



CURRICULUM REFORM IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: EVALUATING POLICY EFFECTIVENESS AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSE

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Received : 2024-09-17

Revised 1 : 2024-09-23

Revised 2 : 2024-10-12

Accepted: 2024-10-28

Published : 2024-11-21

DOI : 10.54443/ijerlas.v4i6.2144

Abstract

There has been intense scrutiny about the design and delivery of curricular in South Africa higher education institutions. Various policies and laws have been established to ensure that the South African higher education contributes to the transformation agenda of the nation. This study contributes to this debate by examining how the South African higher education policies contributes to the transformation of curriculum to meet contemporary socioeconomic needs. The study employs a morphogenetic approach to explore how existing frameworks, such as the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014), have shaped the curriculum design and implementation processes in South African universities. The paper begins by discussing the internationalisation of higher education curricula and highlights the need for graduates to develop global competencies. It further examines the role of the South African internationalisation policy in preparing students for the global economy. The research also addresses how policy gaps, such as the inadequate focus on decolonisation and the lack of alignment with the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), impact the effectiveness of curriculum transformation efforts. The findings reveal that despite numerous policy frameworks and strategic documents, there remains a disconnect between the goals of higher education policies and the practical realities of curriculum design and delivery. This disconnect contributes to the numerous challenges in the higher education sector, manifested through student protests and dissatisfaction with the relevance of academic programs. The paper concludes that a more nuanced approach to curriculum reform is necessary, one that bridges policy intentions with practical outcomes through continuous dialogue among universities, the government, and industry stakeholders.

Keywords: *Higher Education, Educational Policy, Decolonization, Internationalization, Globalisation*

1 Introduction

Transformation is a key concept in South African higher education institutions. Additionally, debates on decolonization, internationalization, and diversity are prevalent in South African society. Higher education has been called upon to transform its curriculum, content, delivery, and assessment to ensure that students who attend these institutions leave transformed (Choppin et al., 2018). Despite numerous discussions, there is consensus that educational systems should enhance their functioning to positively transform student training and learning. Higher education institutions, students, the Government of South Africa, and other stakeholders have undertaken various initiatives to improve and transform the educational system in the country, particularly the higher education curriculum. This has led to various educational reforms, the enactment of laws, and the establishment of policies.

With the advent of democracy, more black students began entering higher education institutions, perceiving education as a means to a better quality of life. Evidently, the "transformation agenda" has driven the creation of various policies and laws concerning higher education in the country. This agenda is reflected in the preamble of the Higher Education Act of 1997, which

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highlighted the restructuring and transformation of "programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic" as a desired outcome of higher education (Swartz & Foley, 1996). The attainment of transformation will be realized if the higher education curriculum reflects this objective. This implies that the curriculum should address the needs of the country and the communities in which these institutions operate. Higher education institutions can achieve this by developing or designing their curriculum based on research that identifies societal needs. This research will inform universities about the content, delivery modes, and assessment methods of the various programs they offer. The fundamental aim of South African education reforms is the enhancement of education, which is expected to contribute to economic development. Consequently, various strategies to achieve this objective have been the subject of deliberations. In contributing to this debate, this paper discusses the potential to design the curriculum in higher education to achieve transformation. The chapter considers diverse levels of analysis, focusing on transformation through curriculum design, decolonisation, and internationalisation of the curriculum. Additionally, this paper explores the potential and possibilities of redesigning the accounting curriculum in South African public higher education institutions. This discussion is particularly relevant given the disruptions caused by COVID-19 in the delivery and assessment of higher education in South Africa.

2. Methodology

The study was conducted using an exploratory literature review approach. This approach was aimed synthesising existing research findings, identify gaps in the literature, and provide insights into the implications for curriculum reforms in South Africa. The author relied on literature from reliable academic databases such as Web of Science, Scopus, PubMed, and Google Scholar. Certain keywords and phrases relating to curriculum reforms were used to search for the literature. Such keywords and phrases included curriculum reform, transformation, internationalization of curriculum, decolonization of curriculum, higher education in South Africa, and accounting curriculum. These phrases were used in connection with words and phrases such as universities, colleges, higher education institutions in South Africa. This activity resulted in the download of 182 research papers.

