

REFLECTING, RENEWING, and REALIGNING:

A baseline study of conceptions
of curriculum transformation
in South African universities



Kirti Menon, Gloria Castrillón, Marcina Singh,
Otilia Chiramba and Shireen Motala

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Contact details

Council on Higher Education (CHE)
No.1 Quintin Brand Street
Persequor Technopark
Brummeria Pretoria
communications@che.ac.za
<https://www.che.ac.za/>

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Advisory Committee:

Professor Vasu Reddy (UFS)

Professor Francois Strydom (UFS)

Dr Britta Zawada (CHE)

Ms Janet van Rhyn (USAf)

Mr Mahlubi Mabizela (USAf)



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Foreword

This research report on curriculum transformation in South African universities was commissioned by the Universities South Africa (USAf) Teaching and Learning Strategy Group in collaboration with the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The research, conducted by the University of Johannesburg, aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how curriculum transformation is conceptualised and implemented across South Africa's public universities. The key aspect of this research was its use of the Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs) from the institutional audits conducted by the CHE between 2021 and 2023, and the rich interviews held with the various stakeholders from across the university sector. The SERs served as the primary source for analysing the narrative accounts and supporting evidence related to the CHE audit standards. The CHE standards emphasise the need for universities to establish and maintain coherent internal quality assurance systems and enable transformation, as outlined in the White Paper (1997; 2013) and in line with the CHE's mandate to oversee transformation in higher education.

The research highlights the complexities and challenges faced by universities in transforming their curricula, particularly in the context of decolonisation, Africanisation, and social justice. As noted in the research, curriculum transformation is often conflated with decolonisation, yet it encompasses a broader range of initiatives aimed at enhancing inclusivity, diversity, and relevance in learning and teaching. The report highlights that "curriculum is a complex construct comprising different elements including content, teaching and learning, all of which intersect with and scaffold each other" (Boyd et al., 2007). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) emphasizes that "curriculum is a powerful lever for changing student performance and wellbeing, and for preparing students to thrive in and shape the future... contributing to a more equitable system" (cited in Akinci & Kurt, 2022, p. 215).

The findings underscore the importance of meaningful stakeholder engagement, including students, educators, and external partners, in driving curriculum change. Despite the progress made, significant barriers remain including resource constraints, institutional resistance and the need for clearer policy guidelines. The analysis of the SERs revealed diverse approaches to curriculum transformation with some institutions focusing on decolonisation and others on broader transformation initiatives. As researchers observed, "the term 'transformation' became ubiquitous in the post-apartheid South African lexicon" (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018), which reflects the broader push for change in the higher education system.

The focus groups for the research provided nuanced insights into the experiences and challenges faced by universities. It was clear from interaction with the different participants that stakeholder engagement on issues of curriculum transformation took different forms at different universities, resulting in a range of responses to how

it was viewed across the different domains in the universities. Systemic challenges, as was noted by one of the focus groups, are only one element of the stumbling blocks to transforming learning and teaching and curriculum.

Overall, the report offers a foundational resource for understanding the current state of curriculum transformation in South Africa through the specific lens of the universities’ experiences. The report provides insights into strategies, challenges, and future directions for higher education, as well as into the diverse approaches to curriculum transformation in evidence across the sector. It underscores the need for continued collaboration and innovation in addressing these complex issues, emphasising that “effective solutions must be grounded in a deep understanding of the underlying factors and principles” driving curriculum transformation.

It is our hope that this research provides a basis for rich and robust discussions on curriculum, transformation and learning and teaching. It has the potential to serve as a portal for further engagements across the sector to address the different nuances of the vexed question of the forms of curriculum transformation in South Africa, and how to prepare for uncertain futures.

It is the intention of the CHE that this research will provide an input into national stakeholder engagements on curriculum transformation, which will lead to the development of a Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) for Curriculum Transformation. This HEPS might in due course form the basis of a themed review conducted by the CHE on Curriculum Transformation or may form part of a themed review on Transformation in Higher Education, more broadly.

Dr Whitfield Green

Chief Executive Officer

Council on Higher Education

1 Introduction

Curriculum is a complex construct comprising different elements including content teaching and learning, all of which intersect with and scaffold each other (Boyd et al., 2007). Curriculum architecture reflects how teaching and learning are structured, organised, weighted, and assessed within the defining parameters of the university and external regulatory environment. Bernstein (1996, p. 47) argues that curricula represent “[h]ow a society selects, classifies, distributes transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control”. Curricula and epistemologies determine how and what students learn to ensure that they develop the knowledge, skills and dispositions needed. Focusing on curriculum redevelopment in post-apartheid South Africa is crucial to social transformation. As echoed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2020), “curriculum is a powerful lever for changing student performance and wellbeing, and for preparing students to thrive in and shape the future... contributing to a more equitable system” (cited in Akinci & Kurt, 2022, p. 215). The research was prompted by Universities South Africa (USAf) through its Teaching and Learning Strategy Group (TLSG), along with the Council on Higher Education (CHE) through its RELATE project. As part of its mandate to monitor and oversee higher education (HE) transformation, the CHE aims to understand how curriculum transformation has been conceptualised across South Africa’s 26 higher education institutions (HEIs). The 26 universities’ Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs) from the institutional audits (2021- 2023) were used as the primary source from which to extrapolate and analyse the narrative accounts and supporting evidence in relation to the CHE audit standards, which are framed by the need for coherent internal quality assurance systems as well as the call for transformation as set out in the White Paper (1997; 2013).

The research sets out a baseline of the status and understanding of curriculum transformation in public universities as it pertains to the period leading up to and during the CHE’s national institutional audit process. Inductive qualitative approaches were applied using the information in the SERs, and quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The analysis of the SERs was followed by focus group discussions, which enriched the understanding of the state of curriculum transformation in public higher education in South Africa. The specific questions identified for exploration are:

- a. What concepts and terms are related to curriculum transformation in the institutional reflections on learning and teaching?
- b. What do institutions understand by the concept of ‘curriculum transformation’ and related concepts that either directly or circuitously align with the concept?
- c. Is decolonisation synonymous with curriculum transformation?
- d. How are current processes, such as programme design, development and review, used to drive curriculum transformation?

e. What are the stumbling blocks that impede curriculum transformation at universities?

As part of this process, the research sought to identify and describe the concepts and terms used to represent the processes of curriculum transformation in South African universities. The project examined how South African universities have conceptualised curriculum transformation. Through exploring the SERs, the research sought to identify the drivers of curriculum transformation, including individuals, groups, organisations, and other factors that influence and initiate these processes. The related question of whether strategies aimed at decolonising the university curriculum are used interchangeably with processes of curriculum transformation and the factors that facilitate or impede curriculum transformation were also explored.

The CHE’s audit focused on universities’ internal quality assurance mechanisms, transformation, social impact and social justice. The role of technology, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) in society, and data analytic capability also formed part of the audit’s exploration. The findings in this report provide a current, up-to-date situational analysis of the SERs’ understandings, processes, and implementation of curriculum transformation at South African universities using documentary and verbal sources. Secondly, identifying the factors that hinder curriculum transformation has helped to reveal critical gaps that need attention. Thirdly, the research examines how different universities deal with the issue of curriculum transformation, illuminating the similarities and differences between various university types. Fourthly, by framing the research within decolonial theories, the research will demonstrate if and how the universities’ SERs address the effects of colonialism and apartheid, impacting how universities define, understand, and promote curriculum transformation and social justice.

2 Methodology

This section sets out the methodology and the study's limitations.

2.1. Desktop Analysis

Desktop analysis involves systematically gathering secondary information from various (online) sources, including books, journal articles, websites, blogs, governmental and nongovernmental publications and statistics to ascertain prevailing trends, conceptions and views on a specific area of interest. The desktop analysis culminated in a literature review on understandings and manifestations of curriculum transformation in HE (see Section 3). More specifically, the desktop analysis highlights the prevailing conceptualisation of curriculum transformation locally and globally, stakeholders and drivers of curriculum transformation in South African HE, and policies that advocate for the realisation of curriculum transformation as a process and outcome.

2.2. Textual Analysis

A textual analysis analyses a text to understand the author's deliberate meaning. This kind of analysis also allows researchers to ascertain elements of power, the intended audience, why the text was written and positioned in a specific way and what was intended by the formulation of the text. The textual analysis in this research analysed the SER from 26 public universities. The texts were analysed in relation to the research questions, with some focus on deviations and outliers in how these reports were formulated and completed. The analysis of the reports also highlighted key findings relating to the conceptualisation of curriculum transformation, the drivers of transformation and the activities related to the pursuit of curriculum transformation at each of the institutions. The analysis included a two-phased approach: a manual initial analysis by the research team and a technical analysis using ATLAS.ti. Each approach was cross-referenced to ascertain converging themes, diverging themes and outliers.

2.3. Focus Groups

In addition, the report draws on the findings of five focus groups conducted with various stakeholders from the 26 public universities. Focus group discussions can be a vital source of information, particularly when exploring views and experiences about a contested issue or concept. Focus groups typically involve a discussion with about five to 12 people (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Cyr (2016) notes that focus groups have three fundamental elements: the individual, the group and the interaction. During the focus groups, the researchers offered sufficient time for individual responses directly with the facilitator and allowed respondents to engage with each other. Responses provided evidence of convergence and divergence in the various institutions' understandings and experiences of curriculum transformation. The data demonstrates that the multiple views and experiences cement curriculum transformation as a contested domain.

Respondents included high-level university management at the level of deputy vice-chancellors (DVCs) and senior representatives from the academic quality/teaching and learning office. A total of 67 respondents participated in the focus groups. The focus groups allowed the researchers to nuance information ascertained in the SERs and provide a more accurate representation of what universities in South Africa are doing concerning curriculum transformation. The SER template used during the institutional audits is acknowledged as limited in the kind of information requested and culminated in a particular and perhaps limited framing.

Ethical clearance for this research was obtained from the CHE Ethics Committee, and ethical conduct was observed. Although respondents participated freely in the focus groups, the anonymity of individuals and institutions is respected and protected. As such, no persons or institutions are explicitly identified in this report. Specific institutional geographical and/or historical markers may challenge anonymisation, and the researchers have tried to minimise these incidences.

3. Literature Review

Curriculum transformation in South African HE has been a complex and multifaceted process, deeply rooted in the country's historical context and ongoing efforts to address past injustices. Since the end of apartheid in 1994, there has been a concerted push to reshape the higher education landscape to reflect better the diverse needs and experiences of all South Africans. This literature review examines the conceptualisation, drivers, and challenges of curriculum transformation in South African universities, focusing on decolonisation, Africanisation, social justice, and responsiveness to global technological and economic shifts. It explores the various policies, stakeholder roles, and institutional initiatives that have shaped the transformation agenda while highlighting the persistent barriers and tensions that continue to impact progress in this critical area of educational reform.

Debates regarding change within South Africa's HE system are replete. The term "transformation" became ubiquitous in the post-apartheid South African lexicon (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). After 1994, studies scrutinised how institutions of higher learning adapted to and addressed racial marginalisation and developed transformation policies to rectify past injustices and reshape higher education to align with national priorities (Mekoa, 2018; Mzangwa, 2019). Globally, the HE landscape has experienced significant changes in response to globalisation, technological advancements, and unique developmental challenges.

Bhudha et al. (2023) note that curriculum transformation has attracted considerable debate and research in recent years. Echoing this, Le Grange et al. (2020) note that while the push for curriculum transformation in South Africa has been there since 1994, the student protests of 2015 and 2016 precipitated a renewed interest in the transformation of universities. Likewise, Menon and Castrillón (2019) argue that decolonisation debates force universities to review the curriculum, teaching and learning and interrogate the prioritisation of Western knowledge. As a result of the student protests, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) announced a summit in October 2015 on the need to transform the curriculum (Mashilo & Govender, 2023).

In general, curriculum transformation refers to reevaluating, restructuring, and revising the content, structure, delivery methods, and goals of an educational curriculum (Bearden, 2022). Jacobs (2010) contends that curriculum transformation aims to address societal changes, emerging needs, and advancements in knowledge and pedagogy to better prepare students for the challenges and opportunities of the future. Ryan and Tilbury (2013) argue that curriculum transformation involves

incorporating new perspectives, technologies, teaching methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches. Curriculum transformation can occur at various levels, including individual courses, programmes, and entire educational systems (Fullan, 2015). Updating course content to reflect current research and industry trends, integrating new technologies to enhance learning experiences, promoting critical thinking and problem-solving skills, fostering inclusivity and diversity, and aligning educational outcomes with the needs of employers and society can all be included in the scope of curriculum transformation (Fink, 2013; Jacobs, 2010). These definitions suggest that curriculum transformation incorporates elements of social justice, compliance and relevant skills development.

Diverse contexts impact the conceptualisation of curriculum transformation differently. For instance, in post-colonial contexts, a central focus has been on recognising formerly marginalised groups, such as Black communities in many African countries (Mzangwa, 2019). In America, transformation has been centred around ensuring that graduates are ready for the market, producing globally competitive graduates (Bassis, 2015). Similarly, in the 1980s-1990s, Brazil underwent curriculum transformation and cultural change, associating HE with cultural processes (Menon & Castrillón, 2019).

Post-colonial states across the African continent have sought to address inherited and embedded Eurocentric ways of learning, teaching and knowledge production (Cross & Ndofirepi, 2017). Moreover, curriculum transformation in Africa has focused on addressing the production of low-quality graduates, graduate unemployment, and graduates' questionable societal contributions. These challenges stem from deep-rooted problems of inequality, poverty, and lost cultural identity. The central drive across Africa has been the decolonisation of these institutions and redressing the past injustices rooted in African colonialism and of apartheid in the case of South Africa (Chiramba & Motala, 2023). As African states transform to deconstruct Western-centric curriculums, the need to transform institutions of higher learning to meet global standards remains imperative (Maringe & Ojo, 2017). Despite curriculum transformation being a key focus in HE, the sustainability of change is questionable (Maringe & Ojo, 2017; Mekoa, 2018; Idahosa, 2019; Menon & Castrillón, 2019). Maringe and Ojo (2017) argue that achieving sustainable transformation will remain a challenge until specific developmental challenges of a country are addressed, such as poverty and inequality. Menon and Castrillón (2019) argue that there is an inherent danger of viewing technical changes to curricula mandated by regulatory bodies as deep curriculum transformation.

The sections below discuss the conceptualisation of curriculum transformation, its markers and associated challenges.

3.1. Conceptualisation of Curriculum Transformation

Change, improvement, and development are often interchangeable with transformation (Chiramba & Motala, 2023). Change involves altering the status quo incrementally, with varying scales and reversibility. Transformation, however, is fundamental and far-reaching, aiming for lasting shifts in beliefs and values. Improvement focuses on making systems more effective and efficient, while development pertains to societal and economic growth. However, these concepts alone do not guarantee transformation. True transformation requires profound cultural and ideological shifts, equity, social justice, equality, political will and an enabling environment. Simply

managing change or enhancing efficiency does not suffice. Genuine transformation in HE demands societal change, not just institutional innovation. It encompasses symbolic, epistemic, and ideological shifts supported by democratic principles (CHE, 2023).

Different concepts such as decolonisation, Africanisation, social justice, responsiveness and reform have been used to understand curriculum transformation (Chiramba & Motala, 2023). The concept has been discussed as complex, demanding and challenging. Goorney et al. (2023) argue that there is a need to answer the questions 'what, why and how' in the conceptualisation of the phenomenon. Buttressing this, Fish (2021) brings to the fore that the question of what needs to be in a transformed curriculum is absent as the focus has been on curriculum structure, the democratisation of knowledge in terms of who has access up until 2008, and then forward in the future curriculum began to emerge under the notion of identity. Mendy and Madiope (2020) highlight that transformation is sometimes used interchangeably with reform and renewal. These authors argued that the concept refers to the practices and processes HE institutions use as part of their social responsibility, engaging with and responding to concerns and problems such as the need for Africanisation and the changes made in teaching and learning content. They further argued that curriculum transformation involves teaching and learning, research investment and engagement and curriculum emancipation for all stakeholders.

