



THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARGARET ARCHER'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Haruna Maama

Department of Financial Accounting, Durban University of Technology

Corresponding E-mail: harunam@dut.ac.za

Abstract

After the end of the apartheid regime, the South African Government and other stakeholders have made several commitments to enhance and transform the nation's educational system, particularly higher education. To achieve this, the government implemented several educational reforms, passed legislation, and established policies. Despite some discussions and debates surrounding educational improvement, there is still a lack of comprehensive analysis that examines the specific contributions, challenges, and potential challenges of these policy frameworks in driving positive transformations. Accordingly, this research examines the transformative impact of South African Higher Education policy frameworks using Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory as an analytical framework. The study conducts a desktop document analysis of published literature, including policy documents from the South African government, to explore the contributions and challenges of these policy frameworks. The analysis reveals a lack of significant changes in agency, social, and cultural structures, indicating the absence of morphogenesis processes. Furthermore, there is a lack of commitment from various agents to the policy objectives, particularly evident in weaknesses in fulfilling mandates and the resulting institutional instability due to student protests. The study highlights that the anticipated impact of policies, strategies, and financial resources may have fallen short of expectations regarding the transformation process. The findings contribute to understanding the limitations and effectiveness of South African Higher Education policy frameworks, offering insights into the complex dynamics between structure, culture, and agency. This research informs policymakers, educators, and stakeholders involved in higher education by providing recommendations to enhance the transformative potential of these policy frameworks. The research has broader implications for understanding educational improvement and policy frameworks in other contexts, as the insights gained from this study can be applicable and valuable to similar settings facing challenges in educational reforms..

Keywords: *South African Higher Education, Policy Frameworks, Transformation, Margaret Archer Sociological Concepts, Morphogenetic Theory, Educational Reforms*

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the end of the apartheid regime, the Government of South Africa and various stakeholders have made several efforts to enhancing and transforming the country's educational system, with a particular emphasis on higher education (HE). This commitment has led to the implementation of various educational reforms, the establishment of policies, and the enactment of laws (Mzangwa, 2019; Motala & Pampallis, 2020). The underlining aim of the South African education reforms is the improvement in education, which would transcend to economic development. Consequently, policy frameworks and strategies aimed at achieving this objective have been the focus of educational discussions (Jooste & Hagenmeier, 2022). These policy frameworks and strategies are designed to align with the transformation agenda of the South African government (Hlatshwayo & Shawa, 2020).

To achieve the transformational agenda of the South African Government in the education sector, the government has enacted and commissioned the following Acts and Frameworks: The

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARGARET ARCHER'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Haruna Maama

Higher Education Act (1997); White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014); National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers (2018); and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. It is widely agreed that educational systems and reforms should strive to enhance their functionality and contribute to the positive transformation of student training and learning. At the heart of the discussions on higher education lie several critical questions: What constitutes educational improvement? What is the role of the state in driving such improvement? How should the education system be organised to achieve transformation? What are the measurable indicators of educational improvement? These questions have sparked intense debates within the education discourse, highlighting their controversial nature.

Despite the considerable efforts and numerous policy frameworks implemented to transform South African higher education, there is a need for in-depth research that explores the effectiveness and impact of these policies. While there have been discussions and debates surrounding educational improvement and policy frameworks, there is still a lack of comprehensive analysis that examines the specific contributions, challenges, and potential inhibitions of these policy frameworks in driving positive transformations. Moreover, there is a dearth of research that utilizes a sociological analytical framework, such as Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory, to examine the South African Higher Education policy framework and its transformative impact. Thus, this research aims to address these gaps by providing a detailed analysis of the policy frameworks and their outcomes, employing a sociological lens to understand the complex dynamics at play.

The study adopts a sociological analytical framework, drawing upon Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory, to evaluate the implementation of educational policies in South African higher education and their transformative impact. The morphogenetic analysis enables the identification of multiple issues, including the roles of agents, within the social and cultural structure. By exploring the visibility and interrelationships of these aspects, we gain insights into the effectiveness, relevance, and ramifications of the South African Higher Education policy framework in facilitating positive transformations. This study aims to analyse the extent to which various policy frameworks in South African higher education have either facilitated or impeded the country's transformation. By undertaking this research, we seek to contribute to the ongoing dialogue surrounding educational improvement and policy frameworks in South Africa. The study's findings have the potential to inform future policymaking, offering valuable insights into the pathways for achieving positive transformations in higher education and, by extension, the broader socio-economic context of the Republic.