The author adopted certain inclusion and exclusion criteria to screen the literature. Studies maintained for further review were those published in English, conducted within higher education institutions, and focused on the curriculum development and implementation. On the other hand, non-peer-reviewed sources were excluded. The literature were screened by three independent reviewers based on titles and abstracts to identify potentially relevant studies. Full-text articles were reviewed against the inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine their eligibility for inclusion in the systematic review. All identified discrepancies were resolved through discussion and consensus between the reviewers. From the implementation of the inclusion and exclusion criteria together with additional screening, 79 papers were retained and used for the study. Data were extracted using a standardized data extraction form to capture information based on study characteristics such as authors and publication year; research methods; key findings, and theoretical frameworks.

The findings from included studies were synthesized using a narrative approach, which involved organising and summarizing the key themes, patterns, and trends related to curriculum reform and innovation. In addition, a thematic analysis technique was employed to identify common themes, variations, and divergent perspectives across the literature. The findings of the systematic literature review were reported according to established reporting guidelines such as PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). The review provided a synthesis of the literature, involving textual descriptions to illustrate key findings, trends, and implications.

3. Transformation imperatives for Higher Education Curriculum in South Africa

Knowledge acquisition involves three essential elements: curriculum, "teaching and assessment. The curriculum is a combination of instructional practices, learning outcomes, and performance assessments of students that are intended to provide and evaluate the target learning



outcomes of a particular programme. The curriculum has four elements that are in constant interaction: purpose (goals and objectives), content or subject matter, methods or learning experiences and evaluation (Bovill & Woolmer, 2019). According to Bovill and Woolmer (2019), the interaction of these elements within social, political, economic, technological, and environmental contexts constitutes a curriculum.

The foundation of the curriculum lies in the knowledge and skills of a discipline, taught by lecturers and learned by students (Zipin & Breman, 2018). Within each discipline, there are different kinds of knowledge, categorized by Waghid (2003) as Mode 1 and Mode 2. Mode 1 involves problem-solving within a disciplinary context, while Mode 2 involves problem-solving in a specific application or transdisciplinary context. Therefore, significant efforts are required in curriculum development and implementation to achieve desired outcomes. This focus is central to higher education in South Africa, which aims to promote the state's and society's transformation and sustainability agenda. Various attempts have been made to transform South African higher education to overcome the legacy of apartheid.

The challenges of curriculum design and implementation in higher education are not unique to South African universities. Globally, there are complaints about limited government funding for higher education institutions and rising student debt. These issues are compounded by the political pressure universities face when deciding on student fees (Churchill, 2018; Aly & Nurhakim, 2020). Such challenges can hinder universities' ability to achieve transformation through curriculum design, teaching, learning, and assessment. Even the best plans can remain unrealized without adequate funding.

These problems are evident in other countries, including the United States, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Singapore. In South Africa, public universities have faced significant student uprisings over inadequate government funding and rising historical debts. The 2015/16 #FeesMustFall campaign exemplifies how student protests have brought the issue of insufficient tertiary-level funding into national awareness. This has disrupted curriculum delivery over the years. Without fully addressing these funding issues, new curricula may face similar implementation challenges and may not meet expectations.

Another issue affecting the transformation of higher education is the students' mentality. Koloba (2017) notes that many students pursue qualifications without knowing where they will apply the knowledge and skills once they graduate. Some choose programs aligned with oversaturated industries. This raises questions about higher education institutions' responses to the mismatch between graduate output and the skills required to advance South Africa's economy. This mismatch can be corrected through curriculum design and implementation (Choppin et al., 2018; Churchill, 2018). Therefore, higher education institutions must consult with industry when designing curricula. Industry input can help align university teachings with industry needs. Furthermore, curriculum delivery should involve not only academics, who often have theoretical knowledge, but also industry professionals. Industry experts can contribute to curriculum delivery through seminars where they update teachers and students on company operations and current issues. This collaboration helps teachers keep the curriculum relevant to industry needs.

