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## Abstract Booklet



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## **Exploring the impact of multilingualism on academic performance in a South African Higher Education English FAL classroom**

Dr Grace Mavhiza

This qualitative study explored the impact of multilingualism on academic success in South African Higher Education, particularly within English First Additional Language (FAL) classrooms. As a nation characterised by linguistic diversity, South African students often enter tertiary institutions with varied English proficiency levels. These experiences can influence their academic performance. Data presented in this paper was collected through interviews, questionnaires and class observations. 40 first year students enrolled in the English FAL module for a bachelor's degree in education at a South African tertiary institution participated in this study. The findings of the study underscore the bilingual advantage, wherein multilingual individuals exhibit enhanced cognitive abilities that benefit their academic performance. However, language barriers can impede understanding of course material and participation in academic activities particularly for first year students. The research emphasizes the importance of embracing multilingualism. Institutional language policies and support services play a crucial role in facilitating multilingual education, enhancing students' academic skills and proficiency in English. Underpinned by Cummins's Language interdependence theory, this research advocates for a nuanced understanding of multilingualism's complexities in higher education, promoting practices that leverage linguistic diversity to foster an inclusive and equitable educational landscape. Future studies are encouraged to investigate the longitudinal effects of multilingualism on academic trajectories, providing insights that could inform educational policies and practices across diverse contexts. multilingualism; academic success;

**Keywords:** South Africa; English as a First Additional Language; inclusive education; social justice

## **CONVA Model in Addressing Educational Needs of Pastoral Nomads' Out-of-School Children in Nigeria for Ensuring National Security**

Dr Maigari Haruna Bello

This study explores the effectiveness of the CONVA model in addressing the educational needs of out-of-school pastoral nomadic children in Nigeria, with a focus on enhancing access to quality education. Utilizing a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 423 respondents, including parents/guardians, educators, community leaders, and government officials. The findings indicate that while the CONVA model has positively impacted educational access, significant challenges remain, particularly regarding resource limitations, inadequate infrastructure, and a shortage of trained personnel. The study identifies opportunities for improvement, emphasizing the need for increased funding, community partnerships, and the integration of technology into educational practices. The conclusion drawn from the analysis highlights that despite the model's potential, targeted interventions are essential to effectively meet the unique educational needs of pastoral nomadic communities. Based on these findings, it is recommended that stakeholders increase funding to support the CONVA model's infrastructure and resources, thereby improving educational accessibility and outcomes for nomadic children in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** CONVA, Model, Addressing, Educational, Nomadic children

## **“Mitigating the Socioeconomic Impacts of Energy Crisis on Children Higher Education Students Support in North-Western Nigeria**

Dr Ibrahim Abdullahi

Energy predicament in Northern Nigeria is a significant challenge with the region's ongoing economic hardships. The crisis characterized by chronic electricity shortages, mobility Fuel hikes, overdependence on non-renewable, non-sustainable energy sources, and inadequate provision for energy infrastructure. These menace is impacting on the number of children education from basic, secondary and higher level. This invariably, affect general higher education level, bearing low support to learners. Northern Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and small-scale industries which suffering from limited access to reliable and affordable energy. It leads majority households to be poor with subdued economic activities which lead to students' poor support for education. The region fragility aggravated poverty levels which render poor support to education low. The disparity between the northern and southern regions is not comparable with northern having disproportionately lower education. Key factors contributing to this need to be further studied beyond inefficient power generation and distribution systems. Widespread vandalism of energy infrastructure, governance policy as inconsistencies and corruptions may also contribute to menace. Region's overreliance on traditional energy sources, such as firewood, contributes to poverty elevation, environmental degradation which raises health risks. Efforts to address the crisis have been insufficient as limited investments in higher education among majority. The community engagement in addressing the crisis is required with multifaceted approaches such as fostering public-private partnerships, implementing policy prioritize equitable-sustainable energy distribution. Sustainable energy development in Northern Nigeria could unlock more economic potentials.

**Keywords:** improve living standards, and contribute to higher education attainment.

## **Mitigating, Socioeconomic Impacts, Energy Crisis, Children Higher Education, Students Support and North-Western Nigeria**

Mr Ibrahim Maikaita and Mr Abdullahi Abdullahi

A Comparative Study of the Impact of Traditional and No-Code Mobile App-facilitated Blended Learning Approaches to students' learning achievements in Practical Biology: A Case Study of two Colleges of Education in Katsina State Blended-learning instruction, traditional instruction, Adalo® no-coding mobile applications, higher education, cognitive skills, student engagement.

A Comparative Study of the Impact of Traditional and No-Code Mobile App-facilitated Blended Learning Approaches to students' learning achievements in Practical Biology: A Case Study of two Colleges of Education in Katsina State Ibrahim Maikaita Abdullahi Abdullahi Mr This study investigates the comparative impact of traditional versus an Adalo® no-code-mobile-application facilitated blended instructional approach, on students' performance, attitudes, and engagement in biology practical, at Isa Kaita College of Education, Dutsinma, and Federal College of Education, Katsina, from 8th March to 17th May 2024. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design, the study examined cognitive, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, as well as student grades, attendance, and engagement. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to further explore learners' perceptions and experiences for both instructional methods. The results indicated that the mobile app-facilitated instruction significantly enhanced overall student performance compared to traditional methods. Statistical analysis revealed significantly ( $t(99) = 14.653$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) higher post-test scores for the mobile-facilitated instruction group (mean score =  $60.95 \pm 1.885$ ) compared to the control group (mean score =  $37.85 \pm 1.402$ ), with 82.7% of the variance in scores ( $\eta^2 = 0.827$ ) accounted for by the mobile-app instruction treatment. Additionally, the study found a 34% improvement in engagement with course materials for the blended learning group over the traditional instruction group. Qualitative thematic analysis identified themes such as improved understanding, easier comprehension, increased interactivity, heightened motivation, and technical challenges. The study concludes that mobile apps for blended learning have significant potential to enhance educational outcomes and actively engage students, with internet accessibility being a major barrier. The study recommends

the wider adoption and optimization of mobile app-facilitated blended learning practices to improve student learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Blended-learning instruction, traditional instruction, Adalo® no-coding mobile applications, higher education, cognitive skills, student engagement

## **Digital ethics in higher and tertiary learning during the COVID-19 pandemic: Insights from Zimbabwe**

Dr Joseph Tinarwo

Policymakers and other proponents of sustainable development are increasingly recognising the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as a critical threat to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Still, efforts to achieve SDG 4 on enhancing quality education hinge on digital technologies. This research examines the ethical and governance issues of adopting digital technologies in higher and tertiary learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic, drawing lessons from Zimbabwe. Using mixed research methods, this research found that using digital technologies to enhance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in some ethical, governance, and socio-economic inequalities amongst the different classes of learners and lecturers. The study found that using digital technologies has managed to sustain higher and tertiary education learning and made it possible to continue with the academic calendar during the pandemic. However, the results of this study noted that the use of digital technologies in higher and tertiary learning has resulted in issues related to accessibility, affordability, inequality, and sustainability for the different classes of students and lecturers. The paper is crucial in the sight of both policymakers and programmers and recommends that governments must ensure adequate budgetary support to higher and tertiary institutions, build human and institutional capacity, expand digital infrastructure in areas without or with poor connectivity, and ensure that the implementation of digital learning is inclusive of the poor students and lecturers, women and people with special needs.

**Keywords:** Digital Ethics, Higher and Tertiary Education, COVID-19 pandemic, Zimbabwe

## **Lecturers And Students Perception On Electronic Learning As A New Technology Tool For Studying Business Education In College Of Education In Niger State And Federal Capital Territory,**

Mr Abuja-Nigeria Ndako Edotsu

The study investigated the perceptions of Business Education Lecturers and Students on Electronic Learning as a new Technology tool of Studying Business Education in Colleges of Education in Niger State and Federal Capital territory in an era of globalization and digitalization. Two research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. A survey design was used for the study. The study population consisted of all the Lecturers and final year students of Business Education in Colleges of education of study totaling 372; 48 Lecturers and 324 students. The entire population of the lecturers was used, while 215 students drawn using Yaro Yamane technique for a simplified formula for proportionate population and Multiple sampling Procedures. A 20 item structured questionnaires designed by the researcher was used for the study. The questionnaire was validated and its reliability determined with a yielded coefficient of 0.87. The findings of the study revealed that the lecturers and students of business education perceived that e-learning would make teaching and learning of business education much easier. Based on the findings of the research, it was recommended among others that the government and institutions of higher learning be encouraged to expand the implementation of e-learning in Colleges of education.

**Keywords:** E-learning, Perceptions Technology, Teaching, Learning, Globalization, Digitalization.

## **The nexus between male and female adolescents in the use and abuse of substances in the FCT Abuja: Nigeria**

Ibrahim Muhammad Hassan Hassan Dr

This study traced the background of substance abuse to pre-historic times and primitive era of Romans, Greek, and Egyptians abuse of Mushrooms, opiate, castor oil, alcohol etc. to the present realities of substance abuse



in Nigeria which is said to have engulfed 14.3 million Nigerians in recent times. The Research questions were carefully crafted to capture the sex that is associated with substance use and abuse among adolescents in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja, Nigeria. The literature conceptualized the key variables of the study and theoretical reviews. The study employed descriptive survey research design the population of the study was 3, 839,200 projected for FCT Abuja. Several sampling techniques were used to sample 1, 338 respondents covering the six Area Councils in the FCT, Abuja. SPSS Graph-pad, frequencies, percentage and Cumulative graphs was used to present the data from the field with addition of some qualitative analyses. Some of the major findings includes the fact that male adolescents' abuse substances more than their female counterparts.in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja. The following recommendations were advanced, Parents must ensure they exhibit good behavioral dispositions and practice before their wards, and The National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA), National Agency for Food and Drug Administration and Control (NAFDAC) and other control groups should not relent in carrying out their responsibilities on Drug and Substance abuse in other to make Nigeria a Drug/Substance abuse free society with special focus on the Nigerian adolescents/youths as the future leaders of the great country.

*Keywords:* Male, Female, Adolescent, Use, Substance, Abuse, Nexus.

### **Modernising traditional lecture halls: Integrating technology for enhanced learning at one rural university, Eastern Cape S**

Sibonise Mabengwana Mr and Dr. B. Seleke

Integrating contemporary technology, such as interactive whiteboards, digital projectors, and online learning platforms, into traditional lecture halls represents a transformative opportunity to enhance educational outcomes, particularly within historically disadvantaged institutions in South Africa. This study investigates the impact of modernising lecture halls at Walter Sisulu University's Mthatha Campus, exploring how these digital tools influence teaching methodologies, student engagement, and learning performance. Using a quantitative approach,

data were collected from 167 participants, including students, faculty, and support staff, through an online questionnaire. The analysis reveals a positive correlation between technology use and improved student engagement, critical thinking, and knowledge retention, underscoring the importance of infrastructure upgrades and faculty development to facilitate effective technology integration. However, challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, limited digital literacy, and financial constraints were identified as significant barriers. These findings contribute to the broader discourse on educational equity in South Africa, emphasising the urgent need for targeted investments in digital learning environments that prepare students for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. This study offers practical recommendations for policymakers and educators to bridge the digital divide and support inclusive, high-quality education in rural institutions.

**Keywords:** Technology Integration, Educational Equity, Digital Literacy, Rural Higher Education, Student Engagement, Infrastructure Barriers”

### **Quality Sustenance in Nigerian Colleges of Education System: Issues and Challenges.**

Muhammad Baba Baba Dr

Quality education at all levels of education is viewed as a condition through which the development of a nation is attained. Again, teachers are central to the realization of quality curriculum delivery and by extension, the attainment of quality education. Colleges of Education (COEs) in Nigeria are tertiary institutions specifically set up for the purpose of producing and training teachers for the basic educational system. A look at the system of Colleges of Education in Nigeria however reveals that quality implementation of programmes seems to be lacking thereby preventing full achievements of the lofty goals of these all important institutions. For proper clarity, the paper starts with an overview of the College of Education system as a tertiary teacher education institution in Nigeria. The paper further examines some critical issues and challenges facing College of Education system in Nigeria. These includes: policy issues, enrollment of students, financial input, inadequate facilities, proliferation

of outreach study centres, weak internal quality assurance frameworks and so on. The paper concludes that if COEs are to effectively discharge their mandates towards achieving their statutory aim of producing professional teachers, these challenges need to be resolved. Therefore the paper recommends need for review and effective implementation of policies on COEs, exploring sustainable funding strategies and regulations of the establishment of outreach study centres among others.

