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RHETORIC VERSUS REALITY IN SOUTH AFRICA'S POLICY DISCOURSE ON HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS: A CRITICAL REVIEW

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Abstract.

The South African Department of Higher Education and Training issued a Draft Policy for discussing the reclassification of tertiary education institutions. This article scrutinised the proposed policy and provided feedback to the department regarding the challenges, potential considerations, and imperatives of reclassifying higher education institutions in the educational landscape. The study employs a quantitative focus-group research design whereby six experts in Education discussed the impact of policy changes across several educational realities. The role of universities (and other higher education institutions) is discussed, and the results show that the Draft Policy lacks synergy with the country's National Development Plan 2023. There is also a lack of dialogue between public and private higher education institutions, while the Draft Policy neglects public-private partnerships. The study recommends that the Minister of Education establish a Research and Development Committee constituted of Public and Private higher education institutions to collaboratively advise and guide the process of reclassifying higher education institutions in South Africa. This committee will also assist the Minister in reimagining what a future South African university should look like in the current turbulent educational environment where demographic shifts, geopolitical challenges, changing workplace demands and high student expectations for a quality digital experience exist.

Keywords: *South Africa, universities, policy, white paper, research, higher Education.*

JEL Codes: *I23, I23, I25*

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1. Introduction

According to the 2022 UNESCO higher education global data report (UNESCO, 2022), over 235 million students were enrolled in higher education globally in 2020, more than doubling the 100 million students enrolled in 2000 (UIS database). The UNESCO report further indicated that the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) reached 40% globally in 2020, whilst the GER in sub-Saharan Africa remained at only 9% (UIS



database). Notably, the report showed that about a third of enrolment worldwide is estimated to be in private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and two-thirds in public HEIs.

On the 8th of August 2022, Dr Blade Nzimande, South Africa's Minister of Higher Education and Training (DHET), published a draft Policy to classify higher education institutions in South Africa (Kosi, 2022). Specifically, in section 3(1) of the Higher Education Act (no 101 of 1997), higher education institutions are to be classified as *Higher Education Colleges*, *University Colleges*, and *Universities* (SA, 1997). The Minister stated that the policy's goal is for "greater horizontal and vertical mobility by learners in the higher education system" (Van der Merwe, 2022).

South Africa has 26 public universities (11 traditional universities, nine comprehensive universities, and six universities of technology) (De Wet, 2022). Historically disadvantaged universities lag behind former white universities despite focused government interventions to improve research outputs. Several of these universities are also highly indebted, and some have been placed under administration (Van der Merwe, 2022).

The private HEI in South Africa comprises 124 institutions with a total enrolment of 232,915, constituting approximately 15% of the total enrolments of students in the national system. Private HEIs offer qualifications across the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) with undergraduate and post-graduate programmes like public HEIs in South Africa. The governance and regulation of public and private higher Education in South Africa are managed jointly by the DHET, CHE and SAQA.

The draft policy could have far-reaching consequences. Although the draft document does not specify the requirements of types of research or what specific qualifications universities may offer, universities have the mandate to conduct extensive research across a broad discipline range. However, the policy does not stipulate measurement metrics to determine the universities' research activities and outputs to maintain their university status. However, the policy mentions that universities will be reviewed if they do not meet the new criteria (King, 2022). Such universities may be reclassified, incorporated into another higher education institution, or forced to close. The Minister may change an institution's status upon the council's request.

Research-intensive universities (like KwaZulu-Natal, Cape Town, Pretoria, and Stellenbosch) will probably be fine with the draft policy (De Wet, 2022). However, historically disadvantaged universities and some smaller universities could be in danger of reclassification (Van der Merwe, 2022). These universities could face a downgrade or even close-down if they fail to adhere to the research requirements of universities. These requirements likewise apply equally to private HEIs. Institutions that fail to qualify as universities could be reclassified as university colleges (Daily Vox, 2022). The implications of being classified as a university college differ for private HEIs, as this will mean a loss of autonomy.

2. Proposed classification of educational institution types

The new draft policy, as per section 3(1) of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) (SA, 1997), classifies higher education institutions into 1) Higher Education Colleges, 2) University Colleges, and 3) Universities (Kosi, 2022).

More specifically, the criteria as set out in the Draft Policy state that:

- A *Higher Education College* 1) focuses on professional programmes in niche areas and



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develops skills, 2) offers programmes in a specific field or discipline, 3) focuses on undergraduate teaching and learning, 4) provides a holistic approach to education and training, 5) offers a range of qualifications more than 60% on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) that leads to higher certificates, advanced certificates, diplomas, and bachelor's degrees. Fewer programmes may lead to specialised qualifications, such as advanced diplomas. A Higher Education College does not have a research mandate.

- A *University College* is a higher education institution planning to evolve into a university over time under the trusteeship of an existing public or private university. A university college must show stable management, research capacity, and sufficient and sustainable enrollment numbers (for undergraduate and postgraduate programmes) to upgrade to a university.

