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To cite this article: Suzanne Francis , Janine Lewis , Brenton Fredericks & Belinda Johnson (2020) Humanity, expectations, access and transformation (HEAT): revisiting South African higher education entrance assessment in a postcolonial context, *Studies in Higher Education*, 45:9, 1786-1796, DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2020.1793928](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1793928)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2020.1793928>



Published online: 19 Jul 2020.



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Humanity, expectations, access and transformation (HEAT): revisiting South African higher education entrance assessment in a postcolonial context

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ABSTRACT

Entrance assessment and standardized testing is a feature of the South African higher education landscape, with many universities using assessment and testing as benchmarking, placement or, in some instances, gatekeeping exercises. Entrance assessment practices seek to inform universities about the capabilities of students. In this paper we examine current entrance assessment paradigms and practices through our frame of humanity, expectations, access and transformation (HEAT) embedded in a broader lens of postcolonialism. We claim that current practices do not lay a foundation for meeting the larger goals of higher education – they do not transform human relationships, ignore ways of being in the world, fail to sufficiently embed learning-centred teaching, nor promote metacognitive development, self-efficacy, resilience or lead to transformation. In so doing, we contribute a new way of thinking about the transformation of higher education today and the way in which diagnostic assessment could be re-visited to meet broader goals.

KEYWORDS

Humanity; expectations; access; transformation (HEAT); diagnostic assessment; South African higher education

Entrance assessment in South African higher education

The transformation of South African higher education is critical, to provide a learning environment that meets the needs of all students and provides for important capacity-building in the South African state, society and economy. South Africa's historic approach to education is one that was racialized, class-based and imbalanced. Yet today, despite advances in educational thinking and attempts to transform higher education, current attrition rates deprive South Africa of potential capacity across all sectors. Creating a learning-centred curricula that addresses the under-preparedness of students and provide innovative approaches to learning is, moreover, a matter of social and political justice and a further step to transforming higher education in South Africa.

Despite the aforementioned, in the South African higher educational landscape there is a mismatch between student under-preparedness, success, the curricula, as well as teaching and learning strategies that are used in higher education at the first-year level. Frequently, academic staff have limited knowledge and understanding of the skills sets and cognitive abilities of the students in their classrooms as well as the challenges that they face. This is particularly the case in first-level modules where class sizes in some subjects can range from 300 to 1500 students.¹ Often there is a mismatch between the curricula to be taught and its relationship to the pre-existing knowledge and experiences of students. Curricula conveys 'powerful messages about education and legitimate knowledge. Decisions about curriculum content are decisions about the types of knowledge that

“count” and, similarly, decisions of exclusion are determinations of what might be considered to be non-legitimate knowledge’ (Bernstein 2000, in Ashwin et al. 2015, 154). This mismatch is most evident in a post-colonial context, where curricula become a site of exclusion. As a result, teaching is frequently not learning-centred and attrition rates among students are amongst the highest in the world (Malada 2010).

Universities in South Africa use matriculation points as a basis upon which to determine admission, and thus acceptance, into programmes. Some, in addition, employ benchmarking tests as a way of predicting performance. One example is the National Benchmarking Tests (NBTs) that measure English literacy, mathematical literacy and mathematics. However, in the South African higher educational landscape, with the long history of racialized and class-based education, such tests have oftentimes (but not always) been used as a method of exclusion, rather than as a diagnostic assessment to enable innovation in teaching and learning strategies. Assessment in South Africa, as elsewhere, focuses upon the proficiency of a student at a single point in time. This is often through deficit assessment (the weaknesses of the student) and error analysis (errors committed by the student) (Bejar 1984). In addition, such tests can be expensive, partly as a consequence of ‘private’ ownership and copyright protocols which make them prohibitive and mean further that universities cannot easily adapt them for their own context.