**Keywords:** Quality, Colleges of Education, Challenges.

### **The impact of higher education policies on young African refugees' access to and retention in South African universities: Social Justice Concerns**

Celestin Mayombe Dr Dr Zilungile Pearl Mbatha

Higher education institutions can play a key role in the pathways for hope and meaningful integration of refugee students in the host countries. The paper examines the access to higher education and retention of African young refugees (aged 18-34 years) in higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa while facing multiple challenges due to institutional policies. While many young refugees might have the privilege of completing their basic education (Grade 12) in South Africa, they face barriers to accessing higher education due to their refugee background. Only one per cent of refugees who complete secondary education secure access to local universities or TVET colleges. The purpose of the paper is to examine the facilitators and barriers to their transition from secondary schools to higher education and training. The research project was conducted in five cities, namely Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Bloemfontein. The researcher used a mixed research design of both quantitative and qualitative research approaches to conduct the study. A purposive sampling technique was used to select the total sample size of 610 participants (510 refugee youths, 80 parents/caregivers of these refugee youths and 10 refugee community leaders, 10 admissions officers and/or student financial support officers of three HEIs). While the

study is in the data analysis phase, the authors argue that without special programmes to reach the most marginalised and vulnerable youth in crises, including refugees, Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG4) will be unachievable. The impact of policy barriers to HEIs can be linked to social trends such as child marriage, prostitution for refugee girls, criminal activities, increased drug and alcohol consumption and absolute poverty. The study will contribute to the establishment of a solid base for effective evidence-informed practice and policy-making.

**Keywords:** Access to higher education, higher education, higher-education policy, refugee youth, retention in higher education, social justice.

### **Exploring the Efficacy of Student Support Services on Academic Performance and Retention Rates among TVET Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities: Mixed Method Approach**

Samaila Hamza Dr Dr Haruna Angulu

**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the efficacy of student support services on academic performance and retention rates among TVET undergraduates in Nigerian universities. A Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Cluster sampling technique was used to sample six states one from each geo-political zone in Nigeria. All the 18 universities in the sampled states were used for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 experts based on their working experiences and educational qualifications in TVET to participate in the qualitative sector of this study. The target population for quantitative part consisted of 150 respondents. An interview protocol and 20-item structured questionnaire were used for qualitative and quantitative data collection respectively. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Exploratory Factor analysis (EFA), Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were used to analyse the quantitative data. The findings reveal that student support services, such as academic advising, counseling, and mentorship, have a significant positive impact on academic performance and retention rates of TVET students. However, the study also identifies challenges and limitations in the provision of student

support services, including inadequate funding, insufficient staffing, and limited infrastructure. The study recommends that Nigerian universities should prioritize the development and implementation of effective student support services to enhance students' academic outcomes and success. Conclusively, the study highlights the need for policymakers and educators to address the challenges and limitations in the provision of these services.

**Keywords:** Student support services, academic performance, retention rates, undergraduate students, Nigerian universities

### **Exploring challenges faced by humanities first-year students as they adjust to the new academic and social environment: Case study of South African university**

Zenande Nonkula Ms Mr Nana Agyeman

The transition from high school to university poses significant challenges for first-year humanities students as they adjust to the demands of a new academic and social environment. This study aims to explore the multifaceted challenges these students encounter, focusing on academic, social, emotional, and financial aspects. Academically students often struggle with adapting to independent learning, time management, academic writing, and unfamiliar teaching styles. Socially, the need to build new relationships and integrate into diverse university communities can create a sense of isolation and anxiety. Emotional challenges, including homesickness and imposter syndrome, further complicate the adjustment process, impacting students' mental well-being and academic performance. Financial difficulties also exacerbate stress, with many students managing tight budgets and facing funding challenges. Using qualitative research methods (interviews and surveys), this study captures the lived experiences of first-year humanities students, identifying key support mechanisms and coping strategies. The findings suggest that early interventions, such as orientation programs, mentorship, academic support services, and mental health initiatives, facilitate smoother transitions. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the

factors affecting first-year humanities students. It provides actionable insights for higher education institutions to enhance student retention, well-being, and academic success.

*Keywords:* First-year students, humanities, academic adjustment, social integration, mental health, higher education, transition challenges, support strategies.

## **Reinventing Digitalization in Higher Education Management: Examining University Staff's Application of ICT for Achieving SDGs 2030**

Ikechukwu Ogeze Ukeje Dr Dr. Chinyere Ori Elom and Dr. Chukwudum Collins Umoke

Digital transformation remains a sine qua non for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 policy indicators in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. This paper aims to examine the various challenges facing higher education institutions (HEIs) in developing countries during this era of digitalization and underscores the need for the full adoption of ICT in university education management (UEM). The acquisition and development of digital skills among university staff—ranging from faculty members (academic staff such as professors, lecturers, and researchers), administrative staff (handling non-teaching duties like registrars, bursars, or HR personnel), support staff (technical, maintenance, or clerical roles), to non-academic staff (not directly involved in teaching or research)—has become critical for the attainment of the 2030 SDGs. For universities in Nigeria to deliver quality education and make relevant societal impacts in this era of globalization, it is essential to consciously integrate SDG 4 target indicators into staff training modules (STMs) and performance appraisal frameworks. This approach addresses existing challenges such as unstable academic calendars, brain drain, low literacy rates, poor educational infrastructure, and unequal access to quality education, especially in rural areas. These efforts have significant implications for sustainable education management (SEM) and development, as ICT facilitates courses and training on sustainable practices and global citizenship through virtual platforms while enabling the integration of sustainability concepts into

research and teaching agendas. In conclusion, integrating SDGs into Nigeria's educational system and administration could lead to sound educational reforms (SERs) that prioritize sustainability, equity, inclusivity, and innovation.

**Keywords:** Higher education management, digitalization, university staff, ICT, SDGs, Equity, Challenges, Nigeria

### **Towards a Stakeholder-Centric, AI-Driven Educational Governance: Leveraging the “Open Campus Model” to Strengthen Collaborative Education through University Guidance and Counseling Units**

Chinyere Ori Elom Dr Dr. Ikechukwu Ogeze Ukeje and Dr. Chukwudum Collins Umoke

The integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in education, combined with active stakeholder participation, is essential for addressing critical challenges in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed significant gaps in the education system, including disruptions to academic activities and inadequate support for students' learning needs. These challenges underscore the urgency of adopting innovative, technology-driven solutions to enhance learning outcomes and governance. This paper explores how university Guidance and Counseling (G&C) units can play a pivotal role in enhancing collaborative and participatory education governance within Nigeria's higher education system. This study presents the “Open Campus Model” (OCM), a stakeholder-centric, AI-driven framework for participatory education governance. The OCM fosters seamless collaboration, knowledge exchange, and problem-solving within and across institutions, creating a dynamic platform for continuous improvement in education delivery. Within this context, the Guidance and Counseling (G&C) units in universities play a crucial role by addressing students' learning problems and promoting participatory education. Drawing from the experience of Alex Ekwueme Federal University, Ndufu Alike, Ebonyi State, Nigeria pilot test, through effective AI tools, G&C units can offer personalized academic counseling, mental health support, and career guidance, ensuring students are actively involved in decision-making processes about their education. Furthermore, G&C units act

as mediators between students, faculty, and administrators, facilitating stakeholder collaboration in education governance. This participatory approach helps identify and resolve learning barriers, ensuring inclusive and equitable access to quality education.

**Keywords:** AI-Driven Educational Governance, participatory education, AI rethinking, AI calibration, Open Campus Model, stakeholder engagement, sustainable education reform, equitable access, Higher Education G&C unit

### **“Addressing Challenges in AI-Powered Adaptive Learning Systems to Enhance Science Education Student Performance in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: Implications for Sustainable Development**

Chukwudum Collins Umoke Dr Dr. Chinyere Ori Elom, and Dr. Ikechukwu Ogeze Ukeje

The integration of Dynamic AI-powered adaptive learning systems (D-AIPALs) in developing countries presents transformative potential for education, particularly in achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 (Quality Education) and 10 (Reduced Inequalities). This study explores strategies to overcome challenges in deploying these systems to enhance student performance in Nigerian tertiary institutions. D-AIPALs personalize learning experiences, improving academic outcomes and engagement by tailoring educational content to individual student needs. Existing research highlights their ability to provide real-time feedback, automate routine tasks for educators, and offer equitable access to quality education. However, challenges such as algorithmic bias, data privacy concerns, and unequal access must be addressed to ensure inclusivity. This study employs in-depth qualitative interviews with education stakeholders from various faculties and departments at selected AE-FUNAI campuses. The aim is to gather insights into their experiences, challenges, and perceived benefits of adaptive learning platforms. Preliminary findings reveal that AI systems can help bridge gaps in science education, a critical area with persistent performance disparities. These technologies also address resource allocation disparities, enabling underserved populations to access quality education. By addressing these barriers, adaptive learning systems contribute to reducing educational inequalities, aligning



with SDG 10 indicators. Ultimately, D-AIPALs can enhance educational quality, inclusivity, and accessibility, fostering progress toward SDG 4. Their successful implementation in Nigerian tertiary institutions could drive sustainable development by promoting equity and improving student outcomes.

*Keywords:* D-AIPALs, Student Performance, Science education, Educational technology, Nigerian Tertiary Institutions, Sustainable Development

### **“Exploring the Efficacy of Student Support Services on Academic Performance and Retention Rates among TVET Undergraduates in Nigerian Universities: Mixed Method Approach**

Samaila Hamza Dr 1. Dr. Haruna Angulu 2. Jamilu Mustapha Chedi

This study explores the efficacy of student support services on academic performance and retention rates among TVET undergraduates in Nigerian universities. A Sequential Exploratory Mixed Method approach was employed, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. Cluster sampling technique was used to sample six states one from each geo-political zone in Nigeria. All the 18 universities in the sampled states were used for the study. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 experts based on their working experiences and educational qualifications in TVET to participate in the qualitative sector of this study. The target population for quantitative part consisted of 150 respondents. An interview protocol and 20-item structured questionnaire were used for qualitative and quantitative data collection respectively. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data. Exploratory Factor analysis (EFA), Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) were used to analyse the quantitative data. The findings reveal that student support services, such as academic advising, counseling, and mentorship, have a significant positive impact on academic performance and retention rates of TVET students. However, the study also identifies challenges and limitations in the provision of student support services, including inadequate funding, insufficient staffing, and limited infrastructure. The study recommends that Nigerian universities should prioritize the development and implementation of effective student support services to enhance students' academic outcomes and

success. Conclusively, the study highlights the need for policymakers and educators to address the challenges and limitations in the provision of these services.

**Keywords:** Student support services, academic performance, retention rates, undergraduate students, Nigerian universities

## **Exploring Student Perceptions of E-Tutoring in ODeL Institutions: Challenges and Opportunities**

Debbie Sanders Dr Dr Shirley Mukhari

This qualitative case study aims to explore students' perceptions of e-tutors in an open-distance e-learning (ODEL) environment. It focuses on their experiences and the value of e-tutoring in supporting their academic studies. With the shift to online education, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic, e-tutoring has become an integral part of ODeL. E-tutoring is designed to bridge the gap between students and their learning resources. This study aims to understand how students view e-tutoring, their interactions and the extent to which e-tutoring contributes to their engagement with the course material and ultimate academic success. This study used qualitative case study research data. Data were collected through semi-structured focus group interviews with students actively participating in e-tutoring complemented by the researchers analysing relevant documents. Specific themes were revealed as a result of the inductive analysis. These were related to the students' expectations of the e-tutoring system, their experiences with the e-tutor module site, and the advantages and challenges encountered in e-tutoring interactions. The findings highlight that students value e-tutoring because, through this process, timely feedback is delivered, a sense of connection in the online learning space is created and support in their academic progress is provided. However, students identified challenges such as inconsistent communication, time constraints, connectivity issues, and varying levels of support. This study provides valuable insights into students' experiences of e-tutoring and highlights opportunities for improving e-tutoring practices to align with students' needs and contribute more effectively to their academic success.