The policy specifies a university as a large-scale institution focussing on undergraduate and post-graduate higher education across various disciplines. It is actively involved in research, knowledge production and innovation and engages local, national, and international communities. In the case of a public university, the Minister (empowered by section 3(3) of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997)) (SA, 1997) may determine and assign the scope and range of the university's operations. At least half of a university's degree programmes must be offered to a doctoral level. The university's core mandate is to teach and learn, conduct research, and perform community engagement. Van der Merwe (2022) notes that universities can be classified into one of three categories, "depending on a range of operations across undergraduate and post-graduate teaching and research, emphasis on its activities will determine whether a university is teaching-led, comprehensive, or research-led." According to the current draft policy, South African Universities of Technology could be reclassified as *University Colleges*.

3. Problem statement

The lack of access to higher education and the limited progress in redressing historical inequalities continue to plague the South African higher education landscape. Despite policy initiatives and efforts to promote access and equity, a significant proportion of the population still faces challenges in accessing and benefiting from higher education opportunities. The legacy of the apartheid era, coupled with new challenges such as massification, quality, access, and equity, continues to impact the national system's ability to meet the diverse needs of its population and contribute to the country's socio-economic development effectively. This persistent issue hinders social mobility and exacerbates existing social and economic disparities.

The background to the draft of the new higher education policy in South Africa lacks a comprehensive understanding of the historical, socio-economic, and political factors that have shaped the country's higher education landscape, which may result in the development and implementation of policies that are not well-suited to address the unique challenges faced by the South African higher education system.

In line with the developmental needs of many emerging markets across the globe, the massification of higher education has become imperative for many countries, including South Africa, as they seek to increase access and participation rates to foster economic growth and social development. However, this massification brings numerous challenges, such as ensuring education quality, equity, and relevance and



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addressing the necessary infrastructural and resource demands to accommodate growing student numbers. As a result, South African higher education institutions face the daunting task of navigating these challenges while meeting the diverse needs of their expanding student populations.

Three decades after the advent of democracy in South Africa, the current Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) remains problematic, indicating that a significant proportion of the eligible population still does not access higher education. This low GER hampers the country's efforts to develop a skilled workforce, drive economic growth, and exacerbate existing social and economic inequalities. When comparing the Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) in higher education between South Africa and its peer countries, it becomes evident that South Africa fares poorly in providing access to higher Education for its eligible population. This disparity highlights the need for critical evaluation and benchmarking against successful higher education models in similar countries.

The low research output in South Africa's higher education sector is another significant concern, as it hinders the country's ability to advance knowledge, foster innovation, and contribute to global competitiveness. Despite efforts to improve research capacity, South African public higher education institutions need to catch up with their international counterparts and help attract sufficient funding, resources, and skilled researchers. Moreover, systemic challenges, such as inadequate research infrastructure, limited collaboration between institutions and industry, and a lack of incentives for researchers, exacerbate the situation.

Further, the South African higher education system faces a critical challenge in addressing the skills mismatch between the labour market demands and the skills and qualifications graduates acquire. This disconnect contributes to high levels of graduate unemployment, underemployment, and a need for more skilled professionals in key sectors of the economy. There is a need to examine the factors contributing to this skills mismatch, understand the alignment between the higher education system and the labour market, and develop strategies better to prepare graduates for the evolving demands of the economy. This will require close collaboration among higher education institutions, industry stakeholders, and policymakers to ensure that the education system is responsive to the needs of the labour market and contributes to sustainable economic development in South Africa.

There is a pressing need to investigate the underlying causes highlighted above, evaluate the effectiveness of current policies and interventions, develop innovative solutions to address these challenges and ensure that all South Africans have equal access to quality higher education.

4. Objectives

This article aims to scrutinise the Department of Higher Education's Draft Policy for Institutional Types and propose recommendations for improvement.

5. Research Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research design to collect the required data, investigate the policy implications, and make recommendations. The population includes all private higher education experts in South Africa who are actively managing private HE institutions. A specific inclusion criterion was that these experts had to be actively associated with a private business school in the country. The final inclusion criterion was that these experts had to know the draft policy on institutional types well. Exclusion



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criteria are experts from public institutions, government or private institutions that do not have a business school. Six higher education experts were identified based on their extensive experience in higher education, research profiles and managerial experience. Direct knowledge of education policies and experience with the South African Department of Higher Education served as an additional criterion for inclusion in the expert panel. The following expert panel was hand-picked to investigate the draft policy:

Expert 1 is an experienced academic with significant experience in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) Regulatory environment and is currently the Academic Dean at a large Private HEI.

Expert 2 is a seasoned academic researcher currently appointed the Head of Research at a Private HEI.

Expert 3 is the Director of Teaching and learning at a Private HEI.

Expert 4 is the Managing Director of a Private HEI and has extensive experience in the South African higher education landscape.

Expert 5 is the Registrar of a large Private HEI.

Expert 6 is the Head of the Department: Career Development at a large Private HEI.