Bhudha et al. (2023) conceptualise curriculum transformation as responding to public demand. Within the global context, curriculum transformation is significant and relevant in the contexts of developments, whereas in South Africa, it is about dismantling apartheid given the country's history. This aligns with Mendy and Madiope's (2020) observation that South African HEIs have begun to implement curriculum transformation partly because the educational system the country inherited from its colonial legacy is thought to be unresponsive to the needs of the country and its students' teaching and learning experiences. Key themes in curriculum transformation are linked to the decolonisation of knowledge, which involves challenging Eurocentric perspectives and incorporating diverse epistemologies and ways of knowing (Mbembe, 2016). This includes revising curricular content to reflect Indigenous knowledge systems, histories, and cultures in addition to cultures and other knowledge forms and sources.

Curriculum transformation promotes inclusivity by acknowledging and affirming students' diverse identities and experiences (Banks, 2006). This involves incorporating multicultural perspectives, addressing issues of gender, sexuality, and disability, and fostering critical consciousness about social inequalities. Curriculum transformation aims to advance social justice by addressing inequities in education access and learning opportunities (Apple, 2004). This includes promoting equitable outcomes for students from marginalised backgrounds and challenging structures of power and privilege within educational institutions.

In conceptualising curriculum transformation, Mathibela (2021) emphasised sustainable teaching and learning platforms aligned with the societal needs of today and the future. In the Indonesian context, Lubis et al. (2022) viewed curriculum transformation as an innovation in a challenging digital era and a means to ensure value and quality. Taking cognisance of identity within the African context, Mashilo and Govender (2023, p. 126) posit that transforming the curriculum means changing the organisation of teaching and learning in African universities from the colonial and

Western ideas and injustices underpinning it. Redressing past injustices, responding to the changing environments, claiming identity and ensuring social justice has, therefore, remained significant in different scholars’ conceptualisation of curriculum transformation.

3.2. Decolonisation and Social Justice as Drivers for Curriculum Transformation

Critics have argued that the apartheid regime in South Africa supported an exclusively Western model of education and that university education was based on a monocultural approach with a bias towards Western values and expectations (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). Within the context of decolonisation, there has been a paradigm shift to accommodate a new form of education which is not only supposed to address the imbalances of the past but to be relevant to the 21st-century knowledge economy (Ebewo & Sirayi, 2018). As part of curriculum transformation, decolonisation aims to redress past injustices and achieve relevance in the current market demands. As such, decolonisation is positioned as one aspect of curriculum transformation in postcolonial states.

By analysing transformation reports from seven colleges at UNISA, Mendy and Madiope (2020) noted that the colleges offered decolonised content. There was the removal of content that favoured the minority’s dominance and that made the African content look inferior. This aligned with what Gwandure and Mayekiso (2021) highlighted that decolonisation as part of curriculum transformation entails changing prescribed books, theories and learning content that is based on Western ideas, focusing more on Indigenous African knowledge or issues affecting African countries to be predominant in the curriculum. Moreover, the decolonisation of the curriculum also had to look at all the other causes for the differences in the performance of white and black students. However, like curriculum transformation, Fish (2021) has raised concerns about a decolonised curriculum regarding set standards and how it would look without Western knowledge. In this context, reframing curriculum epistemologies in South Africa and Africa may also have implications for the validity of knowledge in a global context, particularly since globalised knowledge is often equated to liberal, western epistemes and validated using Western mechanisms, such as qualification frameworks.

Thus, the curriculum is not an isolated entity but takes cognisance of the various stakeholders and broader society at large. Echoing this, Menon and Castrillón (2019) and Bhudha et al. (2023) argued that curricula need to be aligned with the expectations of students and their lived experiences. The drive to ensure equity and fairness and address diversity is also a critical marker of meaningful curriculum transformation.

3.3. Africanisation: Curriculum Transformation as Identity-driven

Decolonisation advocates have called for the need to Africanise the curriculum as part of transformation. As a result, there has been a thin line between decolonisation and Africanisation. As Nyoni (2019) noted, African curricula reflect Western ideologies, that have led to curriculum transformation and have centred on African identity inclusion as part of the transformation process. Ebewo and Sirayi (2018) posit that

the transformation of the education sector is supposed to boost the Africanisation (African-oriented content) of the syllabus, foregrounding the cultural practices and values of the African people. In researching a case study of the Faculty of the Arts at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), these authors noted that, in its pursuit of a transformed curriculum, there is inclusion and emphasis on, and expansion of, the African contents in the various subjects that are offered in the faculty to prepare students to focus on aspects of the arts as cultural institutions.

Likewise, Mashilo and Govender (2023) argue that African identity should be central to the decolonisation of African universities. They view Africanisation as the inclusion of local ideas and not the overhaul of Western notions. From this standpoint, all cultures that have shaped the country and continent we have today are implicitly recognised. The curriculum is a critical element in the transformation of HE, so the inclusion of an African epistemic in HE is imperative. The curriculum must harbour the original, authentic African teachings and values of communalism, togetherness, family-hood, African people's needs, unity and group consciousness (Mashilo & Govender, 2023).

3.4. Technological Shifts and Employability

While decolonisation and Africanisation called for the inclusion of African ideas and identity while dealing with binaries of superiority and inferiority between Western and African content, responsiveness remains vital. As part of the global economy, Africa must be responsive to global demands such as pandemics, climate change and 4IR (Mashilo & Govender, 2023). Remaining relevant within the global sphere is, therefore, significant.

Mathibela (2021) argued that responsive curriculum transformation requires purposeful changes to teaching and learning platforms. These changes should enable graduates to connect across disciplines through transdisciplinary research and practical interactions. Curriculum transformation is inevitable in some contexts. For example, technological advancement and responding to pandemics require curriculum transformation. Fish (2021) notes that curriculum transformation sometimes comes as a need to respond to the ever-changing environment. Meanwhile, Goorney et al. (2023) allude that with improving technology, many new educational courses and university programmes are needed to prepare a workforce for the developing industry. Mendy and Madiope (2020) highlight how global competition in terms of technology advancement has forced the University of South Africa (UNISA) to implement distance learning through a MyUnisa platform (Mendy & Madiope, 2020). Together, these authors postulate that curriculum cannot be meaningfully transformed without considering external scientific and technological advancements that may benefit society, now and in the future. The COVID-19 pandemic reiterated this notion and illuminated the importance of creating flexible, adaptable and technologically friendly curriculums.

Underdevelopment and the digital divide remain realities in most African countries. These factors can hinder responsiveness in curriculum transformation, despite institutions' willingness to change. Gwandure and Mayekiso (2021) argue that curriculum transformation should be responsive to the needs of the country, political organisations and employer organisations. Content should be relevant to employing organisations such as the public service, corporate world and nongovernmental

organisations. Citing UNISA as an example, Mendy and Madiope (2020) observe that academics were given specific tasks to address national challenges and market needs. These tasks included intensifying research into their teaching methods, developing novel assessment and feedback mechanisms, boosting graduate employability, and enhancing the Africanisation of learning content. This approach aimed to improve both the relevance and effectiveness of education. They had to ensure relevant content for students' employability considering the contemporary and future community, locally and globally.

3.5. Roles of Different Stakeholders in Transforming Curriculum

Curriculum transformation is a multifaceted endeavour involving active participation from various stakeholders across different sectors. In South Africa and beyond, governments and education authorities play a pivotal role in shaping policies and frameworks for curriculum development and implementation (Department of Basic Education, 2020). They allocate resources, oversee alignment with national educational goals, and ensure inclusivity and relevance in the curriculum (Reimers & Chung, 2019). Educational institutions, including universities, schools, and colleges, implement these policies and guidelines, adapt teaching methodologies, and monitor effectiveness (Scott et al., 2019). Educators are at the forefront of curriculum transformation, designing and delivering lessons, integrating new pedagogical approaches, and providing feedback on curriculum content (Chisholm, 2019). As key curriculum beneficiaries, students actively engage in the learning process, provide feedback, and advocate for inclusivity and diversity (Jansen, 2018). Civil society organisations and advocacy groups monitor government policies, advocate for inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum content, and provide resources and support (Chisholm, 2019). Employers and industry representatives contribute by offering input on workforce skills, collaborating with educational institutions, and providing practical opportunities for students (Scott, et al., 2019).

Research institutions and academics conduct studies, generate evidence-based recommendations, and provide training to stakeholders (DHET, 2013). Collaboration between academia and other stakeholders enhances curriculum transformation efforts (Chisholm, 2019). By engaging these diverse stakeholders and leveraging their respective roles and expertise, curriculum transformation initiatives can be more comprehensive and effective, leading to improved educational outcomes and societal development (Mashilo & Govender, 2023; UNESCO, 2017). From these varied roles and responsibilities, it is evident that successful and meaningful curriculum transformation requires multi-stakeholder engagement.

3.6. Transformation Policies Post-1994

Since the dawn of democracy in South Africa, curriculum transformation has been a significant element in education policy to redress past injustices. To push the transformation agenda, the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) was put in place in 1995 to investigate the sector. It reported that the legacy of apartheid marked by inequalities flawed its excellence (CHE 2022; Bhudha et al., 2023). The Green Paper on Higher Education Transformation followed in 1996 to redress inequalities and increase access to all, particularly previously marginalised

communities. In 1997, the seminal Education White Paper 3 was published, leading to the adoption of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (CHE, 2015; 2022).

The White Paper (1997) re-emphasised the need to transform the South African education system to serve the new social and democratic order, meet new national needs, and respond to new realities and opportunities (Bhudha et al., 2023). In line with this, the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 emphasised the need to restructure and transform academic programmes so that institutions could respond better to the human resource, economic and developmental needs of South Africa, as well as redressing past injustices (CHE, 2022). In 2001, the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa was introduced to provide an implementation framework for the Education White Paper 3. As noted above, in most cases, the transformation of HE is guided by context. In the case of South Africa, these different policies mentioned centralised addressing inequalities, increasing access through different teaching and learning patterns, curriculum transformation and more varied modes of delivery. As noted by CHE (2022), in line with Mendy and Madiope (2020), these policies aimed to bring about social justice, overcome the legacy of our colonial and apartheid past, and overcome inequity and injustice.

3.7. Universities' Pronouncements on Curriculum Transformation

Student protests are not a new phenomenon in South Africa. However, the 2015/16 student-led protests became a landmark in transformation debates. The protests highlighted the persisting inequalities in HE and the need for universities to review the curriculum to ensure social justice and address marginality. The student-led protests prompted most universities to reflect on curriculum regarding transformation and decolonisation. Motivated by a desire for a just and equitable future and acknowledging its historical role in perpetuating systems of colonialism and apartheid, as promoted by colonial and Afrikaner nationalist ideologists who served as academics, the University of Pretoria revisited its curriculum (University of Pretoria, 2017). In March 2016, in a collaboration between the student societies and university management, a process of critical consideration of the meaning and shape that curriculum transformation should take was formed. Four key elements, which include responsiveness to social context, epistemological diversity, renewal of pedagogy and classroom practices, and an institutional culture of openness and critical reflection, guided the critical consideration of the curriculum.

Similarly, in August 2016, the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (STLC) at the University of Johannesburg approved the Guidelines for Curriculum Transformation within the institution (University of Johannesburg, 2016). Central to the curriculum transformation guidelines were the standards guiding curriculum review, broad guidelines, critical questions to be considered, and actions to be taken. These guidelines included transparency, access, responsiveness, social justice, and engagement of different university stakeholders.

Through the Curriculum Change Working Group (CCWG) established in 2016 to engage with the curricula, the University of Cape Town adopted the Curriculum Change Framework (CCF) (University of Cape Town, 2018). The CCWG was formed to facilitate dialogue across the university over 18 months to shape strategies for meaningful curriculum change. Its engagements encompassed discussions and

debates on decolonisation the role of the public university, exclusionary pedagogical and assessment practices, flexible learning pathways to ensure student success and retention, the relationship between curriculum and institutional culture and the use of the wide range of linguistic, cultural and experiential resources that students and staff bring to the classroom (University of Cape Town, 2018, p. 4). Engagement with various stakeholders, including staff and students, was seen as a way to determine pathways to meaningful curriculum change. The above initiatives illustrate how selected universities have dealt with curriculum transformation.

3.8. Challenges and Barriers

Curriculum transformation is complicated and challenging for most institutions. Dell (2018) notes how challenging the battle is and highlights the possibility of opposition. Gwandure and Mayekiso (2021) discuss the challenges of curriculum transformation, arguing that it must be informed by national ideology. It is this ideology in South Africa that is unclear as it advances and retreats without taking a forthright position or articulating a national ideology. On the aspect of clarity, Mashilo and Govender (2023) examined curriculum transformation in four South African universities, two of which are Historically Black Universities (HBUs) and two Historically White Universities (HWUs) and noted that while some have clear plans of curriculum transformation, others did not. According to these authors, context, history, and commitment also impacted the progress of curriculum transformation. In this case, one would argue that some of the barriers and challenges of curriculum transformation are unavoidable as they are historically rooted. Thus, despite efforts, sometimes structural realities impede the success of curriculum transformation. Revealing historical disparities, Mashilo and Govender (2023) noted that within the four institutions, curriculum transformation differed with institutions as there was more progress for the HWUs compared to the HBUs. Whilst this may refer to the extent to which curriculum transformation is centred in academic debates at the universities, it is not a valid judgement on the depth of curriculum change.

Gwandure and Mayekiso (2021) highlight that a country's dominant cultures, religions, political parties and economic performance influence curriculum transformation. Considering economic performance, one would argue that sometimes inadequate resources undermine curriculum change. For example, when discussing the nexus between the technological shift and curriculum transformation above, it was highlighted that most African countries face the challenge of inequality in accessing digital resources. Keeping up with the changing economic market marked by technological advancement, most African countries are bound to lag behind those with much-improved technology and access. These lags impact modalities of delivery as opposed to actual curricula.

Based on its history, South African policies and discussions around curriculum transformation have focused on demolishing the legacies of exclusion and redefining the binaries of superiority and inferiority. Decolonisation, Africanisation, social justice, employability and technological shifts were key to curriculum transformation. Though policies on transformation were put in place post-1994, there has been a disjuncture between establishment and implementation. Menon and Castrillón (2019) noted that not much has transformed in South African universities, highlighting the key difference between change and transformation. Access and equity, responsiveness, efficiency, and effectiveness are competing tensions reflecting competing priorities.

Despite curriculum transformation being driven by local needs, responsiveness to global demands is challenging to meet contextualised priorities. The scarcity of resources and lack of clear objectives regarding curriculum transformation also limit stakeholders' ability to implement the transformation process.

4. Analysis of the SERs

An intensive analysis of the 26 SERs reveals two key 'curriculum transformation' drivers:



Figure 1: Key drivers of transformation enunciated in the SERs

The first of these is, simply stated, *technical or factual compliance* with the regulatory and quality framework requirements. In other words, the focus was on aligning aspects of the quality assurance system, academic programs, and programme and qualification mix (PQM) that did not meet the university's requirements, minimum standards, or strategic goals. Significantly, part of this transformation is articulated as the need to refine offerings in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), to 'close out' the ongoing aspects of Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) alignment, phase out unaligned programmes, and obtain accreditation for replacement programmes. The relative importance of this driver varies across the sector but is sufficiently evidenced in the SERs to warrant mention.