There is evidence of some real innovation that has arisen out of existing tests.² However, it is not clearly established that these tests provide the best possible overall indicator of performance across all institutions. Nor is it clear, because of their historic view of core skill sets rooted in language literacy and mathematics, that they provide a baseline from which to develop innovative curricula to meet the needs of South Africa across all disciplines.

There is a wealth of literature on the significance of attrition rates and the importance of throughput in higher education in South Africa. Scholars agree that university drop-out rates are shocking (Malada 2010), poor first-year success rates are a serious challenge to higher education (Jacobs et al. 2015) and higher education is failing to meet the demands of the South African economy (Mouton, Louw, and Strydom 2012).

International debates around widening participation fall generally into two approaches which have led to a number of models of responding to student diversity. First, a deficit approach emphasizes a deficit in participation as the ‘fault’ of the student, an approach generally rooted in the way in which higher education structures and processes developed to cater for the traditional student, generally middle class and of the dominant ethnic group, studying full-time. The non-traditional student must assimilate into the dominant modes of the existing institutional context (Ashwin et al. 2015; Leathwood 2006). The second approach recognizes that students ‘face barriers that because they are negotiating an environment that was not designed for them, and, if they are to enjoy equality of access, it is this deficit in the environment which must be overcome’ (Tinklin, Riddell, and Wilson 2004, 642). Thomas and May’s (2010) dimensions of student difference respond to student diversity through a model that groups diversity into educational (skills, knowledge and experiences), dispositional (identity, self-esteem, confidence and beliefs), circumstantial (age, means, location, time) and cultural (language, values, race, cultural capital). The process of transformation in the South African higher education context, moving universities from sites of institutionalized racial exclusion concerns all four dimensions of student difference.

Historic racial inequalities in South Africa require that access to university be widened, both epistemologically and ontologically. In South Africa, various standardized tests have been introduced in a range of universities in attempts to predict student performance, to review access and admissions criteria and to inform institutional decision-making (Wilson-Strydom 2010). These tests, however, have received significant critique. Some authors claim that standardized testing can be used to further exclude those that have already been disadvantaged through historic injustices. A case in point is the argument that there is little point in universities admitting students if there is no reasonable probability that those students will be capable of successfully completing the programme in which they are permitted to enrol (Fraser and Killen 2005). Academic staff complain that they

have to repeat curricula multiple times to ensure student understanding (Gower 2009; Nel and Kistner 2009). Such claims place the burden on the student (Le Cordeur 2014), without considering ways in which the widening of ontological and epistemological access can be achieved in the classroom. In terms of justice, there is, moreover, little critique of the ways in which these methods are part of a broader process of continued postcolonial segregation.

Other critiques focus on the limitations arising from using only language literacy and mathematics in standardized testing, claiming that effective study skills are also an indicator (Du Plessis and Gerber 2012) and that gender³ also has an impact on performance (Smith and Edwards 2007). Whilst there may well be a potential limitation in their range of applicability across disciplines, the results of such testing might also provide only a 'static' measure of current ability as opposed to potential ability (Van de Merwe and De Beer 2006), providing little indication of the way students might learn in an optimum environment.

In light of such critiques, some universities have developed other measures to assess student readiness⁴ such as scholars at the University of Witwatersrand who include a biographical questionnaire alongside their standardized testing for applicants who do not automatically qualify for admission (Enselin 2006). It is purported that these alternative measures provide more information on the qualities needed for success at university, than the test. That said, it remains to be seen how this is transforming teaching and learning.

In light of these initiatives, we claim, in this paper, that an assessment of other skills sets such as those that are interpersonal and existential (global and cultural awareness, social responsibility and ethics, flexibility and adaptability) and other dimensions is lacking, as well as other forms of assessment that provide a holistic diagnostic assessment of students. Such an assessment might illuminate more clearly some of the challenges that students face and create more interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary or trans-disciplinary learning-centred teaching. It is anticipated that this will also stimulate further discussion on how alternative methods can be utilized to make entrance assessments more inclusive and more aligned to learning-centred teaching.