4. Decolonisation of the Curriculum in South Africa

To contribute to the transformation of higher education, one essential issue that must be addressed is the decolonisation of the curriculum in South Africa. According to Grange (2016), decolonising the higher education curriculum involves enabling individuals marginalized under the apartheid regime to embrace and recognize their own cultures, tell their own stories, and learn from books written by African authors that reflect African cultural values rather than Eurocentric models. This approach implies that the country must attain independence in knowledge, skills, values, beliefs, and traditions. In the context of decolonisation, three crucial relationships need to be considered: a politically distant university from the state, a university culturally close to society, and a university intellectually connected to the broad scholarly and scientific values of global learning (Heleta, 2016).

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The latter is particularly important for curriculum design. The curriculum must be influenced by the social context of South Africa and the global economy. The interaction of these elements in the social, political, economic, technological and environmental context constitutes a curriculum. It must be emphasised that in trying to decolonise the higher education curriculum in South Africa, possible challenges can be encountered which can undermine its purpose. First, there is the threat of scrapping the accepted international standards, which may cast a shadow on the national development objectives in the context of globalisation. Some discipline knowledge cannot be altered to suit the local context. For instance, in the accounting discipline, global standards guide the preparation of financial statements. All firms worldwide comply with such standards in preparing their financial statements. An attempt to decolonise the curriculum should not completely disrupt the content of the subjects under study. However, there is more room for improvement regarding the decolonisation of the accounting curriculum in South Africa. For instance, issues about social and environmental sustainability can be included in the curriculum, which is currently absent.

5. Threat of misunderstanding and misapplying a Decolonised Curriculum

The need for a decolonised curriculum in South African higher education has not been questioned. Whilst there is a consensus that a decolonised curriculum in South Africa is long overdue, its implementation can be misaligned, posing a threat to the sustainability of higher education curriculum. The first possible threat associated with the quest for the decolonisation of higher education curriculum is the danger of imposing the local universities to look inward and isolate themselves from the rest of the world in terms of what they teach and how they teach them (Badat, 2010). South Africa attracts international students from different parts of the world. Designing the curriculum to reflect only the South African context will result in South African universities losing their attractiveness. In addition, South Africa trains students for the global economy, where some work for multinational firms and international organisations. Because of this, there is a need for the curriculum to strike a balance between knowledge relevant and specific to South Africa and those relevant to the global world.

Decolonisation of the curriculum also involves inclusivity and representation. To address this, Shumar (2013) contends that the commoditisation of higher education must also be eliminated. This suggests that decolonisation and decommodification in South African higher education institutions are not mutually exclusive. They must work together. One cannot exist without the other because the economic imbalances instigated by the apartheid regime persist. Regrettably, South African higher education remains commoditised, with wealthier individuals able to access programs perceived as valuable in the job market. In other words, the economically marginalised are mostly not offered the opportunity to pursue those programmes that are perceived to be elite. Sadly, the individuals seeking these elite programmes may not have issues with the westernisation or the colonisation of the curriculum because they may have the intention of travelling and working outside South Africa. The economically marginalised individuals who may be able to affect changes to the curriculum are mostly not afforded the chance to offer such programmes. This point is crucial because Grange et al. (2020) report that the debate on the decolonisation of the curriculum in South Africa is at the behest of students. This suggests that students play instrumental roles in designing and implementing a decolonised curriculum. However, if the students championing this agenda are not given the chance to pursue such programmes, they cannot affect such changes. For instance, about 70% of South African Chartered Accountants are white, mostly with privileged backgrounds. Such instances affect the agenda to decolonise the accounting curriculum in South Africa. The case may be similar in other disciplines.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that many grounds need to be covered to achieve the transformation of the curriculum in higher education in South Africa. This involves championing inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. In this context, a transformed higher education curriculum must be one that provides relevant knowledge that is affordable, decolonised and quality. In addition, transformation must be linked to integration, where we can find a new South Africa that brings everybody together with even opportunities. To achieve transformation in higher education



curriculum, there is a need for a new reality, policies and structures to permit contributions from different voices.

