, the issues of equity and access assume greater importance given the need to address past inequities (Department of Education 2007). Thus, equity in higher education includes equality of access and provision, equality of programme quality and curricula as well as equality of calibre in terms of graduates. The critical concern here is that equity should have a substantive quality rather than being confined to mere numbers. This point is accentuated by Cassim (2005) who elaborates that equity suggests a fair access to educational resources of equal quality and value to enhance educational attainment. Further, the fact that equity and access are central to people's beliefs about fairer societies, social change and national and global development implies that governments, policymakers and universities and practitioners can only ignore issues of equity and access in the provision of HE at their peril. This paper thus seeks to find a niche into which to contribute to the current scholarly debates and discourses on the provision of higher education in South Africa.

ACCESS AND EQUITY MEASURES AND OUTCOMES

With regards to the South African higher education context, it is fair to point out that great strides have been made in improving access, particularly for the previously disadvantaged (Cloete 2002; Akoojee and Nkomo 2005; Motala 2005). At the same time tremendous growth had been made in the under-and postgraduate offerings.

As noted by Higgs (2010), there had been a dramatic increase in enrolment in public higher education institutions from 550 000 in 2002 to 837 000 in 2009. At the same time a report by the Department of Education (DoE 2006) has shown that in 1993, 57% of all headcounts students were in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HSS), 24% in Business and Commerce (BC) and 19% in Science Engineering and Technology (SET). Nevertheless, while enrolment patterns have been on the increase, the sad thing is that these figures did not necessarily translate into increased output (that is, completed qualifications) rates in respect of all the racial groups (Cloete 2002; Cassim 2005). As DoE (2006) report puts it, enrolment figures disguised the fact that African students consti-tuted the minority of the enrolments in SET and BC. The fact that the HE system is not producing more African graduates in areas classified as scarce skills therefore evokes the issue of equity of opportunity among different race groups. This view is extended by Fiske and Ladd (2004) who argue that student performance continue to be racially differentiated with black students doing worse than white students in most disciplinary fields of study. These outcomes, therefore, undermine the gains made in terms of access.

Among the momentous challenges in need of urgent attention as articulated by Cassim (2005) include the following: the problem of high dropout rates, especially at first year level, the inequitable distribution of students over fields of study, low throughput and graduation rates, alienating and unconducive institutional cultures, under resourcing of HE institutions, poor academic performance levels, inadequate infrastructure at some HE institutions. This paper, therefore, posits that all universities in South Africa should make deliberate efforts to encourage and support students who enrol for scarce skills subjects such as Engineering, Technology.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Prior to independence in 1994, many South African citizens experienced financial challenges in accessing higher education (Motala 2005). Thus, the National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was borne out of the need to ensure that a large number of poor students were able to access HE. In particular, NSFAS as a loan and bursary

scheme has the express purpose of addressing the rising student debt problem in higher education institutions (HEIs) and to give effect to the government's commitment to redressing the inequities of the past by making HE affordable. The statistics below attest to the extent to which NSFAS served as a rescue aid for many students who were in financial distress. In 2008, NSFAS was reported by Fiske and Ladd (2004) to have assisted182 497 eligible students with funding of which 54 per cent of these were females. The same author proceeds to note that in 2009, 93 percent of the students who benefited from NSFAS were Africans. Erasmus (2010) gives further corroboration by showing that in 2008/09 R2.5 billion was advanced to 153 000 students. The report concludes that aid to the value of R12.2 billion had been rendered since the inception of NSFAS.

While NSFAS should be hailed for making HE accessible and affordable, the critical challenge is that the funds were not sufficient enough to cater for everyone in need nor all costs related to higher education study. As noted by Fiske and Ladd (2004), this form of financial aid covered only 60 to 70 percent of the costs of the educational upkeep required for each student per year. This means that the student has to fork up the remaining amount from his/ her own pocket. This has the overall effect that students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are ejected out of the higher education system through failure to raise sufficient funding to sustain their studies.

Universities are thus always faced with a polemic dilemma of choosing between higher support levels for fewer students, or lower support levels for more students. It is important to point out that whichever way chosen is problematic in the sense that if a small number were allocated full bursaries then a larger majority would suffer and this would result in protests. At the same time as the bursaries are halved so as to cover more students this result in many students becoming unable to complete their studies due to insufficient funding. Our opinion in this case is that higher support levels for few students is better than under funding. The rest of the students who do not receive NSFAS support will then be catered through other initiatives such as loans from banks, non-governmental organisations and other civic groups. Cassim (2005) argues strongly against under funding of HE since to him this does not enable students to succeed. He further describes the use of NSFAS loans to inadequately fund many students as a

paradox that contributes to a high dropout and failure rate among the very group for whom the scheme was set up to provide access to higher education.