After the initial interviews, the multiple-interview Delphi-based design was used to ensure rich data and content saturation. The Delphi technique consists of seven steps (Haughey, 2021). They are: 1) Choose a facilitator, 2) Identify the experts, 3) Define a problem, 4) Round 1 questions, 5) Round 2 questions, 6) Round 3 questions and 7) Act on findings. This means that after the initial results, as per the Delphi technique, the summarised concepts identified were shared with the experts to request that they consider all the views and rethink their responses (Barret & Heale, 2020). As such, new thoughts were stimulated. The second round of individual interviews followed. Like in the first round, these new views were again shared with the group of experts to consider. The Delphi feedback technique was followed until the experts' knowledge was exhausted. In some cases, three Delphi feedback rounds were required, while other experts participated in more interviews, in-person and virtual meetings, or group discussions during September 2022. After all the experts had exhausted their knowledge, rich data was available to investigate the draft policy for institutional types objectively.

6. Considerations, challenges and imperatives

Against a background of fundamental shifts in the demographic, socio-political and technological environments in South Africa (SA) and beyond, with its attendant impact on the macro-economic environments, especially in emerging markets, there is an urgent need to rethink the architecture and landscape of the Post-school Education and Training (PSET) sector in general and the higher education sector.

The discussions below are premised on the following considerations:

- The political specificities of the current period in South Africa versus that of the early colonial period when the higher education sector was not regulated as it is today.
- The emergence of large, well-endowed educational technology companies (such as Coursera, Udemy and Udacity) purporting to be HEIs and acting as 'proxies' for universities.



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- The growing impact and contribution of the private higher education sector in responding to the call for expanding access to and massification of higher education and addressing critical educational and developmental imperatives as enunciated in the National Development Plan (NDP).
- There is a fundamental shift in the critical purpose of higher education in the 21st century, especially in digital transformation, pedagogy in teaching and learning, personalised and lifelong learning, and the nature of university-community linkages.
- There is a mismatch between demand and supply regarding affordable access to higher education globally, regionally, and locally.
- There is growing dissension over the mismatch between skills, labour markets, and industry needs.
- The significant concerns relate to the ability of the PSET sector in SA to meet the targets of the National Development Plan (NDP).
- There is a need for a policy on institutional types in higher education to accelerate the transformation of the higher education sector in South Africa, particularly in terms of enabling public-private partnerships.

The preceding considerations, challenges and imperatives are intended to create a meaningful context for the DHET to fundamentally reconsider the purpose and scope of suggested amendments to the Higher Education Act (no. 101 of 1997) rather than the current attempt in the draft policy to define new institutional types (SA 1997).

Further, in responding to the DHET's request for comments on the draft policy, this study has taken the liberty (and responsibility) to make more substantive contributions to the DHET based on a high-level set of thoughts and meta-analysis of the unique context in SA as well as opportunities and threats in the local and global higher education landscape. We strongly believe that the current moment in South Africa's constitutional democratic journey presents an inflexion point for higher Education and a unique moment to reimagine the higher education landscape in SA.

7. The Landscape of Higher Education

The landscape can be distinguished at several levels. At a global level, higher education is grappling with being relevant in a post-pandemic environment regarding:

- Demands for lifelong learning to cope with the technological and social changes brought about by the Knowledge, Digital and Consumer-based economies, the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the significant disruptions technology has realised.
- Skills and competencies development, and not only degrees, are becoming the needs of the future.
- Investments in private higher education through private equity and sovereign wealth funds and the development of new business models in higher education disrupt traditional educational institutions.
- Evolving needs and expectations of the 'student-consumer' and the imperative of student-centric education.

According to Buckner (2017), enrolment in higher education has increased rapidly worldwide (from 1997 to 2017) with the increased number of higher education institutions. However, Buckner points out



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that the 'vast majority of the new HEIs are private', reiterating that private higher education has become the fastest-growing higher education segment worldwide. Throughout the world, the public sector cannot cope with the demand for the provision of higher education, mainly because of reduced funding.

At a regional or continental level (Africa) these challenges are amplified because of:

- A lack of resources or resource deficits and funding and financing issues.
- Issues of governance and institutional leadership.
- Research underperformance.
- Issues of access to higher education and gender imbalances regarding higher education participation.
- Rapid population growth in the youth category.
- Higher education is not keeping pace with the needs and demands of the 4IR, the new types of jobs, and the required relevant skills and competencies.

Teferra and Altbach (2014) contend that demand for access to higher education is 'unstoppable, especially in Africa's traditionally low postsecondary attendance levels, but higher education is recognised as a key force for modernisation and development. This view is supported by Goujon, Haller and Kmet (2017), who state that 'all African governments recognise the importance of higher education and increasingly invest in it' albeit at the expense of other important sectors. Zeleza (2018) points out that the growth of Private HEIs is partly a result of escalating student demand and the incapacity of public institutions to meet it.

In South Africa (country level), all these challenges are manifest in several characteristics of the higher education system:

- There is a shortage of higher education places coupled with the affordability of HE, resulting in relatively low Gross Enrolment Rates (GER).
- Insufficient production of graduates, particularly at the master's and doctoral levels. (The NDP target for PhDs was 5000 per annum).
- There appears to be a mismatch between skills acquired in secondary and tertiary education and labour market needs. This contributes to the high unemployment rates, especially among young people in the 18-27-year category and can also be seen as a marker of an ineffective higher education system.
- There is a fundamental need to align the higher education system with the external environment, especially in terms of the globalisation of higher education and labour market dynamics and disruptions.