It must be stated that some universities have responded to the call for a decolonised curriculum. For instance, in the Higher Education Summit held in October 2015, the Minister of Higher Education Blade, Dr Blade Nzimande summoned all South African universities to decolonise and Africanise. Responding to this beckoning, Stellenbosch University appointed a task team to design and implement decolonised curriculum, whilst the University of Cape Town appointed a curriculum transformation committee to explore ways to decolonise their curriculum (Grange et al., 2020). However, the debate about the decolonisation of the curriculum persists, ostensibly because not many grounds have been covered to achieve this agenda. Perhaps, the government must show interest in this pursuit by financially rewarding universities that commit to this agenda.

6. The Internationalization of Higher Education Curriculum

Many universities have chosen to internationalise their curriculum to respond to the challenges of preparing graduates for employment in 'the global economy,' where they may work globally. As a result, many universities use curriculum internationalisation as a technique to prepare their graduates for work in the global economy. In this context, the internationalisation of higher education is defined as an intentional or guided process to incorporate intercultural, international, and/or global dimensions into higher education to advance the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education, and thus to improve the quality of teaching and research (Leask, 2016). On the other hand, curriculum internationalisation is described as the incorporation of intercultural, international, and/or global characteristics into the content of the curriculum, as well as learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching techniques, and support services of a program of study (Leask, 2016).

However, Jones et al. (2021) contend that curriculum internationalisation, on the other hand, is a multifaceted concept that can be defined and approached in various ways. Some universities take a pragmatic approach aiming to achieve or maintain a competitive edge by providing a curriculum relevant to a broader number of students worldwide or fostering abilities that allow graduates to work in international settings (Crosling et al., 2008). An ideological approach to internationalisation prevails where it is necessary to prepare graduates with lifelong learning abilities for the largely unknown but increasingly interconnected future world. The incentives for internationalising higher education curricula may involve both of these aims.

There are different ways through which the internationalisation of curriculum can be implemented, including student mobility, the use of English as a language of teaching/communication, recruitment of students from other countries and the inclusion of specialised optional international subjects. However, the internationalisation of the curriculum transcends these activities. These activities are various ways through which internationalisation can be achieved. This shows that universities or higher education institutions implementing any of these activities can be characterised as having an internationalised curriculum. These focus of these activities or strategies is to expose students to the world.

Moreover, Leask (2016) explained that an internationalised curriculum is part of the teaching and learning activities. Its focus is including contents that are not directly related to the country where the students are studying but to other parts of the world. This approach helps students contextualise and analyse issues from a global perspective. Additionally, an internationalised curriculum requires a robust support system, suggesting that universities must be willing to invest resources to achieve their learning outcomes. Thus, implementing an internationalised curriculum can be costly. There are numerous benefits for higher education institutions, particularly in South Africa, when they internationalise their curricula. Firstly, internationalisation can help developing countries enhance their social and economic capabilities while advancing science and scholarship through academic exchanges (Marinoni et al., 2019). Western universities are also creating global networks to support knowledge transfer, progressive policies, and international research, thereby improving investment and impact measurement.

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Tight (2022) asserts that universities are using e-technology and social media to enhance public access to information, improving talent recruitment and retention, and providing access to higher education in nations where local institutions cannot meet demand. Furthermore, internationalisation can improve academic quality and foster internationally-minded students and staff, leading to national and international citizenship for students and personnel from disadvantaged nations (Ilieva et al., 2014). It also generates revenue for universities and facilitates talent exports. Western developed countries benefit financially from international students, franchising academic programs to overseas providers, and ensuring quality (De Wit, 2013; Brandenburg et al., 2019). Local students, universities, and the country benefit from a diversified and enriched learning environment. Internationalisation can transform the lives of international students by producing graduates who are globally aware and culturally sensitive. Student mobility allows students to experience new contexts, enhancing their understanding of the links between their local environment and the global world. Moreover, internationalisation fosters desirable international values in students, such as international mindedness, openness, second language proficiency, flexibility of thought, tolerance, and respect for others. It also promotes ethical commitment, encouraging students to reflect on their ideas while cultivating a sense of duty and civic involvement.

