Mitigating Graduate Unemployability through Student Academic Support at the University of Fort Hare

Alfred H. Makura

Central University of Technology, Free State, Kuselwa Marala,
Cape Peninsula University of Technology
E-mail: maralak@cput.ac.za

ABSTRACT This paper reports on how the University of Fort Hare manages its academic development or support programmes and curricula for the benefit of all students using a developmental approach. It explains how the university has structured and managed its quality-assured academic support programmes in an endeavour to mitigate potential unemployability of its graduates. Informed by its mission and vision, the university promulgated strategic plans that address gaps in our knowledge of academic support programmes through quality assurance measures aimed at improving academic access, graduate quality and employability potential. This case study adopted a mixed methodology. Using secondary statistical data captured from the academic support programmes on offer, and participatory expository observation, the paper shows how such programmes potentially impact on access, graduate output rates, and perceived employability. Statistical data were analysed using simple descriptive statistics plotted on frequency tables and backed by narratives from a key informant, and researchers. The perceived positive impact of the Fort Hare academic support project makes a strong case for universities to sustain capacity building and sustainability if challenges of access, teaching and learning and student employability are to be realised.

INTRODUCTION

A cursory review of the history of higher education shows marked shifts in its conceptualization and what it purports to do and how it is responsive to societal needs. Barnett (1990) captures Plato's view of higher education as being the understanding and critiquing of knowledge for its own sake in pursuit of total wisdom. Newman in Barnett (1990) discusses the notion of knowledge as extending horizons and that university education then was for intellectual enlargement and character formation. This was, according to Barnett (1990), a radical liberal education that was an intellectual self-empowerment. In the medieval age although the object of study was strictly controlled, what counted as knowledge was subjected to continual reassertion and demonstration through disputations, particularly structured discussions. Learner growth was evidenced by advancing levels of competence and

was acknowledged through the awarding of degrees by the body of scholars.

The functions of the modern university in Jasper's view (Barnett 1990), are research, teaching, a professional education and the transmission of a particular culture while Essack et al. (2012), Francis et al. (2010) believe the core functions revolve around teaching, research and community engagement. For Barnett (1990), placing emphasis on the usefulness of education by universities was indicative of the underwriting of nationalism and the new technological age. His ideas capture tensions felt between the Germany state and the university at that time. Barnett's (1990) views on what disciplines universities could teach are opposed to those of Newman. According to Newman (1909), universities are an assemblage of strangers in one spot who focus on teaching different things through communicating and circulating thought and truth. The Jasper Woodbury programme (2013) advocated social constructivism and brought up the link between teaching and learning on the one hand, and research on the other. The programme extended Newman's perception of the role of a university by arguing that students needed to situate their learning around interesting topics. In this regard, the epistemology and sociology of knowledge yielded the following implications for the university curriculum: students' academ-

Address for correspondence:
Dr. Alfred H. Makura
Central University of Technology, Free State,
Faculty of Humanities,
Department of Postgraduate Studies,
Private Bag X20539,
Bloemfontein 9300,
South Africa
E–mail: amakura@cut.ac.za

ic freedom to actively engage in the academic enquiry; doing of research as an active encounter with knowledge and an interdisciplinary approach to knowledge. The whole process then was self-formation through self-criticism and this is a necessary condition of life. University players and activities are, in essence, anchored in instruction according to the Jasper Woodbury programme (2013).

During the 1960 the growth in higher education across the Western world was accompanied expansion in its functions. The current stage is marked by a sharp change in attitude on the part of the state. There is a new emphasis on value-for money, accountability, planning, efficiency, good management, resource allocation, unit costs, performance indicators and selectivity and reduced opportunities for tenure (Barnett 1990). Subjects within the curriculum are preferred to the extent to which they contribute towards the economy. This is an era that is strangely devoid of public debate on the wider aims of higher education. Faced with the various tensions, we posit that some universities have no single sense of direction. Objective knowledge and academic autonomy, two underpinnings of liberal higher education, are not available in modern society. This epistemological and sociological undermining marks the boundary of the modern discourse about the idea of higher education.