This research makes several important contributions to the field of higher education policy and transformation in South Africa. Firstly, by employing Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory as an analytical framework, the study offers a novel perspective to understand the impact of the policy frameworks on South African higher education. This theoretical lens allows for a comprehensive examination of the roles of different agents and their interrelationships within the social and cultural structure, shedding light on the effectiveness and relevance of the policy frameworks. Secondly, the research contributes to the existing literature by conducting an in-depth analysis of the South African Higher Education policy framework and its impact at various levels: globally, nationally, and institutionally. By examining the transformational impact across these different scales, the study provides a nuanced understanding of the outcomes and challenges faced in the implementation of the policies.

Additionally, the research addresses the gap in empirical studies that investigate the extent to which South African public higher education institutions effectively utilize their agency to



contribute to the socio-economic landscape of the Republic. By examining the decision-making processes within these institutions, the study offers insights into the role they play in driving positive transformations and enhancing the socio-economic context of the country.

2. IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

The study involves a desktop document analysis of published literature, including those published by the South African Government on higher education. The study undertook a content analysis of the various policy documents in higher education in South Africa. A content analysis research approach is an acceptable method to peruse and analyze public documents and it is embraced by scholars such as Hall and Steiner (2020) and Khirfan et al. (2020). The documents were read cover to cover to understand their main objectives and their strategic implications. Policy documents relating to higher education in South Africa were downloaded from the websites of the Department of Higher Education and websites of other government institutions responsible for higher education. These documents were analyzed to assess their contribution to the transformation agenda of the South African government.

The specific policy frameworks of South African higher education that were reviewed in this study include the following: the Higher Education Act (1997); White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2014); National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers (2018); and the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training. The other policy documents reviewed included the funding framework for Ministry of Education (2004), and the Framework for Qualifications Standard in Higher Education issued by the Council on Higher Education and the Ministerial Statement on the implementation of the University Capacity Development Programme. Finally, cultural, agency and structural issues affecting South African higher education were analyzed by using Margaret Archer's morphogenetic framework.

3. MARGARET ARCHER'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF STRUCTURE, CULTURE AND AGENCY

In the following discussion, the study discusses the key concepts of Margaret Archer's Morphogenesis theory and further relate them to the changing higher education context internationally, nationally and institutionally. Before proceeding, there is the need to explain the fundamental canons of Archer's Morphogenesis theory. These canons include the concept of agency, culture, and structure. According to Archer (1995), agency is the domain of human action and interactions. Archer explains that agency is the ability of an individual to act autonomously and to make their own free choices. Culture, on the other hand, relates to the body of ideas and beliefs (Slemming, 2019). On the other hand, Archer's described structure as material goods, which are unevenly allocated across the society. Structure also relates to the domain of social positions and roles (Archer, 2018). At the heart of Archer's theory is the concept of morphogenesis, which means to change in the shape of things, in this context, agency, structure or culture. Archer (2018) clarifies that the morphogenetic cycle involves the process of social change (transformation), which may or may not occur to cause the changes expected by a group of social actors.

The morphogenetic cycle is the analytical framework of the interaction between agency and structure that can generate a social transformation (Newman, 2020). The morphogenetic cycle accounts for the process of social change (or stability), the product of the dynamics of interaction between agency and structure, or between different social groups. It consists of three parts: structural and cultural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration (Mutch, 2017).

Haruna Maama

Structural and cultural conditioning is the first moment in the cycle. Vega (2019) makes us understand that the systemic properties of society are consequences of past actions from the framework that limits and allows the action of agents. Karasev (2022) also explains that the structure has social and cultural conditioning properties. In this context, structure directly depends on material resources, both physical and human, whereas culture relates to the world of ideas and social norms.

Within Margaret Archer's Morphogenesis theory, agency plays a key role in the morphogenetic process, which is closely related to the determinants of the structure (Mutch, 2017; Archer & Morgan, 2020). This suggests that agents' positional level is related to vested interests, that is, objective characteristics of the situations that agents live in and that predispose them to courses of action or lifestyles (Vogler, 2016). In this case, agents can act against these interests. Still, they must bear the costs that this will entail since the vested interests have benefits for meeting needs that are not equally distributed in society.