7. An evaluation of the South African Internationalisation Policy

The South African government established a national internationalisation policy after recognizing the potential for student and staff mobility, enabling South African citizens to study or work abroad on a short- to medium-term basis. Previously, South Africa had not sufficiently focused on promoting its higher education system internationally. Therefore, appropriate policies were needed to support, regulate, and facilitate international collaborations and partnerships between institutions of higher learning, leading to the development of the Policy Framework.

The South African government emphasized the necessity for universities to internationalise to enhance their scholarship, research, and innovation activities. The absence of a national macro policy framework had previously hindered their growth potential in this area. According to the South African Minister of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, the Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa was ratified to address this gap. However, even after the policy's introduction, higher education institutions (HEIs) primarily handled internationalisation within their institutional capacities. The policy provides a framework to guide universities in their internationalisation efforts, offering legitimacy and direction even for those institutions that had already initiated internationalisation activities independently.

The Policy Framework represents the first substantive effort by the South African government to address higher education internationalisation at the national level. Its preparation and adoption mark a significant milestone in the evolution of internationalisation within the sector. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) aimed to justify the need for internationalising South Africa's higher education industry. Within the framework, internationalisation is defined as "an intentional or guided process to incorporate intercultural, international, and/or global dimensions into higher education to advance the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education, and thus to improve the quality of education and research." Curriculum internationalisation is further described as "the incorporation of intercultural, international, and/or global characteristics into the content of the curriculum, as well as learning outcomes, assessment tasks, teaching techniques, and support services of a program of study."

Despite its comprehensive scope, the Policy Framework makes only a passing reference to decolonisation, a critical issue in South African higher education. This omission represents a missed opportunity for the policy to be fully reflective of and responsive to its local context. However, this gap can be addressed in the short term through strong sector engagement at the institutional level. The Policy's flexibility and autonomy enable South African HEIs, the primary sites of internationalisation, to consider relevant issues such as decolonisation when developing new institutional internationalisation policies and strategies or aligning existing ones with the national framework.



Nevertheless, decolonisation should be debated collectively across the sector as a matter of national concern.

Additionally, the Policy Framework does not explicitly connect internationalisation to advancements in the higher education environment related to the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR), information and communication technology (ICT), and virtualisation. For instance, guidelines on how ICT can enhance internationalisation and support the establishment of new collaborative platforms for research, teaching, and learning are absent. In this regard, the Policy could have done more to highlight opportunities and provide national direction on ICT-related innovations and virtual internationalisation methods, particularly relevant in resource-constrained institutions like those in South Africa's higher education system. To address these challenges, collective engagement is necessary, focusing on the importance of decolonisation within the context of higher education internationalisation. Such engagement should aim to provide clearer guidelines on integrating decolonisation and internationalisation agendas, recognizing that a decolonial perspective allows for a distinctly South African approach to internationalisation. This approach should include a critical examination of dominant internationalisation concepts and methods, particularly regarding power and knowledge dependencies, and assess their relevance and utility to South African higher education. As a starting point, the current notion of internationalisation should be thoroughly scrutinised and adapted to the specific South African context, considering its philosophical foundations and socio-economic uniqueness.

8. The internationalization of the Accounting Curriculum

Recognising the various approaches to internationalisation, there is a need to discuss the strategies of curriculum internationalisation in the discipline I teach, which is financial accounting. As a response to globalisation, the literature on curriculum internationalisation stresses the attributes needed for graduates to operate internationally. These have been reviewed by Leask (2016), who claims that curriculum internationalisation has been given insufficient guidance. Indeed, the literature tends to emphasise the attributes for graduates to operate internationally but provides limited guidance on curriculum internationalisation.