**Keywords:** e-tutoring, open-distance e-learning (ODEL), student perceptions, academic engagement, qualitative research, opportunities and challenges.

## **Conceptualising resilience in higher education: A scoping review**

Deerdre le Roux Ms

The health, well-being, and employability of university students are important areas of concern within higher education. Due to an increased focus on the areas above, there is a growing interest in student resilience. However, conceptualisations of resilience are widely varied. Since it is often viewed as a fixed trait that individuals either possess or lack, the influence of context on resilience is frequently underestimated. The purpose of this review was to enhance the understanding of resilience in the broader context of higher education. A scoping review of the conceptualisation of resilience within higher education is provided with the methodological framework for scoping reviews developed by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) serving as the basis for this review. The scoping study method is guided by the need to identify all pertinent literature, irrespective of study design. The initial search via the databases EBSCO, ERIC and PsychINFO yielded 189 records. Finally, altogether 41 contributions were included in the scoping analysis. Each resource was evaluated thematically to identify key categorisations of resilience. Three selected themes were used to organise the results. There is a pressing need for concerted efforts to establish a cohesive understanding of resilience. Despite the evolution of resilience research over the years, this does not imply that all avenues of inquiry have been thoroughly explored. Therefore, future research across all dimensions of resilience is needed. Recommendations for educators and researchers are discussed.

**Keywords:** resilience, higher education, student, mental health, student experience

## **Remediating the Challenge of Term Variation in High School Science Textbooks through Content-Integrated Terminology Literacy**

Ishiyaku Abubakar Mbela Abubakar Mr

Underachievement in science is a serious challenge for South African and Nigerian high school learners and term variation in science textbooks contributes to it. Although several recommendations have been offered on how to address the challenge, little has been done in a) determining the effects of term variation on learners' performance, b) designing a pedagogic framework that can be used to surmount the challenge. Consequently, a mixed method design was used to determine the effect of term variation on the performance of learners. The study was conducted in Adamawa state, Nigeria and in Cape Town, South Africa. Two hundred high school learners from both study sites wrote achievement tests individually while sixty learners verbalized their answers in groups of three. The test questions had a Cronbach alpha reliability measure of (10 item test  $\alpha = .70$ ). Learners were given two text configurations to consult. The terms in the texts vary but ideational content in both texts are similar. Learners were expected to use grammatical categories from Systemic The performances of learners were analyzed using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation test and Thematic Content Analytical techniques. The results indicate no significant relationship between achievement in the test administered and the language competence of learners. The results of the analysis of the dialogue Think Aloud Protocols further showed that learners lacked the requisite meta-linguistic strategies for responding to term variation. In conclusion, the potentials of content integrated terminology literacy as a useful pedagogic framework for responding to term variation was discussed.

**Keywords:** Underachievement in Science, Term Variation, Content-Integrated Terminology Literacy.

## **Revitalizing Health Services Management Training to Tackle Poor Patient Care and Leadership Through Applying Ubuntu Philosophy**

Sheillah Hlamalani Mboweni Dr

Every day, we are confronted with disturbing reports from social media, television, and newspapers of patients being treated with disdain and disrespect in healthcare facilities. The absence of empathy and compassion in these settings raises a critical question: "What has happened to our Ubuntu?" As Africans, we pride ourselves on the values of Ubuntu, which emphasize the importance of humanity, empathy, and community. Yet, our healthcare systems often fail to reflect these values.

**Objective:** To explore the application of Ubuntu philosophy, as a model in transforming health services management training curriculum.

**Methodology:** This presentation draws on a critical review of existing literature on Ubuntu, along with insights gained from teaching health services management and shaping the curriculum of the new postgraduate programme. Where we propose a framework for incorporating Ubuntu as a native African philosophy, or model into health services training and education.

**Results:** Our analysis suggests that incorporating Ubuntu principles into the health services training curriculum, particularly in domains like servant leadership, project planning and development of nursing or healthcare standards, could enhance patients' care experiences and health outcomes.

**Conclusion:** Applying Ubuntu principles to the health services training curriculum can address shortcomings in leadership, lack of culturally sensitive approach care plans, and poor interpersonal and communication skills, contributing to improved health services and patient experiences. By embracing Ubuntu values, healthcare providers can develop patient-centered, empathetic, and compassionate care.

**Keywords:** curriculum development, health services management, nursing standards, patient experiences, servant leadership, project plan, Ubuntu philosophy

## **Navigating Policy and Regulatory Environment in Higher Education: BSc degree renewal at the Faculty of Natural Sciences, University of the Western Cape, South Africa**

Audu B.N., Conana C., Marshall D., Sabata S., Herbert M., Holgate D., Dube A., KhadijaP., Rio W. and Dean D.P. Audu and Conana Dr Prof Christiana Conana

This paper explores the intricate processes involved in the renewal and rebirth of degree programs within the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), South Africa. It addresses the challenges posed by the evolving institutional policy and frameworks, as well as national policies and regulatory frameworks in higher education. This paper discusses the theoretical framework underpinning program renewal and the practical steps taken to guarantee all stakeholder involvement. It also provides insights into how the institution and the faculty in particular is adapting the mandates for transformation, inclusivity, and academic excellence in the type of scientist that would be produced from her BSc degree renewal. Through a detailed analysis of UWC's strategies, this paper elucidates the critical role of policy navigation in enhancing educational offerings while adhering to national educational objectives. It concludes by highlighting the implications of this initiative for the institution and the wider higher education sector in South Africa. Keywords: Policy, renewal, degree, programme, social justice, scientific excellence and transformation.

## **Exploring the impact of multilingualism on academic performance in a South African Higher Education English FAL classroom**

Shoayb Ahmed Dr Mavhiza

This paper explores the challenges and opportunities of teaching Arabic in an online institution in South Africa, focusing on decoloniality, Africanization, and multilingualism. The study investigates how Arabic, traditionally viewed as a foreign language, can be taught in alignment with decolonization principles, addressing the historical legacy of colonial education that marginalized African languages and cultures.

Using qualitative methods, the research employs case studies of Arabic language programs at South African institutions, examining how African-centered pedagogies are being integrated into curriculum design. Focus groups with students and educators provide insight into their perceptions of Arabic's role in African scholarship, culture, and religion, highlighting both opportunities and barriers to incorporating African perspectives. Ethnographic observations of online classrooms further shed light on how these pedagogies are implemented in practice. Additionally, document and content analysis of syllabi, curriculum materials, and policy documents is used to assess the extent to which Arabic language instruction aligns with the goals of decolonization and Africanization. The study emphasizes multilingualism as a critical skill in South Africa and across Africa, where navigating multiple languages fosters personal and professional growth. By advocating for greater collaboration between South African institutions and the broader African continent, the research aims to contribute to the transformation of higher education, promoting a decolonized, Africanized Arabic curriculum that reflects the continent's linguistic and cultural diversity. Arabic, decolonization, Africanization, multilingualism, diversity, teaching

“Investigating the Departure of Phase One Participants of the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) at an institution of higher learning Luvuyo Ndawule Dr Since its inception, the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) at a certain institution of higher learning, designed to offer permanent employment, has seen all Phase One participants leave the institution. This study aims to explore the reasons behind this trend, focusing specifically on the experiences of Phase One participants. The research addresses the following question: What factors contribute to the departure of Phase One nGAP participants from this institution?

Rooted in the theoretical framework of organizational commitment and job satisfaction, this study employs a qualitative approach. The sample includes all former Phase One nGAP scholars who have left the institution. Data collection instruments consist of in-depth qualitative interviews. The data will be analysed using thematic analysis to identify key themes and patterns.

Ethical considerations will include ensuring informed consent, guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of participants, and addressing any potential power dynamics between the researcher and participants. The study will also follow ethical guidelines to minimize any psychological distress or discomfort experienced by participants during the interviews. The study is limited by the small sample size of 4 participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data might introduce bias, as participants may have varying levels of recall and personal perspectives. Another limitation is the potential for non-response or partial response from some participants, which could affect the completeness of the data.

While the study offers valuable insights, it is limited by the availability of participants and their willingness to share candidly. Delimitations include focusing solely on Phase One participants and excluding other phases and institutions. The findings aim to inform policy revisions and improve support structures to enhance the retention and professional growth of nGAP scholars.

**Keywords:** nGAP (New Generation of Academics Programme), Retention, Organizational Commitment, Job Satisfaction

## **AN EDU-SOCIO MODEL OF CORE ACADEMIC SKILLS FOR UNIVERSITY STUDENT SUCCESS**

Dr De Wet Schutte (DPhil; TPLR(SA))

The journey of any university student is characterised by continual adaptation to a unique, multidimensional, and ever-changing academic and social environment. No student can be fully prepared for this new educational landscape after leaving secondary school, and it is acknowledged that, particularly for first-generation students, their level of preparedness is generally lower than that of second (or more) generation students from a single family. However, all enrolled students and university management strive towards “student success.”” For this study, student success was defined as the successful progression towards graduation within the prescribed timeframe. Six domains of core skills



with associated elements necessary for academic achievement were identified and integrated into a universal edu-socio model for student success. This model also served as the theoretical foundation of the Student Success Thermometer, a universal early warning self-assessment tool for students. It is posited that this universal edu-socio student success model can be applied across university settings to guide the development and monitoring of performance intervention programmes and support services for students across all campuses and their academic performance spectrum.

**Keywords:** Student success, Academic skills, Student support, edu-socio model for student success.”

## **REVOLUTIONIZING GEO-INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY EDUCATION AT SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY: THE ROLE OF 3D PRINTING IN BRIDGING THEORY, PRACTICE, AND GEO-SPATIAL VISUALIZATION**

Dr Tolulope Ayodeji OLATOYE and Dr Elrico KOCK

**ABSTRACT:** Raymond Nkwenti FRU This study examines the transformative potential of 3D printing technology in revolutionizing geo-information technology education at Sol Plaatje University (SPU). The research addresses the research problem encountered through traditional methods of teaching geo-spatial concepts, which often fail to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, thereby limiting students' ability to visualize and analyze complex data effectively. The study highlights the significance of integrating 3D printing as a pedagogical tool to enhance spatial understanding, foster innovation, and prepare students for real-world applications in geo-information technologies. Guided by Experiential Learning Theory, which emphasizes learning through direct experience, this research adopted a quantitative methodology. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 100 students in the Faculty of Education, gathering insights on their engagement, understanding, and perceptions of 3D printing in geo-information learning. Findings revealed that students who interacted with 3D-printed geo-spatial models demonstrated improved comprehension,

greater enthusiasm for the subject, and enhanced problem-solving skills compared to those taught using conventional methods. The study recommends integrating 3D printing technology into geo-information curricula, supported by faculty training and institutional investment, to enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes.

**Keywords:** 3D Printing; Digital Innovation; Experiential Learning; Geo-Information Education; Geo-Spatial Visualization; Pedagogical Tools; Sol Plaatje University.

### **Exploring the Impact of Collaborative Learning Techniques on Student Learning Outcomes and Social Interaction**

Shame Mugova Dr

The research investigates the benefits of collaborative learning techniques. The action research investigates the impact of group work on student learning and social interaction. The research question is: How does collaborative learning through group work, influence student learning outcomes, student social interaction in the classroom? The objective is to assess the impact of collaborative learning on students' social interaction and teamwork skills and identify best practices for implementing collaborative learning techniques that maximize both academic and social benefits for students. Participants are Entrepreneurial Finance students assessed through group work. Data was collected through interviews to gain in-depth information from participants and observations on how students behave in class, in natural setting without interfering and getting their group dynamics observing their gestures their social interaction. The analysis includes comparing social and interpersonal skills of students and analysing changes in social interaction and teamwork dynamics.