In the light of the foregoing, the need to encourage community involvement in financing higher education becomes an urgent matter as government can obviously not go it alone. This study further argues that the widely held paradigm in which higher education is perceived as a public good that rests on government responsibility to provide to all citizens needs to be seriously interrogated. The authors of this study, therefore, call upon the South African state and university leadership to propose new policies which encourage the direct beneficiaries of HE (students and their families) to contribute to the cost of higher education. Thus, the policy of cost sharing in financing higher education should be aggressively pursued.

Motala (2005) cites the issue of delays in finalising institutional allocations as well as the finalisation of loan agreements between students and NSFAS as some of the challenges militating against the success of NSFAS. Many stakeholders have widely criticized the NSFAS loan management scheme as being slow, cumbersome and inefficient and hence in need of revitalization. The critical issues here are that the slow processing of loan applications and agreements, and delays in finalising institutional allocations and in transferring funds create serious difficulties for universities and students alike. For instance, the late disimbursements of NSFAS allocations to students exacerbates the problem of students from low socio-economic backgrounds particularly as far as registration, accommodation, meal and book costs are concerned. We, therefore, agree with Erasmus'(2010) suggestion that the implementation of an electronic loan system by government could go a long way in revitalizing the system.

Contributing to this debate, Ptyana (2004) suggests that it is high time universities diversify their sources of income by mobilizing more financial resources from business, community, households and development partners. The current situation whereby the state remains the most important source of funding in many public universities is becoming increasingly untenable. They should also ensure more efficient and cost-effective use of the available institutional resources. Accountability and transparency is definitely needed in the utilization of the existing resources. There is,

therefore, need for leadership training and capacity building of university executive management so as to improve their effectiveness.

LANGUAGE ISSUE

Language is often regarded as the gateway to culture, knowledge and people. The more languages one masters, the more access one has to other cultures, to knowledge and to other people (Higgs et al. 2000). As articulated by Clarke (2007), what is relevant to the learning process is the fact that mastery of the language in which a subject is taught is the key to mastery of the subject matter. He goes on to say that the Eurocentric nature of the South African HE system, at the heart of which has been the use of European languages, has constituted a barrier against the successful education of the masses of African people. Commenting on the situation in South Africa, Cele (2004) observes that the existing language barrier inherent in many higher education institutions of learning tend to adversely affect the possibilities of success for the majority of students.

In terms of the South African National Education Policy Act (Department of Education 2001) the right to choose the language of learning and teaching is vested in the individual. The aim of this policy is to support the teaching and learning of all other languages required by learners or used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, and the South African Sign Language. At the heart of this piece of legislation is the need to counter disadvantages resulting from different kinds of mismatches between home languages and languages of learning and teaching used in educational institutions. Higgs (2010) argues with reasonable justification that despite the government's commitment for multilingualism and the promotion of language rights in all spheres of public life, the HE sector seems not to reflect the multilingual nature of South Africa. Motala (2005) extends on this view by pointing out that the indigenous African languages in South Africa have been neglected for far too long in HE and this had grave consequences for the success of many students. Related to this is the issue of failure by the higher education system to recognise and integrate indigenous knowledge into their systems (Department of Education 2003). If these arguments are anything to go by, then it sounds fair to say that more can definitely be done towards the promotion of mainly African languages

in South African HE institutions so that exclusion is not perpetuated through language barrier.

While easy solutions to the language problem are not in sight, the authors of this paper believe that multilingualism could go a long way in mitigating the impact of the problem. However, multilingualism in this case should not be narrowly conceived as mere efforts to help students speak foreign languages, without seeking to make indigenous languages, media of instruction in HE. Another possible way of promoting indigenous South African languages is through the academia, as suggested by the South African minister of higher education, Blade Nzimande. The minister proposed that university students may in future be required to learn a South African language other than English or Afrikaans in order to be allowed to graduate (IPP Media 2008). The idea of making indigenous African languages media of instruction in HE should not be taken as an impossibility as it has worked very well in the case of Afrikaans in South Africa where today students can study medicine, and other hard sciences in Afrikaans. Thus, the way Afrikaans developed as a language of the academia could serve as an example for other indigenous South African languages.

