Comparing Transformation Disclosure Trends of Publicly Funded Universities in South Africa

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Abstract: More than 25 years into democracy, South Africa's higher educational landscape remains challenged by the slow pace of transformation and the residual inequality of apartheid. We utilize a mixed-methods research approach to analyze, interpret, and compare transformation-related disclosures among publicly funded universities, with reference to their historical apartheid-era categorization. We particularly explore the mechanisms introduced to improve academic access and success of students from previously disadvantaged groups. Moreover, we identify the challenges that have contributed to the slow pace of transformation. ATLAS.ti was used to analyze and interpret the transformation-related disclosures in publicly available annual reports of the universities included in this study. We find that historically advantaged universities tend to disclose more support mechanisms, but historically disadvantaged ones face greater infrastructural challenges. We offer a unique perspective on the transformation support mechanisms and challenges experienced by public universities in South Africa based on their historical classification.

Keywords: apartheid-era categorization, publicly funded universities in South Africa, stakeholders, transformation disclosures.

INTRODUCTION

"In a society that continues to have a strong political will to transform itself by combating forms of social exclusion historically defined by race, gender and class inequalities, the inability of the education system to produce graduates breeds new forms of social exclusion, exclusion from living meaningful lives as critical citizens and playing a part in the mainstream economy" (Cele & Menon, 2006).

From the onset of South Africa's democracy, several changes were implemented to the higher education landscape to redress historical inequities. This included merging several universities, to facilitate transformation and improve access to higher education and provide financial support for those considered 'previously disadvantaged' (National Commission on Higher Education South Africa, 1996). The transformation mandate stemmed from the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, in 1996. This gave rise to the introduction of various policies such as the Framework for Transformation produced by the National Commission on Higher Education in 1996, and more recently the White Paper on Post-school Education and

Training, approved by the Cabinet on 20 November 2013. There are presently 26 publicly funded universities in South Africa (Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa, 2014), categorized as either historically advantaged universities (HAUs), or historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs), differentiated by the infrastructure and funding provided before democracy (Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa, 2013). However, following the mergers, these transformation goals remain largely unrealized, because many of the universities entered the democratic era with visible differences in their material, cultural and social positions prior to democracy (Jansen, 2003), making it appropriate to differentiate between HAUs and HDUs. Although both HAUs and HDUs experience challenges relating to transformation, the nature of these challenges differs according to a combination of the demographics of the student body, as well as the legacy resources at each university, thus requiring different the mechanisms to optimize transformation, from the perspective of access to university education and to ensure successful completion of studies by students, from previously disadvantaged groups.

Social transformation represents a component of Elkington's (1998) triple bottom line, albeit comparatively newer than environmental and economic reporting, but remains particularly pertinent to fulfilling normative stakeholder expectations of transparency and accountability (IoD, 2016; IoD, 2009; Mckenzie, 2004; Önder & Baimurzin, 2020). Scholars suggest that organizations respond to these stakeholder expectations through the provision of appropriate voluntary disclosures in their annual reports; particularly since specific sustainability reports are seldom produced and given the low adoption rate of integrated reports (Brusca et al., 2018). In recognizing that South African universities fall within the public sector and are primarily funded through state subsidies, with a mandate to facilitate transformation in education, increases the expectation that universities should comprehensively account to stakeholders (Department of Higher Education and Training South Africa, 2014; INTOSAI 2013). The primary theoretical underpinning for this study is, therefore, stakeholder theory, which incorporates the fundamental principle of public accountability.

Stakeholder theory relates to the intention and responsibility of organizations to account to stakeholders for the value they create or destroy (Freeman et al., 2004). Stakeholder theory thus supports the rights of stakeholders and introduces the need for greater accountability. Stakeholder interests are regarded as critically important and are addressed through the adoption of effective stakeholder engagement and the implementation of good corporate governance practices (Isnurhadi et al., 2020). Accountability relates to how organizations effectively account to their various legitimate stakeholders, about how they have discharged their responsibilities (Fernando & Lawrence, 2014), which is particularly important in the public sector (Flak & Rose, 2005; Landrianni & Russo, 2013). This has led to calls for increased transparency and accountability relating to their corporate social responsibility (CSR) disclosures (Abeysekera, 2013; Fernando & Lawrence, 2014; Önder & Baimurzin, 2020; Rensburg & Botha, 2014), which in turn enhances the organisation's reputation and contributes to increased perceptions of organizational legitimacy (Usman, 2020).