4. THE LINK BETWEEN MARGARET ARCHER'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS OF STRUCTURE, CULTURE AND AGENCY WITH THE CHANGING HIGHER EDUCATION

The morphogenetic theory was created to analyze large social processes, which transcends over periods of time, implying that it was not intended to analyze specific phenomena. In this context, Margaret Archer's sociological concepts can be employed to analyze the changing higher education context internationally, nationally and institutionally. According to Vega (2020), the study of components of Archer's sociological theory and the form of interaction between agency, structure and culture can provide perspectives that help to understand higher educational improvement processes. This is based on the view that the logic of the morphogenetic cycle results in a historical analysis of a transformation process; that is, it focuses on its implementation (Karlson, 2020). For instance, according to Vega (2020), from the higher education setting, this can be interpreted from a research perspective, such as the study of the interaction between the properties of the social and cultural structure (represented in this case by the educational system, the social context of universities and its fundamental norms) with the agents (in this case the individual and collective actors in the educational communities).

Thus, the shared roles played by the structure and agency in the context of a specific culture could be advanced in the more particularized identification of the dynamics of educational improvement, its stability, or even its improvement. This can also be useful as an input for strategies that aim to generate impulses for educational improvement, given the knowledge from which they can be founded (Vega, 2020; Nudelman, 2021). Noting that the improvement in higher education is a transformation process, it bears similarities to other processes of social change. Furthermore, mutual elements can be identified between the analytical logic of the study of the improvement in higher education and Archer's morphogenetic proposal. This is because both agree on the review of a process of stability or change involving agents, institutions, and a context. This reflection motivates the study to argue that acknowledging the characteristics and dynamics of structure and agency can help identify or deepen the knowledge of factors, conditions and contexts that facilitate or hinder the improvement and transformation of higher education.

Considering these analytical challenges of the study of educational improvement and how it resembles sociological approaches to social change, morphogenetic analysis can be employed to deepen the understanding of the transformation of higher education. The expectation is to identify



analytical keys or logics of the study of social change, which can help to understand from another perspective of higher educational improvement. This endeavour can be useful in expanding ways to analyze the processes that describe transformation and identify elements that can be considered from educational policies to generate effective impulses oriented to the objective of improvement. In more specific terms, Archer's sociological theory can be used to examine the extent that the management of South African higher education institutions and the government use their agencies to develop the human resource, economic and development needs of the Republic.

5. TRANSFORMATION IMPERATIVES FOR HE IN SA AND STUDENT PROTESTS, DECOLONISATION AND GLOBALISATION

Various attempts have been made to transform South African higher education to wean it from the apartheid legacy. Hence, with the dawn of democracy, more black students entered higher education as the youth perceive education to be the means to a better quality life (Mzangwa, 2019). Evidently, transformation has been the driving force for the country's various policies and laws on higher education. The transformation agenda is reflected in the preamble of the Higher Education Act, 1997, which 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 (Swartz & Foley, 1996).

Access to financing, particularly on the side of students, is one of the main obstacles preventing the realization of reform in higher education (Francis & Webster, 2019). The government of South Africa has put in place several policies to lessen the financial pressure on students from economically disadvantaged families. Redressing the imbalances of the past by increasing access to universities for students from previously disadvantaged communities has also created financial burdens of debts on both the university and those students who are unable to progress academically, as most of these students end up losing the financial support provided by National Students Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS), which is a bursary scheme funded by the South African Government through the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). Hence, the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training; Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System, Published, 20 November 2013 (Government Gazette, 15 January 2014) was introduced. This document articulated that the South African government committed itself to progressively introducing free university education for the poor as funds become available. This has created an expectation from students that university education should be free.

Finance has become the biggest obstacle preventing access to university education and the attainment of transformation in South Africa. According to Archer's sociological theory, financial issues are frequently categorized under structure. Cooke et al. (2004) showed that as students advance through university, they grow more anxious about their financial situations, with more students indicating that they are more worried about their finances in the third year than in the first or second year. This is especially true for self-funded students, who begin to realize the effects of their mounting debt as graduation day draws near. The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) is a funding program that the government established to address the problem of student financing. However, a number of administrative errors, inefficiencies, and corruption have prevented many students from reaching the anticipated outcomes. Due to financial constraints, rather than struggling to complete their modules, students battle to survive. University student dropout rates are now very high as a result of this. This has derailed the march towards attaining transformation in higher education in South Africa.

Haruna Maama

The NSFAS administration's inefficiencies have had a clear and significant knock-on effect. Many students start or participate in protests, which typically result in the destruction of properties, out of a fear of being left out due to the delay in releasing their monies for registration and sustenance. Although the students' actions cannot be justified, understanding and acknowledging their difficult situations can help to stop this semestral "ritual". The money made available by the NSFAS is typically the only source of income that students have access to. This suggests that a delay in releasing these funds will create a body of students whose primary and immediate needs would be food. As the adage goes, 'a healthy mind can be found in a healthy body', the focus of these hungry students would not be to feed their brain but their stomach. These have created a culture of demonstrations among the students. As a result, they participate in protests whenever there is a chance. The response of official institutions and agencies to student protests is more worrisome. Students frequently find that they only receive audience and positive feedback when they demonstrate. This supports the idea that demonstration is the only language that the structures and agents can understand. One is left to ask if the structures and agents are proactive or reactive in light of this. The latter would describe the agents' mindset based on the events.