Coloniality and decolonization

Many of these challenges in South African higher education may be seen to be distinctively embedded in coloniality. The discourses of decolonization that emerged in Latin America and Africa in the 1960s,⁵ and evolved to provide an explanation for the complexities of the continent bear upon South African higher education today. The decolonizing project is comprised of two parts: first, the struggle against epistemic coloniality⁶ which is frequently formulated in terms of a critique of a dominant Western European model (De Sousa Santos 2014; Chabal 2012; Hobson 2012). This critique is rooted in understandings of the postcolonial state and public as captured by colonial residues since the beginnings of the colonial period.⁷

The second part of the decolonizing project attempts to imagine and to formulate alternatives to this epistemic model. This demands a new understanding of ontology, epistemology and ethics that is rooted in considerations of power and agency. For Mbembe, in order 'to tease out alternative possibilities for thinking life and human futures in this age of neoliberal individualism, we need to connect in entirely new ways the project of non-racialism to that of human mutuality' (Mbembe 2012). As such a decolonized university is about 'radical sharing and universal inclusion' (Mbembe 2012). An epistemic decolonization is not a project in constructing an African essentialism, but rather one that recognizes that regimes of representation continue to structure discourses about what belongs and does not – and in higher education continues to exclude both the tangible 'other' and further shapes the discourse about what belongs and what does not. To decolonize education requires a reshaping of roles and possibilities and further, the possibility of becoming.

In light of the current debates on the transformation of South African higher education, the approach to coloniality by postcolonial scholars and the challenges we outlined above in relation to current entrance assessment practices at first-year level, we develop in this paper a new principled

framework of Humanity, Expectations, Access and Transformation (HEAT) through which we consider entrance assessments. Through this framework of HEAT, we provide a critique of the inadequacies of entrance assessment practices in the South African higher education system, so that this may be better understood in the design of future assessment models.

Humanity

Humanity refers to ways of being, belonging, believing, partaking, striving and surviving within the global context. Worldwide, a growing concern is an extent to which undergraduate and postgraduate programmes produce people who are work-ready, with the necessary life skills or world fit that increases their employability, particularly in the Humanities (Maharasoa and Hay 2001). De la Harpe claims that higher education institutions do not produce graduates equipped with the necessary 'lifelong learning skills and professional skills' (De la Harpe, Radloff, and Wyber 2000, 232) to enable them to find employment and to progress in their careers.

Discourse about the purpose and function of tertiary institutions, providing education, raises questions about graduate employability. Subsequently, traditional notions are challenged about what should be taught, how it should be taught and for what purpose. Increasingly, governments and the private sector demand that the academy move beyond traditional approaches⁸ of teaching and learning towards enhancing employability. This evolving relationship, between higher education institutions, government and the private sector, is characterized by a broader philosophical tension concerning the role of the tertiary sector in providing education, a workforce to serve the needs of the country or both (Morley 2001; Lees 2002).

Higher education is a national development priority in the developing world as a result of the correlation between a quality education, strong economic growth and improved socio-economic development. Economic growth is the result of the development of fundamental skills, attitudes and abilities such as literacy, numeracy, motivation and perseverance. A broader range of skills, attitudes, abilities and knowledge is required both as a result of the massification of education and the requirements of employers. Therefore, the production of graduates results in both private and public benefits.

Worldwide, there are multiple approaches to building employability into curricula. In Australia students must complete a set of 'generally expected' attributes (Cranmer 2006), whereas in Finland skills are integrated into curricular and personal study plans. In Denmark the completion of a competence profile is required by the qualifications framework. The South African National Qualifications Framework,⁹ in its design, comprises critical and specific outcomes for each level (National Qualifications Framework Act, No. 67 of 2008).

