

INCLUSION OF STUDENT DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A HOBSON'S CHOICE

Wandisile Mdepa – Student Governance Practitioner and

L Tshiwula- Vice Rector Student Development and Support
University of the Western Cape- South Africa

EAN 20th Anniversary Conference, 20th -22nd June 2011
VU University Amsterdam, The Netherlands

INCLUSION OF STUDENT DIVERISTY IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A HOBSON'S CHOICE

INTRODUCTION

- Access to higher education in Africa has hindering barriers
- Governments in Africa often have to balance their country's needs and make choices amongst pressing priorities
- This presentation paper offers a view of student diversity inclusion in higher education in South Africa
- Inclusion or exclusion of student diversity in HE is a Hobson's choice
- If South Africa is to survive as a competitive economy

Introduction cont..

- place this understanding in a historical context
- between 1948 - 1993 characterized by legalised unequal separate development, i.e apartheid
- The Bantu Education Act, Act No 47 of 1953 classified and separated education according to race, separate departments, made up of White, Indian, Coloured and Africans
- The extension of Universities Act, Act No 45 1959 established non-white colleges
- apartheid HE landscape was inherently inequitable, differentiated along the lines of race and ethnicity

Introduction cont..

- Africans as the majority population had the lowest participation rate in HE
- In its forty five year rule, the apartheid-government had 36 universities, 15 technikons
- staffing of these institutions subscribed to separate development except black institutions
- predominance of white staff in senior positions
- South Africa's past left HE with challenges that hinder access and participation i.r.o diversity
- language as a medium of instruction
- therefore campus culture, gender, ethnicity, race is just as differentiated

HIGHER EDUCATION POST 1994

- turning moment was the adoption of the Interim Constitution (Act, 200, 1993) guaranteed universal suffrage
- allowed to vote in the 1994 general elections for the first time in SA history
- final Constitution (Act 108) adopted in October 1996
- Section 29 guarantees the right to basic education, including adult education and further education
- 29 subsection 2(c) refers to redress results of past discriminatory laws and practices
- The first document formed basis for radical HE sector
- the National Commission on Higher Education: An overview of a new policy framework for Higher Education Transformation, August 1996

HIGHER EDUCATION POST 1994 cont..

- The central features of this document =
 1. Increased participation of students and increased diversity and flexibility with enrolment and programme offerings; the reference to massification was understood to address equity, redress and development;
 2. Greater responsiveness with its social context, i.e. an open knowledge system;
 3. Increased co-operation and partnerships across HE and in terms of the tension between the state and higher education autonomy, and with civil society
- participation was targeted at a 18-24 year cohort
- key was to produce the high level skills required for economic growth

HIGHER EDUCATION POST 1994 cont..

- student enrolment increased from 473 000 to 799 388 in 2008
- realization the ideal of equal opportunity for access and success still a long way off
- Government supporting document to redress and open access to student diversity in line with National goals Human Resource Development Strategy(HRD-SA,2010-2030)
- agenda of inclusion of a diversity of students in the scarce skills area
- equitable outcomes in education and training in respect of race, gender, disability and geographic location
- aiming at SA being ranked in the top 10% of comparable countries i.r.o. economic competitiveness
- raising the number of engineers, medical doctors, artisans, doctoral graduates, research and development personnel

ACCESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- In 2001, the NPHE estimated gross participation rates at 15% and set a target of 20% by 2011/2016
- The 18-24 year cohort is approaching 20%,
- still a racial divide, whites are at a 60% , more than half of Indians are in HE
- the rate for Africans is 11% and Coloureds are at 7% rate
- is low quality of primary and secondary schooling a factor?
- pivotal role in preparation and widening participation for HE (survey in Europe, Africa)
- access a major concern, proponents of diversity argue admission and selection should favour Africans
- success remains a huge concern
- Stakeholder Summit on HE Transformation (2010) agreement that access should be widened

ACCESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION cont..

- the environment should enable the success of students
- UCT applying racial quotas to
- African and coloured students in medical school.
- Vice-Chancellor is quoted
- using a race-based policy is second best and it is a proxy for disadvantage most of the time. Our experience shows that a black student coming from a township school who manages 65% or 70% in matric has overcome incredible odds, we know that if they had been in a good school, they would have got 90% therefore we do not want to penalise them because of the accident of the circumstances they were born into
- Nigeria university of Ibadan students less developed states are given special admission
- provides opportunities five such students to have access to HE
- enabling access (NSFAS) 60% loan and 40% bursary does not cover all requirements
- have to drop out of HE
- major problems students face in Africa are lack of resources

ACCESS OF SOUTH AFRICAN STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION cont..