Concerning access to higher education, the 2015 march to President by students marked a significant turning point towards access to free education and transformation. This resulted in the presidency announcement that in 2016, there would be a suspension in the increment of fees. However, this blanket announcement was made without proper planning. It had spillover effects across all spectra of higher education funding. For instance, students on bursaries from other companies were affected because their fees were not increased. Even some were never paid at all. In hindsight, it is clear that the system was not ready to distribute student funds. As a result of the poor planning and its subsequent implementation, the system started collapsing from the beginning because considerable efforts and thought were not applied to it (Matukane & Bronkorst, 2017). According to Griffiths (2019), the announcement and its timing were wrong because it did not allow for time to plan to accommodate and integrate the new structure. Evidently, the structures that have been established to achieve in transformation constantly work against students. This means the system is not working for those it intends to benefit, which underlines a structural breakdown.

Transformation can also be characterized as the intersection of race, gender, age and class. This indicates that diversity is an essential element towards the attainment of transformation of higher education in South Africa. Given this perspective about transformation, it can be argued that considerable progress has been made in South Africa. For instance, the number of females occupying the vice chancellorship position in South African universities is increasing. Though the number is comparably low to the male counterparts, the fact that females are considered for such positions tells the commitment towards transformation. Another important aspect of transformation in higher education in South Africa is the integration of African academics in previously white universities. For example, the vice chancellors of the University of Cape Town (UCT) and University of South Africa (UNISA) are black females. Not only that, the majority of the deputy vice chancellors at UCT are also females, which underlines the grounds gained concerning diversity and transformation in higher education in South Africa. It stands to know how these individuals will utilize the agency (power) to transform higher education further.

It is crucial to highlight that the problems facing higher education institutions are not unique to South African universities. The trend worldwide is complaints about limited government funding for higher education institutions and rising student debt. These problems are exacerbated by the



political pressure facing universities when making decisions on levying student fees (Loveday, 2018). These problems have been highlighted in other countries, including the United States of America, Germany, the United Kingdom and Singapore (Hill & Lawton, 2018). Over the years, the public university of South Africa has experienced severe student uprisings as students complain about inadequate government funding and rising historical debts. The 2015/16 #FeesMustFall campaign is a typical example of how student protests brought the insufficient tertiary-level student funding problem into the national consciousness.

One issue affecting the transformation of higher education is the curriculum design and the students' mentality. This phenomenon fits into the cultural concept of Archer's theory. Currently, the majority of the students in high schools are looking to enter into the traditional and comprehensive universities. The students have been made to believe that attending university education is the only or maybe the best choice available to them. Hence, they are obsessed with the prospect of entering universities as they do not consider any other educational option. Meanwhile, most of these students may not have the required knowledge and skills for tertiary education. This has resulted in a high unemployment rate among university graduates. This starkly contrasts with the apartheid era, where most of the students were going into an apprenticeship. The later system ensured that students obtained the required skills to enable them to integrate well in the job market or establish their own business.

Moreover, Koloba (2017) reports that several people study for a qualification with no idea of where they would apply the knowledge and skills from the programme once they graduate. Some would select a programme that was aligned with an oversaturated industry. One then wonders what higher education institutions' responses are to the mismatch that often arises between graduate output from the institutions and the types of skills required to advance South Africa's economy. Considering that public higher education institutions obtain funding from the government, one wonders if there is room for the government to introduce a block of the grant that is dependent on producing graduates with qualifications that are considered to be essential for the growth and development of the economy.

To achieve transformation in higher education, one essential issue that needs to be discussed and addressed is the decolonization of higher education in South Africa. According to Mheta et al. (2018), decolonization of higher education in South Africa involves previously marginalized individuals under the apartheid regime embracing and recognizing their own cultures, telling their own stories, learning from books written by African authors and managing these universities guided by the values that reflect African culture, instead of those based on Eurocentric models. This implies that the country must be independent and open to collaboration concerning acquiring knowledge, skills, values, beliefs and traditions.