The second driver, perhaps more correctly 'trigger', are *events and factors* such as the #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall protests and the fall-out due to affordability limitations. The inherent tensions, contradictions, disparities and complexities of the sector appear to have simmered for the decade preceding this, resulting in the 2015 protests. Of course, the period covered by the SERs means that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic cannot be ignored as all institutions grappled with the challenges presented by emergency teaching and the period's social, economic and psychological fallout. The digital divide highlighted existing inequalities among students and staff, prompting responses that had not previously been addressed or received substantial attention.

An additional consideration is that merged institutions have been more significantly affected by events than those universities not affected by mergers. The initiation of the institutional audits in 2021 did not leave much time for institutions still contending with post-merger complexities. Much has been written on how the protests brought into stark focus how institutional cultures had remained unchanged (see, for example, Le Grange, 2020). Curricula themselves held exclusionary power, functioning as barriers to students' sense of belonging and ownership, excluding many from the institution by default. Social exclusionary patterns replicated on university grounds threw universities into action as the concept of transformation became the lever for change. The SERs signalled that terms like decolonisation, transformation, change and inclusion are often conflated and defined in varying ways.

Recognising these factors, the SERs universally reflected the extensive work undertaken by universities to improve student access. This included ensuring curricula were designed for access and student success, examining the impacts of the funding formula and completion within minimum time, and critically considering questions of employability and curriculum relevance. For other universities, the impetus took the specific form of decolonisation, decoloniality, or Africanisation to enable epistemological access and encourage new knowledge formation. Initiatives in this regard demonstrate creativity and commitment to curricula designed to meet the needs of South African students and society more broadly. Although specific universities are not identified in the discussion below, some groupings in similar trends and approaches emerge.

It must be noted that the researchers were not requested to interrogate or verify the processes, activities or documents developed by universities regarding curriculum transformation. Nonetheless, it became clear from the SERs and focus groups that intense, ongoing, meaningful discussion and debate occur across the universities.

4.1 Defining and Enacting Curriculum Transformation

Across the 26 SERs, several clustered themes emerge. Examining the terms and concepts used concerning curriculum transformation in the context of teaching and learning reveals variable approaches to defining curriculum transformation per se. The ATLAS.ti discussion, which follows this section, analyses the range of definitions at a textual level. However, a high-level analysis of the SERs' responses to the question of curriculum transformation reveals different interpretations.

Several institutions have a curriculum transformation framework (these may be referred to with varying nomenclature), which guides how curriculum transformation is effected at the programme level. One university indicated that its framework encompassed 'renewal' and 'transformation' and provided a list of graduate attributes the university commits to in its curricula. However, as programme reviews have not been well-implemented in that university, it is unclear how this commitment will be expressed in curricula or the classroom. In effect, the framework limits the commitment the university makes in its mission statement and other documents, given its focus on improvements to the form and structure of curricula, modes of delivery, and compliance with the CHE criteria. The university does note the contradiction.

In one university, transformation is understood as teaching and learning, research and community engagement, drawing on "ontological, epistemological, axiological, political, ideological, and disciplinary/transdisciplinary conceptions of a complex

commitment to the transformation of the broader society”. In this university, a charter states that everyone is responsible for creating an enabling environment “for the realisation of full human potential where diversity, equity and quality thrive”. The creation of such an environment is equated to quality HE, and the university focuses its attention on students from quintile 1 to 3 schools:

For [the university], transformation is not limited to interpretations of shifting staff and student demographics, increased graduate throughput rates, or the Institution’s research outputs. Rather, it includes curriculum renewal and transformation, research, integrated [community engagement], and targeted internationalisation such that we co-create knowledge that contributes to local and global pools of knowledge.

Significantly, the university states the “deeper transformation” means that curricula align with “sectoral, regional, continental, and global imperatives” achieved through the “advancement of African Indigenous languages and culture and promotion of Indigenous knowledge systems”. In this sense, transformation and decolonisation are intertwined. The change has been achieved through adjustments to the language policy toward becoming “a truly bilingual university”. At this university, the transformation agenda has taken the form of a “substantial reconfiguration of the curriculum, [d]ecolonisation of the syllabus and advocacy for an environment which speaks to the cultures of the province”.

Curriculum transformation across many SERs is expressed as part of the university’s approach to quality or even as quality. In this cluster, quality is both compliance and the pursuit of social justice, often with the call to decolonise HE as an added element. For example, one SER states, “[the university] has intentionally spurred conducive conditions and monitored transformation, essential to the quality project”, indicating both the necessary will and the budget needed to achieve these gains. Similarly, another university states that the need for curriculum transformation is embedded into all “aspects of teaching and learning, innovation, and the pursuit of social justice”. In this university, key themes that inform the curricula transformation to benefit students and staff have been included in developmental activities and addressed in programme reviews. Departments and faculties create teaching and learning plans to implement curriculum changes, enhance pedagogy and research, and report on their impact. The themes are, in the main, decolonisation, the 4IR, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), translanguaging, and so on. Reporting is consistent and coherent at the Senate level. An important rider is the recognition by the researchers that the actual curricula of the specific university or universities have not been examined. The examples outlined express the discussions, processes, and strategies various universities have implemented and reported on in the SERs.

There are universities where curriculum revitalisation/reform constitutes curriculum transformation, specifically in response to the call for decolonisation. How this is undertaken varies. For example, operational differences exist in how such a process would work. In one university, ‘curriculum transformation’ and related concepts are understood as *expanding knowledge archives* and ensuring curriculum relevance. However, this university has no review processes at the programme/curriculum level. Nonetheless, the university argues that its approach to transformation is that it “adds value to students’ lives by creating opportunities for them to be transformed in life-enhancing ways, as a contribution not only to individual students but also to social justice and the development and betterment of society”. Decolonisation – or related concepts – are not mentioned aside from indicating that the 2015 student protests

triggered the need to change for this university. At a second university, curriculum transformation is viewed through the lens of quality, inclusion, and decolonising the curriculum. The university plans for staff and students to understand how the legacies of South Africa's past continue to impact learning and teaching, and a budget is allocated explicitly to projects in this scope. Programme review is directed at ensuring alignment with these goals. In a third university, following the protests, task teams were established to discuss and oversee diversity, institutional culture, decolonisation, protest, academic freedom, funded access to university, the demands of the world of work and curriculum transformation. The tasks teams' work was driven by the need to 'reimagine' the future of work and the skills and knowledge needed for that future. The SER was unclear on how such changes had been achieved at the curriculum level.

Although one university expresses clear directives to its faculty and others, it reports that transformation in its context has and is "an ambitious journey" to "reimagine the multi-campus institution as a university known for equity of experience and a commitment to social justice". In this case, social justice is articulated as the discourse of the national goals and targets expressed in the National Development Plan (2030), the White Paper (2013), the DHET's Policy Framework on Differentiation in the South African Post-School System (2014), and the Sustainable Development Goals. In this respect, the SER records a university in the process of expressing the importance of diversity to its constituents. To this end, the university

defines the objectives of transformation in terms of adapting what the university does, or how it achieves this, to realign the organisation with a changed external environment and optimise its ability to pursue its fundamental purpose. Institutional cultures, language and curriculum reform are at the centre of transformation in HE.

Changing institutional culture in line with the values will require "continuous engagement and collegiality" to ensure the "ongoing management and monitoring of transformation".

Finally, several SERs focus on student success as an expression of the transformation of the curriculum. First-year student support, academic and other skills development, and work-related skills are contained in programmes that are often well-funded and managed. One could question, however, whether these efforts are as transformative as the universities in question believe or assume. In one SER in this group, curriculum transformation is rarely mentioned, and there are inherent caveats to when a curriculum change would need to be addressed:

... faculties, schools and departments have the necessary access to information ... [to] identify potential areas for further institutional research or curriculum development.

... modules are interrogated ... which could lead to the identification of a module or programme renewal process to be initiated.

Curriculum renewal and transformation processes ensure that the overall curriculum remains aligned with the institution's mission, vision and goals and its particular context, and is responsive to changes in knowledge, in particular, local contexts and the expectations of relevant stakeholders.

It is important to acknowledge subordinate themes from several universities: curriculum transformation – or transformation of any sort – relies on a university's

ability and willingness to address challenges and promote inclusivity. A reading of the SERs indicates that there are challenges in some institutions which relate directly to this, although they may not be made explicit. Definitions of curriculum transformation articulated in the SERs are varied, overlapping and co-occur. Figure 2 highlights the dominant understandings that emerged.

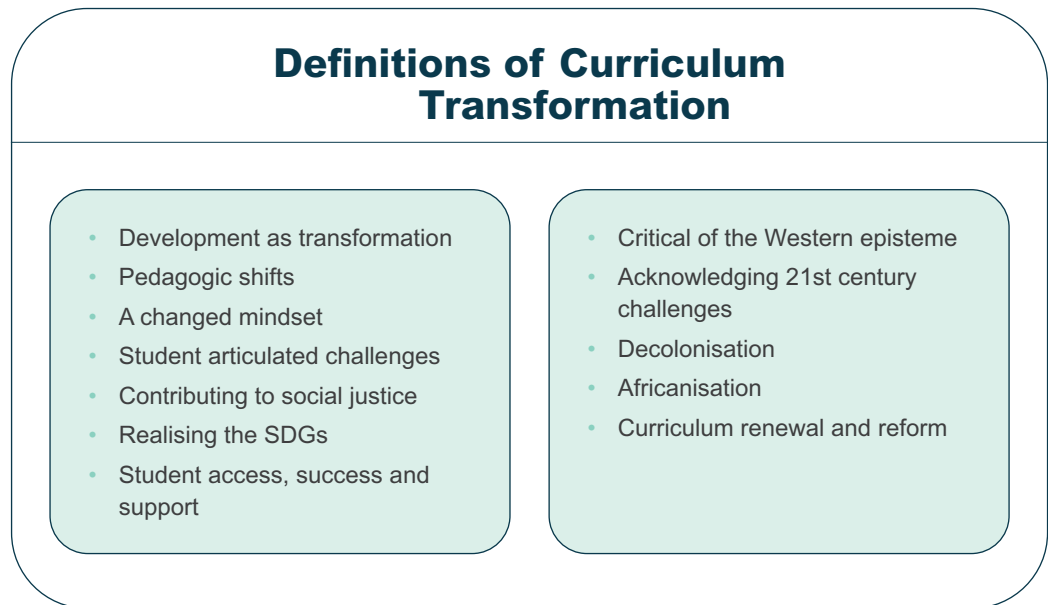


Figure 2: Definitions of Curriculum Transformation Emerging from the SERs

There appears to be general agreement across universities that curriculum transformation must be ongoing or a continuing process. What is inconsistent is what curriculum transformation means, resulting in aims and goals that differ in intensity and form and which vary depending on the university’s aims, goals, location and history. The ATLAS.ti analysis of themes affirms and elucidates the above and the focus group discussions.

4.2 University-wide Initiatives

University-wide initiatives are ubiquitous and variable in terms of depth of engagement with the substantive (rather than formal) issues of curriculum transformation. In some, the process is driven by top-down ‘directives’ with varying degrees of success. In at least two SERs, the universities’ commitment to transformation is renewal, not only of curriculum but also of management and operational matters. In both cases, issues relating to the universities’ PQMs are mentioned, focusing on a somewhat formulaic view of ‘quality’, such as the need to meet the requirements of the CHE. Support to students and staff is seen in both as the natural next step, with a focus on systems (including learning management systems). The link between the graduate attributes in the case of one university, the mission and vision in the case of the other, and the transformation of curricula to achieve these remains unsaid. For example, one university’s curriculum development framework indicates that it “is an expression of the *process* to be followed and *complied with* regarding the *conceptualisation, development, accreditation and review* of all ... programmes. In

addition, the SER continues, and the document sets out “procedures for guiding all curriculum transformation” to ensure relevance, responsiveness, and alignment to new developments in the discipline, professional body requirements, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the CHE and the DHET. Two universities argued that curriculum transformation is evidenced in the increased SoTL publications and published pieces on decolonisation of the curriculum from across its faculty and from the projects and initiatives in institutions (for example, the university capacity development programme (UCDP) which indicate a concerted effort to enable curriculum transformation.

In many universities, existing processes have been leveraged for curriculum transformation purposes without necessarily defining what the transformation is from and what form it will take once the change occurs. In a somewhat tautologous relationship, programme design, development, and review are thus offered as curriculum transformation. Many, if not all, universities have implemented initiatives to engage academic staff in curriculum transformation, focusing on decolonising the curriculum, embracing diversity, and social justice. However, in some instances, despite university-wide initiatives, including charters and frameworks, workshops, advisory committees for curriculum development, and surveys to gather input from staff and students, the ends have not always been attained.

In another institution, a similar theme is evident. At an institutional level, the commitment is made to meet the purpose of HE set out in the White Paper (1997) and of “the need for transformation”. This form of symbolic rhetoric is evident in the SERs of many universities, though it is unclear whether it has gained traction and moved to significant changes. To this end, curriculum renewal is seen as ‘enhancements’ to teaching and learning in which the curriculum extends beyond content and into assessment and pedagogy. Alongside this understanding of curriculum transformation is the theme of curriculum decolonisation, which is addressed through various activities, including seminars, guest speakers, and specific meetings focused on decolonisation and Indigenous languages. The university’s commitment is clear; however, actual curriculum change appears to be limited, if not non-existent, as programme reviews have not occurred for at least the period covered by the audit. The university comments that:

When programme reviews are revived, they need to include criteria related to decolonisation and transformation and pay particular attention to curriculum renewal, particularly in the light of what has been learned as a result of the pandemic.

The university states that it ensures that curriculum transformation and decolonisation are on the agendas of all relevant faculty committees. However, its SER does not address the extent to which pivotal matters related to curriculum transformation are debated at length and with sufficient depth. Interestingly, even in those SERs that addressed this issue, there was substantive discussion in the focus groups on whether these debates filtered evenly through the different universities and at the levels required for action. University structures largely tend to focus on technical details rather than substantive matters, which may or may not be reflected in agendas or meeting minutes. Many policies encounter a similar dead end, as the gap between policy and practice is not elucidated at the curriculum level, let alone at the module level, where academic engagement with students occurs. In this university, there was no transformation plan for curricula or even for the transformation of the academic staff.

In other universities, management has faced challenges despite the institutional initiatives it has implemented. For example, in one university where curriculum transformation and decolonisation are more or less synonymous, the faculties were requested to engage with “the University’s understanding of decolonisation”. A colloquium and several workshops were held to facilitate this and to support the development of a shared understanding. However, the SER clarifies that there has been no shared understanding and a level of stagnation and resistance. The university reports that the student body is divided on the matter. Some students have rejected decolonisation, while others feel uncertain of the importance of decolonisation or Africanisation in a global environment. Thus, although some programme changes were reported, it is unclear that curriculum change is driven by the need for ‘curriculum transformation’. The university obtained funding to move beyond the stagnation by facilitating a collaborative curriculum design, development and renewal process to establish “a process and methodology for the [university] to engage with a collaborative approach for curriculum transformation and reform”.

One SER adopts a comprehensive view of transformation, requiring various initiatives, including building capacity among staff for promotion and supporting the “institutional curriculum change” needed. This university notes, however, that there is a “tendency to resist rather than embrace the challenge of change [which] calls for ongoing staff development.” Several institutions have noted that changing the demographic profile of staff and students as an intentional agenda is a precondition for the curriculum transformation agenda. Building on this, this university notes further that the monitoring arm of quality management ensures that teaching and learning, research and community engagement are relevant. In this university, the SER expresses an “ideological transformation agenda underpinning increased enrolment of students from under-served communities.” Despite all of this, the SER notes that university academics voiced concern at the risk that the ‘formal’ transformation of the staff and student demographic eclipses the ‘deep’ transformation taking place:

Perhaps staff ... were highlighting the generally accepted notion that transformation does not involve commitment to superficial change but to deeper and wider-ranging endemic change.