Transformation in higher education remains topical and relevant to both local and international stakeholders, including government, students, and donors (Adonis & Silinda, 2021). Despite the adoption and implementation of several policies and plans to accelerate transformation, the rate of success remains low, with many universities becoming increasingly financially dependent on state subsidies (Adonis & Silinda, 2021; Nongwa & Carelse, 2014; SAHRC, 2017). Cele & Menon (2006) suggest that social inclusion at higher education institutions depends on the complexity of the factors in policies and their implementation. However, the former Principal and Vice Chancellor of the University of South Africa noted that little scholarly research adequately addresses the transformation efforts of universities (Makhanya, 2019). This gives rise to the question of how the universities compare in disclosing their transformation initiatives? Thus, the objective of this paper is to

identify and compare the transformation disclosure trends of South African publicly funded universities, with a secondary objective of differentiating between the disclosures of universities classified as HAUs and HDUs.

The South African higher education environment remains at the center of dissatisfaction, especially by students finding themselves unable to access or succeed at universities, thereby impeding their ability to achieve their career potential. Research into transformation at universities remains broad with an emphasis on overall transformation, challenges in achieving transformation, restructuring of the higher education sector, and in relation to student identity (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Cele & Menon, 2006; Cross & Johnson, 2008; Makhanya, 2019; Moja & Cloete, 2017). However, prior research does not appear to effectively compare the transformation interventions disclosed by the different universities, particularly within the context of the HAUs and HDUs classification, thus providing the important gap that this paper attempts to address. In the light of what stakeholders need and expect from universities, as well as their demand for greater transparency and accountability, this study is informed by stakeholder theory incorporating the principles of public accountability.

Adonis & Silinda (2021) confirm the slow pace of transformation in the South African higher education sector and support the call for the additional disclosure and communication of the mechanisms introduced to stimulate transformation, as well as to identify the challenges that impair transformation. Within this context, it should be noted that the institutional resources available to the different universities, significantly impact their ability to adopt and effectively execute the interventions necessary to support access to, and success in tertiary studies, by students from previously disadvantaged groups. Acknowledging that all universities differ in structure, as well as financial, academic, and infrastructural resources, effective transformation at these universities introduces different challenges that require a variety of agile approaches. Moreover, the legacy issues arising from the socio-economic conditions that affected South African universities prior to democracy, continue to have a pervasive impact on the availability of resources at the various universities (Barac, 2015). Residual demographic inequity between HAUs and HDUs remain, caused by factors such as entrenched acceptance or exclusionary criteria that existed prior to democracy (Badat, 2016), requiring different responses to support access to, or successful completion of studies, by students from previously disadvantaged groups. The discriminatory way in resources were and continue to be allocated during and after the official demise of apartheid, such as infrastructure and funding for example, present serious challenges that impede successful transformation (Manik, 2015; SAHRC, 2017). Additional factors such as social and academic barriers further impact effective transformation (Barac, 2015). This concurs with the views of scholars such as Wilson-Strydom (2011), who recognize that increasing access, without a reasonable opportunity of success, simply represents social exclusion in another form, confirming the appropriateness of the approach adopted by this paper to identify and evaluate the mechanisms introduced for both access and success. Extant research identifies social and academic barriers, such as funding, inferior primary and secondary school education, poor mathematical literacy, language differences and institutional cultures, as major challenges that must be overcome (Barac, 2015; Crous, 2017; Matsolo et al., 2018; SAHRC, 2017).

The transformation interventions adopted by publicly funded universities are guided by legislation, frameworks, and objectives (SAHRC, 2017). Research into transformation of the South African higher education sector, has tended to focus on language policies, shared dialogue (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Kamsteeg, 2016; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012; SAHRC, 2017), and the contribution of information and communications technology (ICT) which is considered important for supporting transformation initiatives in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (Jones et al., 2017). Although Ngidi (2007) found strong agreement between both lecturers and students about the factors that contribute to success in university studies, they had differing perspectives about the factors resulting in failure at university, particularly noting a need for increased communication between universities and students.