**Keywords:** Group work, Collaborative learning, learning outcomes, social interaction, teamwork

## **Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the Digital Divide: Integrating AI into online teaching and learning practices without further marginalizing those already digitally disadvantaged**

Amber Clarke Ms

It can be argued that the higher education students most impacted by the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) are those who are already marginalized within online learning spaces. In this chapter, the author explores the cognizance that needs to be taken around assumptions when integrating AI in Higher Education practices. Students facing adverse circumstances, where online learning already presents barriers such as limited access to digital devices and stable connectivity, need to be at the forefront of such decisions. Without tailored methodologies and a sensitive approach to strategically integrate AI in online teaching and learning practices, the digital divide amongst students will widen. A fragmented and impulsive AI-integration process will ultimately contribute toward the cycle of inequality and injustice facing our South African education system. This chapter unpacks the foundation of implanting an all-inclusive AI approach in online teaching and learning practices in the Higher Education sector.

*Keywords:* Artificial Intelligence, Higher Education, Inclusivity, online teaching and learning, digital divide.

## **Adjusting South African Learners (Grade R - Grade 12) from the Bantu Education System to a Post-Apartheid and Post-COVID-19 Era: A Triangular Model Approach Involving Teachers, Parents, and Social Workers with Technology and Person-Centered Practices**

Fatiema Petersen-Galant Petersen-Galant Mrs.

This research intends to explore the influence of South Africa's evolving education system, shaped by historical and political factors, on present-day school-going children. The study examines how technology can be utilized to address systemic challenges and empower students in various aspects—socially, psychologically, cognitively, and generationally.

Building on Mishra and Mallik's (2014) research, which highlights parental unawareness of school-based assessments, and Labuschagne et al.'s (2023) findings on South Africa's educational difficulties—including limited digital infrastructure and technological literacy—the paper aims to investigate how a triangulated approach, involving schools, parents, and learners, can foster positive educational outcomes. Through an eclectic methodology, which hopes to incorporate in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, posits that collaboration among these groups is imperative. Suggesting successful outcomes depend on a shared understanding of the education system by all parties involved. Parents, Learner/s, Teachers, Leadership. The study wants to show how technology, when harnessed effectively, can help mitigate challenges and empower learners, ultimately contributing to an improved educational experience.

**Keywords:** Triangulation System, Hybrid Problem Solving Learning, School Based Assessments, Post Covid-19, Post Apartment, Bantu Education, Political Alliance, Impact on World Alliance/s since 1994

### **Empowering Through Mentorship: A Narrative Inquiry into the Experiences of Black South African PhD Mentors**

Luvuyo Ndawule Dr

**ABSTRACT:** Despite progress in education equity, significant disparities persist in the demographics of PhD graduates in South Africa. While Black South Africans constitute the majority of the population, they remain underrepresented among doctoral graduates. This paper explores the personal experiences of a Black South African PhD graduate who has spent nearly a decade assisting and mentoring PhD candidates from diverse backgrounds.

The main question this paper seeks to address is: How do personal mentoring experiences contribute to the success and retention of PhD candidates, particularly those from underrepresented groups?

The theoretical framework for this study is based on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which examines the role of race and racism in perpetuating social

disparities. CRT is relevant as it provides insights into the structural challenges faced by Black PhD candidates and the importance of mentorship in overcoming these barriers.

Methodologically, this study adopts a qualitative approach, relying on narrative inquiry to capture the nuanced experiences of the author. As the focus is on personal experiences, there is no sampling or sample size. Ethical considerations include maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of the mentees, as well as obtaining their consent for sharing specific anecdotes.

Proposed findings suggest that personalized mentorship plays a crucial role in not only academic success but also in building confidence and resilience among PhD candidates. The significance of this study lies in highlighting the impact of mentorship on diversifying the academic landscape and providing insights into effective support mechanisms for future PhD candidates.

Keywords: Mentorship, Underrepresented, Critical Race Theory, Narrative Inquiry, Education Equity”

### **Leveraging interactive whiteboards for integrating indigenous knowledge in teaching cellular respiration in Life Sciences**

Lwazi Nsindiso Mkhwebane Mr

**ABSTRACT:** The Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) document for Life Sciences in South Africa emphasizes integrating Indigenous Knowledge (IK) into teaching and learning. However, implementation remains limited, with many teachers not integrating IK. This reluctance is often linked to traditional teaching methods, which diminish learner engagement. Amid technological advancements, integrating Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), such as Interactive Whiteboards (IWBs), offers innovative potential. Using IWBs to integrate IK in Life Sciences education could enhance learner interest and inspire careers in science, critical for addressing global sustainability challenges. As such, this study examined Life Sciences teachers’ practices

when using IWBs to integrate IK when teaching cellular respiration in Grade 11. Guided by Cognitive Justice and the Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning (CTML), the study adopted an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data was collected from 153 teachers in Gauteng through a questionnaire and analyzed using SPSS. Ten teachers were then selected for semi-structured interviews and observed teaching cellular respiration lessons.

Findings revealed that while teachers value IWB integration of IK, they face challenges such as insufficient professional development, lack of IK resources, and technical issues. Teachers primarily used IWBs to display static images or videos rather than leveraging interactive capabilities for engaging IK integration. The study recommends ongoing professional development, IK-specific resources compatible with IWBs, and improved school infrastructure. Implications include systemic changes in teacher training and resource provision to foster inclusive, culturally relevant teaching. Future research should expand to other provinces and examine IK integration's impact on learner engagement and performance

Keywords: Cellular respiration; Cognitive Justice; Life Sciences; Indigenous knowledge; Interactive whiteboards”

### **Indigenous African Music inclusive Music Education curriculum: a case study of the Odeion School of Music**

Absolum David Nkosi Dr

**ABSTRACT:** Curriculum reformation is one of the prioritised South African Universities' programs in the promotion of decolonization of teaching and learning to promote social justice and inclusivity. Indigenous Knowledge systems are being brought to the façade in higher education. The Odeion School has implemented an Indigenous African Musical Arts inclusive Music Education and Practice module that promotes social justice and multicultural music education. Qualitative narrative case study research was conducted with the Music Education students who went through this reformed module to solicit their experiences. The role and views of the OSM management on this initiative were also enquired. The research found that Music Education students were empowered with African

Indigenous Music Learning Theories and pedagogies, empowering them with skills and knowledge that enable them to be well-rounded Music teachers. However, some resistance from students who have never been exposed to it is imminent, therefore empathy, patience, and inspirational teaching are necessary. Departmental Management and Leadership support have been identified as a crucial factor for effective module reformation or curriculum decolonisation.

This research demonstrates how Music Education modules can be reformed by incorporating Indigenous African Musical Arts Education theories and practices. A similar approach could be adopted by different Music departments by incorporating their immediate community's indigenous music traditions in their Music Education and Practice modules.

**Keywords:** African Musical Arts Education, Curriculum Reformation, Decolonialisation, Music Education”

### **Values-based Physical Education in a diverse South African context**

Cherese Jones Couto Dr NA

**ABSTRACT:** Global changes in how learners interact with their environment have raised concerns about South African students' health and values. Deteriorating health and reduced physical activity highlight the importance of physical education (PE), which fosters holistic development and moral character. Values-based PE emphasizes teaching values through physical activities, promoting ethical behaviour and social justice. This qualitative research involves pre-service teacher training workshops aligned with the South African curriculum, integrating the values of Olympism and Ubuntuism. Feedback from ten PE pre-service teachers shaped these workshops, which utilized the Teaching of Personal and Social Responsibility Model and included lesson plans based on curriculum objectives. By enhancing cultural competence, teachers can effectively impart these values, ensuring that PE becomes a platform for community bonding and emotional well-being in diverse classrooms.

**Keywords:** Cultural Competency / Olympism / Physical Education /

Ubuntu / Values-based Education

### **3D Printing Digital Twins as Sustainable Alternatives to Tailoring Mannequins in Fashion Education**

Reena Pandarum Dr N/A

**ABSTRACT:** The global fashion industry is reported to contribute 10% of the world's carbon emissions. To address this, the sector is currently engaged in adopting sustainable manufacturing practices. One such initiative is the 3D printing of digital twins or true-to-life 3D models for optimising pattern drafting for sizing and fit of clothing. Digital twins are representations of the lifelike human body extracted from a 3D full body scanner and 3D printed to optimise the production process of tailoring mannequins that are currently used by the fashion sector. Hence, this study explores 3D printing of digital twins from a cohort of 509 South African women scans aged 18-70 years old from all "walks of life." volunteering for the study. The 3D printing was conducted using the dominant body morphotype arising in the dataset. The study further explores the limitations of the currently in-use tailoring mannequin manufacturing process, which fails to reproduce the complex geometries of the entire human body with exact girth and length anthropometric measurements. The digital twin manufacturing process streamlines mannequin production processes whilst minimising the environmental impact of a traditional tailoring mannequin creation, which typically requires numerous modifications, and generates excessive raw material waste. In higher education, the integration of 3D printing into the fashion curriculum offers students practical experience in sustainable design and manufacturing processes. By training fashion students to draft garment pattern blocks from digital twins, with body shapes and sizes that currently exist in a country population, universities encourage a mindset of resource optimisation and waste minimisation.

**Keywords:** 3D printing, fashion curriculum, 3D scanning, sustainable development, higher education, digital twins"



## **Catalysing Change: Our Journey Through the PGDip in Higher Education and Its Influence on Knowing, Doing, and Becoming**

Mei Luo Zamalotshwa Mlotshwa Ms Miss, Mei Luo

**ABSTRACT:** Embarking on the Postgraduate Diploma (PGDip) in Higher Education has significantly transformed our professional practices as Learning Experience Designers (LXDs) at the University of Witwatersrand. This proposal explores how professional learning programmes like the PGDip act as catalysts for transformation, reshaping our roles in higher education and influencing academics' curriculum design and student success.

Participation in the PGDip prompted deep reflection on our professional identities, enabling us to adopt the language and concepts of Academic Development (AD) and enrich our roles in Academic Staff Development (ASD). It altered our engagement with academics, HE professionals, students, and the broader educational context. We shifted from providing technical support to engaging in reflective practices, researching, and reimagining the complexities of designing for teaching and learning. By critically applying pedagogical theories, we align theoretical frameworks with practical applications in curriculum development. Concepts such as curriculum responsiveness, contextual and conceptual learning (Moll, 2004; Maton, 2020), and epistemically diverse curriculum (Luckett, 2001) have deepened our understanding of meaningful learning experiences. Exposure to these theoretical models challenged our conceptual understanding and influenced our approaches to curriculum design and collaboration with academics. Engaging deeply with foundational theories allowed us to move beyond superficial concepts, fostering enriching collaborations and co-creation. The ripple effect begins with personal introspection, extending to broader educational and social contexts. Our PGDip journey strengthened our resilience and adaptability, refining our practices to align with evolving educational needs. We have positioned ourselves as agents of change, advocating for holistic, interdisciplinary curriculum design that fosters lasting impact.

**Keywords:** Transformation, Curriculum Enhancement, Reflective Practice,

## Collaboration, Influence

### Exploring Afrocentric Approaches to AI Policy Framework Development in South African Higher Education: A Case Study of Decolonizing AI Integration

Thabo Director Horings Mr

**ABSTRACT:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is becoming more common in universities worldwide, but South Africa still lacks clear policies on how to use it in a way that suits its unique educational needs (Opesemowo & Adekomaya, 2024). This study looks at how South African universities can develop AI policies that reflect African values and support the decolonization of education.

The research focuses on identifying key Afrocentric ideas that policymakers can use to ensure AI is implemented in a way that aligns with African ways of teaching and learning. This study has employed a Qualitative methodology, a Snowball sampling approach, a semi-structured interview data collection method, and a Thematic data analysis. A case study of a South African university will be used to examine existing AI policies, compare them to global standards, and check whether they fit with South Africa's decolonization goals. The study will gather data by reviewing policy documents, and analysing relevant literature on AI, education policy, and decolonization,

The findings reveal that while AI can improve education, current policies often follow Western models that don't fully address local needs and cultural values (Chan, 2023). This research recommends an Afrocentric AI policy that includes indigenous knowledge, fair access to technology, and inclusive education while supporting the decolonization of higher education.