Financial accounting and reporting is often regarded as the most universal business language understood globally. Nevertheless, various factors shape the accounting practices of different countries and firms. To prepare students for careers in multinational companies with international operations, it is essential for them to understand the diverse practices of accounting across different regions. In this context, contend that accounting is particularly suited for internationalisation because it functions on a global scale while also exhibiting strong local characteristics. Many accounting graduates find employment in international jurisdictions or work for South African branches of global organisations.

It must be acknowledged that internationalising a curriculum is challenging because it necessitates organisational change. Academics must teach various content in different ways, resulting in time-consuming modifications that may be regarded as a loss of academic independence and autonomy. This challenge is particularly pronounced in financial accounting, where there are differing opinions on whether the accounting curriculum is already sufficiently internationalised.

On one hand, some argue that the financial accounting curriculum is inherently internationalised due to the global acceptance of accounting standards by international accounting bodies and corporations (Crosling et al., 2008). This view suggests that further internationalisation may be unnecessary. On the other hand, there are compelling arguments for further internationalisation within the financial accounting discipline, given its relatively neutral cultural base and the influence of professional and accrediting organisations that advocate for more global perspectives in accounting education. However, based on my understanding of curriculum internationalisation, there are additional areas within the financial accounting curriculum that can be further developed to enhance internationalisation. As previously discussed, successful curriculum

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internationalisation requires both the development of global attitudes and the transformation of organisational structures.

To achieve this, it is essential for lecturers to embrace a sense of psychological ownership, initiating evolutionary and additive changes rather than viewing these efforts as a threat to their academic independence (Robson & Wihlborg, 2019). To internationalise the accounting curriculum, a significant challenge is to overcome resistance from staff who may view discussions about internationalising the accounting curriculum as a waste of time. To address this challenge, it is important for academics to understand the concept and process of curriculum internationalisation. To achieve this, there will be a need for sensitization and workshops to get all staff together to better understand the curriculum internationalisation and discuss its meaning and shape for their subject, allowing them to participate in and own it. The workshops must include as many staff as possible and demonstrate to them the need for commitment to an internationalisation project. All academics must be encouraged to determine how 'international' their disciplines should be on their own. The premise behind this type of project is that if it is successful, it will have a 'demonstration effect,' resulting in broader adoption throughout the university. Individual academics must be convinced that teaching and learning innovation does not threaten their employment, contributes to their career advancement (in comparison to, say, research), improves learning outcomes, and can be implemented cost-effectively, in addition to leadership and continued financial commitment by faculty and university management.

Another strategy will be to align the goals of curricular internationalisation with those of the accounting curriculum. This approach must aim to identify educational strategies and approaches that can be used at different levels of internationalisation. For example, blending the curriculum with international examples, case studies, examples, and viewpoints can build international awareness by fostering reflective ways. As international examples of financial accounts are introduced into the classroom, this will aid staff in developing ownership. International examples, particularly from countries with a substantial investment presence in South Africa, would allow for inclusion and make the subject matter relevant to students' circumstances. Students' worldwide awareness would be raised due to international examples. A modification in the teaching will be required to guarantee that the examples are not used arbitrarily, and the class discussion of the international examples will encourage students to consider similarities and variations in how the accounting concepts are used in other situations. The internationalised perspective will underpin students' capacity to evaluate problem solutions in a globalised environment.

The second level of the implementation of internationalised accounting curriculum will be the integration of cross-cultural engagement into university formal and informal life experiences. This level highlights the shift in students' perspectives as it will help them adapt and accommodate other cultural perspectives. In this way, a collaborative online international learning (COIL) project with an international university is crucial. This is a virtual student exchange between accounting students in different foreign universities. In this way, the students will learn how various cultural, social, political, and economic environments affect accounting practice, thus preparing them for the global world. The third level of internationalisation strategy will be through foreign language studies and exchange programs, which will immerse students in global situations, allowing them to 'consolidate the international literacy gained through internationalisation experience. I must admit this strategy will have to be staggered over time, and students will have to be encouraged to have a basic accounting understanding in different languages such as Swahili, French, Mandarin, Arabic, etc.