The primary goal of HDU transformation is therefore not necessarily about transforming student demographics, but rather about ensuring successful completion of studies, which remains a challenge, given the residual inequities in resource allocation. Furthermore, previously disadvantaged students, both at HAUs and HDUs, often face systemic barriers, such as language difficulties or poor school preparation, especially when compared to their counterparts from more privileged communities (Carolissen & Bozalek, 2017), increasing the need to implement alternative mechanisms. However, Africa & Mutizwa-Mangiza (2018) caution that using the term historically disadvantaged, when referring to universities, could have the opposite effect. While on the one hand the HDU classification allows these universities to receive higher funding from the government, on the other hand, the term may stigmatize these universities, specifically for potential donors, which may in turn inhibit institutional transformation.

Although HAUs may appear to increase the number of students from previously disadvantaged communities, these larger numbers still do not proportionately represent the demographic profile of the South African population (Manik, 2015; SAHRC, 2017), suggesting that more robust mechanisms are necessary. Furthermore, research undertaken by the University of the Witwatersrand reveals that strategies such as those facilitating the development of a more inclusive culture at a HAU are insufficient to be effective in a large base of students. Alternative strategies such as mediation, negotiation, and shared meaning about the campus experience, are thus required (Cross & Johnson, 2008). The challenges reflected above, which impair the effectiveness of transformation policies and practices, suggest that more innovative and agile mechanisms are required, thereby increasing the relevance of this topic.

The observations emerging from this study offer important insights into the different transformation initiatives, challenges, and goals of the various universities. It also provides a platform for those charged with governance at the respective universities, to not only the identify areas where their transformation performance could be improved, but also to indicate how they could enhance their accountability disclosures to their legitimate stakeholders. In addition, the relevant Government ministry and department, could use the findings to develop and introduce additional mechanisms to accelerate meaningful transformation.

METHODS

This paper deployed a mixed-methods research approach involving both qualitative and quantitative components to collect, analyze and interpret comparative transformation disclosure trends published in publicly available reports of South African publicly funded universities, as well as to compare between the relative transformation performance of HAUs and HDUs. The mixed-methods research approach increases the reliability of the observations emerging from this method (Pan et al., 2008).

The study commenced with a review of pertinent scholarly literature relating to transformation challenges, and the mechanisms available to South African universities, to support the transformation of the student body. This provided the preliminary framework for the study, which was updated with additional challenges and mechanisms subsequently identified through a thematic content analysis of the annual reports of the publicly funded universities included in the study. Although South Africa presently has 26 publicly funded universities, purposive sampling was used to select the 16 universities accredited by the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) to provide the academic component of the Chartered Accountant Training Program. The study used the 2015 annual reports of these universities which were the most recent available on the respective university websites at the point of data analysis. However, despite being SAICA accredited, since the non-financial information of North-West University and Walter Sisulu University were not publicly available at the time, they were excluded.

The publicly annual reports obtained directly from the websites of the publicly funded universities included in the study provide the primary data for this study. Using ATLAS.ti software, codes and themes were identified and collected through inductive and deductive coding. The data emanating from the codes and themes were further analyzed according to whether the respective universities would be classified as HAUs and HDUs, improving the homogeneity of the data of the universities with similar characteristics (Etikan et al., 2016). The data were further analyzed using the 'count coding' function on ATLAS.ti to ensure the alignment with the research objectives. The suitability of the research approach adopted for this study are confirmed by Ceulemans et al. (2015) and Wilmshurst & Frost (2000), who similarly qualitatively analyzed annual and sustainability reports.

Systematic coding and theme identification was used to subjectively analyze and interpret the observations from the qualitative content analysis of the textual content (Bowen, 2009; Cho & Lee, 2014). This process involved three steps: first, the code was generated, reviewed, and revised within the context of the study, and with respect to the reliability of the code (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011). Second, inductive coding was subsequently used to include additional codes emerging from the annual reports (Smit, 2002). Third, ATLAS.ti was used to count and compare the study data for each university using the identified codes and themes. The narratives were used to identify similarities and differences in the observations of the various universities, simultaneously highlighting the differences between HAUs and HDUs. Pertinent excerpts from the annual reports were also used to substantiate the findings.