Curricula reform in South Africa employs the National Qualifications Framework across the areas of (i) education and training, (ii) academic and everyday knowledge (iii) disciplines and subjects. In this way, it aims to contribute towards the overall personal development of every student as well as the socio-economic development of society. Accordingly, programmes should be designed to enhance graduate employability by incorporating graduate attributes such as intellectual skills, personal attributes, communication and organizational skills. This, it is claimed, should improve their chances of employability (Coopers and Lybrand 1998).

Expectations

Expectations refer to belief, trust, promise, hope and desire within the context of individual life chances. In higher education, expectations exist within three overlapping groups: staff and their expectations of students and their impact; students and their expectations of what a university education comprises and the impact that it will have upon their future; and society and the expectations of how the scholarly community can transform society. We focus on values, skills and existing knowledge as categories that inform the expectations for these groups. In university contexts in South

Africa, language policies justify the expectations of academics which curtail the metacognitive abilities of students, and neglect the politico-historical patterns of South Africa. Universities are primed to shape the discourse and methodology of practitioners, scholars and researchers.

Language is a gateway towards multi-cultural conversations, and in the context of higher education in South Africa, these expectations are regulated and repressed. This is 'ignoring the fact that educators and linguists – no matter how hard they try – are not always in control of the definition of terms like "competency" and "error"' (Laurence 1993, 19).

Staff, students and society at large are unanimous in the belief that a tertiary education will provide a desirable future. These perspectives offer a conflated impression that without a degree one will be unable to raise one's status, both economically and socially. This may be compounded by the residues of South Africa's political-economic history where access to education and socio-economic goods were segregated (Mngomezulu and Maposa 2017). Prospective students believe that through education they will be able to improve their socio-economic circumstances in a country where poverty and inflation are on the increase, whereas job opportunities are becoming increasingly scarce and competitive to obtain. Conversely, the contemporary view holds that the resultant economic majority is still monopolized by those who attained higher education qualifications during times of segregation. A student is seen as 'an autonomous subject who, by virtue of their access to public education, are going to actualize their potential making the most of opportunities offered to them' (RSA 2010). Therefore, the significance of obtaining a degree or postgraduate qualification is tantamount to improved socio-economic conditions in the community.

Students measure their learning of skills and acquisition of knowledge according to their frame of reference from basic education. There is risk in attaching value to this perception because the South African education system is primarily regulated through the national agenda for redress and access (Badat 2015, 5–9). This has caused a large chasm in the development of metacognition¹⁰ to manifest between basic education¹¹ and tertiary education. Students perceive that their skills are suitable for the requirements of epistemological and ontological access (CHE 2010). However, when it is revealed that they are underprepared and/or lacking it has a devastating impact, leaving the student disillusioned, frustrated and angry with the system. Moreover, in the achievement of a qualification, the tools of critical thinking, problem solving, and analytical discourse are not factored in by the student, family or society. The disjuncture between expected and actual achievement may require deficit management through the implementation of a discrepancy clause (Lesh 1979 in Bejar 1984, 175–6).

[10] In an educational context, the determination of, 'expected' scores is more difficult. A source of difficulty is the fact that the scale of a psychological or educational instrument is subject to variation across time or across versions. (Bejar 1984, 176)

Lesh (1979 in Bejar 1984, 176) further distinguishes horizontal from vertical discrepancies. A vertical discrepancy occurs when actual achievement lags behind expected achievement in a given content area. On the other hand, horizontal discrepancy refers to when an achievement in a content area is 'out of phase' with the student's achievement in the other content areas.

Access

Access refers to claim, permit, consent, participate and accept in the context of the academic environment. Today the landscape of higher education in South Africa is confronted with new challenges whereby admission to an institution of higher learning is perceived as being coupled with academic success. The 'fees must fall campaign'¹² which emerged during late 2015 and by 2016–2017 exposed a number of stumbling blocks such as student readiness, financial constraints, the language of learning and teaching, and transport, which all hinder student success and increase attrition as well highlighted the need for universities to transform curricula.