As highlighted earlier, internationalising the accounting curriculum can be beneficial. This will transform the experience of students and staff, helping them anticipate diversity. This will assist them and make the accounting module relevant and perhaps enjoyable. In this context, I expect growth in implementing IoC in Africa. This is because the world is witnessing significant changes in higher education due to the rapid penetration of the internet, the economic shift, changes in societal demographics, economic transactions, and the increasing globalisation and internationalisation in higher education. These significant changes have created a need for scrutiny in the internationalisation of curriculum approaches in African higher education institutions. From the onset of the twenty-first



century, there has been a rapid change in the higher education sector, with several changes in every sphere of human activity.

For instance, increased competition among higher educational institutions is intensifying, workforces are diversifying, work demands are becoming more challenging, and technological changes are rapid. This fast-changing landscape in the higher education workplace requires universities in Africa to be attractive to students from outside the continent and those within it. Additionally, there is an increasing trend in unemployment in Africa; hence, most of its graduates look for employment outside the continent. This reality is not lost on the management of universities in Africa. Therefore, they have limited options but to develop a curriculum that will prepare their graduates for the global economy. Consequently, universities that fail to recognise and implement effective internationalisation strategies may face obsolescence. Furthermore, there is a growing awareness among parents and students of the global and corporate demands of the 21st century, which will likely drive universities to meet these expectations through their curricula.

9. The response of relevant Policies in South Africa to Curriculum Design

It is clear that the higher education curriculum in South Africa is fraught with challenges and misalignment that cannot respond to the country's socioeconomic needs. Various frameworks, policies and laws have been established to address this issue. Some of such frameworks, policies and laws passed to help transform the higher education curriculum include the Higher Education Act, 1997; White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2014; National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers, 2018, among others. Among these, the Higher Education Act 1997 is the most consulted document when discussing the transformation of the curriculum of higher education in the country. The Act's main aims are to establish a structure to transform programmes and institutions to better respond to human resources, economic and development of South Africa, redress past discrimination, ensure representativity and equal access, and offer equal opportunities for learning and growth. To achieve this, there must be a synergistic relationship between the subjects taught and the needs of society.

The various education policies reflect the curriculum transformational agenda. "As indicated, the preamble of the Higher Education Act, 1997, highlighted the restructuring and transformation of 'programmes and institutions to respond better to the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic' – as one of the desired outcomes of higher education. Moreover, the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training; Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System*, 2014, committed the South African government to introduce free university education for the poor" progressively. These policies collectively underscore the intent to achieve meaningful transformation through curriculum design.

However, a pressing question arises: Have these higher education policies succeeded in achieving societal transformation through effective curriculum design? There is a growing concern that universities are not producing graduates with the skills required by industry. This disconnect is evident in the high unemployment rate among South African youth, which stands at around 67%. This situation indicates that the current educational system is failing to prepare students for the workforce, resulting in a mismatch between the curriculum and the skills demanded by the industry. Consequently, there is a perceived lack of engagement between universities, government, and industry, which hinders the development of solutions to this problem.

The failure of the current curriculum to foster a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and the workplace reflects a broader issue. The curriculum has not effectively addressed the needs of individual citizens, employees in both public and private sectors, or the broader societal and developmental goals. For instance, the Ministry of Education's 2004 funding framework reveals that the higher education teaching output grant is based on the number of graduates produced by public higher education institutions. This framework supports the notion that public higher education institutions should perform tracer studies to assess whether their curricula remain relevant to the country's human resource and economic needs. As Shongwe and Ochola (2011) found,

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many Library and Information Science graduates from the University of Zululand were dissatisfied with their qualifications and the curriculum provided.