**Keywords:** Afrocentric AI policy, higher education, decolonization, South Africa, AI in education, policy framework

### Exploring ADDIE model in supporting continuous professional development within an Open Distance e-Learning Institution

Phumza Maureen Makgato-Khunou Dr Dr Jabulani Owen Nene

**ABSTRACT:** This study explores the role of the Centre for Professional Development (CPD) in developing academic staff within Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) settings. Some South African higher education

institutions are either blended or moving completely online post-COVID-19. This shift brings new challenges that require extra support to academic staff in upholding teaching qualities and engaging students effectively. This article aims to unpack the CPD processes using the five (5) phases of the ADDIE Model (analysis, design, development, implementation, and evaluation). Grounded in Constructivist learning theory, which complements the ADDIE model in this context by emphasising active engagement, reflection and continuous improvement. This study employs the mixed methods approach to gather participant feedback through Microsoft Forms and Power BI (MS PBI) during the 2024 training sessions. Subsequently, data is analysed thematically to identify recurring themes per the ADDIE model, providing insight into processes followed by the CPD in the digital context. A key finding is that following the ADDIE model leads to improvements and enhances academic attendance for the training provided. However, training conducted without adequately understanding the practicing's needs can result in resistance or lack of attendance. Academic Staff, ADDIE Model, Professional Development, Open Distance e-Learning Institution, Training

Examining the role of Language Services in supporting tuition and enhancing learning in Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL)

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**ABSTRACT:** The Language Services Directorate is a central hub for language resources, critical in overcoming the linguistic gaps between diverse students and instructional content in Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) environments. This directorate offers translation, editing, glossaries, and terminology standardization, greatly improving the accessibility, clarity, and inclusivity of educational materials. However, their role in supporting tuition and improving learning outcomes in ODEL settings remains insufficiently explored. This study aims to examine how language services enhance tuition and support learning in Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL). This highlights the vital role of Language Services,

which encompasses all official South African languages that support students and enhance learning. The study will use content analysis as a qualitative method.

Keywords: Language Services, Open Distance e-Learning, Tuition Support, Multilingual

Language Services, Open Distance e-Learning, Tuition Support, Multilingualism

A modification of programme delivery to address employability challenges: Case of a Diploma in Accounting at a University of Technology

Maluta Jerry Netshandama Mr Dr Sedzani Faith Musundwa

**ABSTRACT:** Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are under extreme pressure to prepare their students for the workplace. Extant literature suggests that a misalignment between graduates' skills base and expectations of the labour market exists, contributing to a low uptake of graduates by the labour market. The literature further considers the lack development of employability skills of graduates as a hinderance in the educational system frustrating the employment prospects. This study therefore proposes the adoption of a qualitative approach to investigate how to enhance the employability of Diploma in Accounting graduates, specifically those from University of Technologies. Though conducting semi-structured interviews with academics, employers, and students, and undertaking a content analysis of existing curricula the researcher aims to explore how the graduate's employability can be enhanced, and employability increased. The author posits that the employability of the graduate is a skill that can be developed alongside the technical skills within the accounting programme. Graduate, Skills, Employability, Unemployment, Curriculum

Why do you want to work in the hospitality industry? A case of students from KwaZulu Natal, South Africa Nelisiwe Mlotshwa Ms Dr Anisah Deen-Pather The hospitality industry is recognised as the sectors that supports socioeconomic growth, and fervent research was conducted on the impacts of COVID-19 however, there are limited studies which focus on why students' join the hospitality industry after the unfavourable impact of COVID-19. Using the qualitative approach the study purposively targeted final year students within a higher education institute (HEI) that offers a diploma in hospitality management in KwaZulu-Natal. Focus groups was

conducted to attain a rich understanding from the students and data was collected from six focus groups comprising of six participants. Data information was then transcribed into text for meaningful analysis and theme formation. Results revealed that six prevalent themes emerged namely: Easy course to get into; misperception between culinary and hospitality; parental and relative's influence; opportunities to travel abroad; previous work experience and the opportunity to be employed. Findings indicate that students pursue a career within the hospitality industry due to the job possibilities regardless of the pandemic's impact and the industry's vulnerability thereof. Findings also indicate that students chose a career in hospitality as it was the only suitable option if one does not perform well in Science and Commerce at secondary school. Although this study was limited to single university it provides valuable implications mainly for the hospitality curricular amongst HEI's that offer the courses in hospitality management. Recommendations include that HEI's should increase focus on upskilling their students to promote employment to assist the hospitality industry in South Africa we rebuild the industry post COVID-19.

Keywords: Students, HEI's, hospitality industry, hospitality career

Developing digital literacy skills through the use of e-portfolios for students in higher education

Buhle Stella Nhlumayo Dr

**ABSTRACT:** The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically accelerated the adoption of digital tools and online learning in higher education. E-portfolios, as digital platforms for collecting and reflecting on students' work, became valuable tools in supporting students' development of digital literacy skills. These skills, encompassing a range of competencies related to using technology to access, manage, and communicate information, are crucial in academic and professional contexts. However, there are challenges associated with using e-portfolios with students which may include a lack of technical skills among users, inconsistent access to technology, time commitment required to create and maintain e-portfolios, difficulty in navigating e-portfolio platforms, concerns about privacy and data security, lack of clear assessment criteria, and potential for subjective evaluation by teacher-educators. This paper responded to the following question: How can e-portfolios be used to promote digital

literacy for students in higher education? Underpinned by the interpretive qualitative paradigm and using phenomenology as a mode of inquiry, this paper is framed by the New Literacies theory, which emphasizes the ability to access, evaluate, create, and utilize information across various digital platforms, encompassing not only technical skills but also critical thinking and ethical considerations when navigating the digital world. The paper generated data through semi-structured interviews with six pre-service teachers from one selected South African university. Data were analysed through thematic analysis. Possible findings include the benefits of using e-portfolios to encourage self-directed learning for students, allowing students to explore and experiment with digital tools and technologies at their own pace which leads to deeper engagement and learning, lastly, students may apply different digital tools in practical and real-world contexts. Keywords: digital literacy, e-portfolios, self-directed learning, learning autonomy, digital technologies

### Leveraging Technology for Teaching, Learning, and Student Support in Higher Education: A Wellness-Centered Approach for Developing Countries

Dr Racheal Mafumbate

**ABSTRACT:** The integration of technology in higher education has revolutionized teaching, learning, and student support, significantly influencing student wellness. This study explores how technology-enhanced educational experiences impact academic performance, mental well-being, and overall student success in developing countries. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with university faculty, students, and support staff. Thematic analysis revealed key insights into educators' and students' perspectives on technology's role in fostering a balanced learning environment, the impact of digital tools on engagement and well-being, and the challenges and best practices in leveraging technology for holistic student support. Findings indicate that technology enhances flexibility, accessibility, and engagement, supporting students' academic and emotional well-being. Online learning platforms, virtual collaboration tools, and AI-driven support systems facilitate personalized learning and mental health resources, while mobile wellness apps, teletherapy services, and digital time management tools assist students in managing stress and academic

pressures.

Despite these benefits, challenges such as digital fatigue, social isolation, and technological access disparities remain prevalent, particularly in resource-constrained settings. While technology plays a crucial role in promoting student wellness and academic success, a balanced and inclusive approach is necessary to mitigate its negative effects. Institutions must adopt strategies that ensure digital well-being, equitable access, and holistic student support systems. Future research should examine the long-term impact of digital interventions on student mental health and academic performance in higher education.

Keywords: AI-driven support; revolutionized; student support; technology; wellness

## Promoting Diversity And Inclusivity In Higher Education: A Global South Social Justice Demand

Dr Gbenga Michael Adeyeye

**ABSTRACT:** Achieving social justice in higher education is mostly dependent on diversity and inclusivity; this is especially true in the Global South, where historical imbalances and systematic inequalities still exist. This study looks into why inclusive educational practices are so important for getting around problems like gender inequality, socioeconomic inequality, and the underrepresentation of minority groups that happen in underprivileged communities. Driven by social justice theory, the article emphasizes how inclusive policies and practices could be transforming agents for equity, access, and empowerment.

Through case studies and theoretical analysis, the study investigates programs aiming to effectively foster inclusion in higher education, including affirmative action policies, need-based financial aid, and culturally relevant curricula. Along with the difficulties of putting these policies into effect—resistance to change, limited resources, and poor policy execution—it also covers While stressing the need for structural reforms to guarantee permanent change, the question of how technology might help close gaps and increase access for rural and underprivileged groups is carefully examined.

From merely addressing symptoms of exclusion to incorporating diversity and inclusivity as basic principles, the study urges a paradigm change in the higher education systems in the Global South. It demands cooperative

efforts among governments, organizations, and people to establish fair learning settings in which every person may flourish. This study adds to the continuing conversation on equity in education by framing diversity and inclusivity as social justice imperatives; therefore, it provides useful insights for building a more inclusive and diverse higher education scene in the Global South.

**Keywords:** Diversity, Inclusivity, higher education, Social justice, and Global South

## Stress in the Age of AI: A Phenomenological Study of Generation Z Students in Private Higher Education in South Africa

Ms Kim Kromoser

**ABSTRACT:** Generation Z, individuals born roughly between 1997 and 2012, are the current university cohort of students and the first generation to grow up with widespread access to digital technology. As digital natives, they have been immersed in technology from a young age, influencing all aspects of their lives. The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into modern life has led to significant transformations in many areas, including higher education. The intersection of AI technologies with academic environments offers both opportunities for innovation and challenges in adaptation. This study explores how AI in private higher education impacts Gen Z students, with a particular focus on the phenomenon of technostress—the stress induced by excessive use or dependency on technology. This theory, developed in the 1980's proved relevant to previous generations. However, Gen Z has grown up in a digitally saturated environment, making technology, including AI an integral and familiar aspect of their daily lives. Therefore, this study explores Gen Z's unique relationship with AI and investigates its influence on their stress levels within the context of private higher education. Using a phenomenological approach, the research delves into how students perceive AI's growing influence on their academic and professional futures, particularly in fields traditionally dominated by humanistic skills. Through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, this research uncovers Gen Z private higher education students' perceptions of AI and its potential impact on their stress levels, academic performance, future career prospects, and overall well-being. The findings indicate that Gen Z students generally view AI positively, not as a stressor, but rather as a tool



that can enhance their educational experiences through personalisation and efficiency. However, they also approach AI with a critical mindset, acknowledging both its potential benefits and ethical challenges. Their unique position as digital natives allow them to engage with AI in ways that previous generations may not have, making their perspectives particularly relevant in discussions about the future of education and technology. Recommendations are provided as to how private higher education institutions can support students and promote digital literacy, ethical AI use, faculty training, and student-centred solutions to optimise AI integration and reduce stress. Keywords: Artificial intelligence (AI); Generation Z; private higher education; stress, technostress, Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.

The Role of Mobile Devices in Facilitating Student Support and Learning: A Case of Final-Year University Student from two institutions of higher learning in Zimbabwe.

Mr Andrew Mangena and Mr Nhlanhla Mkwelie  
Mr Ntokozo Ncube

**ABSTRACT:** Mrs Charity Ncube Mobile learning (ML) has drawn considerable interest in Zimbabwe as a means to improve educational access. The increasing popularity of mobile devices and internet connectivity provides students with the opportunity for flexible access to educational resources. Learners also have an opportunity to get student support systems through mobile devices. The significance of the study is greatly to the learners, lectures and administrators. The purpose of the study was to establish how learners are making use of mobile devices in learning and student support. The study explores the role of mobile devices in ML and student support. The study also examines opportunities and challenges in the use of mobile devices for learning and support. The study also looked into the institutional strategies to promote ML and student support through mobile devices. The study used interpretivism as the paradigm in order to get real lived experiences and opinions of the participants. A qualitative approach following a case study was utilized to get a context-specific understanding of the issues under study. Data was collected using interviews and analysed thematically. The study found that mobile devices were used in learning for resource sharing, synchronous learning, and assessment and also for academic student

support, administrative support and technical support. Challenges found included internet connectivity, delayed responses from lectures and administrators and learning methods limitations. While the positive uses included enhanced student support and improved collaboration and communication. The study recommends that the universities should work on policies to encourage ML, trainings for staff, and investments in resources for learners like data and on user friendly student support Mobile Apps.