The CHE, in a paper entitled Dimensions of Transformation of Higher Education in South Africa (2022), notes the many dimensions of higher education transformation but focuses on the dimensions of digital transformation, social transformation, curriculum transformation, leadership, governance and management, research and knowledge production, higher education funding, and institutional environments.

8. Policy statements and legislation



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Section 29 of the Constitution of South Africa states, *"Everyone has the right... to further education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible"*.

The Education White Paper No. 3 (Transformation of HE, 1997) emphasises that "South Africa's transition from apartheid and minority rule to democracy requires that all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era".

The PSET Green Paper (DHET 2012) promotes higher Education as an expanded, effective, coherent, and integrated system. The PSET 2013 White paper notes, "The Department of Higher Education and Training seeks to improve the capacity of the post-school education and training system to meet the country's needs" (DHET, 2013). In 1994, South Africa embraced a constitutional democracy. The Constitutional imperative demands that all sectors transform to align with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act no. 108 of 1996) (SA, 1996). Furthermore, s29 (b) of the Constitution defines the right to HE: 1) Everyone has the right to further Education, which the state, through reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible. This is a right and not a privilege. In addition, SA is bound by the obligations in terms of Article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognise that to fully realise this right: (c) Higher Education shall be made equally accessible to all, based on capacity, by every appropriate means, and by the progressive introduction of free Education.

Consequently, the basic principles of democracy, equity, quality, expansion of education and training opportunities, and the integration of Education and training set out in the numerous documents dealing with transformation in the higher education sector are generally consistent with the principles of the Constitution and establishes the basic framework for transformation.

9. The Reality of the South African Higher Education System

The findings of Khuluvhe and Ganyaupfu (Fact Sheet on Access to Tertiary Education in South Africa, 2022) reveal that in the period 2017 to 2019, South Africa's Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) "remained much lower than the GERs of peer BRICS economies (Brazil, China, India and Russia), and other comparable emerging economies like Malaysia and Mexico" (Khuluvhe and Ganyaupfu, 2022). These authors conclude that "despite having higher participation rates than averages of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), South Africa's low performance by international standards suggests the strong need to strengthen its policy measures to accelerate the expansion of access to higher education".