Overall, the SERs highlight the complexity of curriculum transformation efforts, the importance of inclusive and diverse perspectives, and the ongoing commitment of institutions to address challenges and promote meaningful change in learning and teaching practices. Figure 3 lists some university-wide initiatives instituted at several of the 26 public universities.

1	Transformation of student and staff demographics
2	Ongoing curriculum and programme reviews
3	Flexible module choice
4	Identifying enablers of curriculum transformation
5	Embedding technology in learning and teaching
6	Availability of and support for multimedial learning and teaching
7	Enabling student success
8	Decolonisation as an ongoing process and an outcome
9	Graduate attributes and employability
10	Research-informed learning, teaching and assessment

Figure 3: University-wide initiatives to realise curriculum transformation

4.3 Narratives of Transformation

In several SERs, transformation becomes the stories the universities tell about their ‘journeys’. Curriculum transformation, and how it is or will be realised, becomes a minor character in the tale of a university. Narratives of transformation – at a level perceived as higher than curriculum – are evident in both newer and older and merged and unmerged institutions. Some of the trends noted in 6.1. and 6.2. are relevant here too.

There is a clear distinction between the newer universities that did not have a presence during apartheid and those that nonetheless face the challenges of their legacy. In one of these, transformation is expressed as social and as responding to the negative consequences of apartheid. The aspect of transformation is, the university asserts, evident in its curricula, which will produce graduates equipped to transform professions and their own social and employment environments. The links between how the university understands transformation and the National Development Plan (2030) goals are delineated. However, what is unclear, for example, is how this translates into the curricula, where the focus on producing competent graduates in the discipline dominates. In this university, there is no framework for the transformation of the curriculum, perhaps because they are still new, and there is no mention of conversation, dialogue, or reflection on either transformation or decolonisation.

In another long-established university, a 25-year perspective is taken to demonstrate the journey that transformation has taken in terms of access and the student body’s demographic composition. The university notes that given the changes to its racial composition, “the characteristics of the student body have changed significantly”. This university has a body which meets four times a year to address teaching and learning, research, students and staff, and transformation. The university notes its alignment with the broad transformation agenda through its support for early-career academics and its focus on gender representativity. The university’s understanding

of transformation is concentrated on the extent to which it has changed, as well as on the potential it has to change the lives of its students:

Universities have an important role to play in adding value to students’ lives by creating opportunities for them to be transformed in life-enhancing ways, as a contribution not only to individual students but also to social justice and the development and betterment of society.

In this view, transforming the university’s student demographics is part of fostering “sustained academic excellence”. The #FeesMustFall movement amplified the need for the university to establish “a cosmopolitan and diverse university boasting a conducive institutional culture for all”. Interestingly, in this SER, there is no mention of decoloniality or Africanisation. The absence of discussion in the SERs is by no means a reflection on whether decoloniality surfaces on the university’s agenda.

The narrative of ‘excellence’ informs curriculum renewal through the relationship between content, pedagogy, and assessment; the connection between curriculum and policy; and understanding of “historical patterns of change in the ideological underpinnings of university curriculum policy”. Several committees work with quality and evaluate the programme offerings, including the content of the programmes, to drive curriculum change, with the result that:

The impetus for curriculum change has manifested in a variety of ways over the last five years. It is accurate to say that in the main curricular, change emerged organically following the critique levelled at curricula by the #RhodesMustFall movement ... and more formal opportunities for supporting and resourcing curriculum change”.

The following is a sub-category of the differing narratives of curriculum transformation in response to whether decolonisation is synonymous with curriculum transformation. Although in the SERs, curriculum transformation is not necessarily synonymous with decolonisation, it is almost always seen as inclusive of it. Curriculum change, transformation, and decolonisation are seen as a priority. In some SERs, decolonisation is more strongly associated with curriculum transformation, and there is notable repetition of the need for the ‘renewal’ and ‘reinvigoration’ of academic programmes.

4.4 Compliance-driven Activities

Universities experienced the impact of the restructuring of the HE sector differently. Among the comprehensive, traditional, and universities of technology (UOT), it can be argued that the UOT experiences were the most difficult due to the very nature of the systemic changes. The shift from centrally approved curricula (in the previous technikon model) to university-owned curricula, in addition to shifts in the national qualification frameworks, meant that the UOT had more work to do in developing their curricula, teaching and learning models and abilities to curate their offerings. Evidence of this can be seen in several of the SERs, whose journeys are mapped against milestones distinct from those in other universities. Comprehensives were in a similar situation, often resulting from the integration of diverse institutions. This created a need to develop bespoke curriculum frameworks while borrowing heavily from the prior institutions. For merged institutions and UOT, where the complexity of the change management process included governance, management, aspects of teaching and learning, research, staff development, and PQM planning, sixteen years is a short period. The brevity of the period and the trajectory of change is

evident in the SERs, many of which reflect the required preoccupation with technical and regulatory requirements. It must be noted that this is not a judgement on the SERs but the natural consequence of the preceding histories.

Compliance activities are used extensively to support and drive curriculum transformation. For example,

We [university] define curriculum transformation as encompassing the change efforts that have been undertaken by individuals, projects, collectives, faculty, committees and the Institution at large to address the possible constraints of the traditional curriculum, especially where epistemic content and pedagogical practices do not create conditions for a socially inclusive and socially just community of staff and students at X.

By cementing a definition, efforts towards curriculum transformation allow for a uniform conceptualisation across faculties, resulting in more focused efforts towards transformation. Even if the definition is not all-encompassing, it does allow for some consistency between faculties, making it easier for evaluations and comparisons.

Similarly, at another university, a quality assurance-focused group interrogates all new learning programmes and all changes to curricula, which are tabled at this committee before proceeding to senate bodies. The discussions identify any concerns relating to the proposed programme changes or new programmes before discussion by senate structures. Curriculum transformation in this university encompasses all aspects of student support and leveraging online environments for teaching and learning (not only during/prior to COVID-19).

In other cases where universities have had governance problems, this is reflected in the SERs. In these cases, and particularly small ones, the SERs evidence universities in 'survival' mode. In these, the SERs were not as focused on curriculum transformation as they were on regulatory compliance and, in some cases, on meeting the recommendations of administrators' reports. The universities visibly build a solid bedrock of governance structures, policies and processes. In some cases where there have been governance failures, this has led to a focus on structural compliance with the academic planning processes of the DHET and the CHE rather than grappling with issues of curriculum transformation.

Also evident are efforts to enhance the curriculum about compliance and developing student competencies – akin to student success and/or student employability. This extends to discussions on graduate attributes, employability and skills required. Sometimes, the focus is on meeting the minimum requirements of disciplines, professions, or regulators. Curriculum review in these universities consequently focuses on the 'requirements' of content, competencies, or mode/s of delivery. Although SoTL is mentioned in one SER, for example, as a way of developing or managing curricula, it is unclear how this is to be integrated into the university's processes of review, which are predominantly content-based.

Curriculum transformation as part of quality promotion activities cannot be dismissed. Formal reviews, improvement plans, progress reports, and benchmarking allow universities to address the specific demands of their context and the fitness of the purpose of the programmes, institutional culture and ethos. In this group, several elements are seen as critical to the transformation of teaching and learning and curriculum: appropriate policies and strategies, innovations in pedagogy and curricula, dedicated funding of curriculum transformation initiatives, and relevant technologies.

4.5 Stumbling Blocks to Transforming Learning and Teaching and Curriculum

In addition to staff and student recalcitrance noted in isolated SERs, one SER makes a poignant observation:

Disciplinary coherence is seen as an asset in structured curricula, and that the labour market still prefers tailored programmes. However, anticipating the future needs of society remains the task of the University, and to foster inter-, intra-, and trans-disciplinarity, greater collaboration amongst academics has resulted in new programmes.

Other challenges relate to access to resources, student involvement, “a lack of discipline-specific definitions of terms and understanding of a decolonised education system”. Some institutions highlighted that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected curriculum transformation. In some instances, the faculties themselves were reported as unsupportive of “centrally driven curriculum review, renewal or transformation, and those:

whose qualifications were externally accredited or governed by international agreements were not easily mobilised to change their curricula. The de facto refusal to critically look into the existing curricula resulted in faculties adding courses onto the already heavy curricula available.

In closing, one of the key stumbling blocks to the transformation of the curriculum is a lack of a shared understanding of what constitutes transformation and the requirements of the regulatory bodies. However, the development of a single, shared definition is not recommended. Universities should be encouraged to identify what curriculum transformation means in and for their specific contexts and then to calibrate activities, actions, resources and commitments to achieve their goals.

5 ATLAS.ti Analysis

5.1 Data Analysis

ATLAS.ti Web Version 7.7.1-2024-04-25 (ATLAS.ti) and Adobe Acrobat Standard (including AI Assistant for Acrobat) DC version 2023 (Adobe Acrobat) were used to analyse the data derived from 4 462 pages in 26 SERs from public universities. The concepts and terms related to curriculum transformation were extracted, including inter-related themes such as decolonisation, teaching and learning, quality management systems, and other closely aligned words. Institutional reflections on learning and teaching demonstrate a close inter-relationship between several concepts, terms, and definitions in the broad field of curriculum transformation. AI allows for rapid, efficient analysis, avoiding data contamination and a secure environment. Fourth, the application is designed to ensure the specificity of the output.

5.2 Findings and Discussion

5.2.1 Understanding of the concept of 'curriculum transformation'

As highlighted in the thematic analysis, the data generated by ATLAS.ti concur that universities understand and apply the concept of curriculum transformation in different ways. Figure 4 below highlights the dominant themes that were generated. An additional explanation of each item is provided in Addendum A.

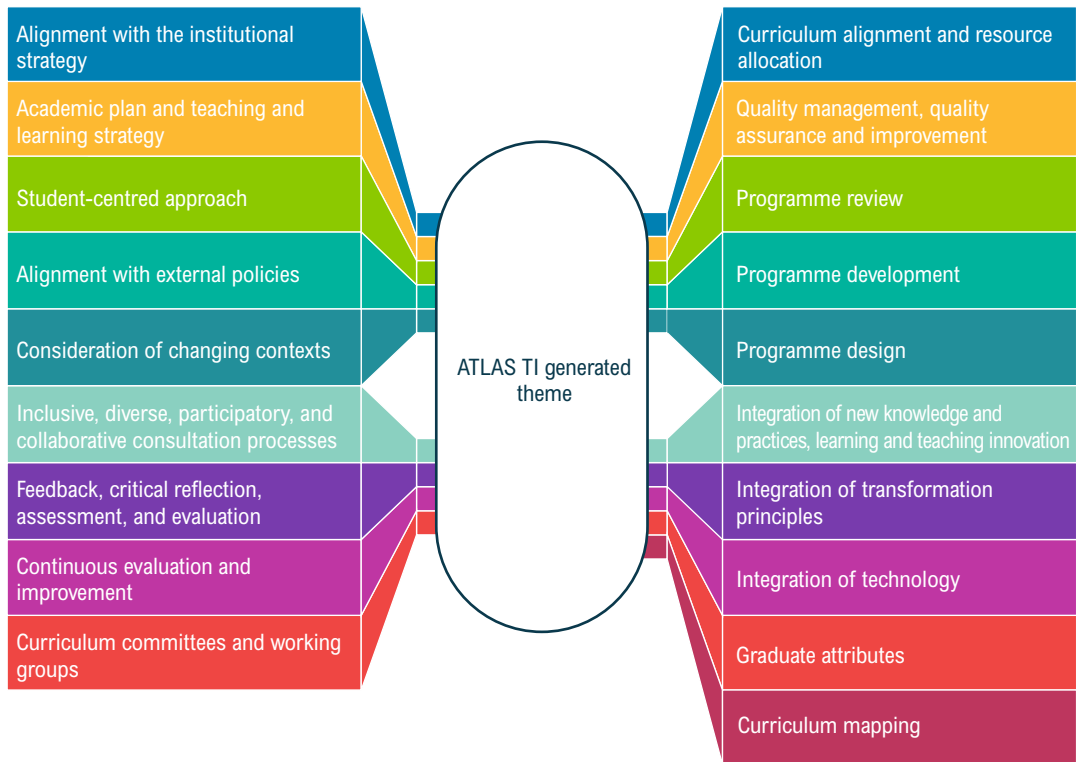


Figure 4: ATLAS TI-generated Themes of Curriculum Transformation (ATLAS.ti, 2024)

5.2.2 Decolonisation and curriculum transformation

The ATLAS.ti generated analysis suggests that there are instances where curriculum transformation is used interchangeably and equated to decolonisation, but that was not the case across institutions. Three universities used decolonisation as synonymous with curriculum transformation. Other universities mentioned concepts and initiatives that align with the broader goals of decolonisation in HE, such as addressing socio-economic inequalities, promoting inclusivity, recognising diverse perspectives, and incorporating African and Indigenous knowledge systems into the curriculum. In general, decolonisation was identified as a specific aspect of curriculum transformation.

In terms of decolonisation in the context of curriculum transformation, universities included the following imperatives:

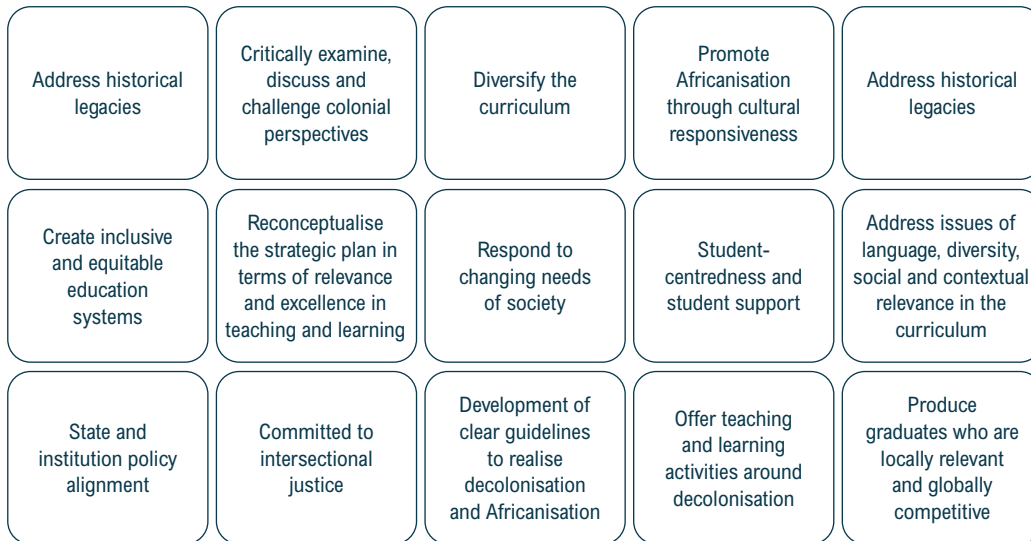


Figure 5: Institutional understandings of Curriculum Transformation in the context of Decolonisation

5.2.3 Stumbling blocks that impede curriculum transformation

Like the findings of the thematic analysis, the stumbling blocks that impede transformation range from financial impediments to infrastructural impediments to epistemic and institutional culture impediments. Figure 6 highlights the overarching themes, and additional analysis is highlighted in Addendum B.