In talking about decolonization, three crucial relationships are involved, comprising a politically distant university from the state, a university that is culturally close to the society and universities that is intellectually connected to the broad scholarly and scientific values of global learning (Heleta, 2016). It must be emphasized that in trying to decolonize the higher education system 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 globalization. The second threat associated with the quest for the decolonization of higher education is the danger of forcing local universities to look inward and isolate themselves from the rest of the world (Badat, 2010).

Haruna Maama

Decolonization involves inclusivity and representation. To address this, Shumar (2013) contends that the commoditization of higher education must be eliminated. This suggests that decolonization and decommodification 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 appears to be commoditized, where the rich can afford the programmes perceived to be in demand in the job market. For instance, in 2020, the dream of Mumtaaz Emeran, a medical student at the University of Witwatersrand, was nearly shattered because she owed R471000 to the university. The university gave her 24 hours to pay the fees; else, she would not be graduated. It took philanthropists and 'good samaritans' to mobilize money for her. Unfortunately, many students with similar plights could not get similar assistance. Therefore, to treat access to South African higher education as a commodity to be bought by those that can, would do little to correct the imbalances in the system and the attainment of transformation. In this case, it is fair to state that the structure and agents of higher education have failed to live up to expectations in ensuring fair and equitable access to higher education.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that many grounds need to be covered to achieve transformation in higher education in South Africa. This involves championing inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. In this context, a transformed higher education must be affordable, decolonized and of 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, there is the need for a new reality, policy and structures to permit contributions from different voices.

6. THE EXAMINATION OF RELEVANT HIGHER EDUCATION ACTS AND POLICIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

Higher education in South Africa is fraught with inequalities that have hindered transformation. These are the legacies of the apartheid era. Various frameworks, policies and laws have been established to address this issue. Some of such frameworks, policies and regulations passed to address the inequalities in higher education and achieve transformation 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 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 agents and structure to actualize such changes.

Among the various chapters in the Higher Education Act, 1997, the one with morphogenetic power is in Chapter 4, which provides the governance framework in higher education in the Republic. The governance structure provides the way, manner and form of decision making. It is about who makes decisions and how and why they are taken. This chapter of the Act is germane to attaining its objectives because it provides frameworks and structures through which agents would make decisions. In addition, it provides that 60% of the Council of a university should come from outside the university, most of them being appointed by the government. At first glance, it may portend an attempt by the government to control the management of the universities surreptitiously. On the other hand, it marks a sound and standard practice because it ensures independence from



management and further engenders oversight over the management. This, the study would argue is good because the practice is similar to the governance structure of the private sector, where the majority of the board of directors is independent (Chen et al., 2013).

One issue concerning the governance structure of the universities as enshrined in the Higher Education Act, 1997 is its failure to accommodate the institutional context of the universities. The Act provides a standardized governance structure for each university, eliminating different sets of rules and criteria for each university. This is to have centralized governance to redress inequity between institutions. This practice limits the influence of culture on the agents of the universities: no room for feelings, beliefs and perceptions. Therefore, a committee exists to make decisions based on policies, procedures, and rules, which must be applied consistently, repeatable, and legitimately. Here, gender, race and social class do not influence decision-making.

At this point, the question is: what dominates governance in the Chapter 4 of the Higher Education Act of 1997. Is it Structure, Culture or Agency? The preceding discussion based on the prescripts of the content of the Act suggests that structure is a dominant force in the Act and then followed by the agency. Therefore, the Act, especially Chapter 4, is designed for morphogenesis because it enhances the capacity of 'agency' (management, senate and council) to change the structure. This is because the Act allows Council and Senate to review rules and statutes if not aligned with the Act; hence, it is deemed to enhance the agency's capacity to change the structure. One important and interesting issue is how the Act accommodates culture. Unfortunately, little room is made for culture; however, it sometimes overpowers agency and structure. For example, the universities' Senate, Council and management sometimes yield to the demand of the student representation councils (SRC). The SRCs achieve this through demonstration, which is a cultural element. In this case, it can be concluded that culture and agency mostly override structure in South African higher education institutions. Whether the governance structure has achieved its intended purpose is an open question. However, it creates a good structure for agents to accomplish their morphogenetic tasks.

The White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2014 is another significant policy that governs higher education in South Africa. Its strategic goal is to increase the post-secondary education and training system's capacity to satisfy South Africa's needs. The framework provided policy guidelines to guide the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and the numerous institutions it oversees in helping to create a developing nation with a thriving democracy and economy. In addition, the White Paper lists the following policy goals: a post-school system that can help create a just, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist, and democratic South Africa; a single coordinated post-school education and training system; increased access, improved quality, and increased diversity of provision; a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace; and a post-school education and training system. The White paper has provided adequate structures to ensure effective functioning of higher education institutions in the country. However, the agents to use these structures were not clearly defined in the White Paper, thus leaving a yawning gap in its implementation. Once more, the White Paper has no morphogenetic objective because it is only about structure without defining the agents and how they would use the structures to impact society to achieve transformation.