The research method and design allowed for replicability, thus supporting reliability. Bias was avoided by using a sample displaying similar characteristics and by consistently evaluating all non-financial content contained in the 2015 annual reports. Furthermore, recent relevant literature guided the formulation of the preliminary framework used for the initial coding. Trustworthiness was achieved using techniques of reflexivity, triangulation, and referential adequacy. The detailed literature and content analysis supported triangulation and referential adequacy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the content analysis of the non-financial annual report disclosures of the various universities included in the study, are presented in the tables below. These results are subsequently analyzed, interpreted and discussed within the context of the major themes emerging from the study, supported with appropriate extracts of the annual report narrative disclosures. Table 1 provides a quantitative comparison of the relative mean transformation disclosures of the HAUs and HDUs, reflecting their respective transformation disclosure trends.

Table 1 Relative Mean Transformation Disclosures of HAUs and HDUs

	Access Initiatives Gr=82; GS=88	Challenges Gr=67; GS=69	Success Initiatives Gr=127; GS=128	Transformation Mandate Gr=34; GS=32	Totals
Historically advantaged universities Gr=579; GS=10	7.6	4.7	10.9	2.9	26.1
Historically disadvantaged universities Gr=106; GS=4	7.25	5.25	12.5	3.75	28.75
Average	14.85	9.95	23.4	66.5	54.85

Whereas Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of the transformation disclosures of the individual universities categorized as HAUs, Table 3 reflects the breakdown for universities categorized as HDUs.

Table 2 Quantitative Comparison of Publicly Funded Universities Categorized as HAUs

	Access Initiatives Gr=82; GS=88	Challenges Gr=67; GS=69	Success Initiatives Gr=127; GS=128	Transformation Mandate Gr=34; GS=32	Totals
Stellenbosch University (US) Gr=117	18	9	24	8	59
University of Cape Town (UCT) Gr=45	1	5	3	0	9
University of Johannesburg (UJ) Gr=106	10	4	22	3	39
University of South Africa (UNISA) Gr=33	0	3	1	4	8
University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) Gr=82	8	4	9	0	21
Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) Gr=55	7	7	12	0	26
Rhodes University (RHODES) Gr=37	2	6	2	0	10
University Of Kwazulu-Natal (UKZN) Gr=41	15	5	14	5	39
University of Pretoria (UP) Gr=50	14	3	15	6	38
University of the Free State (UFS) Gr=13	1	1	7	3	12
Totals	76	47	109	29	261

Table 3 Quantitative Comparison of Publicly Funded Universities Categorized as HDUs

	Access Initiatives Gr=82; GS=88	Challenges Gr=67; GS=69	Success Initiatives Gr=127; GS=128	Transformation Mandate Gr=34; GS=32	Totals
University of Fort Hare (UFH) Gr=31	18	9	24	8	59
University of the Western Cape (UWC) Gr=32	1	5	3	0	9
University of Limpopo (UL) Gr=24	10	4	22	3	39
University of Zululand (UNIZULU) Gr=19	0	3	1	4	8
Totals	29	21	50	15	115

Table 4 collectively reflects the funding initiatives disclosed by HAUs and HDUs to facilitate transformation.

Table 4 Funding Initiatives to Support Transformation of the Student Body

	Historically advantaged universities Gr=579; GS=10	Historically disadvantaged universities Gr=106; GS=4	Totals
Cumulative funding initiatives Gr=42; GS=43	33	9	42
Mean funding initiatives	3.3	2.25	3

As described below, the primary themes emerging from this study relating to the transformation initiatives disclosed by the selected universities include funding, ICT enhancements, institutional change, leadership, language policies, student support mechanisms, as well as the other mechanisms, which support academic access and success.