In South Africa, the state macro-economic policies as well as the constraints of globalisation have led to two opposing tendencies (Reddy 2004). The first is that the university should become 'entrepreneurial' in its organisation, outlook, research and curriculum content. The second is that the predominant mandate of the university should be to produce the person-power and knowledge that would make South Africa globally competitive by helping it reconfigure into a 'knowledge economy'. Thirdly, universities "are the places where students' minds are shaped in preparation for enacting their responsibilities as citizens in a democratic society" (Waghid 2010: 491). In particular, the Joint Initiative for Priority Skills Acquisition (JIPSA) brought into renewed focus the skill needs of the economy and the role of higher education (Griesel and Parker 2009). This development coincided with managerialism and marketisation of higher education bringing to the fore the question of graduate employment particularly unemployability.

The South African Scenario

Graduate unemployability in the South African context is slowly becoming a topical issue. This scenario is situated in a society that is characterised by high levels of poverty and unemployment (Maistry 2010) and a history of education in South Africa, characterised by racial segregation, fragmentation and inequalities (Matoti 2010). Employment differentials and attitudes also occur by race, culture and gender (Human Sciences Research Council 2005; Coetzee 2012). A report by Bernstein (2013) on behalf of the South African Centre for Development and Enterprise revealed that young Black graduates were more likely to be unemployed (6.7%) than White graduates (2%). These factors put into the spotlight the quality of the graduate churned by the respective higher education institutions as well as the quality of education on offer. Beinstein's (2013) report posited that this residual gap could be explained by the quality of degrees offered by historically black universities. Hence, Maharasoa and Hay (2001) have opined that employability, particularly post graduation employment rates, is an indicator of quality. Graduate students themselves are positive about employment prospects (albeit in an uncertain employment context) after leaving college (Coetzee 2012). Most South African higher education institutions have in place centres of ' academic excellence' or 'academic development centres' or 'centres of teaching and learning' whose mandate is to offer academic support to students. The aim is to improve the quality of particularly, the undergraduate student. Research on practices aimed at empowering the 'disadvantaged learner in the South African higher Education context is scanty (Makura et al. 2011; Archer 2010). This paper reports on how the University of Fort Hare has structured and run its academic development or support programmes for the benefit of all students by adopting a developmental approach. Such an approach places the student at the core of curricula and pedagogic processes. The university has embedded quality assurance measures in these support programmes as well as other measures aimed at improving access, graduate quality and possible employability. So, as competition for students increases, employability has become a marketing tool for academic programmes (Maharasoa and Hay 2001).

A report commissioned by Business Leadership SA (BLSA) (2006) identified skills shortage and poor quality education as twin evils impacting on unemployment and consequently on economic growth in South Africa. The Black youth are at the receiving end as regards unemployment. These youths are poorly educated and low skilled in an environment demanding highly skilled and capital intensive labour (Business Leadership South Africa [BLSA] 2006). The report states that at least 200 000 youths with a tertiary qualification are unemployed. These hail from historically black universities (such as the University of Fort Hare *est.* 1916). Historically black universities are perceived to have a history of offering programmes with low employment prospects (for example, Arts and Humanities) (U.S. Commission on Civil Rights 2013). Apartheid created these ethnic-based universities by removing them from catchment areas that contained modern infrastructure, by eliminating emerging leadership within these institutions, denying them research infrastructure, and subjecting them to chronic under-funding (Nkomo and Sehoole 2007). This pernicious form of institutional marginalisation (Nkomo and Sehoole 2007) puts into perspective, the quality of graduates and the relevance of secondary education they received. Such students, according to the BLSA report (2006), do not posses minimum requirements for science related programmes. As a way of mitigating graduate unemployability, universities have been challenged to satisfy students' expectations by offering programmes that lead to some employment (Maharasoa and Hay 2001). It is this context that the academic support programmes at the University of Fort Hare (UFH) are contextualised.

The Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) at the UFH

This centre was established in 2004 with a mandate to coordinate functions related to curriculum development, cooperative education, teaching and learning excellence, student assessment and success, reflective practice and the professional development of staff (University of Fort Hare Website 2009). These functions were, prior to 2012, performed by three Units viz: Teaching Development; Learning Advancement and e-Learning. Of these, the Learning advancement Unit played the greatest

role as regards students' development particularly their learning. In an attempt to generate new forms of thinking and doing, the then Learning Advancement Unit (LAU) of the TLC came up with innovative student support programmes aimed at not only unlocking students' potential, but enhancing their academic performance, and access (Makura et al. 2011). This enabled previously marginalised students to access quality education. The unit's focus was to increase academic access to such groups, and in the process, improved the quality of education as well as countering the deleterious effects of apartheid. After 2011 the unit system was abandoned in preference to a unitary 'pivot system' which streamlined the offerings of the centre. Through the pivots (*inter alia* Facilitation, Curriculum development, Technology enhanced Learning, Post graduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training, Evaluation, Marketing, Induction etc.) Teaching and Learning Centre consultants provide academic and professional support to students and staff as well as leadership in the implementation of TLC strategic plan. The following teaching and learning strategies (University of Fort Hare Website 2009) have been crafted for the benefit of students viz:

- Provision of student support and development initiatives
- Nurturing a culture of excellence through research in teaching, learning and re-curriculation
- Establishment of internal and external partners in pursuit of development in teaching and learning in higher education

Pursuant to the first stated strategy and partly the second, the TLC offers a battery of voluntary peer academic programmes namely, Supplemental Instruction (SI), Language and Writing Advancement programme (LWAP), Computer Assisted Language Programme (CALL) and the National Benchmark Test (NBT). These programmes are collectively referred to as Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS). These academic support programmes seek to improve the students' language and writing as well as subject matter mastery in the various courses particularly the traditionally 'difficult' ones. Subjects perceived as difficult, are referred to as 'risk' though the students that enroll in them are not 'risky students'. Both under and post graduate students are encouraged to voluntarily seek peer assistance at the TLC. It is the supplemental

instruction programme that is sort after particularly by undergraduate students. The Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme "....focuses on helping students understand the subject content..." (Twalo 2008: 3). Generally, students have challenges in Science (Mathematics, Stats, Chemistry, Physics, Computer Science, etc.) and Economics related subjects (Accounting, Economics, Commercial law etc). Incidentally, it is these areas that are sort after by prospective employers on the job market. As such, the TLC has made it its mission to improve students' academic proficiencies in these subjects using a developmental approach. In a developmental approach, students are trained to reflect on their practices and such practices and feedback are evaluated at individual, peer and institutional levels (University of Fort Hare Website 2009).

English, not being the first language of the overwhelming majority of the students, is a threat to concept and skill mastery. As 'the' official mode of instruction, it presents challenges among the (mainly Black) students. The Language and Writing Advancement programme (LWAP) is meant to mitigate these challenges. This programme focuses on improving students' proficiency in writing in the respective academic discourses. The ability to communicate (verbally or in writing) is an integral element at the workplace. Imparting the language skills in our context is the task of specially trained peer facilitators called Language and Writing Consultants (LWC). Hence Archer's (2010) proposition that historically disadvantaged students/learners need assistance with academic writing for them to acquire discipline specific conventions. Most students submit their assignments to the TLC for scrutiny prior to submission to respective lecturers. The TLC's input helps improve the quality of the written work. As regards the National Benchmark Test (NBT), every undergraduate is expected to write this test prior to being admitted for academic studies. The fundamental purpose of the test is to establish the students' entry level academic literacy in Mathematics and English grammar and place the candidate into an appropriate degree programme. Rankin et al. (2012) demonstrated that the National Benchmark Test (NBT) possessed a higher predictive power than most conventional academic subjects. Regrettably, the NBT result has not been effectively used for such purpose as the programme is in its infancy at Fort Hare (Our

personal experiences 2009-2012). The TLC has however been able to identify students that require academic support on the basis of the NBT results. The centre works with faculties in identifying and encouraging such students to make use of the academic support system. As such access to such support programmes is assured and unlimited, albeit, for the conscientious student.