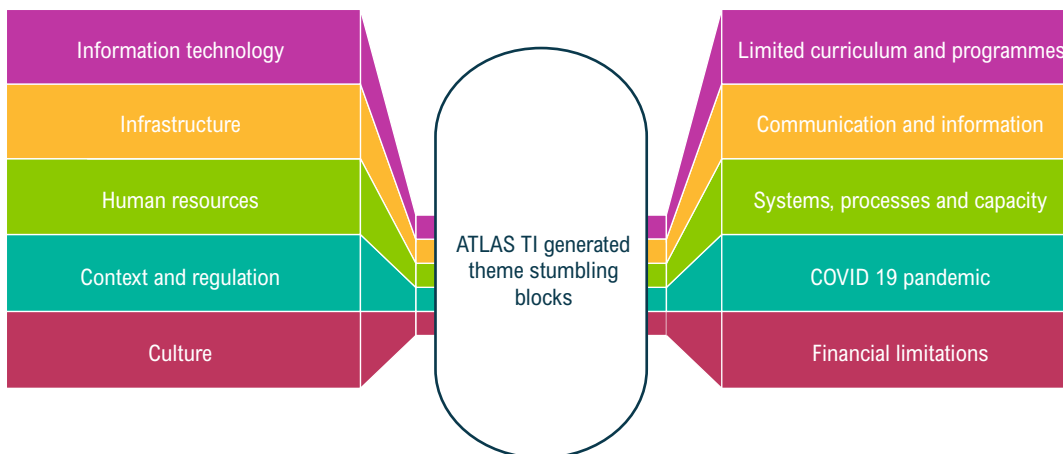


Figure 6: ATLAS.ti-generated stumbling blocks to curriculum transformation as articulated in the SERs (ATLAS.ti, 2024)

6. Focus Groups

The report also draws on the findings of five focus groups conducted with various stakeholders from the 26 public institutions. Focus group discussions to gain deeper insight into a phenomenon or personal experience. In this instance, the focus groups were vital to providing more detailed information about how universities conceptualise and manifest curriculum transformation. Respondents included high-level management, such as DVCs, and representatives from the academic planning, institutional planning, and quality offices. A total of 67 respondents participated in the focus groups. Two sessions each were set up for deputy vice chancellors and senior staff in learning and teaching, quality offices, and staff development. An additional session was scheduled for those who may have missed a scheduled session and wished to make input. Some respondents experienced poor connectivity and were present only for parts of the discussion. The focus groups allowed the researchers to obtain nuanced information accessed through the SERs and facilitate a discussion on what universities in South Africa are doing with regard to curriculum transformation. The focus group discussions centred on the following questions:

- a. What, in your view, does curriculum transformation mean, and what does it entail?
- b. In what ways does your institution's view of transformation align to that of the CHE and DHET?
- c. To what extent is curriculum transformation at the centre of your university's teaching and learning strategy?
- d. How are current processes such as programme design, development, and review used to drive curriculum transformation?
- e. To what extent has this filtered down to academics in the classroom, and how do you know this?
- f. Any other comments or observations?

The discussions proceeded collegially with animated participation, although all questions were not addressed equally. There was discussion on curriculum, teaching and learning, university contexts and initiatives, and the external regulatory environment. The discussions were robust, with participants sharing and interacting with each other, making for rich exchanges. The transcribed interviews were analysed, and distinct themes emerged. Although the interviewers were conscious that focus group discussion analyses may appear to suggest group cohesion in responses, this was not the case, and the wide-ranging views are reflected below.

6.1 Theme 1: Conceptualisation and Contextualisation of Curriculum Transformation

Respondents from the focus group highlighted a diverse approach to understanding curriculum transformation. As noted in the account below, curriculum transformation is an umbrella term for various aspects of institutional transformation(s), including, but not limited to, Africanisation, decolonisation, diversity, inclusion, compliance, curriculum renewal and redesign, developing graduate attributes, encouraging entrepreneurship, and community engagement. These findings correlate strongly with the ATLAS.ti analysis undertaken. Interestingly, some institutions claimed to have completed the task of 'curriculum transformation', citing examples such as the 'addition of HIV/AIDS' to student guides. A few discussants spoke of the extent to which senior executive management of the university drives curriculum transformation. The discussion on curriculum transformation often focuses on the processes for curriculum change at the university, the need to consider the required graduate attributes, the complexity of external regulatory processes and capacity challenges within the university. A few discussants spoke of the pressures on the curriculum, noting that there also needed to be a strong focus on the disciplines, compliance with professional body requirements and that 'curriculum is like a balloon, and we keep stuffing it until it may burst'. Several respondents also noted how decolonisation and Africanisation are conflated with curriculum transformation, making it difficult to realise in practice.

There was broad consensus that the CHE was far removed from the teaching and learning spaces, despite national reviews, programme accreditation and audits. This distance could be why the CHE's approach was viewed as positivistic and compliance-driven, based on narrow standards, and an absence of a full appreciation of curriculum or the work being undertaken in teaching and learning. This parochial approach often prompts universities to report in specific ways that could be construed as one-dimensional and not fully representative of what universities do. The overwhelming view was that, for example, due to the nature of the focus areas and standards for the institutional audit, it was not easy to communicate the extent and depth of work being undertaken at universities. Additionally, the contextual realities of each university need to be considered, especially in relation to curriculum transformation.

For example, a DVC of a university stated the following (which the participants in the focus group strongly supported):

The strategy of the university, which addresses the theme of curriculum transformation explicitly, deals with aspects of inclusion and diversity, and refers explicitly to decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum... It also refers to the broader mandate of the university in terms of the PQM. It is partly concerned with providing students with an in-depth orientation to their fields of study within the broader challenges of the social justice commitment of the university, and that is why the Africanisation and decolonisation of the university education are key. It includes recognising the importance of epistemic access to student success and the creation of an enabling teaching and learning environment, and by that, I mean technology-enriched and adequately supported teaching and learning experience in the classroom. This is our university's strategy in terms of creating transformation as part of our university goals.

And:

At [university], curriculum transformation is part of an annual process whereby academics from schools and faculties are required to review their curricula and programmes. Firstly, they need to look at how responsive the purpose of the programme is – these discussions happen at school and faculty level where specific curriculum issues that may be problematic are identified. This is a way to enhance the curriculum, and the recommended changes are discussed at Faculty Board level and from there go to the Quality Office to comment on how the process should unfold.

And:

Looking at what we are doing at [names university], we have a Vision 2030 which is giving us marching orders for what we should focus on. It spells out things related to the kind of graduates we need to produce, and we are talking about the distinctive education we want to avail to our stakeholders. In talking of curriculum transformation, we look at how we can gear our curriculum to develop relevant graduates. We consider project-based learning and design thinking in reviewing curricula, ensuring that each discipline incorporates things like entrepreneurship.

And:

At [names university], curriculum transformation encompasses a whole lot of things. Mainly, it links to the transformation agenda as contained in national policy documents, ensuring that curricula will provide access to knowledge-making processes for the majority of students. It is particularly important for [names institution], which over the past five years radically transformed its student demographic profile – about 60% of students are now NSFAS funded.... there has been a big focus on developing literacies in the first-year curricula, as evidenced by a big project for as many first-year lecturers as possible, to infuse literacies [literacy] development into the curriculum. These literacies do not only cover academic literacy but also what it means to be a student at a university and being engaged in a specific discipline.

And:

In the main, curriculum transformation equates to access with success. You don't just massify education; you must ensure that students' engagement with academic admin, teaching and learning and fellow students will enable them to succeed. In so doing, you will also address attrition. While students are in the university, the curriculum should enable students to acquire the necessary skills and attributes that will make them ready for the world of work. Entrepreneurship is, therefore, a particular focus area, enabling them to survive while looking for work. The review process also relies on inputs from industry partners and employers to ensure the relevance of the curriculum.

As the analysis of the SERs signalled, many universities had initiated processes to discuss curriculum reform or transformation. Some initiatives were purely focused on compliance with external regulatory requirements, whilst others responded at different junctures to external/internal drivers like employability of graduates, decolonisation or other imperatives. An overwhelming refrain from universities was the commitment to widening access as signalled in national policies and the imperative to ensure student success.

[Names university] instituted an academic renewal programme, which incorporates curriculum and programme renewal. Curriculum transformation is a process focused on reflecting, renewing, and realigning, which include[s] things like decolonisation, inclusivity and access to knowledge. We're looking at incorporating graduate attributes in the curricula, and it is also important to consider the interplay between the formal, extra and co-curriculum and how they all work in tandem towards student success and achieving graduate attributes.

However, for others, curriculum transformation as an umbrella term makes it challenging to define, as highlighted in the quote from a university respondent:

The notion of curriculum transformation is complex, broad, and ambiguous. When we talk about transformation, what are we transforming – context, content, people, practices, philosophy, pedagogy, or ideology? Some of these are visible, and some [are] invisible, like ideology and hegemony. It is quite a difficult task to define.

A respondent at another university echoes this:

Curriculum transformation could mean many things, from continuous programme review and renewal activities to more periodic evaluations and purposeful redesign of, e.g., modules, programmes, or qualifications. Many cues could be used for such reflections on and rethinking of curriculum and pedagogical matters. E.g., the development of critical citizenship and other graduate attributes, improving the employability of graduates, enhancing the equity/parity of student success, [and] decolonising the curriculum.

The subjectivity of curriculum transformation and the absence of clear signals despite symbolic rhetoric

The term curriculum transformation is often conflated with decolonisation and Africanisation, but for me, it is two different things. I looked at our Curriculum Policy, which states that curriculum transformation means decolonising the curriculum, but for me, it also means current knowledge and innovative teaching methods.

In addition, the focus group data highlights that the conceptualisation of curriculum transformation cannot be divorced from contextualisation. That is to say that institutional demographics, such as the institution's location, age, and institutional history, are key factors affecting the approach and interpretation of curriculum transformation. These factors have been outlined in the analysis of the SERs. Three institutions highlighted these as critical to understanding curriculum transformation in a South African context.

What does curriculum transformation mean for the [names institution]? It means quite different things from what it did 10 or 15 years ago when the curriculum was hardly reviewed or updated.... The other component was also to think about new curricula that the university could introduce, given our rural context.

Debates on curriculum transformation invariably gravitate towards teaching and learning within the South African context, with the vestiges of apartheid and poor schooling systems continually persisting and impacting universities. The following point raised and echoed by others in the discussions flags the teaching and learning issues that plague HE:

Our institution has a Curriculum Transformation Framework in place, which places curriculum transformation at the centre of teaching and learning, but there are questions we are grappling with. We cannot forget the histories of universities and where they emerged from, and also the barriers to access that applied. The issue of language, which builds and influences culture, is at the centre of marginalising groups. English is still the dominant language which continues to present a challenge to students who are not as fluent in it and feel alienated by it.

Surprisingly, despite curriculum transformation being a key policy priority for South African universities, it has not been equally operationalised at all universities, as noted by the respondent from University G below:

At [names Institution], curriculum transformation is not yet central to our operations. There is a lot of talk about curriculum transformation, but it is not yet institutionalised in all our operations. It is not yet a central component.

The university in question arose through complex merger processes and had gone through significant internal turmoil, resulting in institutional assessors and administrators being appointed. Additionally, there was little or no stability at the senior management level, leaving staff feeling ‘rudderless.’

Concerning approaches to curriculum transformation, the varied understandings of curriculum transformation filter through how universities operationalise the concept. It must be noted that there is no critical consensus as to what constitutes curriculum transformation. Some universities highlight that curriculum transformation includes a multi-level approach requiring action at various institutional levels (i.e. senior management, faculty level, classroom level). For others, it is demonstrated in the (external) community relationships.

6.2 Theme 2: Approaches to Curriculum Transformation

The dominant approaches suggest that curriculum transformation requires a multi-level approach, with internal and external stakeholders, to ensure its realisation, as highlighted below:

We consult both internally and externally, particularly with employers of our graduates. In Health Sciences, where we produce nurses, doctors, pharmacists and dietitians, we are particularly focused on ensuring that we produce graduates that [who] will be competitive. Internally, we ensure that transformation starts at the departmental level, where the SRC is represented. From there, the curriculum is discussed at School level to ensure that we have quality programmes. From there, it goes to the Faculty Board for approval, where colleagues with the necessary experience locally and internationally will ensure that our curricula are up to standard. Senate’s Academic Planning and Senate’s Teaching and Learning Committees will also consider the curriculum, and our Quality Assurance Division plays an oversight role to ensure that we meet the statutory requirements imposed by the DHET, CHE and professional bodies. At Senate, we have the cream of the crop of academia, senior academics and support functions to ensure that the programme is relevant and up to standard. Even at Council, where the final approval is granted, there is robust engagement and debate.

Another approach highlighted by institutions is looking at curriculum transformation through a transdisciplinary lens:

[It is critical] to link it to other initiatives that will get us to the same objectives, which is why I mentioned community engagement as another lens and transdisciplinarity as a way to bring about transformation in both teaching and learning and research.

Although this was not probed in detail, there was some discussion about the need to broaden disciplinary boundaries and opt for multi-disciplinary initiatives.

6.3 Theme 3: Drivers of Curriculum Transformation

There are several drivers of curriculum transformation across the 26 universities. These include internal and external policy drivers, establishing committees, centring curriculum transformation as a research agenda and using student voices as a gauge for transformation.

The first driver of curriculum transformation at most of the institutions is policy-related in that there are policies that are specifically dedicated to curriculum transformation, as highlighted in several extracts below:

At [names university], we had an interesting process a couple of years ago when we designed a Transformation and Renewal Framework. The process taught us that it does not work to develop policy outside of practice. We had a two-year process of consulting faculties, and the final policy was approved by all faculties because their views were incorporated, and there was considerable buy-in from them. The disadvantage is that you lose the ability to push a line – there is a limit to how far you can push your understanding of concepts like transformation, decolonisation and Africanisation. A lot of these instruments are helpful, and our vision, which is linked to the IOP which talks about public good and social justice. The learning has been that everything must be from the bottom up, and all faculties must be able to engage with ideas to inform a robust policy that will make progress.

Several universities, in the SERs and focus group discussions, highlighted the need for inclusive processes for curriculum transformation at universities.

I'm from [names university], and when we talk about transformation in the curriculum, we re-curriculated our programmes to align with the current transformation agenda. We are also guided by the [university] Vision 2030, which informs our teaching and learning strategies, which enables us to put students at the centre of learning. We also looked at implementing and enforcing graduate attributes.

At [names University], we have a Strategic Transformation of Educational Programmes to align them with Vision 2025, which takes cognisance of students, university stakeholders and management. One can have beautiful concepts, but if there is no financial, time and effort invested, the process will be fruitless. We had a demanding process, but we are reaping the benefits.

The second driver of curriculum transformation is the establishment of committees that focus specifically on transformation, including curriculum transformation, to drive initiatives and programmes.

We established different task teams for curriculum renewal, review, and quality assurance. If we align these things with the institutional strategy, we should be clear about the benchmarks or measures for successful transformation. If you transform the curriculum, how do you ensure that the strategy of student success is achieved? What are the outcome measures? Those are the issues we are delving into.

And:

Our university uses these [committees] to transform curriculum. Any department hoping to change programmes have to engage with our Teaching Development Team, which incorporate teaching development specialists and, our Academic Planning team, and the Quality team to look at what needs to change and why it's changing and aligning it with Vision 2030 as well as industry. This ensures plugging into the relevance of the curriculum as well as issues of language within the programme – language training is provided to students and goes beyond English, Afrikaans, and Xhosa to include Sign Language. All of that would be infused within the curriculum conversation before the forms are completed for submission to relevant parties.

The third driver of curriculum transformation, to ensure that it remains topical and current, is establishing it as a research agenda, as highlighted in the quote below:

[The university] has instituted two projects in the recent past, one of which is the PQM Review Project, which is broader than the internal and external reviews of programmes, and another which is loosely referred to as the New Century Curriculum Project, which looks at the institution's programmatic offering as a whole, and the extent to which for example general degrees respond to social issues and also prepare students for the world of work. By that, I don't mean only meeting [the] demands of the marketplace but also entrepreneurship and engaging with communities and the like.

A fourth driver of curriculum transformation is placing student voices at the centre, which is crucial for realising a transformed curriculum.

Student feedback is also sometimes used to drive curriculum transformation and change, and we are also looking into student success to guide curriculum transformation. Obviously, contextual changes – globally and nationally – inform what we do. We try to be really responsive to all these different aspects.

Identification of these drivers does not necessarily indicate that they all exist co-terminously or at the same level of intensity.