While this paper argues that African languages be developed to their full academic potential, it is live to the momentous challenges that go along with this endeavour. For instance, there is no ready answer on how to give equal prominence to and raise the standards of 11 official languages present in the South African situation. Probably one possible way of getting around this problem would be to start with the three Nguni group of languages (Isixhosa, Isuzulu, Isindebele), a Sotho and a Venda language since these are spoken by the majority of the African people and then spread to other languages in a gradual manner.

ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES AND STUDENT OUTPUT

The term academic development is conceptualised by Boughey (2003) as an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. The ultimate aim of academic development activities is to improve the efficiency of the HE system by addressing issues of student disadvantage or under-preparedness. Widely held conceptions of disadvantage or under-preparedness are underpinned by assumptions that depict students as :

(a)   Lacking skills
(b)   Experiencing gaps in conceptual knowledge areas
(c)   In need of language development
(d)   Lacking the ability to think critically

While Brew (2002) notes that many effective academic development initiatives are being conducted by Centres for Teaching and Learning or Centres for Higher Education Development, Bitzer (2010) argues that academic development programmes remain largely marginal in many HE institutions with some universities not having such programmes at all. Consequently students do not receive an optimum environment for learning with the ultimate effect that many of them either fail or do not graduate within regulated time.

In the light of the foregoing, sustained development of academic skills and competencies of lecturers remains a critical strategy of improving the quality of graduate outputs. The clarion call for all universities is that they need to develop and maintain effective programmes of academic development so that academics are subjected to a process of continuous professional development achieved through workshops, training and one-to-one sessions. It is important to indicate that such academic development programmes should not just exist in name but should have noticeable impact on throughput and graduation rates. As articulated by Volbrecht (2003) higher education, institutions have a moral and educational responsibility to ensure that they have effective programmes in place to meet the teaching and learning needs of the students they admit. This is critical given the large numbers of unprepared students who enter higher education. Therefore, academic development programmes play a crucial role in improving the efficiency of the HE system in terms of graduate outputs. This study thus recommends that sustainable collaborations between and across universities could go a long way in mediating challenges related to academic development in South African universities. Such collaborations will enable universities with less experience and expertise in running academic development programmes to benefit from the substantial experience that exists in other institutions. Alternatively, universities and governments can also explore regional collaboration in the development and delivery of academic development programmes in order to ensure that experience and best practices in academic development benefits the system of higher education system as a whole.

UNIVERSITY PEDAGOGY

While it may be argued that higher education experience, especially at undergraduate level, is potentially a time of great intellectual stimulation and personal growth, a large number of students are diminished by the experience. In terms of Ptyana's (2004) argument, the way the academic community chooses to do things in the design and delivery of the curriculum makes a material difference to outcomes. Several local and international studies have shown that institutional ethos and approaches to the education process are a key variable in who succeeds and fails in higher education (Cloete 2002; Cele 2004; Clarke 2007). A study on the performance of minority students in American higher education institutions conducted by Clarke (2007) showed that most successful institutions were those that applied the academic values of empiricism and deep inquiry to their own practices. Thus, the type of pedagogy used in universities is critical as it acts as a medium through which knowledge can be communicated and acquired in the teaching /learning trajectory.

Academics in HE in SA should respond creatively to the diversity of the student body through teaching approaches that cater effectively for the realities and diversity of the student body. As Higgs et al. (2000) observe, relevance and adequacy of learning systems in HE institutions should be given top priority. The traditional education on which so much higher education teaching has depended, has major limitations in meeting the challenges of contemporary South African teaching and learning conditions, which are more complex than ever before (Clarke 2007). The onus, therefore, rests squarely on universities and academics to find fresh approaches to teaching so as to reach the needs and aspirations of most students. The change strategy that is needed to influence the prevailing academic culture in universities is complex and multifaceted and calls for a coordinated approach to issues that relate to pedagogy. Lecturers should, therefore, put in place teaching and learning strategies, structures, systems and processes that improve meaningful participation of learners and enhance leaning potential for all learners. Motala (2005) argues that pedagogy can improve significantly if the challenge of attracting and retaining the best academic talent is overcome. There is, therefore, need for offering appropriate incentives and rewards to academics in universities so that universities are not deprived of the human resources they

so desperately need for their own development through brain drain.

THE ISSUE OF UNDERPREPARED STUDENTS

While the massification of higher education, has helped improve the participation rate in HE, it has the undesirable consequence that a lot of mediocre type of students, many of whom are least prepared for HE can now access it in increasing numbers. This paper treats the student level of under-preparedness as another aspect of social exclusion that requires deep analysis. This is so because students who are not fully prepared for higher education studies are denied their right to excel in higher education either through failure, grade retention and dropping out. This section focuses specifically on student level of under-preparedness as a variable that makes the achievement of equity elusive.