In all the programmes, peer and staff observations are used as quality assurance mechanisms in line with the university's quality assurance vision. The peer facilitators are a cohort of local and International students possessing academic acumen in the 'risk' subject areas in which students need academic support. The support programmes are non-remedial and proactive and use an active learning, peer-collaborative model whose quality is assured as intimated earlier. Moreover, student attendance is voluntary hence a conscientious student is capacitated. As such, the students are actively engaged in process learning. In an effort to offer the students quality education, the Peer facilitators concurrently receive extensive on-going training and supervision (in-service training) by trained qualified full-time staff. In line with quality assurance, the Peer Facilitators are mentored by knowledgeable TLC consultants. Mentoring is an established professional support or nurturing strategy world over for student learning and adjustment and involves tasks and behaviours such as modelling, encouraging and assessing the protégés (Lazarus and Tay 2003 in Sutherland et al. 2003). In the South African higher education system, mentoring is also used by lecturers to capacitate both the mentor and mentee (Nundulall and Reddy 2011; Chweu and Schultz 2010; Schulze 2010). Each peer facilitator keeps and maintains a continuously updated portfolio for self-reflection and evaluation. Prior to 2011 when the staffing situation was good, the TLC used to award a 20 credit South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) accredited certificate (National Qualifications Authority, NQF 6) to Peer Facilitators meeting a set standard. The certificate/qualification was referred to as the Certificate in the Facilitation of Learning (CFL). It continues to exist on paper. The CFL quality assurance issues were derived from the UFH policy framework using a developmental and total quality management perspective (Makura et al. 2011). Its objective was to

train and equip peer facilitators with 'best teaching and facilitation practices' aimed at enhancing student academic performance. Postgraduate students (Masters' and PhD candidates) who are peer facilitators however, do have another avenue of enhancing their professional and academic standing. They can enrol for the Post Graduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training (PGDHET) offered to staff by the TLC. These qualifications are not only meant to increase access to education but employability of the UFH graduate. To ensure that the services offered to the clients are of high quality, quality assurance guidelines and mechanisms are adhered to. The teaching and learning strategy reflects the university's and the TLC's vision, mission, and appropriate modes of delivery while taking cognisance of the students' attributes.

**The Skills Deficit Model:
A Theoretical Framework**

The world of work expects graduates with social, technological, problem solving and life-long skills (Maharasoa and Hay 2001). Part of the University of Fort Hare's mission statement focus on the need to "…apply knowledge to the scientific, technological and socio-economic development of …nation and the wider world" (UFH General Prospectus 2012: 2). It is possible to realise this target since the institution's vision is that of an entity committed to teaching and research excellence despite multifarious challenges besetting higher education particularly graduate unemployment. According to the skills deficit model, a 'faulty' education system is responsible for the persistent unemployment characterising a particular society. The graduates that are churned by an education system are devoid of critical skills (Pauw et al. 2006) hence are 'unemployable' in most instances. This is despite the emphasis on skills over formal knowledge by the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in the South African context (NCHE 1996). There is thus, a mismatch between what the world of work requires and the qualification provided by an institution. To this end, the SARUA (2008) report recommends the establishment of links between universities and firms in the southern African region through informed research and interactive tools. This was in response to SADC's (Southern African Development Community) objective of promoting productive employment and (human) resource utilisation.

Hence the HSRC's (2005) contention that choice of learning institution, geographical area and employment sector, determined economic outcomes, of which, employability was a key factor. The constraint therefore, is not much so on the quantity of graduates but their quality (Business Leadership South Africa 2006). It is skills deficit in terms of quality rather than a skills shortage in terms of numbers (ibid). It is education that lies at the heart of the graduate unemployment problem (Pauw et al. 2006). The BLSA (2006) report goes further to argue and demonstrate that poor quality of science education and poor academic performance are responsible for the low enrolment figures in key study areas in South Africa. Bally (2007) cited in Makura et al. (2011), has observed that students coming into university are underprepared and this under-preparedness, in the case of UFH, stems from its traditional student market which is characterised by poor performance of the provincial school system. It is the location of the institution and historical factors which have impacted negatively on student throughput and retention rates (SANTED II 2006 report cited in Makura et al. 2011). These factors negatively impact on the quality of graduates that are unleashed into the world of employment. Hence a suggestion by Stes (2009) for universities to invest in student centred active-learning, assessment and curriculum development. The UFH has therefore, through its vision and mission, devised mechanisms aimed at increasing student output and retention rates. The mechanisms are meant to inform strategy and in the process identify students "at risk" to meet their demands and expectations (SANTED II Report 2006 cited in Makura et al. 2011).