Theme 1: Funding Initiatives

As reflected in table 4, 42 transformation related funding initiatives were collectively identified in the 14 annual reports examined. Interestingly, when examining the respective disclosures of HAUs and HDUs, it was noted that the mean funding initiatives of HAUs are almost 50% higher than that of HDUs, at 3.3 per HAU compared to 2.25 per HDU. It is submitted that this variance may be attributed to two factors: first, HAUs still have greater access to resources; and second, to reduce the impact of legacy inequities, HAUs have a greater need to transform. However, both HAUs and HDUs disclosed similar funding needs and expressed an urgent need for increased funding. In their narrative disclosures, all universities referred to challenges caused by declining state subsidies, NSFAS funding and other income, which hamper the ability of previously disadvantaged students to access and succeed at tertiary academic institutions. All universities relied extensively on state subsidies, and particularly on funding from the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to increase academic access and success of financially disadvantaged individuals, which is consistent with the findings of other studies (Africa & Mutizwa-Mangiza, 2018; Badat, 2016; Nongwa & Carelse, 2014).

Confirming their greater access to resources, HAUs revealed that additional funding was obtained from alumni funds (NMMU, UP); council funds (UKZN, NMMU, RHODES, WITS); own university sourced bursary pools (RHODES, UCT, UKZN, UP, SU, UJ); leadership donations (UKZN, NMMU, RHODES); philanthropic organizations and individuals (SU, UJ, UKZN, UP, NMMU, RHODES, UCT, WITS) to assist previously disadvantaged students. Together with their student representative councils (SRCs) and university trusts (UJ, UKZN, WITS), some universities disclosed additional bursary sources including those funding the 'missing middle' as well as non-NSFAS students (UJ, UP). For example, some of the funding sources representing new mechanisms by the University of Johannesburg, include the UJSRC Trust Fund bursaries for 'missing middle' students and the UJSRC and university management partnership to assist non-NSFAS students with the initial minimum payment, as well as the University of the Witwatersrand's WITSSRC funding drives, which raised ZAR 1 million[1] in one month. The Annual Report of the University of Johannesburg (p.27) discloses that:

"The University recognizes that many potential and current students cannot afford university fees and we will thus continue with the support that we provide for our students through, inter alia, the top-up to the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to the value of ZAR45 million; the ZAR12 million UJSRC Trust Fund that supports students who, due to inadequate NSFAS funds, are unable to finance their university studies;

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1   USD 1 equals approximately ZAR 16 on 17 June 2022.

through financial support from private and public sources of R38 million to students in the so-called 'missing middle' – these are students who do not qualify for NSFAS but whose family income is simply insufficient to finance their studies through loans; and, through its support of our R10 million that funds two meals a day to 3 500 financially needy students. Moreover, we are pursuing, with vigor every conceivable avenue to assist our students with the financial means to excel at university."

As explained above, not unexpectedly, HDUs disclosed fewer sources of additional funding, which included alumni funds (UFH); own university funding (UNIZULU, UWC) and philanthropic organizations (UNIZULU, UWC). The University of Limpopo also disclosed funds generated from third-stream partnerships through the University of Limpopo Trust. However, the greater need to redress legacy resource imbalances implies HDUs also receive higher state subsidies (Africa & Mutizwa-Mangiza, 2018).

Theme 2: Information and Communications Technology (ICT) Enhancements
The use of ICT to enhance both teaching and learning was evident across many HAUs (NMMU, SU, UKZN), with student-oriented ICT enhancements also identified at a HDU (UFH). Most residential universities emphasized the importance of their rollout of Wi-Fi and LAN across their campuses and residences (NMMU, SU, UFH, UKZN) (Badat & Sayed, 2014; SAHRC, 2017; Elangovan et al., 2021).

Some HAUs introduced financial aid to increase students' ownership of laptops or tablet devices (NMMU, UCT, UKZN). These devices are primarily used to support the blended learning approach emerging at HAUs (UNISA, SU, UCT, UJ) and at a HDU (UWC), which allow students to download and view recorded lectures at their convenience (NMMU, SU, UCT, UJ, UNISA, UWC). An extract from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's annual report (p.7), illustratively describes the importance of ICT for student learning as:

"ICT forms the backbone of all our business operations and assists in enhancing the learning experience of our students. The blended learning environment has become a key focus area and has grown exponentially over the last few years, with 489% growth in Moodle sites since their inception in 2012. Expansion of our Wi-Fi deployment was enabled with the commissioning of a new wireless LAN controller, providing capacity to be scaled up to 2500 wireless access points. The Wi-Fi deployment at the Postgraduate Student village was completed. The student device initiative saw a total of 220 Windows tablet devices handed over to selected students who are not funded, living off campus, registered for an UG qualification in 2015 and who are at academic risk. Access to technology was further increased through the provision of a new 100-seater lab at Mission Vale Campus and an additional 43-seater computer lab on the Bird Street Campus. Lab Stats, a lab management software package, has been rolled out to the new 24-seater Lab at Sanlam Student Village, to provide ICT Services with utilisation information per station as well as the software being used on machines."