Another important policy document that guides the South African higher education is the National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers, 2018. The Framework's goal is to direct systemic efforts across higher education to advance academics' teaching skills and recognition by fostering better coordination and integration, increased collaboration, and uniform

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARGARET ARCHER'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Haruna Maama

and equitable access to opportunities at various phases of their professional careers. This framework clearly states what is expected from academics in South African universities. The framework also has an advocacy role that focuses on nurturing, supporting and developing academics as university teachers. The University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG) and the University Capacity Development Program (UCDP) are critical enablers of the requirements at diverse institutions in various ways. The framework provides a clear structure for the agents (academics) to achieve their objectives. Therefore, to ensure that university investments have the expected consequences, university lecturers or academics are to perform several duties. They are under a great deal of pressure because of this. Academics are generally believed to have three primary responsibilities: lecturing or teaching, conducting research and handling administrative duties (Marlita et al., 2021). Academics are likewise expected to include community engagement as their primary responsibilities. Nonetheless, the framework is flexible, which permits various universities to align their strategic objectives with the whole or parts of the framework. This suggests an interplay between structure, agency and culture. Here, the policy provides structures for the universities to develop responsibilities and roles for lecturers.

In theoretical terms, the higher education policies and frameworks meet the agent's status in the process described by the policies, especially the Higher Education Act 1997. In this particular case, the management and other agents of the universities can make independent decisions on behalf of the universities. In addition, academics can discharge their roles, reflecting the structure of the universities and independently or separately from the processes defined by the management team (agency). It is clear here that agency is living its own morphogenetic process. Regarding the analysis of the structures and their disposition, various regulatory authorities are part of the university structure that conditions the universities based on financial, educational standards and monitoring and control procedures. The analyses further show the presence of two cultural conditions in higher education in South Africa conditioned by policies. The first is a bureaucratic culture, where the universities are recognized as part of a national system. They have the function of implementing the educational norm and policy definition for public establishments. The second is a performance culture, in which the quality of the university is presently based on the results they obtain from different indicators, especially learning measurements (professional exams such as SAICA, law and other professional bodies) and research output.

7. POLICY DIRECTIVES, SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION AND INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

The various higher education policies in South Africa reflected transformational agenda. As stated in the preamble of the Higher Education Act of 1997, one of the goals of higher education was the reorganization and transformation of "programs and institutions to better respond to the human resource, economic and development demands of the Republic" (Swartz & Foley, 1996). Moreover, the South African government committed to gradually implementing free university education for the underprivileged in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training; Building an Expanded, Effective, and Integrated Post-School System, published in 2014. These emphasize the fact that the various educational policies sought to bring about transformation. The question is whether the higher education policies have achieved societal transformation. In the preceding paragraphs, the study analyzed the connection between the factors related to the policy directives in terms of structure and agency and the interaction between these strata. The next



paragraphs then assess whether the structure and the agents have favoured or constricted the transformation agenda of higher education in South Africa.

Concerning structural conditioning, the universities' governance structure favours improving the universities. On the contrary, inadequate financial provisions for students is considered a factor that constricts the improvement process. For instance, due to financial challenges, there is about 50% dropout rate of first-year students in South African Higher institutions (Govender, 2020). This may be a problem of structure, where no funding system is provided to the students. In addition, this may also be a problem of culture where the students do not take their studies seriously.

Concerning educational policies, their implementation involved the generation of a set of expectations for improvement, which has been problematic over time. This is particularly clear about the vague funding model that the policies provide. It is essential to acknowledge that some of the most relevant efforts for higher education transformation were made in the context of the work carried out by the government in respect of the NSFAS and NRF funding for undergraduate and postgraduate students, respectively. Notably, the percentage of government resources spend on education is among the highest in the world. This further shows the government's genuine commitment to societal transformations. However, their application and implementation are nothing short of bizarre.