Research Question

What academic mechanisms has the University of Fort Hare instituted to improve access, graduate quality and, consequently mitigate unemployability?

METHOD

Design

This study adopted case study design which was grounded in a mixed methodological approach. The case study has the advantage of unraveling complex issues and phenomena in

specific geographical locations. It has added advantages of developing theory, evaluating programmes and developing interventions (Baxter and Jack 2008).

Instruments

This study mainly used secondary statistical and word data derived from selected programme activities within the teaching and learning centre (TLC) as well as researchers' insights and observations during their tenure at the institution.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were systematically selected from the Peer Assisted Student Services (PASS) activities reports for 2010 through to part of 2012. Data from programme evaluation instruments or surveys were added to demonstrate how our interventions are impacting on students' academic life. Data were captured by category to investigate utilisation by selected categories. Ethical issues were adhered to and our current report is an epitome of the university's desire to market its academic programmes and their perceived efficacies.

Data Analysis

These data were run and analysed using quantitative and qualitative approaches. The former were presented on frequency Tables while the latter data came from evaluation instruments and were analysed for their content to discern themes and other related issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The preceding data has amply revealed the various student academic support programmes

at the University of Fort Hare. Two programmes are mainly utilised by students. These are the Supplemental instruction and the Language and Writing Advancement Programme. Tables 1 and 2's statistics show the extent to which the students utilised the Supplemental Instruction programme programmes in 2010 and in term 1 of 2012. [N.B: An academic year has four terms. Term 1 is normally very busy with new undergraduate students extensively seeking academic support as they endeavour to ground themselves in higher education.]

Table 1 shows that over thirteen thousand students utilised the Supplemental Instruction (SI) progranmme in 2010. This Table shows a decline in programme utilisation from the previous years (results not shown here) as given by Makura et al. (2011). The decline could possibly be attributed to the soccer world cup event in South Africa which resulted in the rescheduling of the academic programmes. It is also pleasing to note that the Science/Agriculture and Management and Commerce faculty students topped the list in 2010 as regards attendance or programme utilisation. These two faculties offer courses that are critical to the development of the South African economy. Term 1 2012 stats reflect a marked increase in programme utilisation by the faculties of science and Agric and Social Science and Humanities. If we quadruple term 1 figures we get a sense of what the annual (2012) utilisation rate was. Regrettably evidence at our disposal indicated that students from the crucial faculty of education did not use our SI programme. The reason perhaps stems from the fact that none of the education faculty courses are listed on the SI programme. In other words, education courses are not regarded as 'risky'.

Table 2 shows the courses which were popular with students in 2010 during the term the particular course was offered. This 'popularity' is evidenced by the number of Supplemental in-

Table 1: S.I. attendance statistics 2010

Faculty	SI Sessions		Total attendance		Consultations	
	2010	2012 (Term 1)	2010	2012 (Term 1)	2010	2012 (Term 1)
Science and Agriculture	374	47	4674	1178	287	10
Management and Commerce	359	83	5248	974	315	37
Law	244	20	2016	425	38	7
Social Sc. and Humanities	134	40	1853	1103	78	17
Total	911	190	13791	3680	836	71

Table 2: SI Sessions Statistics 2010 and 2012 by course

Course	Faculty	No. of SI sessions	
		2010	2012 (Term 1)
Accounting 2	Management and Commerce	63	14
Chemistry 1	Science and Agriculture	26	-
Business Maths	Management and Commerce	24	7
Computer Science 1	Science and Agriculture	24	-
Introduction to Law	LAW	22	-
Accounting 1	Management and Commerce	21	15
Economics 1	Management and Commerce	19	22
English 1	Social Sc. and Humanities	18	24
Physics 1	Science and Agriculture	18	13
Mathematics 1	Science and Agriculture	15	8
Botany 1	Science and Agriculture	13	-
Social Work 1	Social Sc. and Humanities	13	3
Geology	Science and Agriculture	12	3
Law of Contract	LAW	12	-
Psychology 1	Social Sc. and Humanities	12	5
Commercial law	Management and Commerce	11	-
Customary Law	LAW	11	6
Law of Persons and Family	LAW	11	-

Source: UFH TLC Programme Statistics

struction sessions conducted. Only courses that recorded ten or more S.I sessions were selected.