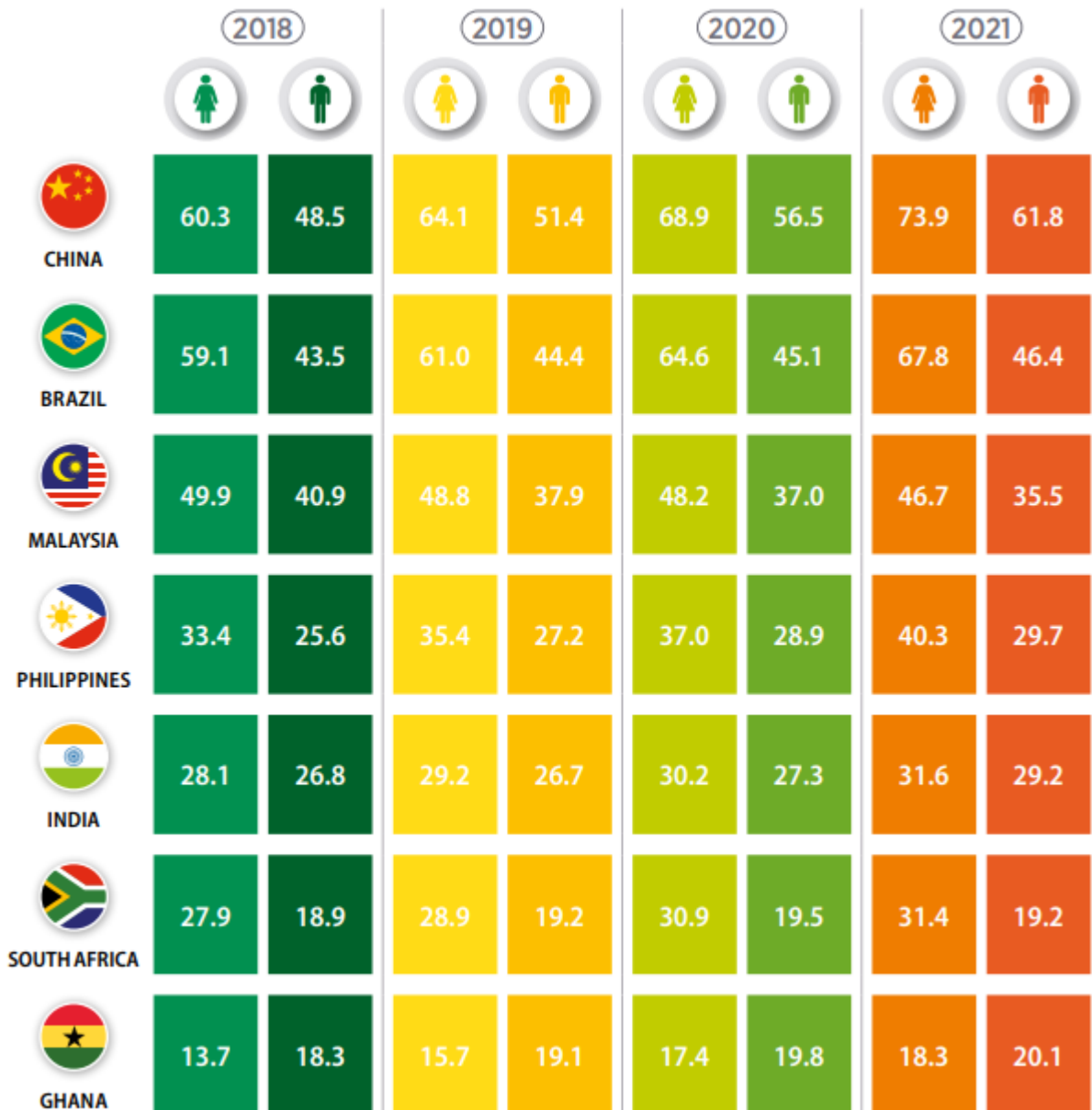


Fig. 1: South Africa's Gross Enrolment Ratios (GER) for Tertiary Education (2018-2021) compared to other countries

Source: DHET (2024)

The National Development Plan 2030 (NDP) supports this need for higher education expansion. The NDP's chapter on *Improving Education, Training and Innovation* states that "higher education should incorporate a range of different institutions that work together to serve different priorities, including effective regulatory and advisory institutions" (SA, 2013). The vision of the NDP is that "in 2030, one in six



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people will be a university graduate". This emphasises that the NDP regards university education as vital for social and economic development.

Since 1994, South Africa has been building a new education and training system whose goal has been to meet the needs of a democratic society. Policy developments have been aimed at democratising the education system, overcoming unfair discrimination, expanding access to education and training opportunities, and improving the quality of Education, training, and research. As such, the purpose of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) (as amended) was, inter alia, to (SA, 1997):

- regulate higher education
- provide for the establishment, composition, and functions of a Council on Higher Education (CHE)
- provide for the establishment, governance, and funding of public higher education institutions
- provide for the registration of private higher education institutions
- provide for quality assurance and quality promotion in higher Education (SA 1997)

The development of the hybrid education system recognised two types of higher education providers (public and private) through legislation. The Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) defines the two providers as follows: 1) a "private higher education institution" means any institution registered or conditionally registered as a private higher education institution in terms of Chapter 7 of the policy, and 2) a "public higher education institution" means any higher education institution that is established, deemed to be established or declared as a public higher education institution (SA, 1997). Kinser (2015) notes that private higher Education plays a significant role in South Africa because it absorbs the excess demand for higher Education left by the insufficient capacity of public institutions. Private Education, therefore, alleviates the demands on the higher education budget of the country and provides additional access to higher education for those students who can afford to pay for themselves.

Some private higher education institutions in South Africa apply distance and blended learning. As such, access is provided to a cohort of students who cannot find admissions in public higher education institutions. First-generation entrants characterise these cohorts: second-chance entrants, mature working entrants and the so-called "missing middle". (The missing middle is those too poor to afford university themselves but also not poor enough to qualify for government funding.) This school-leaver cohort student population is quite small, with the bulk of the students aged 30 years and older, suggesting that most of the students have started employment before accessing higher Education. This has been a trend throughout the private higher education sector – over 59% of all students in the PHE sector are African, with the main growth being among African females (DHET, 2022:29).

Many of these students are also second-chance students who started an undergraduate degree at a (public) university but dropped out for some other reason and are now in an accessible learning environment while they are employed. This is evident from the many exemptions granted to students who have already completed a part of the programme elsewhere. Although most students accessing private higher education in South Africa are in the 18 to 24-year cohort, the typical private business school part-time undergraduate student population consists of primarily mature-age students (30 and above), of which approximately a third is employed in the public sector (especially in the older cohort – 37 years and above).



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Some private business schools recently registered and offer doctoral degrees, such as the Doctor of Business Administration (DBA), contributing to high-level knowledge production. As such, offerings by Private HEI's enable students to progress articulately from NQF level 5 to NQF level 10. Private HEI's are affordably priced compared to public institutions); this increases accessibility for many working students who are paying for their studies (They are not reliant on the state's National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) bursary holders funding scheme). Private higher education thus provides access to higher education in ways that the public system seems unable to; this includes geographical access. Private HEIs have a presence in all the provinces of South Africa' (DHET, 2022:35). Access in small towns provides access to Education for the youth and adults who cannot afford to travel to larger towns and cities.