A new heterogeneous, and diversified, student population in South African universities provides the impetus for research into factors that hinder success rates, particularly among first-year students. Success rates among first-year students are hindered by large classes, diverse backgrounds, and levels of academic literacy, lack of staff, poor motivation and inadequate computer literacy (Benvenuti and Cohen 2008). Also, there appears to be a decline in the capabilities of students transitioning from secondary to tertiary education. Hence there is a need to address these challenges in order to improve overall success rates (Byrne and Flood 2005). This is compounded by an increase in student enrolments at tertiary institutions. South Africa has the third highest enrolment figures on the continent, after Egypt and Nigeria (Teferra and Altbach 2004).

Simultaneously, public spending on higher education in South Africa has not stayed abreast of inflation and has decreased significantly. Budget cuts and fiscal restraint are global trends which result in limits to staffing who must manage increased student enrolments. These impact on the quality of teaching, motivation, performance and engagement and student's ability to acquire higher functioning cognitive skills such as problem-solving and critical thinking (Hornsby 2013).

Morrow (2007) claims that opening up access to a broader student base will result in a substantial increase in student enrolments and registrations. Furthermore, he alludes to the fact that epistemological access is both an educational issue and as well as a distinctly political one.

Transformation

Transformation refers to disrupting, transference, truth, authenticity and respect in the context of human relationships. Higher education in Africa is historically an artefact of colonial policies (Teferra and Altbach 2004; Altbach and Selvaratnam 1989; Lulat 2003). Historically the continent was dominated by academic institutions that were structured and shaped according to a European model, but whose academic narrative was dominated by colonial residues. South Africa is no exception. The narrative of the Bantu education system¹³ was to exclude and to limit.

Teferra and Altbach (2004) discuss how higher education on the continent has replicated colonial approaches which include limited access; an alienating language of instruction – predominantly that of the colonial powers and settler communities; limits to academic freedom and in many cases, curricula that are inadequate not only for improved access to employment, but also to transform the socio-economic context and South Africa's place in the world.

In South African universities, the transformation agenda is dominated by three factors: transformation of staff, improving ontological and epistemological access and the transformation of curricula. The transformation agenda in the South African higher education context aims to make university staff more representative of the South African demographic (Merridy Wilson-Strydom 2010). The political agenda has informed this in practice.

Improving ontological and epistemological access is a key component of the higher educational landscape. Increased access is primarily and currently a result of the massification of higher education (by accepting larger numbers of undergraduate and postgraduate students); the lowering of admission criteria; and a strong emphasis on student throughput, rather than an increase in epistemic participation.

Transformation of curricula focuses upon the efficiency of the higher education system to produce graduates that are prepared to serve the South African socio-economic context. To improve and enhance human and economic development it is envisaged that curricula design focuses on the efficiency of the system (such as throughput and contribution to the economic situation in the country).

Demographic transformation and increased access have provided for further challenges. These include low throughput and graduation rates, high student attrition (largely amongst previously disadvantaged students), concerns about student input. These arise from a variety of factors that have been identified such as prior poor schooling, under-readiness for higher education studies, a lack of

epistemological access through tangible barriers, inadequate teaching and learning support, limited finances and socio-economic factors (Higher Education Monitor).

Should we be re-thinking entrance assessment practices?

Human relationships are not transformed through current assessment paradigms and practices. These paradigms and practices are representative of a value system that is rooted in a western epistemological and ontological coloniality that do not disrupt the status quo or recognize the inherent relationships of power.

Entrance assessments ignore the mismatch in cultural etiquette and ways of being in the world. This speaks directly to acknowledgement, acceptance and access. There should be deeper connections made with regards to hopes, desires and value systems that are inclusive of the inherent aspects of what makes us human. This is not simply a matter for the Humanities, but is a lens that could underpin an approach for an epistemology of education for the STEM disciplines too.