Research by Scott (2009) has shown that a large number of black students in many universities, have problems in following the standard degree curricula in its current form. According to Erasmus (2010), this is a clear indication that the structure of the undergraduate qualifications is not effective for the majority of the current intake. Given the different educational and linguistic backgrounds from which students originate, the need to redesign a flexible curriculum becomes an urgent imperative that needs no further postponement. Erasmus (2010) believes that this argument becomes more credible given the fact that it is unlikely that there is going to be a radically different type of student body any time soon. Admittedly, the need to align the curriculum and HE pedagogy to suit the calibre of the current student population should not be overemphasised. Nevertheless, the Department of Education (2003) views this issue from an interesting perspective when it argues that the existing cohort of students in HE institutions is not necessarily under-prepared as failure to succeed lies more in systemic weaknesses in HE.

Universities and academics are, therefore, urged to develop a deeper understanding of who students are, so as to be able to develop them to their full potential. This line of thinking implies that any strategy for revitalisation should entail a paradigm shift on the part of universities and academics so that students are viewed as individuals with their own identities and who have the potential to thrive in HE (Department of Education 1997). Scott (2009: 29) offers an illuminating view when he asserts that, "the assumptions on which traditional first- year degree courses are based originated in a period when the intake was predominantly homogenous and privileged, and have not changed to match the major diversification of the student body over the last three decades." It is most likely that the large number of students who fail or drop out would most likely benefit from a different curriculum. Thus, if the academic curriculum is not adjusted to suit the changing student profiles, then such curricula will act as an obstacle to the success of a large number of students.

The current student profile in South African HE institutions make it incumbent upon universities to create additional opportunities to enable disadvantaged students to succeed in HE. Thus, the provision of suitably structured foundational provision, extended curriculum programmes, bridging courses, access courses where the emphasis is on the total student experience could give the much needed scaffolding to many students. According to Higgs et al. (2000) student support programmes in many universities are fragmented and are not recognised as critical core business. The crux of this paper is, therefore, to instil an awareness that it is not enough to merely ensure that student profiles in higher education progressively reflect the demographic realities of the South African society without providing sufficient resources and support to ensure that student performance meet the required benchmarks.

Astin and Oseguera (2004) argue that student support programmes should directly address the systemic articulation gap by taking account of the realities of students' prior learning experience. However, it is important to point out that student support should not only be confined at the foundation level because the challenges facing undergraduate students transcend the first year of study into senior phases as well. Building on this argument, Bitzer (2010) succinctly remarks as follows:

" *Concentrating exclusively on the introductory undergraduate phase such as foundational provisioning can have the unintended and highly undesirable consequence of just deferring failure, if articulation with the senior years is not smooth and if the educational process in these years is not effective."*

We are, therefore, in solid agreement with Scott (2009) who argues that extended programmes should not be perceived and thus used as a means

of extending access to students who do not meet regular admission criteria but also as a means of improving the success rates of at-risk mainstream students. The shape of the curriculum is, therefore, central to student success in HE. As aptly argued by the South African Department of Education (2003) the nature, content and organisation of the curriculum is fundamental to the educational process as it influences who succeeds and fails in it. This, in other words, means that the way the curriculum is designed can either serve as an enabler or a limiting factor for students from different social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This idea is extended by Clarke (2007) who asserts that whether or not students will pass largely depends on the alignment between the assumptions of the curriculum and the preparedness, capabilities and orientation of the students. Thus relevance, appropriateness and adequacy of content and assessment methods are critical to the success of students, particularly those who originate from disadvantaged backgrounds. According to Cooper and Subotsky (2001), the current university curriculum is de-contextualised and socially removed from most students' lived experiences and this acts as a contributory factor to lower success rates in HE. Goma (1997) goes further to argue from a global perspective that university education refuses to acknowledge the knowledge present in African society. The author substantiates the argument by citing literature, poetry, art, history, religion, culture as typical examples where African philosophy has been ignored and at best tolerated within the content of the higher educational system.