6.4 Theme 4: Good Practices in Curriculum Transformation

Several of the universities highlighted some progressive practices that were noted as highly successful in driving curriculum transformation. Some of this evidence is listed below.

.... all faculties over the last three years had to identify at least one new curriculum. For example, the university owns a dairy but did not have one programme capitalising on that aspect, although dairy is such an important industry here. I'm told that [the area] has the best grazing land in the world and that the quality of the milk is award-winning, yet all the milk is transported

to the Western Cape. We have submitted a new Bachelor of Dairy Science and Food Technology to address this. In the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, we have the liberation archives but we have no programmes focusing on this, so we developed a new BA in Liberation and Heritage Studies. A third example is a Bachelor of Entrepreneurship to address the high levels of unemployment and all of that. So, curriculum transformation here appears to be out of sync with what other universities think about when they talk about the transformation of the curriculum, given our context. And:

In the last two years, we have had a very intentional process for curriculum transformation, which has been funded. The faculties have three years, which commenced last year, to interrogate various aspects of the curriculum. This includes technical aspects such as credit overload and notional hours, and looking at how these gaps could be addressed. Most faculties do a mid-year report, and after the three years, we will look at how well things that emerged from the CHE review have been addressed. It has been a good structural intervention, and lots of curriculum transformation happened organically since 2015 as lecturers met and responded kind of automatically to areas where change was needed. It would be interesting to see how these different kinds of approaches have delivered.

And:

In addition to the initiatives to develop academic staff, we also have regular engagements with academic staff to discuss and think about curriculum transformation. The important discussions should be at Departmental or programme level to determine what transformation from what to what should happen. We also have a specific fund to support staff to be transformative in their curriculum development work, focusing on social justice issues in particular.

And:

At [names institution], we have quite a good system of getting the message right down to the coalface. Through conversations at the SOTL, which includes our Quality Unit, we are always kept abreast of what is expected in the system. We also have a task team of members consisting of our Quality Unit and our Curriculum Unit, who go as a team into Faculties to host workshops or engage with individual lecturers to review curricula and also to develop new programmes. As a multi-pronged team, they look at different aspects.

6.5 Theme 5: Threats Curtailing the Realisation of Curriculum Transformation

Whilst most universities have made considerable efforts towards curriculum transformation, respondents highlighted several impediments.

First, it is difficult to understand whose responsibility curriculum transformation is and where accountability lies. Whether the onus to drive change is on senior management or lecturers, curriculum transformation could be viewed as so broad that it risks becoming intangible and unattainable.

We have heard about the need to introduce entrepreneurship, for example, but some aspects are easier to incorporate. The SDGs are so broad that they probably can be quite easily aligned, but it is difficult to incorporate

entrepreneurship in all programmes which academics contest. In relation to HIV, we had a huge project at our university to bring content and context into our programmes, and at the time, it was driven by a particular person, but in time, that component has also dissipated. Yes, there are many things that arise and that we have to incorporate along with the expected outcomes and attributes, but lecturers often do not see this as their responsibility.

Secondly, some respondents reflected that macro-level curriculum transformation policy has little bearing on what happens in the classroom. There was despair expressed that national legislative bodies often made pronouncements divorced from the realities of universities.

I think the CHE and DHET make symbolic statements which are then propped up by these guidelines and policies and directives in a sense, and then universities also make symbolic moves at an institutional level. However, we cannot control what is happening in the classroom.

Third, programme accreditation mechanisms should be more direct in prompting evidence for curriculum transformation. There was some discussion on how the audit standards, for example, did not sharply point towards precisely what evidence was required to demonstrate that there were initiatives on curriculum transformation. This is borne out in the SERs, where curriculum transformation is dealt with variably and at different levels of depth.

I would suggest that the CHE Criteria for programme accreditation could be more explicit in terms of forcing people to reflect on what they have and what they could change to bring about forced transformation.

Fourth, the CHE needs to take a firmer approach in defining and discussing collectively with the sector the various kinds of transformation required to effect change. It must be noted that these may vary depending on the contextual realities of the university.

Looking at the CHE documents, they talk about digital, social and curriculum transformation. Unless the CHE enforces that kind of implementation at institutional level, so that they include all these kinds of transformation, institutions will not really do it. We are conflating transformation and decolonisation, and often, the job is given to the Transformation Office, which looks at issues like language and signage, but in terms of curriculum and digitisation, I don't think people see those aspects as transformation – they view these things as part of being relevant and keeping up with the times, and I think in the long-run this will have a greater impact on how we are operating.

Fifth, there was some discussion that internationalisation may undermine processes of curriculum transformation. Though this was not articulated sufficiently, it was raised as inherently contradictory, simultaneously striving for curriculum transformation and internationalisation. This matter has been dealt with above under the discussion on drivers underpinning transformation.

Some of the challenges that we pick up in engaging with decolonisation means that one is also confronted with internationalisation and the ratings of institutions, as well as the vision and mission statements of institutions, which focus on being in the African context. This is a challenge for curriculum transformation.

Lastly, there is no definitive conceptual understanding of curriculum transformation, with most universities embarking on this journey depending on their contexts, leadership, and internal drivers for change.

I think there is disjuncture in the external space, which creates confusion for a University as the DHET and CHE approaches appear to ask for [a] different focus. For example, the view that qualifications are for employment (vocational). It would have been ideal that CHE and DHET speak in one voice about transformation.

6.6 Theme 6: Curriculum Transformation in and for the Future

The feedback from respondents highlights several suggestions to strengthen curriculum transformation in public HE in South Africa. These suggestions are helpful as they advocate for change to be more than tokenism or symbolic. They view curriculum transformation as an ongoing process and believe that there would be new pressures at different junctures. There was a strong sense that changes in programme regulations like the HEQSF or SAQA directives often distracted from the real work of curriculum transformation with ‘tinkering on the margins’.

Respondents highlighted the critical need to include student voices to inform processes of transformation as highlighted below:

The voice of the student[s] is crucial to curriculum transformation; they should be involved in everything we do. At [names Institution], we have a Student Quality Desk, which falls within Quality Management, to ensure that their voices are heard on curriculum review.

And again:

I think that student evaluations on the inputs they receive in programmes and modules is another useful mechanism to get a sense of whether curriculum transformation is happening. I also think that there is value in peer evaluation. Despite all the quality assurance processes, I think that these processes give a true reflection of what is happening on the ground.

Lecturers’ voices have also been highlighted as critical to inform curriculum transformation.

From our side, we have a centralised system for curriculum transformation overseen by Senate committees. One of the challenges with this kind of structure is that at an institutional level, we make various decisions about curriculum transformation but at the level where curriculum is implemented, the lecturers are not always aware of the changes they are supposed to implement.

The statement above emerges through the analysis of the SERs where, despite faculty and university governance processes about academic programmes and qualifications, the substantive issues often do not surface. The discussions focus on technicalities of credits, admission rules, curricula overlap, etc.

Curriculum transformation should be current and reflect the demands of society and should not be developed in isolation from local trends and needs.

... we should be clear about what we wish to change. We have to look at what is happening around us and ensure that our curriculum remains current, aligning with national goals and movements.

It was suggested that the staff profile potentially impacted curriculum transformation.

There were references to the debates during #FeesMustFall and #RhodesMustFall, where divergent opinions and views were often aired.

Another aspect of curriculum transformation is that who teaches matter[s]. I think programmes like GAP ha[ve] really assisted in driving staff transformation at universities, and we are starting to see changes in the profiles of lecturers and senior lecturers. It does not mean that a black lecturer will be more predisposed to driving transformation, but it signifies a change in institutional culture.

A lack of staff buy-in can undermine the processes of curriculum transformation.

I think that sometimes people respond to certain terms negatively, and if we find different ways to talk about these issues, using different terminology or phraseology, people do not resist the concept as such. People are in favour of curriculum renewal, whereas they may resist curriculum transformation.

Curriculum transformation is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour and should be adapted to contextual needs. In the South African context, the university type (i.e. comprehensive, traditional or UoT) is suggestive of the change an institution may need. The feedback from the two universities is noted here:

Even though there are directives from the CHE and DHET, it is important that institutions and faculties should ensure that they contextualise what they do, so that it is relevant to the faculty or department. There is no blanket one-size-fits-all approach to curriculum transformation – the approaches and things we do must actually meet the needs of the particular context. There are various ways to do so, and reporting lines within faculties and curriculum working groups ensure that we don't do things for compliance only but with particular outcomes in mind.

And:

The whole issue of curriculum transformation must be understood in light of the type of university and the types of curricula being offered. In traditional universities, most qualifications are general formative degrees. In engaging with academics in both internal and external reviews, there is a tendency to view curriculum transformation differently depending on the discipline. While there are guidelines from the DHET and CHE, these are challenging to implement in traditional universities. It is generally easier to use the guidance from professional bodies because they are less prescriptive, and their guidelines are easier to use.

Though there was insufficient time to probe in detail, some discussants raised the issue of scarce resources and financial constraints, which hampered curriculum transformation. A few respondents referred to recent budget cuts implemented across the sector by the DHET.

6.7 Synthesis of Focus Group Data

The key findings from the focus groups are synthesised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Synthesis of focus group data

Conceptualisation of Transformation	Key principles for curriculum transformation	Drivers of curriculum reform	Institutional strategies and policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasis on inclusion, diversity, decolonisation, and Africanisation. Focus on social justice and creating an enabling teaching environment. • Differentiates between curriculum transformation and reform. Reflects on the technical aspect and contextual relevance, including new curricular development. • A reflection, renewal, and realignment process incorporating decolonisation, inclusivity and graduate attributes. • Ongoing process focused on holistic development and responsiveness to social issues. • Dynamic process integrating liberal arts and vocational education, focusing on creativity, innovation, and social justice. • Intense engagement in transformation, integrating community and context-specific elements. • Continuous process considering technological advancement and future skills. • Concern about convergence of curricula due to regulatory frameworks, stressing the need for diversity. • Focus on work-integrated learning (WIL) and entrepreneurship, adapting to technological changes. • Broad interpretation of curriculum transformation includes citizenship, employability and decolonisation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevance and Adaptability: Ensuring that curricula remain relevant and up-to-date, meeting local and international needs. This includes integrating African Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS) and technological advancements. • Contextual Responsiveness: Adapting the curriculum to the social, historical and local context, particularly in post-colonial, post-apartheid settings. This involves critically examining existing content and practices to reflect diverse experiences and epistemologies. • Inclusivity and Diversity: Promoting epistemological diversity by incorporating marginalised perspectives and global views and making curricular inclusive of various student backgrounds and capabilities. • Pedagogical Innovation: Reevaluating and renewing teaching methods and classroom practices, including the adoption of blended or hybrid learning approaches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link between quality assurance processes and internal/external reviews. Emphasis on social justice and curriculum responsiveness. • Collaboration with teaching development teams to ensure curriculum relevance and language inclusivity. • Variability in programme quality influencing the outcome of reviews. • Institutional projects, QA processes, student feedback, and contextual changes as drivers of transformation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Review Processes: Some institutions have annual or regular processes for reviewing and enhancing curricula. • Centralised vs. Decentralised Approaches: There is tension between centralised decision-making and decentralised implementation, with central bodies making strategic decisions that may not always be effectively communicated or implemented at the faculty or classroom level. • Quality Assurance and Strategic Alignment: Some universities emphasize aligning curriculum transformation with quality assurance policies and strategic plans.

7 Limitations of the Study

The 26 universities developed SERs in response to the *Framework for Institutional Audits* (hereafter ‘the *Framework*’ CHE, 2021a), aided by the *Manual for Institutional Audits* (hereafter ‘the *Manual*’, CHE, 2021b). One of the key limitations of the research project relates to the use of SERs, which responded directly to four focus areas and 16 constituent standards. The phrasing of the audit standards and the structure and organisation of the *Framework* shaped the institutions’ SERs and the question of transformation in particular. It may be that the *Framework* unwittingly resulted in responses to curriculum transformation more narrowly than may otherwise have been the case. Thus, even where institutions did NOT address deep transformation, it cannot be said that there was intent to obfuscate or omit this, responding as they were a focus on institutional quality assurance processes, mechanisms, and procedures.

Transformation is intrinsic to HE and quality assurance in South Africa (CHE, 2021, p. 13), and in an internationalised context, aspects such as online and other offerings are juxtaposed against the ‘local needs’ of unemployment, food security, security, climate change, among others, all of which are recognised by the *Higher Education Amendment Act (Act No. 9 of 2016, as amended)*. The *Act*, the *Framework* points out, refers to the *transformational imperative* to which HEIs are obliged to respond, not only in terms of the demographics of staff and students but also in terms of curriculum reform (to address some of the pressing needs mentioned above) and pedagogical renewal (CHE, 2021, p.13, emphasis added).

The *Framework* makes clear that it adheres to the foundational precept of the QAF, including transformation issues that are especially relevant to curriculum and pedagogical renewal. The CHE indicates in the *Framework* that institutions should present evidence of their engagement with these issues (CHE 2021, p. 17). The next statement made is that:

One of the major purposes of the external quality assurance system ... is to ensure that institutions *have developed effective internal quality assurance systems*, which provide *an enabling framework* for the provision of high-quality programmes, effective student support, flexible learning modes and innovative pedagogies in order to improve access, retention and success (CHE, 2021, p. 17, emphasis added).

The language of the above suggests that institutions focus on *systems* and *mechanisms* to create *enabling frameworks*. In section 2.4., the “overarching purpose” of audit is given as the evaluation of the “coherence and effectiveness of an institution’s internal

quality assurance system”, and student success, learning and teaching, research, and community engagement are the primary targets of this system (CHE, 2021, p. 19). As a result, transformation is not as sharply foregrounded as the institution’s quality assurance system. Against this backdrop, it makes sense that most, if not all, SERs homed in on the quality management system, regardless of the focus of the particular standard in question. Thus, although Standard 2 mentions transformation as a national priority, it targets the institution’s vision, mission and strategic goals. Standard 14, on the other hand, which focuses on curricula, requires “evidence-based *engagement at various institutional levels*, among staff and students” with “curriculum transformation, curriculum reform and renewal learning and teaching innovation; and the role of technology (1) in the curriculum, (2) in the world of work, and (3) in society in general” (CHE, 2021, p. 26). It is unclear that Standard 14 would lead institutions to focus on definitions of curriculum transformation in the institution, nor even specifically on the role of decolonisation. The phrasing of Standard 14 does not overtly or impliedly require that institutions *define* or *conceptualise* curriculum transformation, reform or renewal outside the parameters set by the Standard’s introductory statement. It may also be pertinent to note that the words decolonisation or decoloniality do not appear in the *Framework* or the *Manual*. The responses to the research questions were thus gleaned from SERs not unambiguously directed at addressing the *substantive* concerns posed in the research questions.

A related point may be made about the developmental role of EQA. Institutional audits allow the CHE to evaluate the coherence and effectiveness of quality assurance mechanisms universities have instituted to realise their vision and mission. As developmental tools, audits illuminate gaps, discrepancies, and weaknesses in HEIs’ IQAs, making recommendations for improvement. In line with global best practice, the CHE has a rigorous process for assessing quality assurance mechanisms in South African HEIs, both public and private. The study’s limitations relate principally to the fact that the primary data source is a group of SERs written in relation to standards in ways that foreground reflective accounts of a limited period in which the depth and coverage of curriculum transformation links uniquely to the context and characteristics of each university. The triangulation of primary data with the contextual realities across the different universities falls outside this study’s scope.

The CHE (2021) notes that institutional audits are a developmental tool to support universities to improve the quality of their administrative processes and teaching and learning engagements and cautions that audits are not ranking tools: “The HEQC does not rank institutions based on audit outcomes” (CHE, 2021, p. 30). It is crucial to highlight that although the research required comparing the interpretations of curriculum transformation, clusters of similarity are simply a means by which the varied approaches may be understood and are not to be considered ranking or even a judgement.