The objective of higher education is to innovate and to broaden the way in which we believe, think and feel about the world, engage with the world and transform knowledge about the world. Alternative ways of critical thinking, being and engaging are not integrated into entrance assessment or to learning-centred teaching.

Wilson et al., acknowledge that oftentimes academics:

neglect to implement effective formative assessment practices to support metacognition, relegating assessment to rank-ordering of students for the purposes of grading rather than using it to scaffold learning. (Wilson and Scalise 2006, 643)

We find that entrance assessments are not always structured in such a way to provide individualized feedback to support the development of metacognition and also that it should include the HEAT principles making it a more holistic approach to entrance assessment strategies. Furthermore, these strategies should be informed by the postcolonial context.

The changing fiscal climate is dominated by multilateral lending agencies that stand in contrast to these broader transformation goals of the postcolonial state. Access is affected by the impact that finance, language and transport have on ways of being, skill sets and inherent knowledge. Entrance assessments do not make provision for measuring the potential of students. All entrance assessments do not overwhelmingly embrace alternative methods and formats and nor do they focus on inclusivity rather adopting an exclusive approach.

There is a lack of focus on self-regulation towards co-creating new meaning and improved futures (Burch et al. 2016). The teaching-learning endeavour does not offer a sufficient process of collaboration between all the role-players. Metacognitive development and new knowledge do not feature, nor are they fostered or allowed to emerge (Fosnot and Perry 2005, p. ix). These entrance assessments do not recognize that a learning centred approach to higher education may result in a process of co-creating new knowledge at an individual as well as communal level.

Self-efficacy and resilience as key features of a lifelong learning approach, are not emphasized in entrance assessments. Bandura et al. (1996) notes that perceived self-efficacy exerts its influence through 4 major processes – cognitive, motivational, affective and selective. 'Students can be described as self-regulated to the degree that they are metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active participants in their own learning' (Zimmerman 1989). Transformative curricula and collaborative methodologies and practices, which awaken critical consciousness, where 'students are responsible for one another's learning as well as their own' (Dooly 2008) are not considered in the entrance assessments or the pedagogy that underpins them. This has further repercussions on the curricula and modes of pedagogy employed in coursework and assessment practices. This can limit the potential vision that the individual can bring to learning-centred teaching.

A highly regulated hierarchical system, which is informed by the colonial encounter, does not facilitate transformation. Admission to the academy does not fully acknowledge the prior learning

of the potential student. Entrance assessments do not perceive and permit a student to be considered a scholar or an intellectual, as opposed to a mere learner who has to acquire skills to service a profession. Entrance assessments do not challenge the vertical pedagogical relationships and therefore withhold agency, consent and acceptance.

Conclusion

There has been a substantial change in South African Higher Education over the last two decades, not least to address the fractured, fragmented, exclusive and broken education system as a result of South Africa's long history of institutionalized racism. The transition to new forms of political arrangement has opened the space for real innovation. Despite significant interventions in this regard, 'the Fees Must Fall' campaign has clearly illuminated the wide chasm that exists between access and success. *Humanity* is both a process of becoming and a central feature of our existence – it is the present becoming and the future possibility to become. There are various ways in which postcolonial and indigenous thinking can be mainstreamed in higher education. The practice of envisioning or vision-making as knowledge-making; by re-framing to enable a deeper historicization of the context-specific challenges in higher education and to provide greater control by sub-altern groups about the way these are discussed; and in restoring dignity through connecting, claiming, representing and theory-making in ways that challenge existing dominance (Tuhwai-Smith 2012). A higher education system that is to contribute to a greater humanity through citizenship must embed humanity as a core feature. Humanity which is central to our existence should feature strongly in epistemic approaches to curricula in order to develop responsible citizenship. The meeting of the *expectations* of students, staff and society depends upon an alternative approach to entrance assessments, one that bridges the gap between *access* and *success* and embeds participatory learning-centred approaches in them. The *transformation* of human relationships needs to be a central goal met through the ongoing quest to provide students with a quality education and beginning with diagnostic assessment.