In addition, the Higher Certificate (HC) programme emerged as an important access qualification. Students who do not qualify for a diploma or degree programme often start off studying towards a certificate programme. HCs are popular offerings at private higher education institutions but not at public higher education institutions. This area should be explored regarding partnerships between public- and private higher education institutions. Higher Certificate and Diploma graduates can articulate into advanced diplomas or bachelor's degrees. In this regard, Chang Da Wan (2007) indicates that "public and private higher education institutions co-exist within the Malaysian higher education system". This situation emanated from "the ever-growing demand for public higher education [in Malaysia] due to the democratisation of education, especially secondary education". Public institutions in Malaysia faced severe challenges of operating within the constraints of their limited allocations given by the government. This prompted the Malaysian government to encourage private institutions to play a more active role in the higher education sector through policy and regulatory amendments. In addition, private institutions were 'supported' to increase their capacity. Wan concludes that this has strengthened and enhanced the role of private institutions as higher education providers in Malaysia. The same benefit could be harvested in the South African educational environment.

10. The relevance of universities in the South African higher education landscape

From the preceding analyses of the current macroeconomic indicators and the specificities of South Africa's higher education scenario, it is evident that the mismatch between demand and supply for access is an ever-growing phenomenon, and public funding can no longer keep up with the challenging task of expanding to meet these perennial needs.

One of the primary roles of a university is the creation of new knowledge through conducting research in addition to teaching. Research and Development (R&D), with little attention to downstream activities involving commercialisation, limits university research's relevance. Technology is the offspring of the research endeavours carried out at the universities. As such, universities in industrially advanced countries have become the prime source of ideas increasingly translated into viable market commodities in products, processes, and procedures. Given that South Africa is on the threshold of the 4IR, the demand for skills and competencies in this respect will increase substantially. However, currently, public universities need help to cope with such demand. They cannot expand fast enough because of financial constraints and a lack of expertise, infrastructure, and essential services. Some private institutions have invested substantially and show interest in capturing a market share in the niche university segment.



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In the context of the above, the current challenges and higher education's role in transforming South Africa into a modern, competitive economy make new and innovative solutions imperative to establish a quality higher education sector. Private higher education could play an invaluable role in this respect. Unfortunately, as recommended by the DHET in its Draft Policy document, the current transitional model obfuscates and delays addressing the real demands of the problems faced by the South African higher education sector.

Considering the preceding meta-discourse on the transitional Higher Education Types proposed by the DHET in its Draft Higher Education Policy, the authors are convinced that the suggested model needs to address the more critical problems and challenges confronting the higher education sector in South Africa. The potential role of Private Higher Education can play in mitigating these dilemmas. Accordingly, it is recommended that:

- The DHET sets aside its Draft Policy and in the absence of a truly diversified higher education system in the country, urgently convenes a dialogue of representatives of all relevant stakeholder organisations (the DHET, Academia, Students, Civil Society and Private Sector) to undertake a national review of the Higher Education Ecosystem to address key issues such as the perennial mismatch between demand and supply of university places, diversity, access, affordability, funding, quality, digital divide, graduate unemployment and lack of synergy between the higher education sector and the developmental objectives of the economy and the National Development Plan (NDP).
- The DHET, through this national dialogue between all relevant stakeholders, develops a Public Private Partnership (PPP) strategy for higher Education in South Africa.
- The higher education PPP policy must stress public interest goals such as social equity, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability, and quality of Education for the 21st century in the interest of South Africa's future.
- The PPP policy should include:
 - The ideals of social equity and inclusiveness through promoting more affordable access of disadvantaged groups to higher education,
 - Transparency and accountability in the operations of the PPP projects, and
 - Improved quality and relevance of higher Education for the national economy and its development.
- The strategy should be made inclusive, allowing the private sector to play an active role by:
 - Creating the necessary legislation to legitimise the position of private institutions,
 - Establishing clear and objective criteria and processes to facilitate the establishment and registration of private higher education institutions as “universities”, and
 - Providing equal opportunities to private institutions.

Moreover, all relevant stakeholders should be involved in formulating the policy, especially the business community, civil society, university administrators, and the CHE. One possible model is the creation of a platform for policy dialogue between the government and all relevant stakeholders.

- The promotion of PPP in higher education to:



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- Facilitate the establishment and development of research universities with industry collaborations,
- Support university Entrepreneurship Hubs, STEAM Laboratories and R&D facilities, and
- Introduce elements in the tax system (e.g., tax rebates, concessions, and waivers) to create incentives for private sector participation in higher Education.
- It is a priority to encourage private higher education institutions to meet labour market training demands. Currently, universities worldwide have limited links with the labour market, and thus, course offerings and contents are deficient in providing graduates with the knowledge and competencies sought by the labour market.
- Empowering the CHE with additional human resources to monitor and evaluate the progress and development of the newly established private universities.
- The establishment of a Research and Development committee constituted of selected members from both public and private universities, the Ministry of Education, and private sector firms so that, as a collective, they identify potential areas for research and development, determine the responsibilities of the parties involved, and oversee the development of technology with collaborative efforts.

11. Role of Private Higher Education

The NDP 2030 (NDP, 2010) states that "private providers will continue to be important partners in the delivery of education and training at all levels". The growth of private higher education has undoubtedly been a major worldwide trend in recent years. A 2022 Higher Education Strategy Associates Report by Williams and Usher (2022) notes that there are around 90,000 higher education institutions globally. Student enrolments worldwide were over 200 million in 2018 (Williams and Usher, 2022:4).