Table 2 shows that second year accounting course had the highest number of sessions in 2010, while English 1 topped during term 1 of 2012 followed by Economics 1. Accounting is a course that is perceived as 'risk' or difficult by students. It was closely followed by a first year Chemistry course which had 26 sessions in 2010. As predicted, the highest number of courses attracting more students was in the Science and Commerce faculties. Accounting, computer science and chemistry are some of the subjects that are on demand in the world of work. In 2012, however, courses in the Social Science and Humanities faculty appeared to be on demand. It was assumed that by capacitating students

through these courses, the client will be empowered to face the challenges of the world of work. [N.B: The blank portions under column 4 in Figure 2 imply that the course was not offered that term or is no longer listed as risky, hence not supported by the TLC).

With regards to the Language and Writing Advancement programme (LWAP), Table 3 summarises the utilisation stats. Students seek assistance in the writing conventions and discourses of their respective disciplines.

The faculties of Management and Commerce and Law provided the biggest number of students seeking consultations on writing skills. Assignments from these faculties are normally written in prose. Students generally have challenges in writing lengthy narratives. Hence they

Table 3: Language and writing interventions 2010

Faculty Task/activities	Consulting on writing skills		Language and writing related activities		
	No. of students	Total consultations	Writing workshops	Workshop attendance	Assignments reviewed
Science and Agriculture	104				
Management and Commerce	487				
LAW	291				
Social Sc. and Humanities	58				
Education	291				
Grand Total	1231	347	85	4709	719

Source: LWAP Year Report 2010

demand that the TLC intervenes by capacitating them with conventional writing skills. What is perhaps perplexing is the low utilisation rate by students from the faculty of Social Science and humanities (which paradoxically is the largest faculty in the university). The same can be said of the total number of students that submitted assignments for review (719) in a university that had a student population of just over 9000 in 2010. In short, only about 8% of students sought assistance with assignment review in 2010. Workshop attendance was high (4709) since these are offered to a captive audience. The demand for writing workshops from lecturers has been on an upward trend from our experience.

Perceived Impact of Academic Support Programmes

A few evaluation instruments were analysed with view to establishing user perceptions of the efficacy of our programmes. The students were probed on how our programmes have impacted on their academic performance. For instance, in Term 1 of 2010 our LWAP workshops and consultations received an 85% satisfaction rating from the 2037 clients that visited us (LWAP Q1 Report 2010). We conducted forty workshops on the two university campuses. The rating for the 74 consultations we facilitated in term 1 of 2011 was 91%. Consultations involve one-on-one interaction between an LWC and the student. These statistics show that the clients were satisfied with our interventions. With regards to the CALL programme, ninety-three percent (93%) of the students interviewed highlighted that their computer skills and competence had increased. In a mini survey we conducted in 2011(Neluswi 2011) to establish students' preferences between the Supplemental Instruction (SI) programme and Tutorial system in a chemistry course, the majority of students preferred the former. Snippets from students' evaluations revealed that the SI programme '…is for a student who still does not understand something in class and tutorial'; '[offers] more opportunities to grasp you work and create better understanding'; 'In SI sessions we attempt problems as a group and we provide the answers for ourselves.'. These sentiments and many more go to show the efficacy of our programmes on students learning. It is this multiplier effect that we

hope will filter to students and improves their academic quality and subsequently, employability.

Researchers' Observations

The challenges besetting the higher education landscape are similar in most universities. As managers and academic development practitioners who worked in a historically black university, we have observed and can confirm that students face serious academic challenges. These range initially from access into higher education. Upon admission, they have to grapple with transitioning into a domain demanding higher cognitive skills and disciplinary conventions that are markedly different from the high school system. The use of English as a medium of instruction and learning presents unique challenges for most students for instance, struggle to put across coherent arguments within the confines of their respective disciplines. The faculty-specific workshops or lectures provided by the TLC are meant to assist students to demonstrate that they know how to act and speak in, and use the jargon of their discipline. In this way, they acquire and perfect literacies by observing and interacting with all the members of that discourse. The efficacy of the TLC interventions is revealed in the quality of the assignments submitted to us, and the course evaluations. Students need to develop the confidence to criticise and argue within their disciplines, and demonstrate an ability to manipulate conventions of academic writing. Through these curricula interventions the university eliminates one of the barriers to student success in the 21st century (that is, language) by instituting appropriate capacity building measures in students.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed that the University of Fort Hare has instituted several or interventions aimed at empowering students with view to increasing their employability or marketability. Most of such students come from poor Black rural communities of the country. The university offers free programmes whose aim is to enhance students' academic performance in line with its vision and mission. The Supplemental Instruction programme is popular among students who aim to improve their content profi-