This study suggests that strategic planning could be the first most important step that South African universities must take in reshaping their curricula. Strategic planning is an inclusive process of consultation involving the university leadership, representative of the academic staff, industry, students, representative of the state and other constituencies in society. This process should result in understanding and consensus among stakeholders thereby ensuring the support needed for implementing the approved curricula. Alluding to this idea, Matos (1997) asserts that in order to generate responsive curricula, universities should partner with the private sector in the development of curricula. He further suggests that industry-university liaison committees should be set up to ensure regular review of university programmes, promote their relevance and quality in the light of rapid scientific and technological advances, and

skills requirements. This is critical if universities are to acquit themselves from the usual accusation from industry that they churn out graduates who are ill-equipped for the labour market.

INEQUITIES OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPES AND STUDENT OUTCOMES

This section argues that while students might have access to HE, the educational experiences that are afforded students differ immensely as a result of institutional inequities rooted in their past. Clarke (2007) argues that inequities of institutional landscape have a direct bearing on the dependency of institutions on state funding as opposed to other income streams. For instance, while the state remains the most important source of funding for disadvantaged and mainly rural universities in South Africa, the advantaged ones can even boost their financial resource bases through so-called second and third-income streams. The latter refers to other sources of funding raised through initiatives such as research, consultancy, invest-ment income and others. As well demonstrated by Bitzer (2010), some previously advantaged universities receive slightly more than 30 percent of their total income from government while previously disadvantaged universities receive up to 70 percent of total revenues from this source. The author goes on to add that while the average historically advantaged university in South Africa gets about 40 percent from third-stream sources, the average disadvantaged university gets 25 percent from this source.

The critical point is that in a situation where government funding of higher education continues to dwindle, previously advantaged universities use their third stream-income sources as a fall back strategy to survive and remain relevant in the provision of quality HE. A recent study at Rhodes University has shown that the proportion of institutional revenue received from the state (the so-called first stream of income) has declined, on average, from 62 percent in 1986 to 41 percent in 2007 (Erasmus 2010). The study further noted that second-stream income, in the form of tuition fees, increased from 15 percent to 32 percent during the same period. However, the contentious issue is that most previously disadvantaged universities, most of which draw the bulky of their students from low socio-economic rural areas have a weak second stream-income bases since their students have serious problems in raising tuition fees

(Motala 2005). This has the cumulative effect that students enrolling with previously disadvantaged universities continue to receive an inferior quality of education as compared to those from previously advantaged universities. This bolsters Alais (2002) observation that the constraints of resources mark a shift from inclusion to a different form of exclusion that hinges on affordability thereby limiting widened participation. The need for universities to share information on their capacity for consultancy, practical research and investments is therefore critical to any programme of revitalisation.

A cogent point is raised by Akerland (2007) when he observes that while some students can overcome the impediment of underfunding through initiatives such as taking on part-time jobs, others especially students at rural institutions, cannot supplement their loans with part-time work as there are few part-time jobs available in rural areas. This has the ultimate effect that student outcomes such as throughput rates, time taken to graduate and dropout rates are unevenly distributed as a result of inequities of institutional landscapes. This, therefore, raises the issue of latent exclusion on the basis of geographical location and status of the university attended by students of different social classes. The situation is exacerbated by the fact that a number of higher educational institutions in the rural areas find it increasingly difficult to attract and retain well qualified academics as well as brilliant students from well-to do families (DoE 2004). Such a situation is difficult to ignore as it introduces latent forms of social exclusion that makes the equity agenda even more elusive. This argument seems to call for a differentiated HE funding model that takes into account historical origin and location of the institution.

CONCLUSION

In this paper we have sought to navigate the challenges that HE institutions experience in their bid to make HE of a superior quality accessible to the majority of the students. The issue of equity in the provision of HE served as the fulcrum around which the discussion revolved. Adding on to the work of earlier scholars and researchers, the paper established that the HE system is characterised by numerous challenges which makes the attainment of equity more elusive. Nonetheless, we remain convinced that such challenges are not insurmountable. This, we have sought to prove by way of suggesting practical strategies of vitalising the

system so as to make it more effective and responsive to a wider student base. The paper has cited the issue of student support, language issue, academic development programmes and pedagogy as areas that easily lend themselves for revitalisation and thereby strengthening the overall HE system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

(1)   Universities need to diversify their sources of income by mobilising more financial resources from business community, households and development partners instead of merely relying on state funding.

(2)   The state and universities need to actively promote the use of African languages as medium of instruction in university teaching/learning so that exclusion is not perpetuated through language barrier. Related to this is the need to develop major African languages to their full academic potential in all higher education institutions in South Africa.

(3)   Universities should put in place teaching and learning strategies, structures and processes that are meant to support and promote meaningful participation of learners from diverse socio-economic backgrounds.

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