- as living standards have severely declined in Africa
- Established there is direct correlation between access and funding in HE
- (2002) Human Sciences Research Council SA study, 70% of drop outs were first generation HE 35% had (NSFAS)
- 2009 was at R2.5 billion for 140 000 students nationally
- in Africa about 30% of students who apply for admission about +- 5% drop out depending on the country
- there is a direct correlation between poverty and student retention all over Africa

CONTESTED DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA

- SA student diversity different
- only country in Africa experienced a deliberate legalised form of exclusion from education
- What's common within the continent is colonisation
- 11 recognised South African languages in terms of the (Constitution Act 108 of 1996).
- not necessarily the case in HE
- enrolments in African languages declining
- hindering access and location of HE, no residences, not subsidized by the state
- Underprepared students are those that arrive at higher education coming from the worst resourced schools, limiting choices, of engineering ,medicine and science
- absence of career guidance

CONTESTED DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA cont..

- competency of speaking English fluently ,medium of instruction in HE
- generally English in Africa plus Afrikaans(SA)
- Provision of academic development to address underpreparedness
- to ensure the success of inclusive diversity
- ethnic groups not homogenous
- harness diversity in the context of access and participation
- In campuses students feel alienated by the dominant culture in formerly white institutions
- The histories of, still have some lingering racism, privileges associated with social class
- Students do express this alienating experience as exclusionary and disempowering

CONTESTED DIVERSITY IN SOUTH AFRICA cont..

- value of diversity ability to redress inequality and confront issues of access and success

ACCESS AND DIVERSITY FROM COMPARABLE COUNTRIES IN AFRICA

- SA increased its diversity enrolments as preferred destination for students from continent
- Zimbabwe sends 39% of its students to SA
- Namibia, Botswana's, Lesotho, Swaziland, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Zambia, Mauritius, Angola
- 9 500 students (SADC) 2008 academic year
- Kenya, diversity is likely to be found in private universities
- with Kenya's unfortunate ethnic tragedies
- Kenya would benefit from a commitment of a HE diversity policy .

COMPARABLE AFRICAN COUNTRIES cont..

- 1995 Kenya introduced a Higher Education Loans Board(HELB), recover government loans, from 1952, create revolving fund for needy students
- reduce the exchequer of financing education which was 40% of the annual national budget
- limited access for students, compared to population
- Analysis of data collected from some HE in Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Cameroon, Togo, Benin, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Zimbabwe, Senegal and Gambia over range of issues such as access to higher education, problems are almost the same
- No equity access as a result of social inequalities
- Growth rate of the African countries has no expansion plans for universities

NATIONAL STRATEGY TO INCREASE ACCESS (SAICA)

- Develop a comprehensive growth strategy for higher education
- Aligned to the South African Human Resource Development Strategy
- To identify barriers for growth at each level
- To develop programmes to overcome each barrier
- To design a new student loan funding model that will respond to the issues of food security to develop strong academic programmes
- Additional tutorial support systems, enable success

NATIONAL STRATEGY cont..

- 70 % throughput pass percentage target
- Life study and workplace readiness programmes
- To have student tracking and monitoring system in enhancing throughput rate
- Students to show commitment to studies (attendance and submission of assignment rates to be 100%)

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY CONNECTING EXAMPLE (BRA WAM)

- Provision of a broad range of development and support services to achieve educational goals
- Ensuring living and learning environment utilizing various opportunities i.e. mentoring
- Partnering mutually beneficial mentor - mentee relationship to contribute to the Provinces Social Capital
- Ensuring a connection between communities and the university

Community connection cont..

- Collaborative Leadership Development Program.
Encourage life skills such as hope and resilience
- Have engaged students on diversity and inclusion through focus groups and debates.

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY CONNECTEDNESS EXAMPLE

- first generation students, black (South African reference to African, coloured and Indian) constitutes 89% South African population
- bridge the gap between the disconnection of first generation university students and their communities at a local level, in a specific university (UWC)
- family goes to great lengths of making sacrifices for their children
- to enter university for a better future life, trying to break free from a cycle of poverty
- hope is , the student will study hard and complete the degree, find a job and assist in raising the family from the poverty cycle
- family expectation can conflict with the student's own ambition

UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EXAMPLE cont..

- managing this family-student disconnection is to involve high school learners with university students from similar backgrounds
- an involvement of grade nine's with students in a big brother-big sister mutually beneficial mentor-mentee programme
- assisting grade nine learners and their families(prospective first generation students) to learn what higher education means for their future
- The project does not set out to recruit future students for its specific university, rather wishes to bridge the gap

CONCLUSION

- South Africa has no choice but to open access for diversity
- HE education has the support from a number of policies and legislation to redress the consequences of apartheid education.
- There are achievements and gains made and also progress on selected implementation processes
- Diversity is also a challenge for some African universities
- Serious attention will have to be paid to a quality foundation of primary and secondary schooling

THANK YOU

- Questions!!