Private higher education has grown incrementally, and private funding has grown three times more quickly than public funding between 2012 and 2018. In addition, more than 90% of higher education students globally pay some tuition fee (Williams and Usher, 2022). These authors further point out that 'in most of the world, higher education includes a mix of public and private provision. Whereas public providers are generally larger and more stable, private providers can offer some flexibility since they can open and close or increase and decrease enrolments with greater ease.

South Africa has seen internal changes and shifts as part of the Sub-Saharan block. A growing pipeline of post-school students fuels these shifts. The Post-School Education and Training Monitor (PSET) indicates that the channel leading to PSET has been producing increasing numbers of school leavers with the qualifications required to enter. This suggests that demand for PSET opportunities continues to grow and will do so in the coming years (DHET, 2021:13). More adults (32.1% in 2020) are completing their school-leaving certificates, thus pointing to a potential increase in the demand for PSET and the consequent need for the expansion of the PSET system (DHET 2021:14). However, in 2018, only 6% of adults had attained a degree. In this regard, South Africa compares dismally to other middle-income countries. This lack of Education compromises the country's international competitiveness' (DHET, 2021:14).



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South African student enrolments at private institutions have grown substantially. From 2019 to 2020, there has been a 4.8% growth (10,053 students), totalling 219,031 students in 2020 (DHET, 2022:20). However, the South African 21,8% gross enrolment rate (GER) is still far below the average for middle-income countries (36%) (DHET, 2022:45), suggesting that the South African higher education system requires substantial growth in the short to medium term to accommodate demand (DHET 2021).

James (2022) (cited by Singh and Tustin, 2022) indicates that there is still "a lack of trust in the value of the qualifications and the quality of tuition offered by private higher education institutions", even though private higher education institutions (Private HEIs) are subject to the same quality assurance regime as public institutions. Singh and Tustin (2022) point out that national quality norms set out by the Council on Higher Education and the South African Qualifications Authority apply equally to public and private higher education institutions. Therefore, the perception that Education provided by the Private HEI's somehow deficient is incorrect. The DHET's 2022 Compliance Report states that the PHE sector is growing in number and academic stature (DHET, 2022:36).

12. Reimagining the University of the Future

Growing turbulence from demographic shifts, geopolitical challenges, changing workplace demands and high student expectations for a quality digital experience is creating significant disruptions in the higher education sector. In addition, universities are still reeling from the profound impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic.

These new phenomena compel universities to redefine their traditional roles and force them to create a resilient system of Education by embracing digital transformation, deploying technology in teaching, learning and assessment, and immersing a university's community into a virtual and remote education ecosystem. The university of the future will offer seamless switching between on-campus, blended or online study modes. A further critical task is for higher education institutions to engage in deep, meaningful curricular reform coupled with fresh and innovative approaches to new pedagogical and pedagogical strategies, without which technology deployment and digitisation will yield minimal results.

According to a report published by the EY Global Education Leader (2022), discerning students demand not only excellent teaching but also to acquire the skills and competencies they need to enter the workforce of the 21st century. This means that future universities will be compelled to deliver a more personalised learning experience to their students by bridging the gap between education and an increasingly competitive labour market through creative work-directed learning, internships (physical and virtual), and university-industry partnerships.

The report further stresses that technology is paramount in enabling this change. Personalised learning is no longer an option but a requirement to meet students' needs. By delivering a larger proportion of courses virtually, educators could free up more time for individualised sessions with students. This will also allow educators to tailor content that better responds to individual needs.

Dennis (cited in the University World News, 2022) claims that future universities will offer access to learning in real time from anywhere. Flexible learning experiences will be available on-demand 24/7 and will be tailored to what a learner aspires to achieve. Furthermore, a learner can study in multiple modes, switching seamlessly between on-campus, blended, or wholly online to suit their lifestyle and to fit in studying with work and other activities. Dennis continues to state that degrees will be one of many



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qualifications a university can offer an individual learner in the future. As the world changes, universities will move toward a mix of degrees and shorter cycle courses. Universities will also work with industry partners to co-create qualifications that respond to industry changes and rapidly move with the changing needs of the workforce. Lifelong learning will become the new norm.

The 2018 OECD Teaching and Learning International Survey in 48 countries found that the student, as a consumer, is specifically interested in how universities can assist with future employment opportunities (OECD, 2018). Furthermore, La Trobe University (2022) forecasts that future universities will be places where universities and industry are co-located and collaborate on projects that solve real-world problems. They will become precincts of innovation that actively apply research for community impact, and they will broker relationships between young entrepreneurs and their supporters. This institution further affirms that as industry and universities form deeper partnerships, learners will benefit from university-based accelerator programmes and incubators, where ideas are stimulated and translated into commercial businesses faster. Degrees and learning activities will also be designed and delivered with industry partners so learners can be sure the skills they develop are relevant for future jobs.

A recent report by Deloitte (2022) suggests that the biggest change one can expect to see in the future university is a more student-centric approach. Each student will be allowed to take charge of their Education by choosing their modules and learning mode, whether on campus or online. By doing this, students are active in their learning and can foster technical and transferable skills when it comes to taking the responsibility of learning into their own hands.