Theme 3: Institutional Change
All universities identified the need for institutional change and the promotion of a more inclusive culture. The need for institutional cultural change at universities and for increased transformation dialogue confirm the observations of scholars such as Badat & Sayed (2014), Kamsteeg (2016) and Mouton et al. (2013). However, studies into student perceptions reveal their dissatisfaction with existing policies, suggesting that on their own, these policies do not sufficiently contribute to effective institutional change. The adoption and implementation of alternative strategies are accordingly required (Cross & Johnson, 2008). HAUs tend to disclose more transformation activities aimed at promoting a more inclusive culture and encouraging open dialogue, since their historical student profiles were primarily 'white' and/or 'Afrikaans', to the exclusion of other South African racial and language groups, and therefore do not accordingly reflect the country's demographics. The greater

need for HAUs to transform is reflected in their higher levels of disclosure of their transformation goals and performance. The major activities at HAUs included student involvement in renaming buildings and residences, changing visual representations of apartheid, for example in pieces of art, and changing ceremonies including graduation music to reflect a more diverse student body, the introduction of several diversity, race and transformation workshops and curriculum renewal to reflect diversity and address student needs (SU, RHODES, UCT, UJ). A pertinent excerpt from the University of Cape Town's annual report (p.29) illustrates their open dialogue to facilitate transformation:

"The most important interventions around institutional climate are conversations and gaining insight into how we see and treat one another. There have been several faculty and departmental forums held to open up such spaces. Some lecturers have created classroom discussions unrelated to their disciplines to encourage students to talk about how they experience the university and their colleagues. As the executive, we have attempted to keep open the space for dialogue and have even accepted disruption at public events and lectures, and extended occupations, in the interest of promoting constructive engagement with all groups. We will continue to do this provided the engagement is lawful, peaceful, and respectful."

Theme 4: Leadership Role

The annual reports of some HAUs (UNISA, UJ, SU), specifically identified the persons responsible for driving transformation, and pledging their commitment to transformation. For example, illustrating their commitment to transformation, Stellenbosch University's annual report (p.14) states:

"In the course of the year, Council's viewpoints as set out above were embodied in various facets of SU activities. In September the Human Resources Committee of the Council approved the inclusion of transformation into the responsibility centre of the Vice-Rector: Community Interaction and Personnel. Consequently, the job title concerned was changed to Vice-Rector: Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel."

While the University of the Witwatersrand acknowledges the importance of appointing a transformation leader, they failed to appoint a senior official to lead their transformation drive. No evidence was found that any other HAU or HDU had considered appointing a senior official to lead their respective transformation initiatives. This observation is of particular concern, since prior research by Badat & Sayed (2014), Kamsteeg (2016) and Mouton et al. (2013), assert that an active leadership role was necessary for achieving effective transformation to ameliorate the observation that many universities do not identify a senior official to assume an active transformation leadership role.

Theme 5: Language Policies

Several HAUs (SU, NMMU, UJ, UKZN, WITS) and one HDU (UL) updated their language policies to include a multilingual approach to teaching. For example, the following excerpt from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's annual report (p.22) refers to: "Multilingualism and language policy implementation through innovative teaching practices". Moreover, Stellenbosch University revealed that for the first time in 2015, English was considered on the same footing as Afrikaans, and that they had introduced interpreters in some Afrikaans lectures for those students who did not understand Afrikaans. Similarly, the University of Johannesburg disclosed that the use of Afrikaans as a language of instruction had been discontinued in certain undergraduate programs. While these observations may appear to support an overall transformed university ideology (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Carolissen & Bozalek, 2017; Kamsteeg, 2016; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012; SAHRC, 2017), it could be argued that migrating to an English oriented monolingual culture is not a sustainable transformation solution, neglecting the need to indigenize and decolonialize.