In light of the Framework for Qualifications Standard in Higher Education issued by the Council on Higher Education (CHE), it is important to note that proposed qualification standards should not dictate the design of programs for institutions. Rather, higher education institutions should use their autonomy to design programs that meet the needs of their students and the broader economy. This raises several critical questions: Should public higher education institutions take the responsibility to contribute towards bridging the Republic's skills shortage actively? What level of responsibility do the institutions take for graduates' unemployment rate or lack of entrepreneurial skills? How dynamic are public higher education institutions responding to changes in the economy's needs?

10. A Reflection on the internationalization of Higher Education Curriculum

From the discussion, it has become clear that universities implement the internationalisation of the curriculum (IoC) in diverse ways. These methods include student mobility, the use of English as a language of instruction and communication, the recruitment of international students, and the inclusion of specialized international courses. However, it is important to recognize that these activities represent different approaches to achieving internationalisation rather than defining it. In my view, these activities can best be described as forms of globalisation, which focus on exposing students to the global world. The discussion has illustrated that an internationalised curriculum is about students' learning experiences rather than merely their exposure to global environments.

To further clarify this, an internationalised curriculum can be characterised in several ways. Firstly, it integrates global content into teaching and learning activities, focusing on topics and perspectives beyond the local context of the students' home country. This approach aims to broaden students' understanding of global issues and enhance their ability to contextualize and analyse various problems. Another significant point highlighted in the discussion is that an internationalised curriculum requires a robust support system, indicating that universities must be prepared to invest resources to achieve the desired learning outcomes. This requirement implies that implementing an internationalised curriculum can be a resource-intensive endeavour. Furthermore, the core of an internationalised curriculum is the enhancement of students' learning experiences, which must be supported by clear learning outcomes, assessment activities, and effective teaching methods.

This study has deepened our understanding of curriculum internationalisation in higher education and clarified its distinction from globalisation. Although these two concepts are often used interchangeably, this study reveals that such conflation is misleading. Gaining a clear understanding of IoC is crucial, as it enables academics and institutions to grasp its rationale and effectively implement it in their curricula. A clearer understanding of IoC would empower academics and institutions to embrace and apply the principles of internationalisation more confidently. Another important contribution of this study is its challenge to the prevailing notion of curriculum internationalisation as merely an exchange programme designed to expose students to different cultures, economic systems, and political environments. Unfortunately, many academics view IoC in this limited way, which diminishes its educational value. This study demonstrates that without a focus on actual learning outcomes, the internationalisation of the curriculum risks becoming a superficial exercise rather than a meaningful educational experience.

Additionally, this study offers valuable guidance for academics and institutions seeking to integrate internationalisation into their curricula. It suggests that efforts should shift from simply offering international experiences to enhancing student learning, implying that an internationalised curriculum must be underpinned by well-defined learning outcomes, a structured assessment plan, and adequate resources. Effective internationalization project must include provision of feedback to students. Without such feedback, students might perceive IoC as just a programme for cultural exchange rather than a meaningful educational activity. Therefore, the implementation of IoC should be systematic, beginning with a clear understanding of its meaning and progressing towards the development of a coherent and effective rationale. In summary, this study emphasizes that the



internationalisation of the curriculum must be approached with a focus on learning outcomes rather than just providing students with international experiences. By addressing these aspects, it is possible to create a more effective and meaningful internationalisation strategy that benefits both students and institutions.

11. Conclusion

The case that has just been analysed showed the need for a morphogenesis process in the curriculum of higher education institutions in South Africa. In addition to the absence of transformations, there is a lack of commitment from the various agents to ensure that the aims of the various higher education policies are achieved. The discussion has demonstrated a lack of commitment and was a weakness in fulfilling their mandates, especially from the side of the government and their regulatory institutions, in providing the necessary resources for the effective design and implementation of the curriculum. This has translated into widespread instability in higher education due to student protests. That is to say, the product of the interaction between curriculum design, teaching and learning has not generated processes of transformation. Considering the above, from the morphogenetic approach, it was particularly evident that the expected effect of policies, mechanisms or even substantial financial resources may have a lower-than-expected impact on the curriculum of higher educational institutions in the transformation process. All these elements contribute to the understanding that higher education transformation can occur in temporary processes that are distinct from policy definitions.

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