Keywords: Mobile Learning, Mobile Devices, Higher Education , Student Support, University Students

The role of teacher training programmes in shaping effective values education practices

Ms Lebogang Msiza

**ABSTRACT:** Values education is essential in cultivating ethical, responsible, and socially aware persons. Teacher training programmes are essential for providing teachers with the requisite pedagogical abilities, knowledge, and attitudes to effectively impart values to learners. This conceptual article examines the significance of teacher training programmes in promoting effective values education practices. This research analyses the impact of teacher preparation on the incorporation of values education into classroom instruction, utilising existing literature and theoretical frameworks.

The research emphasises essential elements of teacher preparation, such as curriculum development, instructional methodologies, and experiential learning techniques that improve teachers' capacity to exemplify and impart values. It examines diverse frameworks for values education, including character education, moral development theories, and social constructivism, illustrating their influence on teacher training programmes. The report also highlights problems in implementing values education, such as cultural diversity, ideological disagreements, and policy limitations, and offers ideas for enhancing values education via teacher preparation.

This study calls for a more systematic and comprehensive approach to include values education into teacher education curricula by assessing best practices from international teacher training efforts. The results

underscore the necessity for ongoing professional development, reflective pedagogical approaches, and collaboration among teachers, policymakers, and communities to maintain values education. This research contributes to the discussion on educational reforms by highlighting the essential role of teacher training in influencing the moral and ethical aspects of learning. Keywords: teacher training, values education, ethical growth, pedagogy, professional advancement, and educational reform.

Automated Business Intelligence communication to enhance student retention at an Open Distance Learning Institution in South Africa

Mr Olwethu Mgwatyu

**ABSTRACT:** While new technologies continue to transform the delivery of teaching, learning and student support, student retention remains a serious challenge for higher education institutions. Institutions of higher learning experience high levels of dropout by students due to several factors, including, amongst others, the lack of timeous communication between the university and the student. Students' dropouts may be attributed to a lack of positive student experiences, ultimately impacting the institution's brand. Many institutions have integrated their databases, student information systems and learning management systems with business intelligence tools or business analytic platforms for student retention and timely interventions. This desktop study explores the role of automated communication workflows within business intelligence tools to enhance student retention. Different journal articles published between 2020 to date will be selected and analysed in terms of how automated business intelligence communication is used to enhance student retention at institutions of higher learning. The challenges currently experienced by students at the University of South Africa regarding timeous communication will be compared with the literature reviewed and recommendations will be made. The study would suggest better ways of using business intelligence to improve timeous communication with students, thereby reducing the levels of dropout caused by lack of information and timeous communication from the university.

Keywords: business intelligence, data mining, learning analytics, student retention, open distance learning

Fostering a culture of continuous improvement in higher education : A quality assurance framework for Great Zimbabwe University

Dr Evans Mandova

**ABSTRACT:** This paper proposes a quality assurance framework to foster a culture of continuous improvement in higher education at Great Zimbabwe University. The objectives of the research are to identify existing quality assurance methods, assess their effectiveness and develop a framework for continuous improvement. A mixed method approach was employed combining surveys, focus groups and document analysis. The results show that while existing methods are in place, there are gaps in implementation monitoring and evaluation. The proposed framework integrates best practices. Institutional goals and stakeholder expectations to enhance academic quality, promote student success and maintain institutional reputation. The conclusions highlight the importance of a culture of continuous improvement in higher education and the need for ongoing monitoring and evaluation to ensure quality assurance. Quality assurance, Continuous improvement, Academic quality, Higher education

**Coping strategies of remote students studying in an open distance electronic learning institution in South Africa** Sylvan Isaacs Mr N/A

Distance education has evolved with time and the advancement of technology which has found a prominent space in education. Higher education institutions use information and communication technologies (ICTs) to facilitate teaching and learning. While this is becoming a new norm in higher education, especially for distance education, students residing in remote rural areas and coming from poor socioeconomic backgrounds might find it very difficult to engage in teaching and learning that is facilitated by ICTs. This could be due to lack of access to suitable resources (such as devices and connectivity) for online learning, including online assessment. This study will explore the different strategies used by students from remote rural areas studying in an open distance learning (ODL) institution that uses ICTs to facilitate teaching and learning. The aim of the study is to explore the availability and accessibility of suitable devices to students to perform their academic activities, including assessment. Individual telephone interviews will be conducted with 10 students residing 150 km and above from the university's regional offices to find out how they access teaching and learning and how this affects their academic success. One face-to-face focus group interview will be conducted with the students to corroborate data collected through individual interviews. The data will be analysed using thematic content

analysis. The results of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge in ODL and suggest ways of enhancing support for remote rural students. Distance education, information and communication technologies (ICTs), open distance learning (ODL), e-learning, online learning, remote students Exploring factors contributing to the low uptake of academic student support services at an open distance learning institution in South Africa Sibulele Koyana Mr N/A Open distance learning (ODL) comes with many benefits, such as opening access to most people and offering the flexibility of studying anywhere, but there are challenges that ODL students usually face. Some students find it difficult to balance competing commitments, especially those who are also employed and have many other roles besides their studies. Younger students entering higher education for the first time often struggle with the demands of ODL because they are not used to being autonomous, self-directed learners who should manage their studies. This study is prompted by the fact that the University of South Africa offers academic student support services to enhance student success; however, the uptake of these services by students is low. Documents such as students' module registration list and examination results obtained from SQL and attendance registers will be used to confirm and track students' attendance of academic literacy sessions for a specific module. The examination results obtained from SQL will be used and compared to the attendance of the support services for the 2024 academic year during the first semester. A survey sent to students who did not participate will provide insights into the reasons for this. Students who passed the module will indicate the type of support they used and how it contributed to their success in the module. The results of this study will create awareness on factors that prohibit students to uptake academic student support services and those that contributed to their success in a specific module.

Keywords: Academic student support, autonomy, open distance learning, self-directed learning, student success

Full-Service Schools' Teachers' experiences in supporting learners with learning difficulties. Implications for Inclusive Education

Prof Mubi Mavuso Mubi Mavuso

**ABSTRACT:** Full-service schools in South Africa were designed to be inclusive in nature. Hence, they accommodate learners with diverse

learning needs. Most teachers in such schools have basic teaching qualifications. Also, learning support educators form part of the school and they serve as members of the school-Based Support Teams. However, the School-Based Support Teams in full-service schools seem inundated with the demands of supporting learners. As a result, learners do not benefit adequately as envisioned by the Department of Education. This community based qualitative research study aimed at exploring the School-Based Support Team' experiences in supporting learners with learning difficulties from a school in Tshwane South District. The study was framed within an asset based theoretical framework. Purposive sampling included eleven participants comprising of 6 foundation phase teachers, a deputy principal, 2 departmental heads and 2 Learning Support Educators. Focus groups interviews were used to collect data. Thematic data analysis revealed inadequate insights of learning support practices and processes, insufficient teacher support, contextual barriers and lack of parental involvement. The study concludes that supporting learners with learning difficulties within a full- service school is complex, and it requires specific inclusive support competences. It proposes a continuous and collaborative support and development for teachers facilitated by the department of education. The researcher argues that continuous teacher development training could lead in improved learning support interventions and process.

**Keywords:** Full -service schools, learning supporting, learners, learning difficulties, inclusive education.

The application of Artificial Intelligence to enhance quality teaching and learning in Africa: Challenges and opportunities

Mr Joseph Hlongwane and Dr Doris Chasokela

**ABSTRACT:** The global education landscape is evolving due to technological advancements. To stay relevant in the 21st century, education systems in Africa must adapt. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can transform teaching and learning through personalised platforms, chatbots, and Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), offering opportunities to improve educational outcomes. This study employed a Hermeneutic Phenomenology design situated in the interpretive research paradigm to discuss the challenges and opportunities of implementing AI in education in Africa, focusing on the perspectives of directly involved stakeholders. The study outlined

successful educational AI systems implemented in African countries like South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania. This indicates that AI integration in education is progressing despite challenges like poor infrastructure and limited access to technology. Key opportunities include personalised learning materials, enhanced educational equity and inclusivity, and access to global virtual academic resources. Key findings indicated that many education stakeholders in Africa are hesitant to adopt AI technologies due to concerns about cultural compatibility, lack of data protection protocols, algorithmic bias, and insufficient requirements for technology in national exams. Recommendations include training local experts in programming to reflect local values, upskilling educators in AI, and establishing clear policies on technology in the curriculum and cyber ethics. The study used secondary data collected from renowned databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and SAGE. These provide authentic, credible, and reliable peer-reviewed literature. A rigorous systematic literature review was carried out using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The qualitative data collected was analysed using thematic and document analysis methods.

**Keywords:** Educational Technology, Equity in Education, Personalized Learning, AI-Enhanced Learning, Quality Education

## Mainstreaming Education for Sustainable Development in Zimbabwean Higher Education Institutions. A Systematic Literature Review

Mr Nhlanhla Mkwelie and Mr Walter Chipambwa

**ABSTRACT:** Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) plays a vital role in the universal journey towards achievement of all seventeen 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 4.7 proposes that Education for Sustainable Development should be mainstreamed in all levels of education. The purpose of this study was to assess the extent to which HEIs are implementing ESD by performing a systematic literature review based on relevant articles retrieved from various databases such as ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and Web of Science (WoS). Keywords and search syntaxes, such as 'Sustainable Development and Education, and 'Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education, were used for the online search. The review followed the preferred reporting items for Systematic Review and

Meta-analyses (PRISMA) standard to search and report relevant articles on ESD. The review of some policies, Vision-Mission and Curriculum practices in HEIs showed that the ESD-related practices are aligned with the country's national SD framework and reflect the goals for the 2030 SDG Agenda. However, the findings highlight the noticeable gaps in the implementation of ESD in some education disciplines. In addition, the HEIs have made visible strides towards the implementation of Education for Sustainable Development in their practices.

**Keywords:** Education for Sustainable Development; Sustainable Development Goals; Higher Education Institution; 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Unlocking product design and development potential through Design Project assessments: Navigating through prospects and dares for the Technical cluster andragogy

Mr Onismo Stephen Hahlani and Mr Walter Chipambwa

**ABSTRACT:** This paper lays the groundwork for understanding the opportunities and challenges faced by Zimbabwean universities in their bid to embrace design project assessment strategies for their Technical subjects cluster. Qualitative methodology design was adopted by the study to solicit data from purposively sampled university Technical cluster lecturers and students through observation, interviews and focus group discussions. Data obtained was categorized into related themes for analysis verbatim. The purpose of the paper therefore, is to proffer recommendations for fidelity implementation of Design Project assessment strategy in Technical disciplines andragogy within the framework of Education 5.0. Study findings show that Design project assessment cultivate within students the skills necessary for product design and development for attainment of the 5.0 philosophy as well as United Nations SDGs. Design Project assessment also fosters in students, abilities and skills critical for the 21st century, relevant for addressing existing and emerging societal problems. Factors debilitating effective adoption of the assessment strategy include unavailability of University Technical cluster assessment policies and lack of critical resources for design and manufacture of projects. The paper recommends for collaborative efforts among key stakeholders, to craft policies on design projects assessments suitable for Technical disciplines andragogy, mobilize resources for



infrastructure, resources and professional development services among others.

**Keywords:** Design, Design project, Design process, Assessment, Andragogy, Education 5.0, UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Prof S'lungile Thwala

**ABSTRACT:** This case study investigates the impact of assistive technologies on enhancing teaching and learning experiences for students with disabilities at a university in Eswatini. Given the growing emphasis on inclusive education, the research examines the specific technologies employed to support these students, as well as adaptive tools that facilitate classroom participation and promote independent learning. Six N=6 lecturers participated in individual interviews while twelve N=12 students took part in the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), and the collected data were analysed thematically. To ensure trustworthiness of the findings, peer review and member checking were followed. The study outlines both the successes and challenges encountered in the implementation of these technologies. Key findings suggest that while these tools have significantly improved accessibility and educational outcomes for students with disabilities, challenges remain related to limited resources, insufficient training, and a lack of awareness. The study emphasizes the necessity for institutional commitment, ongoing staff development, and the establishment of a comprehensive infrastructure to ensure the sustainable and effective use of assistive technologies. By focusing on the specific context of a university in Eswatini, this study provides valuable insights into the opportunities and challenges in fostering an inclusive higher education environment in sub-Saharan Africa.