ciencies. The majority of students are supported in the natural sciences than the humanities. The former is an area that has a higher probability of finding employment after one has graduated. Hence the HSRC's (2005) observation that fewer humanities and arts graduates compared to economic management sciences and natural sciences found employment immediately after obtaining a qualification. The language and writing interventions are meant to address the communication barrier particularly in assignment writing. The TLC programmes are therefore, perceived as impacting positively on student choice of areas requiring support and enhanced academic performance. The perceived positive impact of the Fort Hare academic support project makes a strong case for reposition the 21st century University in addressing gaps in the higher education landscape. Through this way, the challenges of access, programme quality and employability can be realised. Some studies suggest that universities should adopt relevant management styles and value systems for effective organisational programme management. Such values include building relationships, communication and unity of purpose. The university leadership should focus on churning out the numbers and quality of graduates sort by the economy. This could entail fixing the higher education system to focus on narrowing the gap between graduate supply and demand as suggested by some. The SADC's objective of promoting productive employment may be realised. This paper implores all those entrusted with offering academic support interventions to vigorously champion these amongst students and staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that universities sustain programmes that seek to capacitate students in the hope of increasing their (students') marketability or employability. Concept mastery and English language writing are two important skills that ought to form the basis for enhancing the quality of programmes in historically black universities such as Fort Hare. This strategy will have the multiplier effect of improving the marketability and employability of graduates therefrom. Universities also need to capacitate academic staff with more teaching skills especially in the use of Technology (e-Learning and online

programmes such as Computer Assisted Language Learning: CALL). Universities need to move from traditional teaching approaches to those that emphasise scholarly approaches mediated by technology. Progressive curriculum reform is thus imperative if 21st century universities are to eliminate endemic barriers. It is incumbent upon those mandated to move universities forward to promulgate strategic plans that resonate with the vision and mission of such institutions. Such plans are instituted to improve access, graduate quality and, consequently mitigate unemployability.

REFERENCES

Archer A 2010. Challenges and potentials for Writing Centers in South African tertiary institutions. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(4): 495-510.

Barnett R 1990. A contested concept. In: R Barnett (Ed.): *The Idea of Higher Education.* Buckingham: Open University Press, pp. 16-29.

Baxter P, Jack S 2008. Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report,* 13(4): 544-559.

Bernstein A 2013. Graduate Unemployment in South Africa: A Much Exaggerated Problem. From<http://sun025.ac.za/portal/page/portal/Arts/Departments/political_science/docs/Tab/GRDUATE_ UNEMPLOYMENT_ IN_SOUTH_ AFRICA_A_ much_ exaggerate.pdf > (Retrieved on July 26, 2013).

Bhorat H 2007. Unemployment in South Africa: Descriptors and Determinants. *Presentation to the Growth and Development Commission.* Washington: The World Bank.

Business Leadership South Africa 2006. Graduate Unemployment in Post-Apartheid South Africa: Nature and Possible Policy Responses. From <http: // www.commerce.uct.ac.za/dpru/> (Retrieved on April 27, 2011).

Chweu G, Schultz C 2010. Mentoring life skills at a higher education: A case study. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(5): 683-715.

Coetzee M 2012. Archetypal life themes, career orientations, and employability satisfaction of higher education students: A postmodern career counseling perspective. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 26(4): 691-716.

Essack SY, Naidoo I, Oosthuizen F, Bodenstein J, Brysiewics P, Suleman F 2012. Quality teaching and learning in the health sciences. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 26(5): 960-972.

Francis J, Dube B, Chitapa T 2010. University-rural community partnership for people-centred development: Experiences from Makhado Municipality, Limpopo Province. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(3): 357-373.