In terms of the structural factors of a cultural type, it is generally claimed that universities are not producing the skills needed by the industry. Thus, an alarming 67 percent of South Africa's unemployed are young, proving that the country's new educational system is failing to adequately prepare the next generation for the workforce. Therefore, it would seem that there is a gap between the skills required by industry and the curriculum developed and taught by universities. Young people lament the lack of work opportunities whilst business leaders lament the difficulty in hiring qualified candidates. There is unquestionably a problem with the pedagogy and curriculum used in higher education. This can be due to a lack of engagement between the government, the industry and the higher education institutions. These three groups must establish a forum for discussion to find a long-lasting solution to policy formulation and implementation misalignment.

As a result, the policies have fallen short of their intended goal of fostering a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace, as well as being responsive to the needs of individuals, employees and private sectors, as well as the broader societal and developmental goals. Importantly, the elements mentioned are framed in a set of historical characteristics (inherited) of geographical, social and economic type of the environment and the characteristics of students and their families, which further challenges the higher education transformational processes.

A look at the Ministry of Education's 2004 funding framework reveals that the higher education teaching output grant is based on the number of graduates that a public higher education institution produces. This is supported by the inputs of the budget allocation in the Ministerial Statement on University Funding, 2019, which indicates the teaching output grant is based on the number of an institution's graduates. This performance measurement metric in higher education encourages massification, with little focus on transformation. Among other things, it is important to state that public higher education institutions should be required to perform tracer studies of their graduates to determine whether the curriculum of their programs is still relevant to the human resource and economic needs of the Republic. This is relevant because it provides information on the needs for the programmes offered by these universities. For instance, Shongwe and Ochola

Haruna Maama

(2011) found that half of the Library and Information Science graduates from the University of Zululand were not happy with the qualification and the overall curriculum offered.

In terms of the Framework for Qualifications Standard in Higher Education issued by the Council on Higher Education (CHE); proposed qualification standards in higher education should not dictate the design of programmes for institutions. By implication, higher education institutions should use their autonomy in determining the appropriate design of the programmes they offer. In the meantime, the following essential issues need to be addressed. Should public higher education institutions take the responsibility to contribute towards bridging the Republic's skills shortage actively? What level of commitment do the institutions take in graduates' unemployment rate or lack of entrepreneurial skills? How dynamic are public higher education institutions in responding to changes in the economy's needs?

8. CONCLUSION

The study assessed the transformative effects of South African higher education using the analytical logic of Margaret Archer's morphogenetic theory. A desktop document analysis review approach was adopted. The document analysis demonstrated that the higher education policy documents do not engender transformation, which is accompanied by a lack of commitment from the various agents to see that the objectives of the policies are fulfilled. At the agency level, there was a weakness in fulfilling their mandates, especially from the side of the government and their regulatory institutions. This has led to a generalized image of instability in higher education as a result of student protests, which is a cultural issue. That is to say, transformation has not been achieved as a result of the interaction between structural and cultural conditions and the agency in the framework of how universities operate. The study found that there is the absence of morphogenesis processes since no significant changes have been identified in the agency strata, social and cultural structure, and all the interrelationships between those strata.

Given the foregoing, it was particularly clear from the morphogenetic perspective that the predicted influence of policies, mechanisms, or even significant financial resources may have a lower impact on the transformation process than envisaged. These findings contribute to the understanding that higher education transformation can occur in temporary processes that are different from policy definitions. The evidence implies that higher educational policies should delve deeper into a more detailed analysis of the specific and contextualized definition of what it asks of them. This situation suggests that the policy should analyze the precise and contextualized description of what it requires of them in greater depth. This involves championing inclusivity and accessibility in higher education. In this context, a transformed higher education must be affordable, decolonized and of 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, there is the need for a new reality, policy and structures to permit contributions from different voices.



