Editorial

The 21st Century Trends in Higher Education: The South African Context, is the theme of this special issue. The issue consists of case studies that look into the strides and challenges faced in the process of improving higher education, capacity building and sustainability of the education system in South Africa. In South Africa like in many other African countries, the education system faces numerous challenges which include: lack of funding, access to education, governance, management, brain drain and many others (Oloyede 2011; Bello 2011; Mohamedbhai 2011). While higher education is recognized as a key force for educational, economic, social, and political transformations, many institutions face the obstacles in providing quality education, research and services needed (Kotecha 2012; Botman 2013). The challenges facing higher education institutions in South Africa are mainly due to the historical background of the country's apartheid education system (Essop 2013). These challenges are mainly considered to be rooted in the inability of young South Africans to access quality higher education, race and gender imbalance in the higher education sector, lack of adequate infrastructures at institutions of learning, differentiation in terms of qualifications and curriculum at different higher education institutions, unemployable graduates and many others (Nxesi 2013; Essop 2013; Mphuthing 2013). Lack of joint vision among higher institutions in the country has also been considered to be a contributing factor to the current situation in the South Africa higher education system (Nxesi 2013; Essop 2013; Mphuthing 2013).

South African higher education institutions need to enhance curricula and learning, staff development and student enrolments, enhance external relations, and maintain national and international accreditations, planning, research and innovation (SARUA 2012). Educational strategic plans in these institutions have to be enunciated, implemented through the mission statements and goals of these higher institutions (Development Bank of South Africa 2010). The current growing international trends towards open source learning have been suggested for higher education systems and institutions in Southern Africa to transcend current limitations of infrastructural development (SARUA 2012).

While there is clearly a need to enable access by improving student success (access with success), as opposed to simply ensuring their participation (access as participation), the adequacy of these initiatives needs to be evaluated in the context of institutional transformation (Akoojee, Nkomo, Mokubung 2007). In this issue, Ndlovu and Mngomezulu observe a racial equity disparities that remains a serious challenge at South African universities almost twenty years since the end of apartheid. The authors analysed the profile of senior staff at South African universities to see if they comply with the Employment Equity Act (EEA) and found a racial inequality where a White dominant senior management staff still exists at these universities. While the authors recommend a change of mind-set of appointing one group in senior positions in higher institutions, they stress the need for more access to the students from designated groups at tertiary institutions so that they match with their White counterparts.

Makura and Marala report on how a university manages its academic support development programmes and curricula for the benefit of all students using a developmental approach. The report 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 the academic support programmes through quality assurance measures aimed at improving academic access, graduate quality and employability potential. The authors observe that the positive impact of the academic support project at this university makes a strong case for other universities elsewhere to sustain capacity building and sustainability if challenges of access, teaching and learning and student employability are to be realised.

Makoye and Ramatlapana explore the effect of societal pressures on pre-service female student teachers' choices to train as primary, high-school or mathematics and science teachers. Their study looked at the student teachers' choice of the teaching subject or choice of whether to teach at primary school or secondary school and found that female student choices were highly influenced by societal structural expectations. The findings indicated that most students who graduated for the period studied were female students with qualifications to teach at primary school level. The authors believe that female student teachers' choices would have been influenced by the social expectation that women roles were of caring for young children. They recommend more access of women in mathematics and science fields so that they could become role models and change the societal mind-set. Female students especially at middle and high school levels drop out of school because of pregnancies. Malahlela and Chireshe investigated educators' perceptions of the effects of teenage pregnancy on the behaviour of the learners in some South African secondary schools. Their study revealed that teenage pregnancy has a negative or detrimental effect on the school attendance, academic performance, emotional behaviour and relationships between pregnant teenagers, their peers and educators. The authors recommend that teacher training institutions should thoroughly prepare trainee teachers to handle such students. They also recommend schools to have skilled teachers/educators in guidance and counselling to assist pregnant teenagers and teenage mothers overcome the psychological issues surrounding their condition. Implementation of the recommendation by the authors may increase access to higher education for women.

Ntombela and Subrayen explore the nature of access challenges faced by students with visual disabilities at one university in South Africa and found that while access has improved for students with disabilities at this institution, there are still systemic barriers that limit the participation of students with visual disabilities in the academic programs. The authors recommend improved access that requires partnership between government and higher education institutions to monitor and support systemic transformation. Ngubane-Mokiwa discusses perceptions and implications of learners with blindness disability learning through an open distance mode. The study reveals that the academic community has inadequate and inappropriate preparedness to deal with students with blindness. The academic community discriminates these learners from certain career paths and also has stereotypical overtures about students with blindness. The author recommends training and retraining of the academic community on issues of teaching students with blindness including the use of current and applicable technologies to facilitate open and distance learning. The author further recommends future studies to include the academics' perceptions, attitudes and knowledge on teaching students with blindness.

Chikoko, Pillay, Pithouse-Morgan, Morojele and Naicker report on a study that investigated experiences of international postgraduate students from African countries in one school at a South African university. The authors found a knowledge gap regarding how much the institution knew about these students' experiences. Key observations included support sectors of the university that were perceived as inefficient and ineffective. The authors concluded that there is lack of cohesion between the sectors of the university that inhibits international postgraduate students' integration into the institution community.

The debate on what knowledge the teachers require for effective teaching has been debated for the past many years. Mkhwanazi analyzes the teachers' views on their professional practice and finds out that teachers have adequate understanding of what they need in their professional development and practice. Instead of providing teachers with what is usually presumed to be the needs of teachers from the experts, the author recommends to pay attention to the teachers' knowledge of practice in the field and incorporate these in the development of professional programs for teachers. Kaino and Moalosi explore some trends in search of adequate knowledge for effective teaching and conducted a case study on mathematics teachers' pedagogical content knowledge. The authors found that many teachers had no adequate pedagogical content knowledge to understand well the characteristics of the mathematical problems tackled, solutions obtained by different methods, interpretation and understanding of students' problems in learning. They concluded that teachers needed to be improved in their mathe-

matical knowledge for effecting of the topic studied.

Mundalamo and Sedumedi report on the findings of a study on science teaching practicum of pre-service teachers' (PSTs) peer assessment (PA) practices and the important role it plays in the grading of the peers' teaching capabilities. The findings showed a consistent outcome about the PSTs foci and of what were assessed and there was a varied link between what was viewed and the grading of their peers' teaching capabilities. The authors recommend that the assessment criteria for peer assessment be clearly defined and sections be added to the teaching practice journals to justify the mark allocation for every aspect of the assessment.

The articles in this special edition touch on various issues in the South Africa higher education system and it was not possible to cover all issues in a single journal. Though the articles refer to the South African context, the issues discussed in these articles reflect similar situations in most African countries.

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