**Keywords:** Assistive technologies, disability support, Eswatini, higher education, inclusive education

**Advancing Inclusivity and Diversity: Supporting Trans and Gender-Diverse Students in South African Higher Education**

Mx Tandile Mbatsha

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the critical need to foster inclusivity and diversity for trans and gender diverse (TGD) students within South African higher education institutions. Despite progressive constitutional protections, TGD students face persistent challenges,

including discrimination, social exclusion, and the lack of gender-affirming services. These barriers impact academic success, mental wellbeing, and overall student engagement. The paper highlights how institutions remain complicit in reinforcing cis-normative practices through binary administrative systems, curricula that erase diverse gender experiences, and inadequate support mechanisms.

To address these issues, the paper introduces a framework, the model policy as a tool for creating inclusive educational environments that affirm and celebrate diverse gender identities. Key recommendations include implementing gender-neutral administrative processes, establishing comprehensive anti-discrimination policies, and fostering inclusive classroom practices through sensitisation training for academic staff. Additionally, the integration of gender diverse perspectives into curricula and the provision of mental health and wellness services tailored to TGD students are emphasised.

By adopting these measures, higher education institutions can become transformative spaces where all students, regardless of gender identity, can thrive. This work contributes to global and local discourses on equity in education by contextualising the unique sociocultural challenges faced by TGD students in South Africa. It serves as a resource for educators, policymakers, and higher education administrators committed to advancing inclusivity and dismantling structural inequalities.

**Keywords:** Inclusive Education, Transgender, Gender Diverse, Higher Education Institutions, Policy Framework

Developing guidelines for assessment in higher education to ensure that students are prepared for participation in the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolution

Ms Cecilia Johanna Van Zyl

To prepare students for the 4th and 5th Industrial Revolution (4IR and 5IR), assessment in tertiary education should focus on fostering critical thinking, skill development that enables graduates to operate in a technology environment, and continuous learning, as opposed to traditional assessment, which often emphasizes rote memorization. Assessment is no longer regarded to be only a tool to evaluate students' performance but is also used to enable students to achieve learning outcomes. Current assessment guidelines, such as the National Qualifications Framework of

the South African Qualification Authority, must be analysed to determine if changes are required to ensure that such framework remain relevant. To objectives is, firstly, to do a systematic literature review to investigate the literature to identify the qualities and skills that students will need to participate effectively in the 4IR and 5IR, and to identify the requirements that assessment should comply with in the context of a distance education institution in a developing economy, to ensure graduates are prepared for the 4IR and 5IR.

Using information collected through the systematic literature review, guidelines for assessment that ensures that students will be able to participate effectively in the workforce in the current environment but will also be able to adjust to future changes, will be developed. These guidelines will be applied to current assessment frameworks and procedures to determine if these comply with the requirements to ensure that graduates possess the required skills and qualities. Recommendations for improvement of assessment frameworks and procedures will be made. Keywords: assessment, 4th Industrial Revolution, 5th Industrial Revolution, graduate skills, graduate qualities, assessment guidelines  
Beyond accommodations: Transforming mental health support for differently abled students in Higher Education

Dr Kemoneilwe Momi Metsing

**ABSTRACT:** Higher education institutions have made strides in providing accommodations for differently abled students, yet these efforts often fall short of addressing the broader mental health challenges they face. While extended deadlines, note-taking assistance, and exam modifications are essential, they do not fully capture the lived experiences of students navigating academia with mental health conditions or disabilities.

This paper argues for a shift beyond compliance-based accommodations toward a transformative model of mental health support that is proactive, inclusive, and embedded within institutional culture. Drawing on case studies, student narratives, and emerging research, this presentation explores the intersection of disability and mental health in higher education. It highlights the need for trauma-informed practices, flexible pedagogies, and faculty training that nurtures a genuinely supportive learning environment. By reframing mental health support as a systemic responsibility rather than an individual burden, we can create spaces where differently abled students not only survive but thrive.

The presentation will offer practical strategies for institutions to integrate holistic mental health frameworks that go beyond accommodations, ultimately creating a more equitable and accessible academic experience for all.

Keywords: Inclusive Education, Mental Health, Higher Education

### Heritage-based Curriculum Inclinations for Higher Education in Zimbabwe: Opportunities and Challenges from two State Universities Experiences Mr Tapiwanashe Mutonhori

**ABSTRACT:** Globally, curricular inclinations for Higher Education tend to feed into and respond to the developmental aspirations of a country. Cognizant of this, Zimbabwe embarked upon a Heritage-Based Curriculum for the Higher Education sector code-named Education 5.0 which seeks to propel the nation into an "empowered and prosperous Upper Middle Income Economy by 2030. The Education Sector stands out as a strong pillar for the two-phased development strategic plan: National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1), spanning 2021-2025 and National Development Strategy 2 (NDS2), which straddles 2026-2030. At the core of the Heritage-Based Curriculum is the need to leverage on indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) in order to proffer home-grown solutions to the developmental needs of Zimbabwe. Accordingly, this exploratory case study survey explores the opportunities and challenges inherent in the implementation of the curriculum innovation at two selected State University contexts in Zimbabwe. The study unpacks the potential benefits inherent from the implementation of the Heritage-Based Curriculum and attendant challenges obtaining from the experiences of two State Universities in Zimbabwe. The study blended questionnaire with semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to elicit views from various stakeholders on the opportunities and challenges faced by the two institutions in their implementation of the curriculum innovation. The study noted that if well implanted, the curriculum could result in high-priced innovations that could promote industrialization, but most key stakeholders (lecturers) had skepticism over the new curriculum package; resource issues were a critical concern, too. The study, therefore, recommends the need for promoting an enabling environment that stimulates creativity and self-motivation among lecturers and students, alongside the need for resource mobilization and continuous workshops.

heritage-based curriculum;

Keywords: Education 5.0; indigenous knowledge systems (IKS)

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## Possible Sustainable Models for Student Tuition Support at Three Higher Education Institutions in Masvingo City

Mr Tapiwanashe Mutonhori

**ABSTRACT:** Colonial education in Zimbabwe was modelled on the bottleneck system where non-White (African) students had limited access to access Higher Education. This was meant to sustain racial discrimination and a two-tier development model. At independence in 1980, the new regime ushered Education for All by subsidizing education in the Tertiary level, bonding students through Grant support systems. The support did not go for long as it was later abandoned post 2000, causing students from disadvantaged poor backgrounds to struggle to access Higher Education. Accordingly, this paper explores possible student tuition support models which are sustainable. For its objectives, the study explores possible ways and strategies to promote education access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in colleges and universities in Masvingo City. The study adopts an exploratory case study design in Masvingo City, using a sample of 60 student participants from three selected institutions. A questionnaire was administered to fifty (50) people, while four (4) participants were interviewed and six (6) others engaged in focus group discussions. The study noted that Government could re-introduce student loans in partnership with banks; Social Welfare Department should support struggling college or University students; students could equally begin off by getting self-funds post high school through Government entities and support systems from other business entities. To ensure sustainability, it was envisaged that there be financial discipline and monitoring of tuition support schemes, alongside massive investments in these projects. equity; inclusiveness; Higher Education; access; student support, strategies

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research will combine quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to gather comprehensive data on participants' experiences and employment trajectories. Key research questions include assessing the specific competencies gained through the learnership, comparing employment outcomes of graduates with non-participants, and identifying challenges faced during the transition to the workforce.

The study aims to contribute to the discourse on skills development

and employability in the pharmaceutical sales sector, highlighting the role of targeted training initiatives in mitigating youth and graduate unemployment.

By examining the impact of such training interventions, this research aspires to highlight the critical role of learnership programs in fostering employability and addressing socio-economic challenges in South Africa. Through collaborative efforts, a way can be paved for a more skilled and employable youth workforce, thereby contributing to a more prosperous and equitable society.

**Keywords:** Learnership, CHIETA, National Certificate in Pharmaceutical Sales Representation; Youth unemployment; Employability

Academic performance of first-generation students in distance education: a descriptive analysis of demographic factors/ valuables and academic achievements

Ms Ntokozo Sigwane Ms

Distance education institutions attract diverse student profiles, including first-generation students (FGS). Understanding the academic success of FGS in distance education is crucial for increasing tailored student support and achieving inclusivity in higher education. This descriptive study examines the academic performance of the 2023 cohort of FGS at a distance education institution, analysing key demographic variables such as race, gender, age, college/faculty, region (campus), registration status, and disability disclosure in relation to their academic performance in examinations. Data from institutional records of 1515 FGS were analysed using Microsoft Excel to generate descriptive statistics of demographic variables and academic performance. The results show that of the 4278 modules registered by FGS in 2023, 1060 were passed with distinction, 1393 were passed (above 50% and below 75%), 675 were failed, and 243 showed that students were absent from the examination. These findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions to support FGS in distance education, aiming to enhance academic success and reduce dropout rates. By profiling this cohort, the study contributes to broader discussions on FGS in the context of distance education and seeks to improve student success and retention based on empirical data. The study advocates for institutional interventions and student support policies that prioritize the needs of FGS and calls for further research outlining barriers

they encounter in distance education. First-Generation Students (FGS), Distance Education, Academic Performance and Demographic Variables

Enhancing First-Year Student Support at Great Zimbabwe University: Addressing Challenges and Improving Strategies.

Mr Tapiwanashe Mutonhori and Mr Admore Mashokoh

**ABSTRACT:** The research paper examines the challenges faced by first-year students at Great Zimbabwe University and considers strategies to enhance their support. Finding the major obstacles preventing students from succeeding during the transfer to college and suggesting workable solutions are the primary objectives. First-year students, student affairs and administrative staff participated in focus groups and in-depth interviews as part of the study's qualitative methodology to collect a range of viewpoints on student support systems. The main conclusions show that students' adjustment to university life is severely hampered by their lack of social and life skills education, out-of-campus rented and expensive accommodation, restricted access to resources, lack of grants and student loans to fund university education and poor academic preparation. significantly hinder students adjustments to university life Participants underlined the necessity of thorough orientation sessions, improved peer mentorship programs, provision of grants and loans to pay fees and individualized academic guidance as key to helping students adjust to university life and enhance performance The study also emphasizes how crucial it is to have an inclusive campus culture in order to promote academic excellence, engagement and belonging.

In conclusion, by implementing the recommendations outlined in this paper, Great Zimbabwe University can significantly enhance the first-year experience, leading to improved retention rates and academic performance. This study contributes to the broader discourse on student support in higher education by emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by first-year students This study contributes to the broader discourse on student support in higher education by emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that address the unique challenges faced by first-year students.

student support, student support strategies, health and life skills, challenges, peer mentorship programs.



## From Insights to Action—Transforming Student Assignment Challenges into Scalable Solutions for Academic Success

Ms Naseehat Ebrahim Dawood

**ABSTRACT:** Assignment submission is a critical component of student success, yet non-submission remains a persistent challenge, particularly in Open Distance Learning (ODEL) environments. At the University of South Africa (Unisa), where assessment policies historically linked the first-assignment submission to bursary eligibility and exam admission, non-submission has been identified as a key risk factor for dropout and poor academic performance.

This study aimed to bridge this gap by leveraging Unisa's Student Retention Unit's (SRU) Early Alert System (EAS) to identify students who failed to submit their first assignments. A mixed-methods, longitudinal approach (2022–2023) was employed, integrating quantitative surveys and qualitative thematic analysis to capture student-reported challenges on assignment submission. Findings revealed key obstacles, including technical difficulties, time-management matters, financial constraints, desire for increased academic support, and wellness-related concerns, amongst other barriers.