The United Nations challenges universities of the future to address the world's greatest needs (as outlined in its 17 Sustainable Development Goals) (UN, 2022). The UN, particularly, warns that entrenched inequities in Education have only worsened over the decades. Goal 4 should be achieved to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all, focusing on providing affordable access to all forms of learning.

The African Centre for Economic Transformation (2021) believes that the future universities in Africa will have to empower the new workforce with the knowledge and skills to be highly productive and generate innovations in technologies, processes, products, and services. This means ensuring young people have solid foundational skills, good basic cognitive skills, including "STEAM" (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics), digital skills, and non-cognitive skills, including interpersonal and socio-emotional skills like resilience and curiosity and critical thinking skills. Laboratories, entrepreneurship, and innovation hubs must be established to facilitate 4IR STEAM skills as essential components of the future university.

Patterson and Luescher (2022) argue that in the future higher education landscape, emerging economies should focus on producing the right mix of institutions to meet domestic labour and community needs. In support, Professor Goolam Mohamedbhai, a former Secretary-General of the Association of African Universities and former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Mauritius (cited in Patterson & Luescher, 2022) contends that in the absence of a properly diversified system, individual universities are placed in an impossible position as they try to be all things to all people. Mohamedbhai (2022) (cited in Patterson & Luescher, 2022) further asserts that "in developing countries, support for development should be the primary purpose of a future university." In this respect, it becomes clear from the above that



universities are facing significant challenges in fulfilling their core function of delivering graduates who can find work and play a positive role in the community.

Building a future university and a resilient African education system that delivers on all these promises requires joint efforts by all stakeholders, i.e., governments, HEIs, industry, development partners, civil society organisations, and all those involved to work synergistically and support the sector in overcoming the various hurdles and attaining this bright future.

According to Mohamedbhai (2022), the solution to the problem is for each country to undertake a national review of its higher education ecosystem, involving all stakeholders, not just politicians but also academia, civil society, students, and the private sector, to find solutions to key issues, including access, funding, quality, digital connectivity, graduate unemployment, and community engagement.

13. Recommendations to Improve the Draft Policy

The core question that comes to mind is whether the current university classification should be changed. Overwhelming evidence shows that this is indeed the case. Currently, there are disparities between classifying private and public higher education institutions. For example, only public HEIs can be called “universities,” while some private HEIs deliver similar degrees. In practice, this means that some private “colleges” are licenced to award master’s and doctoral degrees, do extensive research and publish various articles, yet they are not allowed to be called a university although they operate in the same educational sphere.

Revisit the premise of the draft policy – the basis on which the criteria were established does not consider present realities. It also does not allow any conversation about what other organising principles could be used to differentiate between institutional types. Instead, it relies on an outdated model that will not serve a contemporary (or future) higher education system and follows a strict hierarchical model.

Consult with the CHE and other relevant bodies regarding the current situation regarding policy prescripts that conflict with the draft policy, including the issue of trusteeship in private higher education institutions. Private higher education institutions are already autonomous and have advanced governance, administrative and quality assurance mechanisms.

All institutions are expected to undertake research as per the Quality Assurance Framework. The draft policy should reflect these requirements.

Remove the public sector bias by reconsidering each clause for usefulness in both public and private institutional contexts. If there are clear differences, indicate 'for public...' or 'for private...'.

Clarify the 'wide range of disciplines. Some public and private institutions already have or will have a specialised area. It should be possible for 'niche universities' to offer the full range of qualifications (undergraduate and post-graduate) in a particular specialised area. A better organising principle would be to consider depth (i.e., offering programmes from NQF 5 to 10 in the same discipline) rather than breadth (offering a wide range of disciplines).

Clarify extensive research capacity and the extent to which 'teacher-led' universities should fulfil these requirements.

Revisit the rationale for the Governance structures—as they stand now, they suggest a public sector bias associated with the trusteeship concept. Private higher education institutions cannot be



subjected to these requirements as they have already developed appropriate governance structures that fit the institution's purpose.

Delink trusteeship is where university colleges want to become universities based on the criteria for this type of institution. Private higher education institutions seek to attain the status of a University College without the ambition to (necessarily) become a university.

14. Conclusion

The article investigated the Draft Policy (or White Paper) for discussion as issued by the South African Department of Higher Education and Training. This new draft policy, as per section 3(1) of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) (SA, 1997), classifies higher education institutions into 1) Higher Education Colleges, 2) University Colleges, and 3) Universities (Kosi, 2022). However, demand exceeds supply in South Africa's higher education landscape, partly due to the country's turbulent past and the massification of Higher Education. Unfortunately, the draft policy fails to understand the challenges emanating from the historical, socio-economic, and political factors shaping the country's higher education landscape. Resultantly, the draft policy is not well-suited to address the unique challenges faced by the South African higher education system. Although the policy might be a first attempt to reclassify higher education institutions, there is still a long way to go before a workable and practical implementable policy is on the table. The Minister (as recommended in the policy analysis), therefore, needs an advisory board or commission with knowledge about public and private higher education institutions to assist him in developing the second draft policy for discussion.

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