Integrating HEAT foci within considerations of entrance assessments should lead to a more holistic understanding of the student and contribute towards transitioning to a more integrated learning-centred teaching approach in higher education. Humanity, expectations, access and transformation (HEAT) provide more than a framework through which to think about how entrance assessment practices are still lacking, but more so, and in doing so, a lens through which a different future is possible.

Notes

1. This is based on the typical numbers of first level students in the Social Sciences disciplines at the UKZN over the years 2012–2016. Data from DMI, a data collection tool used by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.
2. For example, at the Central University of Technology, the National Benchmarking Tests have been used as a baseline from which to develop innovative communities of practice that link the Department of Communication Sciences to the Department of Mathematics.
3. Our study does not explicitly deal with gender and gendered identities despite this having an important intersectionality with race and class (Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall 2013). We do not analyse it here, not because it is unimportant, but because it deserves a separate paper of its own as the centre of analysis and not as an addendum. We acknowledge that different genders may experience different struggles at university through their own lenses and experiences. This topic deserves further exploration in its own right beyond the scope of this paper.
4. These innovations include alternatives to conventional testing such as interviews and portfolios including combinations of these.
5. See further the scholarly work published by Kwame Nkrumah (1965), Amílcar Cabral (2016) and Thomas Sankara during the transition to formal political independence on the African continent.
6. For further discussion of these contemporary debates today see De Sousa Santos, B. (2014) *Epistemologies of the South*, London: Paradigm Publishers and Mbembe, A. (2017) *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
7. The concept of 'postcolonial' is reference to colonial state and society since the beginnings of the colonial period as distinct from 'post-colonial' which refers to a distinct period in time when the states of the South received their

formal political independence from colonial rule. Many postcolonial scholars reject the term post-colonial as it implies that colonialism ended when states received formal political independence or their self-government in a nationally constituted legislature, regardless of whether the dominant discourses were transformed or the new states had economic independence.

8. For heuristic purposes we define a traditional approach to teaching and learning as students being passive recipients of intellectual content through a lecture based method.
9. The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is the system that records levels of learning achievement to ensure that the skills and knowledge that have been learned are recognized throughout the country. The NQF Act [No. 67 of 2008], facilitates an ascending ten level framework, where each level sets out a learning achievement. One of the mechanisms intended to help facilitate the NQF objectives are what are known as Level Descriptors which are indicative of the broad agreement on the benefits of promoting lifelong learning. They provide a 'broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level (SAQA 2012) and informed by the NQF's philosophical underpinning with is 'applied competence', an approach that articulates with outcomes-based theoretical framework adopted by South Africa. The three essential components of competence are: (i) foundational competence which is the academic or intellectual skills of knowledge, the ability to analyse, synthesize and evaluate for information processing and problem solving; (ii) practical competence which includes the operational context and (iii) reflexive competence as demonstrated by learner autonomy (RSA 2012).
10. Metacognition is the awareness and understanding of one's own thought processes which when developed may lead to higher cognitive skills and lifelong reflexive learning.
11. Where the National Senior Certificate (NSC) is the standardized tool of measurement.
12. The Fees Must Fall Campaign is a student-led protest movement originating in late 2015 on the University of the Witwatersrand campus and grew into a country-wide alliance of the major student organizations protesting against the increase in fees. The Campaign highlighted the gap between being admitted to South African higher education institutions and being able to remain and succeed.
13. The Bantu education system refers to the system of education that was implemented following the Bantu Education Act of 1953 [Act No.47 of 1953], later re-named the Black Education Act of 1953. The Act legalized and enforced racially segregated and unequal education for people defined by the Apartheid State as Native, European, Indian and Coloured and registered at birth under these apartheid prescribed categories under the Population Registration Act of 1950 [Act No.30 of 1950].

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

Funding for this research was generously provided by the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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