Theme 6: Student Support Mechanisms

HAUs were found to disclose more mechanisms that support transformation than HDUs, with the University of Johannesburg and the University of the Witwatersrand, disclosing the highest number of mechanisms that support their transformed student demographic profile in 2015. However, despite disclosing several student support mechanisms to drive their transformation interventions, the student demographic profile in 2015 at both Stellenbosch University and the University of Cape Town, was still not representative of the broader South African population. By comparison, since many students at HDUs are from previously disadvantaged communities, their transformation objectives are different, and their need to transform their student body, not as urgent. Since the need for HDUs to transform is accordingly different to that of HAUs, unexpectedly HDUs disclosed fewer mechanisms.

Theme 7: Other Mechanisms to Increase Academic Access and Success

Similarly, to the themes described above, HAUs typically disclosed more mechanisms to improve academic access and success than HDUs. Changes to admissions policies and alternative admissions processes were introduced at HAUs (NMMU, RHODES, UCT) and at one HDU (UL). For example, an excerpt from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University's annual report (p.44) refers to: "Alternative access is provided via the Centre for Access Assessment and Research that assesses students who do not meet the minimum admission criteria."

Additional changes to the normal tuition structure of residential universities were introduced to broaden access through the development of online and blended distance learning qualification programs that are remotely accessible and cheaper when compared to face-to-face tuition methods NMMU, WITS, UCT).

The findings reflected in the themes above, support opportunities to enhance academic access and success identified in the literature, while providing examples of these mechanisms (Badat & Sayed, 2014; Kamsteeg, 2016; Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012; Mouton et al., 2013).

CONCLUSION

The results reveal that all publicly funded universities appear to acknowledge the importance of transformation to their operations, as disclosed in their transformation pledges and the number of activities engaged in to facilitate transformation, albeit exhibiting different levels of reporting. When comparing specific transformation mechanisms, it becomes apparent that the legacy impact of apartheid remains, imposing a greater obligation on HAUs to implement additional support mechanisms and necessitating a greater need for institutional changes. By contrast, HDUs typically disclosed fewer support mechanisms, since it may be argued that they are already considered as 'transformed' from the perspective of their student profile, but experience more infrastructural challenges. From a funding perspective HAUs disclosed more funding initiatives, utilizing both internal and external stakeholders, as well as their SRCs to raise funds. Several universities described how ICT developments were leveraged to enhance their delivery of teaching and learning. Alternative tuition modalities, such as online and blended learning approaches were introduced, optimized by financial support, to allow students to access laptop and tablet devices. The HAU initiatives to change the institutional culture included renaming buildings and residences, introducing race and diversity workshops, curriculum renewal and the increased utilization of visual and sound representations. Amongst the most significant interventions have been the significant changes to language policies by the former 'Afrikaans' universities, which have introduced multilingualism and parallel tuition mediums. Finally, it remains a concern that apart from the University of South Africa, Stellenbosch University and the University of Johannesburg, the remainder of the universities do

not appear to have disclosed that they had identified and appointed a 'transformation champion' to spearhead their transformation efforts. Thus, this paper provides unique insights into how South African publicly funded universities were responding to the transformation imperative. Grouping the universities into apartheid-era categories, provided a platform to not only identify and compare the interventions deployed by the respective universities, as well as their transformation challenges, but also to understand the residual impact of apartheid on their need to transform and the resources at their disposal with which to do so. As such, this paper extends the literature on the disclosure of transformation as a component of CSR reporting, but within a South African publicly funded university context. Not only does it contribute to the growing body of research into this phenomenon, but it also provides useful recommendations that universities and government could adopt to accelerate transformation within their organizations. Although this study has been undertaken in post-apartheid South Africa, and despite South Africa's specific circumstances, the right to education is a fundamental human right, as documented in Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNESCO, 2022). As such, given the challenges continuing to be experienced by students around the world with access to tertiary education, as well as their success, the study results have global implications. We accordingly postulate that publicly funded universities around the world, as well as their governments, should consider developing and implementing appropriate country-specific invention to level the 'playing fields' and make tertiary education more accessible for everyone.

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