REFERENCES

- Archer, M. S., & Morgan, J. (2020). Contributions to realist social theory: An interview with Margaret S. Archer. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 19(2), 179-200.
- Archer, M. S. (2018). Educational politics: a model for their analysis. In *Politics and educational change* (pp. 29-56). Routledge.
- Archer, M. S., & Archer, M. S. (1995). *Realist social theory: The morphogenetic approach*. Cambridge university press.
- Badat, S. (2010). The challenges of transformation in higher education and training institutions in South Africa. *Development Bank of Southern Africa*, 8(1), 1-37.
- Chen, V. Z., Li, J., & Shapiro, D. M. (2011). Are OECD-prescribed “good corporate governance practices” really good in an emerging economy? *Asia Pacific Journal of Management*, 28(1), 115-138.
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (1997). *Higher Education Act of 1997*. Government of South Africa
- Department of Higher Education and Training. (2014). *White paper for Post-school Education and Training*. Government of South Africa
- Francis, D., & Webster, E. (2019). Poverty and inequality in South Africa: critical reflections. *Development Southern Africa*, 36(6), 788-802.
- Govender, C. M. (2020). Hopes, Challenges and Goals—Voices of First-Year At-Risk Higher Education Students in South Africa. *South African Review of Sociology*, 51(1), 55-69.
- Griffiths, D. (2019). #FeesMustFall and the decolonized university in South Africa: Tensions and opportunities in a globalizing world. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 94, 143-149.
- Hall, D. M., & Steiner, R. (2020). Policy content analysis: Qualitative method for analyzing sub-national insect pollinator legislation. *MethodsX*, 7, 1-7.
- Heleta, S. (2016). Decolonization of higher education: Dismantling epistemic violence and Eurocentrism in South Africa. *Transformation in Higher Education*, 1(1), 1-8.
- Hill, C., & Lawton, W. (2018). Universities, the digital divide and global inequality. *Journal of higher education policy and management*, 40(6), 598-610.
- Hlatshwayo, M. N., & Shawa, L. B. (2020). Towards a critical re-conceptualization of the purpose of higher education: the role of Ubuntu-Currere in re-imagining teaching and learning in South African higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 39(1), 26-38.
- Jooste, N., & Hagenmeier, C. (2022). Policy Framework for the Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa: A Compass for Comprehensive Internationalisation?. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 1-21.
- Karasev, D. (2022). The problem of structure and agency and the contemporary sociology of revolutions and social movements. In *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century* (pp. 201-217). Springer, Cham.
- Karlsson, J. C. (2020). Refining Archer’s account of Agency and organization. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 19(1), 45-57.
- Khirfan, L., Peck, M., & Mohtat, N. (2020). Systematic content analysis: A combined method to analyze the literature on the daylighting (de-culverting) of urban streams. *MethodsX*, 7, 1-14.

THE TRANSFORMATIVE EFFECT OF SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION POLICY FRAMEWORKS THROUGH THE LENS OF MARGARET ARCHER'S SOCIOLOGICAL CONCEPTS

Haruna Maama

- Koloba, H. A. (2017). Perceived employability of university students in South Africa. Is it related to employability skills? *International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanity Studies*, 9(1), 73-90.
- Loveday, V. (2018). The neurotic academic: Anxiety, casualisation, and governance in the neoliberalising university. *Journal of Cultural Economy*, 11(2), 154-166.
- Marlita, D., Marampa, A. M., Setyawati, S. M., & Indrayanto, A. (2021). The Effect of Transformation Leadership on Organizational Performance through the Strong Lecturer Engagement. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 58(2), 4595-4605.
- Matukane, M. M., & Bronkhorst, S. (2017). Student funding model used by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) at universities in South Africa. *The Journal of Internet Banking and Commerce*, 22(2), 1-20.
- Mheta, G., Lungu, B. N., & Govender, T. (2018). Decolonization of the curriculum: A case study of the Durban University of Technology in South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*, 38(4), 1-7
- Motala, E., & Pampallis, J. (2020). Educational law and policy in post-apartheid South Africa. In *The State, Education and Equity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (pp. 14-31). Routledge.
- Mutch, A. (2017). Margaret Archer and a morphogenetic take on strategy. *Critical Perspectives on Accounting*, 1-28.
- Mzangwa, S. T. (2019). The effects of higher education policy on transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. *Cogent Education*, 6(1), 1-15.
- Newman, J. (2020). Critical realism, critical discourse analysis, and the morphogenetic approach. *Journal of Critical Realism*, 19(5), 433-455.
- Nudelman, G. (2021). Using agential morphogenesis to track professional identity development in higher education. *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*, 9(1), 78-94.
- Shongwe, M., & Ocholla, D. N. (2011). A tracer study of LIS graduates at the University of Zululand, 2000-2009. *Mousaion*, 29(2), 227-245.
- Shumar, W. (2013). *College for sale: A critique of the commodification of higher education*. Routledge.
- Slemming, F. (2019). Developing agency in a writing centre context: A Social Realist interpretation. *Stellenbosch Papers in Linguistics Plus (SPiL Plus)*, 57, 149-168.
- Swartz, E and Foley, P (1996), Higher education in South Africa: the skills debate, *Education and Training*, 38(9), 34-40
- Vega, L. F. D. L. (2020). The educational improvement analysed from the contributions of the sociology of Margaret Archer: a case study. *Revista Brasileira de Educação*, 1-25.
- Vogler, G. (2016). Power between habitus and reflexivity—introducing Margaret Archer to the power debate. *Journal of political power*, 9(1), 65-82.