Several recommendations arise from the research conducted. Drawing on the observations, analyses, and interviews with university staff at different levels, it is recommended that the CHE facilitate discussions on curriculum transformation without being prescriptive. Universities expressed the need for national conversations on transformation regarding curriculum, teaching and learning, delivery modalities, assessment and academic staff development. However, it was also clear that over-prescribing processes, systems, structures and policies would negatively impact universities, leading to a more compliance-driven than substantive approach, particularly given the need to recognise institutional contexts and autonomy.

Sharing good practices in HE and curriculum transformation was seen as valuable in the focus group discussions, and the CHE and USAf could consider platforms on which such engagements could occur. Material recognition of the contexts and histories of universities is required. The range of institutional differences, which include those between newer and older universities, merged or unaffected by mergers, comprehensives and traditional or UoTs, well-resourced and less-resourced, urban and rural, historically disadvantaged institutions and historically white institutions, and other differentiations must be factored into all discussions about curriculum, as changes and development are context-dependent and necessitate specific governance arrangements and initiatives. Institutions expressed the sense of being constantly under siege from policy and requirements overload from entities like the CHE and SAQA, as well as the need for stability to allow sufficient time for universities to ‘settle’.

The discourse on curriculum is heavily loaded with concepts of ‘employability’, ‘skills, graduate attributes’, ‘decolonisation’, ‘SDGs’ and so forth. Universities are under consistent pressure to embed all these drivers (and new ones as they arise) into HE curricula. The CHE should consider what broad teaching and learning initiatives could be triggered to assist universities with prioritising and contending with multiple competing pressures on the curriculum.

It is recommended that the CHE consider what standalone/extra-curricular programmes or micro-credentials could support the development of specific skills and competencies in the sector. This would enable a national discussion on whether the sector could harness these initiatives. Based on the analysis of the SERs, it is clear that universities have multiple programmes in place, including mentorship, student success initiatives, first-year experience, university-wide non-credit-bearing modules for student enrichment, learning support, tutoring, expanded usage of the learner management systems, etc. From this sector-wide reading, what does not work is a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach. Sharing resources and initiatives could be a rich and rewarding experience for the HE sector.

In light of the increasing fiscal constraints, rapidly increasing student numbers and reduced funds for teaching and learning, the CHE should engage with the DHET to discuss an infusion of funds to relieve these pressures. Teaching and learning and classroom practice, pedagogies, co-creation of curriculum, the role of different stakeholders, and how little is known about classroom practice must be flagged, as how curricula are delivered is personal.

8 Summative Findings

The findings from the input of the SERs, ATLAS.ti, and focus groups were sufficient to permit responses to the initial research questions. A synthesis of the findings is presented below.

Consistent with the literature, the findings suggest a lack of consensus regarding the definition of curriculum transformation, with universities taking both narrow and expanded views. In the SERs, several universities framed their understanding of curriculum transformation around compliance and regulations. In addition, some institutions used the CHE policies, the Higher Education Act, the White Papers, and other national policy and quality processes as 'instructional guides' to transformation. There is much evidence that external events triggered discussions about curriculum transformation, such as the #RhodesMustFall and the #FeesMustFall movements. In some instances, although universities noted this as a catalyst for change, it is unclear what was changed and how.

While a substantial element of compliance is embedded in prevailing conceptions of curriculum transformation, student access and success, funding, employability, and curriculum relevance have also been cited as critical to realising curriculum transformation. The distinction between the levels at which it occurs in a university and how policy is meant to inform practice is also unclear. Additional permutations of curriculum transformation include privileging student and staff voices, advocating for 4IR or 21st-century skills, realising the SDGs, and language concerns.

It emerged strongly from the focus groups that the transformation process occurs at different levels and consequently manifests differently at each level. For example, at senior levels, curriculum transformation could comprise establishment committees, developing frameworks and policies, setting up task teams or similar tasks, etc. However, curriculum transformation in the classroom relies on and varies according to the kinds of pedagogical exchanges in the classroom or to interrogating curriculum content.

Reassuringly, although not all institutions prioritise curriculum transformation with the same degree of intensity, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that all 26 public universities have established frameworks and policies (often including the mission and vision of the university) and committees to address 'transformation' in general, and 'curriculum transformation' in particular. Although some ideas may be conflated in university approaches and documents, they nonetheless set the tone, giving transformation committees instructions on what is needed.

The findings highlight how universities that emerged because of institutional mergers tend to grapple more with (curriculum) transformation than institutions that had not merged. This also highlights some of how institutional culture may undermine curriculum transformation processes. Related to this is the fact that the newly established universities grapple less with transformation issues, suggesting that vestiges, often significant, of colonial and apartheid legacies remain stumbling blocks to meaningful post-apartheid curriculum transformation. Another trend that emerged is that concepts such as Africanisation, decolonisation, transformation, and the like are frequently conflated and conceptually indistinguishable, which has implications for how and whether these are or may be realised in practice.

There are several different drivers of curriculum transformation across all universities. These include funded curriculum transformation programmes, curriculum transformation as a research agenda item, establishing transformation committees and task teams, developing staff professionally on matters related to curriculum transformation – what it means and why it is important, and getting input from various stakeholders, internal and external to the university.

However, there are many impediments to curriculum transformation at South African universities. First, the findings highlight that there are institutions where top-down, macro-level decisions are made about institutional transformation, which does not necessarily translate to what happens in the classroom or at the curriculum level. Second, accountability mechanisms to assess curriculum transformation may be absent, although the reasons for this may differ. Sometimes, it is unclear who is ultimately responsible for whether curricula transform. Despite university-level policies and initiatives, there is a sense of resistance to transformation as a concept recorded in a few SERs which highlight internal university politics and disagreements. Third, cumbersome bureaucratic processes hamper curriculum change, particularly programme development and review processes. Fourth, the curriculum cannot be transformed on a whim as it must be relevant to the labour market, which still prefers tailored programmes. Fifth, competing challenges such as a lack of resources, administrative support, and poor institutional culture limit the time and energy spent on curriculum transformation.

How institutions conceptualise curriculum transformation cannot be divorced from their geographical context or their institutional histories. Several universities have used their context to reimagine curriculum transformation. For example, one university established strong links with the local community to generate income. Another university has developed a series of workshops and lectures for staff on curriculum transformation to ensure staff buy-in because staff are essentially the agents of change in this process.

This baseline analysis provides key insights into processes of curriculum transformation instituted at the various public universities in South Africa. In essence, it highlights that there is consensus between institutions that curriculum transformation is somehow part of what we must do to effect meaningful change in our institutions and society. However, what that change might look like in practice and the best way to do it is still up for debate.

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Addendum A:

ATLAS.ti generated themes and descriptions

Themes	Description
Alignment with the institutional strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guided by and aligned with the values, vision, mission, strategic goals, aspirations, and priorities. This alignment ensures curriculum transformation becomes a strategic endeavour that supports and is integrated with the overall direction and priorities of the university and contributes to the achievement of strategy objectives (e.g., promoting social justice, equity, and the public good)
Academic plan and teaching and learning strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Outlines teaching and learning goals, provides a framework for curriculum development and direction for curriculum transformation, and is regularly reviewed and adapted in consultation with stakeholders Guides the design and development of programmes and ensures that curriculum development and responsiveness to curriculum transformation are considered from a decolonisation perspective A mechanism for faculties to describe their aspirations and commitments for, for example, the next five years, including alignment, resourcing, and transformation Ensures alignment with local, regional, national, continental, and international policy imperatives and emphasises the development of 21st-century skills, social justice, global sustainability, transformation imperatives of South Africa, and innovative teaching approaches
Student-Centred Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures that the curriculum is relevant, engaging, and aligned with student needs and aspirations Academic support framework and mechanisms include tutoring, mentorship, and peer learning Additional resources and assistance to students, which enhances students' learning experience, academic journey, and success

Themes	Description
Alignment with external policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For example, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework and National Framework for Enhancing Lecturers as University Teachers • Involves rethinking and redesigning the content, structure, and delivery of courses and programmes • Ensures that programmes and courses are relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the changing demands of higher education and curriculum transformation efforts are consistent with national guidelines, quality assurance standards, and best practices in higher education • Ensures contribution to the broader goals of curriculum transformation in the country
Consideration of changing contexts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Takes into account the changing operational contexts • Includes considering societal, technological, and economic changes that may impact the knowledge and skills required by graduates • Ensures that the curriculum remains relevant and responsive to the needs of students and society
Inclusive, diverse, participatory, and collaborative consultation processes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prioritise inclusivity and diversity in the curriculum and the design and development of programmes • Thoroughly consult and engage at length with internal and external stakeholders, such as students, student representatives, faculty, academic and support staff, subject matter experts, alumni, employers, industry, community members, government, professional bodies, and other external partners, following a reflexive approach, to identify needs and expectations • Gather and consider diverse perspectives, experiences, cultural contexts, and voices in shaping the curriculum, understand the gaps and areas for improvement in the existing curriculum, and ensure the curriculum meets the needs and expectations of all stakeholders for programme design, development, and review • Fosters collaboration, and a sense of ownership and shared responsibility for the quality and relevance of the curriculum • Extensive consultation processes to formulate teaching and learning goals and aims, and collaboration and input from various stakeholders such as curriculum development practitioners who support academics in developing new programmes and reviewing, revising or expanding existing ones • Participate in advocacy bodies and forums dedicated to sharing good practices in community engagement and curriculum transformation • Address issues of social justice, equity, and decolonisation in the curriculum • Ensures that multiple perspectives are considered, leading to a more inclusive and diverse curriculum that reflects the needs, interests, and experiences of a diverse student body and society and preparing students for the demands of the professional world and society

Themes	Description
Feedback, critical reflection, assessment, and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Applies varied and authentic assessment methods that align with the desired learning outcomes • Assesses and evaluates the effectiveness of teaching and learning approaches, assessment methods and the curriculum in assessing achieving intended learning outcomes • Includes student satisfaction surveys and feedback collection used to assess students’ experiences and engagements, as well as the quality of teaching and learning • Identifies areas for curriculum improvement and transformation and gaps in knowledge, skills, and competencies that need to be addressed through curriculum transformation efforts
Continuous evaluation and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourages ongoing reflection, evaluation, and revision of the curriculum to ensure its relevance, effectiveness, responsiveness, and alignment with the institution’s mission and vision, changing needs of students, the society, and the higher education landscape, and evolving educational standards and best practices • Includes iterative and ongoing review, streamlining, and integration of programme design, approval, and review processes and procedures, comprehensive annual reports by faculties and support departments, and institutional scorecards on teaching and learning activities, outcomes and impact of curriculum transformation efforts, curriculum transformation and alignment, and critical assessment of the attainment of performance goals • Curriculum development and renewal as part of efforts to improve academic performance and operational efficiency • Informs the continuous cycles of evaluation, quality enhancement, and improvement of the curriculum • Allows for implementation of changes to the curriculum over time
Curriculum committees and working groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee curriculum design, development, and review processes, ensuring alignment with the institution’s goals and values • Provide guidance, support, and expertise in implementing curriculum changes that promote diversity, inclusivity, and social justice • Facilitate collaboration and dialogue among faculty members, students, and other stakeholders to foster a collective understanding of curriculum transformation
Curriculum mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Includes mapping learning outcomes, content, and sequencing • Aligns the learning outcomes, content, and assessment methods across different courses within a programme • Identifies gaps or redundancies in the curriculum and areas where the curriculum can be aligned with the institution’s goals, vision, and desired learning outcomes • Highlights areas where decolonisation and other aspects of curriculum transformation can be integrated • Ensures a coherent and progressive learning experience for students

Themes	Description
Graduate attributes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, skills, and values that students should acquire through their educational experience • Defines and aligns graduate attributes with the changing needs of society • Ensures that programmes are equipping students with the necessary skills and competencies for the future
Integration of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digital transformation strategy, which seeks to incorporate digital technologies and innovative online classroom and pedagogical methodologies into the curriculum • Enables the adoption of new teaching and learning methods that align with digital advancements • The university emphasises the integration of. This includes incorporating e-learning platforms, online resources, and interactive tools to enhance teaching and learning experiences. The use of technology enables flexibility, engagement, and access to a wide range of resources for students.
Integration of transformation principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Throughout the programme design, development, and review processes, there is an emphasis on integrating principles of curriculum transformation • Includes promoting inclusivity, decolonisation, Africanisation, and the integration of Indigenous knowledge systems • Recognises and values Indigenous knowledge, local knowledge, and knowledge from marginalised communities • Challenges dominant narratives and promotes a more inclusive and decolonised curriculum • Encourages critical reflection on the curriculum and the adoption of innovative and transformative approaches to teaching and learning
Integration of new knowledge and practices and learning and teaching innovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explores new pedagogical approaches, technologies, and teaching methods to enhance the learning experience and outcomes for students • Incorporates new knowledge, research findings, and emerging practices into the curriculum • Keeps the curriculum up-to-date, relevant, and responsive to changing societal needs and advancements in the fields • Contributes to curriculum transformation by incorporating new perspectives, methodologies, and content, challenging traditional perspectives and incorporating diverse voices and perspectives

Themes	Description
Programme design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear policies, procedures, templates, and guidelines for new programme design (or the redesign of existing programmes), development, and approval (e.g., appointing programme coordinators, establishing curriculum design teams, faculty structures and mechanisms to design and evaluate the quality of proposed new programmes and curricula, institutional qualifications’ evaluation committees) • Reflects the institution’s commitment to curriculum transformation • Involves the intentional planning and organisation of the curriculum, selecting learning outcomes, content, teaching methods, and assessment strategies, and designing the structure and sequencing of courses and modules • Ensures that new and revised programmes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Align with the institution’s values, vision, mission, and strategic goals, policies and procedures, and quality standards – Reflect contemporary global thinking and perspectives and emerging trends – Incorporate diverse ways of knowing and alternative and Indigenous knowledge systems – Consider local understanding, experiences, problems, and topics related to marginalised communities – Incorporate the principles of curriculum transformation (e.g., social justice, decolonisation, inclusivity, equity, diversity, and relevance), promote critical engagement with social issues, and challenge traditional knowledge hierarchies, biases, and power dynamics – Integrate technology-enhanced learning, innovative approaches, emerging knowledge and research areas, best practices, and new teaching and learning, pedagogical and assessment practices – Encourage the integration of interdisciplinary perspectives and approaches, promoting a holistic understanding of complex issues – Consider student success and engagement and the diverse needs, demands, backgrounds, and aspirations of students – Align with national and regulatory requirements and frameworks, criteria for accreditation, the changing landscape of the field or niche areas, and the needs and demands of society and the world of work – Address societal challenges and stakeholder needs – Contribute to curriculum transformation

Themes	Description
Programme development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves management systems (incl. academic planning and quality assurance institutional planning, completing relevant documentation, conducting feasibility assessments, analysing resources and infrastructure, benchmarking similar programmes), interpretation of national accreditation policy for institutional implementation, enrolment planning, and ongoing engagement with academic staff, students, industry professionals, community representatives, and other relevant stakeholders • Focuses the detailed planning, implementation, and refinement of the curriculum, translating the design into a detailed curriculum and module or course structure, including course offerings, detailed course outlines, teaching strategies, and selecting and developing appropriate learning resources and assessment criteria, methods and instruments • Ensures that the curriculum reflects current best practices and addresses the evolving needs of students and society, is coherent and engaging, and promotes student learning, experiences, engagement, and success (i.e., student-centred) • Considers the concepts of ‘fitness for’ and ‘fitness of purpose’ to ensure that the curriculum meets the needs of students, aligns with the university’s strategic objectives, and addresses feedback from students, faculty, and external reviewers • Integrates new pedagogical approaches, innovative teaching and learning practices, technology-enhanced learning, digital technologies, diverse perspectives, interdisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches, experiential learning opportunities, and problem-solving methodologies. • Fosters critical thinking, creativity, and practical application of knowledge in real-world contexts • Incorporates decolonisation, decolonised content, Indigenous knowledge systems, diverse perspectives, relevance, redress, social justice, and inclusive teaching practices • Relevant and responsive to the institution’s goals of curriculum transformation, needs of the students from diverse backgrounds, the changing landscape of higher education, and the desired outcomes and qualities expected from graduates • Guided by evidence-based practices and informed by the institution’s quality awareness, performance management framework, integration of best practices in curriculum design, and alignment with changing educational contexts, needs of students, society, and the workforce