Griesel H, Parker B 2009. Graduate Attributes: A Baseline Study on South African Graduates from the Perspective of Employers, Pretoria, HESA and SAQA. From <http: //www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/transformational_ leadership> (Retrieved May 25, 2011).

Human Sciences Research Council 2005. *Finding Work: Employment Experiences of South African Graduates.* Cape Town: HSRRC Press.

Jasper Woodbury Programme 2013. Cognitive Constructivism and Social Constructivism: Anchored Instruction. From <http: //viking.coe.uh.edu/~ichen/ebook/et-it/ai.htm> (Retrieved on August 6, 2013).

LWAP 2010. *Quarter 1 Report.* Teaching and Learning Centre, East London: University of Fort Hare.

Maharasoa M, Hay D 2001. Higher education and graduate employment in South Africa. *Quality in Higher Education,* 7(2): 139-147.

Maistry SM 2010. Breaking the back of economic and financial (il)literacy in South Africa: A critical reflection of the role of economic education. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(3): 432-442.

Makura AH, Skead M, Nhundu K 2011. Academic Development Practices at Fort Hare University: An Epitome of University Access. Research in Higher Education. From <http: //www.aabri.com/manuscripts/11797.pdf> (Retrieved on May 21, 2011).

Matoti SN 2010. The unheard voices of educators: Perceptions of educations about the state of education in South Africa. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(4): 568-584.

Neluswi F 2011. *Chemistry Student Survey – Semester 1.* Email communication, 28 July.

NCHE Report. 1996. Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation. From <http: //www. education. gov.za/LinkClick. aspx? fileticket= ypm HoED4Q%2FQ%3Dand> (Retrieved May 12, 2013).

Newman JH 1909. The Idea of a University: What is a University? Harvard Classics, 28. From <http: // www.bartleby.com/28/2.htlm> (Retrieved on July 31, 2013).

Nkomo M, Sehoole C 2007. Rural-based universities in South Africa: Albatrosses or Potential nodes for sustainability. *International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education,* 8(2): 234-246.

Nundulall R, Reddy K 2011. Mentorship as a strategy to improve research output at tertiary institutions: A case of University of Johannesburg. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 26(6):1155-1177.

Pauw K, Bhorat H, Goga S, Ncube L, Van der Westhuizen C 2006. Graduate Unemployment in the Context of Skills Shortages, Education and Training: Findings from a firm survey. From http: <//ideas.repec.org/p/ctw/wpaper/9603.html.> (Retrieved on May 8, 2011).

Rankin N, Scher V, Sebastiao C, van Walbeek C 2012. Predictors of academic performance: National Senior Certificate versus National Benchmark Test. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 26(3): 546-563.

Reddy T 2004. Higher Education and Social Transformation: South Africa Case Study, National Commission on Higher Education 1996. *A Framework for Transformation: Discussion Document.* Pretoria: NCHE.

SARUA 2008. Southern African Regional Universities Association: Annual Report.From <http://www.sarua.org> (Retrieved on July 21, 2013)

Schulze S 2010. Mentees' views of a structured mentoring programme at UNISA. *The South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(5): 799.

Stes A 2009. The Impact of Instructional Development in Higher Education: Effects on Teachers and Students. Book Review by Hanno van Keulen. From <http://pdfserve.informalworld.com/575886_751313789_913011620.pdf> (Retrieved on February 12, 2011).

Sutherland R, Caxton G, Pollard A 2003. *Learning and Teaching Where Worldviews Meet.* Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books Limited.

Twalo T 2008. The enhancement of student's performance at Fort Hare University through the Language and Writing Advancement Program. *Journal for language Teaching,* 42(1): 137-151.

University of Fort Hare (UFH) 2012. *General Prospectus.* Alice: University of Fort Hare.

University of Fort Hare Website 2009. Teaching and Learning Centre. From <http: //www.ufh.ac.za/centres/tlc/> (Retrieved on March 16, 2011).

U.S. Commission on Civil Rights. 2013. The Educational Effectiveness of Historically Black Colleges and Universities From <http://www.usccr.gov/pubs/HBCU_webversion2.pdf> (Retrieved on July 25, 2013).

Waghid Y 2010. Re-imaging higher education in South Africa: On critical democratic education. *South African Journal of Higher Education,* 24(4): 491-494.