Themes	Description
Programme review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Systematic evaluation of the implementation, effectiveness and relevance of existing academic programmes conducted regularly (e.g., every five years) • Part of quality assurance processes and improvement plans resulting from these reviews are monitored at the department and institutional levels (e.g., data management system, review cycle, and monitoring of improvement plans) • Assesses whether the programmes are meeting their intended goals and outcomes and are aligned with established standards and objectives • Facilitates evidence-based, data-driven decision-making by collecting and analysing feedback from students, faculty, curriculum committees, external experts, industry experts, external senior academic staff, employers, professional bodies, and other stakeholders, (e.g. surveys or focus groups, data on student performance, retention, and outcomes, benchmarking against national and international standards) • Ensures coherence between the original intentions stated and the actual implementation of programmes • Includes evaluation of the fitness for purpose of the current curriculum and its effectiveness in supporting the institution’s vision for curriculum transformation, institutional goals and strategy, and stakeholder needs • Informs the identification of areas for improvement and innovation in curriculum transformation (e.g., revising teaching methods and assessment strategies and identifying gaps, biases, inequalities, and areas where the curriculum can be further diversified, or decolonisation, social justice, and inclusivity can be further integrated), equity, quality, and relevance • Promotes continuous improvement and ensures that programmes remain up-to-date and responsive to changing societal needs, the needs of a diverse student body, and changing needs of the discipline or profession (incl. incorporating new research findings and emerging needs, trends and practices), and guides addressing gaps in the curriculum (e.g., incorporating new learning outcomes) to improve the quality of teaching and learning, assessment, and student experience

Themes	Description
Quality management, quality assurance and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regular, rigorous, ongoing monitoring, evaluation and reviews of academic quality, faculty, defining documents, curricula, qualifications, and programmes (incl. internal and external reviews, professional body accreditation, and national reviews) to evaluate quality and effectiveness against established national and international regulatory frameworks, professional standards, best practices, and benchmarks • Follows quality assurance frameworks (e.g., policies and guidelines related to quality assurance in teaching and learning and review cycles) and incorporates feedback from stakeholders • Results in the development of quality improvement plans, aligned with institutional strategic plans and contributing to ongoing curriculum transformation efforts • Provides opportunities for reflection to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Assess relevance and effectiveness of curriculum and transformation efforts and alignment with the institution’s strategic goals – Make necessary adjustments/improvements to enhance the quality of teaching and learning – Identify areas where curriculum transformation can be strengthened (e.g., inclusion of diverse perspectives, the promotion of social justice, and the integration of decolonised content) – Identify opportunities for innovation
Curriculum alignment and resource allocation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligns the programme, curriculum, student experience, and resource allocation • Resource allocation at the Executive Director level in finance, facilities, and people and culture

Addendum B:

ATLAS.ti's generated stumbling blocks that impede curriculum transformation.

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Information Technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Access to information technology, network infrastructure (incl. bandwidth), and data, and connectivity issues and limitations for both students and staff (e.g., inadequate online student support services; access to data and devices, especially in remote areas; challenges associated with online teaching and learning; difficulties ensuring equitable access, quality online education, and student success; confidentiality and privacy concerns)
Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inadequate infrastructure and information, communication, and technology services and support• Infrastructural, technological, and equipment challenges, infrastructure upgrade projects and delays, insufficient infrastructure and backlogs in infrastructure development (e.g., laboratories, specialised equipment, physical spaces), inadequate resources and resource allocation, and inadequate research infrastructure, limited resources, and infrastructure for research
Human Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Inadequate, unstandardised performance management• Accountability and selection of Deans with the necessary expertise and commitment to drive curriculum transformation• Inadequate administrative support and capacity challenges in smaller departments• Administrative responsibilities and operational demands on faculty leaders may limit their capacity to drive curriculum transformation effectively• Duplication and bureaucracy, complex decision-making procedures, workload pressures, workload management, time constraints, additional administrative burden, and paper-heavy processes slow curriculum transformation• High teaching loads leave little time for curriculum development and transformation efforts• Capacity, training and development needs of staff, inadequate professional development, and duration of training programmes

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Human Resources (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting targets for academic staff qualifications • Dearth of human resource capacity (e.g., quality manager) and attrition of experienced academics • Lack of academic preparedness • Lack of formalised mentoring and induction processes • Limited employment and career opportunities (e.g., management positions) • Limited engaged teaching and learning scholarship • Limited permanent staff, resulting in a lack of continuity and consistency in implementing transformative changes • Limited recognition of teaching excellence, scope for teaching excellence, and senior-level awards • Low number of staff with doctoral qualifications • Marketing and recruitment challenges • Newly qualified supervisors • Non-availability of staff to address student queries • Recruitment and transformation (representation of under-represented designated group candidates in academic staff promotions) • Restructuring and changes in personnel • Scarce skills and succession planning • Capacity and expertise available for curriculum transformation: academic staff play a crucial role in designing, developing, and reviewing the curriculum • Institutional inefficiencies (e.g., imbalance between different categories of staff, insufficient research office support staff, lack of academic support in regional offices, insufficient specialised support staff, such as laboratory technicians) • Staff recruitment challenges, shortages, and turnover, and the impact on institutional knowledge • Digital literacy and proficiency of both students and staff • Temporary appointments in non-professional administration staff, leading to a lack of continuity in administrative processes

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Context and Regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to address contextual issues (e.g., racialised disparities in wealth and income) • Inflexible regulatory frameworks (e.g., alignment with the National Qualifications Framework levels and purpose) • Competing demands and compliance-focused approaches that emphasise external regulations, accreditation, quality assurance and assessment standards, and regulatory and professional body requirements that make it difficult to implement innovative assessment methods or recognise alternative forms of knowledge and learning • Delay in development and approval of HEQSF-aligned qualifications • Challenges in the South African education system and context, and disparity in the education system • Closing out legal compliance infringements; difficulties in compliance with recommendations; difficulty in interpreting evaluation results • Context-dependent choices in curriculum design and implementation • Continuous adaptation and adjustment to align with changing circumstances • High levels of poverty and inequality in the university’s operational context • Fluctuations in student enrolment and deregistration, impacting curriculum implementation • Graduation rates and skills shortage • Homogeneity of student and staff demographics (e.g., race, language, and social class) may limit the diversity of perspectives and experiences incorporated into the curriculum • Limited Quintile 1 to 4 representation in the undergraduate intake • Reliance on independent schools for student recruitment may limit the diversity of perspectives and experiences within the student body • Incomplete conversion to a comprehensive university • Phasing out of NATED programmes and the transition to HEQSF-aligned programmes, realignment process of qualifications, requiring significant curriculum development, redesign of Category B programmes • Socio-economic challenges faced by students • Tensions with external quality assurance mechanisms • Understanding and adherence to prescribed functions

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of awareness and understanding of curriculum transformation principles and goals • Historical biases and power imbalances in the curriculum, extreme inequality, historical inequities, social, cultural, and economic marginalisation, privileging of Eurocentric knowledge and cultures, and historical identity and traditional programme qualifications mix, disparities and vulnerabilities in the student and staff population • Cultural shift towards a mature quality culture • Contestation between academic and support quality assurance • Hierarchical top-down processes and structures with centralised decision-making and not sufficiently inclusive of diverse perspectives and voices within the university community • Fragmented structures (incl. internal quality assurance) systems, and processes, unclear lines of authority, differences between faculties in assessment policies and curriculum alignment, complexity of universities, division of oversight between faculties and the Senate, decision-making processes, and management structures, lack of coherence and integration of processes, discipline differences and operational challenges, curriculum diversity and differentiation of qualifications across faculties, and faculty autonomy make it difficult to implement standardised curriculum transformation initiatives • Change management challenges, institutional culture, hierarchies, structures, resistance to change (students, faculty members, administrators and other staff, external stakeholders, departments, and traditional disciplines), anxiety about curriculum transformation implementation, and lack of challenging established norms, perspectives, and power structures due to hesitancy to adopt technology, alternative modes of delivery and teaching methods, or new pedagogical approaches, incorporate diverse perspectives or revise existing content, curricula and courses, lack of awareness or understanding of the need for curriculum transformation, concerns about workload or resource implications, or a preference for traditional teaching methods and content • Resistance to conformity, superficial change, and top-down prescription • Balancing national priorities with preserving institutional values and identity
Financial Limitations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial pressure, sustainability, budgetary constraints and competing demands, and difficulties in growing external income streams (e.g., austerity measures, slow economic growth and an adverse macroeconomic climate limit funding for research and curriculum development; chronic underfunding; decline in postgraduate bursary support; differential funding and budgetary differentiation; funding limitations; qualifications covered by NSFAS funding) • High levels of debt and financial aid, putting strain on resources • Hidden costs for students, particularly related to work-integrated learning or clinical practice • Resource constraints for self-evaluations and peer review site visits
COVID-19 pandemic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impact of and challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., economic hardships, academic calendar changes, anxiety, working from home challenges, data and resource problems, feeling isolated, need for additional support) • Disruptions caused by COVID-19 and unrest

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Systems, Processes, and Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Late delivery of study material, guides, and library books • Late NSFAS allocations and challenges with laptop provision • Late receipt of feedback on assignments • Operational silos and a lack of coherence, siloed approach to quality, lack of coordination • Lengthy curriculum approval process • Lengthy disciplinary processes • Efficacy of extended curriculum programmes • Leadership challenges and instability, lack of stable governance structures, continuity and stability of leadership positions • Misalignment of curriculum transformation and research entities • Misalignment of curriculum transformation with professional bodies • Misalignment of curriculum transformation with the institutional strategy, plans, or objectives • Misalignment of institutional strategy with budget • Growing student enrolments, managing many undergraduate students, and increasing student numbers for economic viability without compromising quality • Formal structures and procedures that do not favour cooperation and coordination, and poor collaboration and work-sharing • Complex merger and incorporation of different institutions with diverse missions, programmes, academic cultures, and policies presents a challenge in aligning and transforming curricula across different disciplines and faculties • Complexity of curriculum transformation • Delineation of quality assurance function • Lack of awareness of support systems • Centralised teaching and learning support • Differentiated support for students with disabilities within the regions • Disconnect between approval and implementation • Monitoring and evaluation challenges, inadequate monitoring and evaluation, lack of mandated evaluations • Evaluation weighting and grading • Face-to-face modality capacity development • Faculty development and capacity building in curriculum transformation (e.g., new approaches and pedagogies) • Limited opportunities for faculty development, inadequate training in transformative teaching practices, and inadequate professional development • Lack of incentives for engaging in curriculum transformation and faculty-specific variances in commitment to curriculum transformation • High student-to-staff ratios, limiting individual attention and support for students • Inadequate monitoring of workload allocation at the departmental level, with no written guidelines or norms

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Systems, Processes, and Capacity (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inadequate policy implementation and integration of policy and practice • Inconsistencies in policies and processes, support services, budgeting processes, and review periods • Inadequate student and academic staff support from specific support departments • Lack of coordinated structure, indemnity, and stipend management for work-integrated learning • Integration of quality measures for remote learning • Lack of a tailored risk management plan • Lack of clear procedures for module fee allocation • Lack of cross-cutting mechanisms, documented mandates, organograms, formal mandates, and transparent management structures • Lack of integration between policies and practices • Absence of explicit policies and frameworks for curriculum transformation and renewal • Limited capacity of the Academic Planning Unit and Quality Assurance office • Limited centralised record of curriculum reviews • Limited conceptualisation of programmes • Limited epistemological diversity and methodological complexities • Limited policy guidance for interventions with at-risk students (identifying, tracking, monitoring, and supporting at-risk students) • Implementation of quality assurance framework, inadequate monitoring of quality improvement plans, and need for formalised quality assurance and enhancement planning • Operational difficulties, including poor performance in procurement, technical services, and finance • Outdated policies • Not outsourcing certain services can place a financial and human resource burden on the institution • Perceived lack of alignment between programme and module reviews • Plagiarism and cheating in online assessments • Policy and procedural gaps in programme design templates • Reactive approach to addressing disruptions • Research output management • Review of policies • Role clarity and compliance • Safety concerns, especially in high-crime areas like Johannesburg • Slow approval processes • Need for additional levels of support, both academic and psychosocial, for students from poorer-resourced schools • Verification of qualifications for various applicants

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Communication and Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication and information sharing issues (e.g., communication overload; inadequate reporting of community engagement activities) • External stakeholder alignment (e.g., employer demands and resistance, societal expectations, competitive job market) • Cultural and language barriers • Data quality, data management, data analysis, and systems and platform integration challenges (e.g., accurate and reliable data for monitoring student success, progress, and other indicators, access to information and analytics) • Stakeholder engagement and inclusion issues; ensuring inclusive participation of students, staff, and stakeholders, including African voices, debate, iteration processes, transformation principles, and discussion of decolonisation in curriculum transformation efforts • Further engagement and reflection on decolonisation is needed; difficulty in engaging in collective sense-making • Understanding feeder schools and providing language support for students who speak a home language other than English or Afrikaans • Hesitancy to provide feedback • Institutional reputation, negative publicity, and brand damage • Inaccuracies in online registration systems (e.g., inaccurate contact information provided by students) • Institutional memory and archiving • Insufficient impact assessment • Lack of formal track and trace studies • Lack of formal reporting structure for complaints from students or staff • Lack of clarity and communication about curriculum transformation principles and goals • Lack of standardised system for community engagement, inconsistent and meaningless community engagement as part of the transformed curriculum • Limited data collection, access, analysis, and evaluation instruments, and lack of programme reviews, standardised practices for lecturer and student evaluations, recent and reliable data, and regular surveys to determine the quality of the student experience • Lack of timely and formative feedback • Limited alumni engagement and ongoing feedback • Limited analysis and platforms • Limited feedback mechanisms for employers, hindering insights on curriculum relevance and effectiveness • Limited integration of graduate destination study data • Limited or lack of response to students' emails and telephonic enquiries. • Limited recognition of student input

Category	Stumbling Blocks
Communication and Information (continued)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited integration of student voices, limited student engagement in surveys, evaluation and feedback processes, and programme development and curriculum transformation processes • Limited tracking and monitoring of decolonisation activities • Non-declaration of race by a substantial fraction of students makes it increasingly difficult to track progress towards equity targets and assess the effectiveness of curriculum transformation initiatives in addressing historical inequalities • Quantitative measures of throughput • Records management • Reluctance to use data for surveys • Lack of information about the school sector from which students come
Curriculum and Programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited inclusion of fundamental learning modules • Limited monitoring of coherence between programme intentions and implementation • Limited recognition of marginalised knowledge generated outside of dominant Western contexts • Non-linear paths in higher education • One-size-fits-all approach • Language and academic literacy proficiency challenges for students, language dominance with English as the primary medium of instruction – need for multilingualism • Tensions and dilemmas that emerge while pursuing equity, quality, and development • Slow uptake of e-learning • Enhance student engagement in curriculum transformation processes • Students struggling to adapt to the new multi-modal teaching and learning system • Systemic, structural inequalities and socio-economic challenges can hinder equitable access to quality education • Articulation gap between different qualification types • Variability in curriculum development



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