These insights informed the development of a support resource, the Assignment Navigator — a problem-solution-based intervention designed to provide students with a directory of actionable strategies, and targeted support based on challenges that students in the past have experienced. By translating student experiences into an evidence-based, scalable tool, this research offers a novel contribution to student support strategies in higher education. This work advances the discourse on student retention and success in ODeL contexts, offering practical solutions for institutions seeking to enhance academic engagement and completion rates.

**Keywords:** Assignment Submission, Challenges, Barriers, Assignment Navigator

### Student Success

Dr Goodness Tshabalala

**ABSTRACT:** This study explored how principals in Eswatini lead schools without a deputy principal (solo leadership). As such a qualitative case study embedded within the interpretative paradigm was conducted with ten purposively and conveniently sampled high school principals in

Manzini region of Eswatini. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews. The study aimed to understand how principals succeed in their roles despite the unfilled deputy principal position. Ten principals, who had been in positions for at least three years without a deputy, were chosen for the study. Through the semi-structured interviews, researchers gained insights into the leadership strategies these principals developed over time, considering how their experience and school context influenced their approach. Sense-making theory provided the framework for this study. By analyzing interview data thematically, the research identified recurring themes and patterns in how principals lead without a deputy. Measures were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, including member checking and researcher triangulation. Ethical principles were followed throughout the research process. The study revealed that solo principals face significant challenges, including increased workload, limited support in decision-making and reduced visibility in the school. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training, along with professional development providers (In-service department), offer extensive support to principals leading schools in unfilled deputy positions.

**Keywords:** Humanizing pedagogy: Redefining Learning in Higher Education

Ms Lamla Notshulwana

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the transformative potential of humanizing pedagogy in higher education. Humanizing pedagogy is an educational approach that prioritizes the individual experiences, emotions, and identities of students, aiming to create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment. The implementation of humanizing pedagogy in higher education involves several key methods. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of open communication, encouraging students to share their perspectives and experiences. Secondly, by connecting academic content with students' lived experiences, lecturers can make learning more relevant and meaningful. Thirdly, this approach encourages reflective practice, where both students and lecturers continuously assess themselves and reflect. By reviewing relevant literature, this study explores the theoretical foundations and practical applications of

humanizing pedagogy, highlighting its effectiveness in promoting critical thinking and social responsibility among students. The literature review encompasses various educational theories and frameworks that support humanizing pedagogy, including Freirean pedagogy, constructivist learning theories, and experiential learning models. The review also examines case studies and empirical research that demonstrate the positive outcomes of implementing humanizing practices in diverse educational contexts. Through a combination of theoretical perspectives and practical examples, this paper aims to offer insights into the transformative potential of humanizing pedagogy in higher education. The findings highlight the importance of creating learning environments that value and respect the diverse backgrounds and perspectives of students, fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. By adopting humanizing pedagogy, higher education institutions can create a more supportive and empowering learning environment. This approach not only enhances academic performance but also prepares students to become compassionate, critical thinkers and actively contribute to society. Ultimately, humanizing pedagogy can transform education by focusing on students' overall development and promoting empathy and inclusivity. Humanizing Pedagogy, Higher Education, Inclusive learning, Educational Transformation and Social Responsibility

### Enhancing Student Success in Physics Mark

Dr Sean Herbert and Dr Bako Audu

**ABSTRACT:** Student support in higher education is crucial in improving student success and retention, particularly first-year students from academically disadvantaged communities. These students often face challenges, such as difficult home environments and overwhelming course workloads, which can hamper their engagement and academic performance in physics. This study aims to assess the effectiveness of a structured consultation program designed to support these students at the University of the Western Cape. The consultation program extends academic support beyond regular physics class hours, creating dedicated learning spaces that offer targeted assistance through peer tutors and structured support sessions. Unlike traditional support programs, this program integrates peer-led learning with the lecturer providing study materials, allowing students to engage actively with physics concepts,

reflect on their learning, and monitor their progress. The research questions for the study are: How do the students and tutors involved in the program experience the program? How does the program impact their learning and performance in physics? To answer these research questions, a mixed-methods research approach was used. To investigate how students and tutors experience the program, open-ended survey questions were used. To measure the program's impact on learning and performance in physics, exam scores and coursework performance were analysed. In addition, a survey was used to quantify students' perceptions of the program's effectiveness. This research will provide evidence-based insights into the effectiveness of structured support programs. The findings may help develop more effective, scalable support models to enhance student success, especially for those from academically disadvantaged communities.

**Keywords:** Academically disadvantaged communities, academic support, peer tutors, performance in physics

Self-directed learning as a social justice transformative pedagogy for work-integrated learning in Higher Education

Dr Aloysius Claudian Seherrie and Prof Dumisani Wilfred Mncube

**ABSTRACT:** In this study, social justice was used as a lens to understand the role of self-directed learning (SDL) in influencing constructive engagement and challenging policymaking positions. The current education trajectory highlights a lack of clarity on the way social justice contributes to social transformation in the education system. This study explored the role of SDL in shaping a social justice transformative agenda in higher education while maintaining autonomy. Internationally, SDL has evolved in recent years into a transformative force that assists students to achieve their academic outcomes. The researcher suggests that this approach holds considerable potential for SDL to assist student teachers in cultivating impactful educational settings within both the school and higher education environments, which may support work-integrated learning. This article reports the qualitative findings from an educational policy study involving policy document analysis to analyse textual data, with a focus on interpretation for understanding and scrutiny. The findings indicate that through the implementation of self-directed social justice transformative strategies, students develop valuable skills that help them to work independently without the assistance of lecturers. These

include SDL skills and independent learning, as well as awareness of their responsibility for their learning when exposed to work-integrated learning environments. In addition, such exposure allows students to connect with workplace settings and apply theory to practice, thereby broadening their opportunities for employability and networking.

**Keywords:** Education White Paper 3; higher education institutions; pedagogy; self-directed learning; strategy; social justice; transformative leadership; work-integrated learning

## Evaluating the impact of flipped classroom on students' learning outcomes in Anatomy and Physiology: a systematic review

Dr France Raphela

**ABSTRACT:** Flipped classroom is a student-centered blended learning strategy that has been used to enhance active learning. Many students find anatomy and physiology challenging to learn, and therefore there is a need to investigate the effectiveness of flipped classroom model on students' learning outcomes in anatomy and physiology. In this study, a review of literature was conducted to assess the impact of flipped classroom on students' learning outcomes in anatomy and physiology.

### Methodology

The literature search was conducted on Science Direct, Google Scholar and Pubmed databases to identify studies exploring the impact of flipped classroom on the learning outcomes in anatomy and physiology among students in health science courses. The review was focused on studies that investigated the impact of flipped classroom on students' learning outcomes in anatomy and physiology. The studies published in scientific journals from the year 2018 to date were considered for inclusion in the review.

### Results

Following the literature search and using the relevant inclusion criteria, a total of nine articles were included in the review. A review of studies showed improved academic achievement in anatomy and physiology. Furthermore, the introduction of flipped classroom was associated with increased level of confidence among the students, students' interest and satisfaction and increased overall performance in anatomy and physiology.

### Conclusion

Flipped classroom appears to be an effective student-centered learning

approach as compared to the traditional teaching method in anatomy and physiology. It is recommended that flipped classroom model should be incorporated in the curriculum for teaching anatomy and physiology.

Keywords: Flipped classroom, anatomy and physiology, students' engagement, learning outcomes"

### Assessing the Impact of ChatGPT-4 on Modern Learning Practices

Prof Manuel Uzoma Opara

**ABSTRACT:** This research proposal examines the effects of ChatGPT-4, an advanced language model developed by OpenAI, on modern learning practices. The study aims to determine whether ChatGPT-4 acts as a valuable educational tool that enhances learning experiences and outcomes or whether it poses challenges that may undermine educational integrity and effectiveness.

Keywords: ChatGPT-4, Artificial Intelligence, Educational Technology, Learning Outcomes, Pedagogical Impact.

### Exploring Peace Education as an Academic Jealousy Mitigation Strategy in South African Higher Education Institutions

Dr SulaimON Adewale Dr and Dr Ntokozo D. Ndwandwe

**ABSTRACT:** Academic jealousy, which is rarely studied by researchers, often leads to strained relationships, reduced collaboration, and a toxic work environment. This study explores the role of peace education in mitigating academic jealousy by promoting a culture of mutual respect, collaboration and fairness. A generic qualitative research design will be adopted. Twelve academic staff will be purposively selected from three South African Universities. A semi-structured interview will be conducted with the selected participants. Data generated from the interview will be analysed with the aid of NVivo, while thematic analysis will be used to categorise results into themes and sub-themes. Findings are expected to reveal how peace education can transform competitive academic environments into collaborative spaces that support knowledge-sharing and collective growth. The outcome of this study will contribute to the discourse on sustainable academic cultures by identifying peace-driven strategies such as mentorship, transparent recognition systems and institutional policies that foster equity and collegiality. Implementation of this will create a more harmonious and inclusive academic environment.

**Keywords:** peace education, academic jealousy, higher education, South Africa

The application of Artificial Intelligence to enhance quality teaching and learning in Africa: Challenges and opportunities

Mr Joseph Hlongwane and Dr Doris Chasokela

**ABSTRACT:** The global education landscape is evolving due to technological advancements. To stay relevant in the 21st century, education systems in Africa must adapt. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can transform teaching and learning through personalised platforms, chatbots, and Intelligent Tutoring Systems offering opportunities to improve educational outcomes. This study employed a Hermeneutic Phenomenology design in the interpretive research paradigm to discuss the challenges and opportunities of implementing AI in Africa's education, focusing on the perspectives of directly involved stakeholders. The study outlined successful educational AI systems implemented in African countries like South Africa, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Rwanda, and Tanzania. This indicates that AI integration in education is progressing despite challenges like poor infrastructure and limited access to technology. Key opportunities include personalised learning materials, enhanced educational equity and inclusivity, and access to global virtual academic resources. Key findings indicated that many education stakeholders in Africa hesitate to adopt AI technologies due to concerns about cultural compatibility, inadequate data protection protocols, algorithmic bias, and insufficient requirements for technology in national exams. Recommendations include training local experts in programming to reflect local values, upskilling educators in AI, and establishing clear policies on technology in the curriculum and cyber ethics. The study used secondary data from renowned databases like Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, and SAGE. These provide authentic, credible, and reliable peer-reviewed literature. A rigorous systematic literature review was conducted using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework. The qualitative data collected was analysed using thematic and document analysis methods.

**Keywords:** Educational Technology, Equity in Education, Personalized Learning, AI-Enhanced Learning, Quality Education

Educational Technology, Equity in Education, Personalized Learning, AI-Enhanced Learning, Quality Education

**ABSTRACT:** Integrating Education for Sustainable Development in Higher Education Qualifications: A Case Study Khosi Molala Ms N/A Promoting education for sustainable development (ESD) in higher education is crucial for building a sustainable future for young people. The international sustainable development dialogues recognize the need to integrate ESD content in higher education qualifications. However, there is limited research that examines the integration of ESD content in higher education qualifications. The explorative study reported in this paper will explore the extent to which the ESD content is integrated into higher education qualifications. The study argues that the formative role of higher education institutions is important for integrating ESD content in qualifications. This study highlights the importance of incorporating ESD content in higher education qualifications to prepare graduates who will contribute to sustainable development.

Purposive sampling was employed in this case study to select all registered higher education qualifications that integrate ESD content. This paper presents an analysis of the ESD content in higher education qualifications since documents represent more systematic representations of complex reality. The study revealed that from 19280 registered higher education qualifications, ESD content is integrated in 349 higher education qualifications, which constitutes 2% of higher education qualifications with ESD content. The findings showed that the integration of ESD content in higher education qualifications is inadequate. Recent environmental disasters are evidence of few graduates with ESD qualifications. There is an urgent need to strengthen the ESD content in higher education qualifications to address the socio-economic and environmental reality. The paper details approaches and/or strategies to integrate ESD content into higher education qualifications drawing on local and international examples.

**Keywords:** Sustainable Development, qualifications, integration, higher education institutions, curriculum.

Trends and trajectories in higher education sector 1994 – 2024: 30 years of democratic dispensation.

Dr Azwinndini Chris Tshivhase



**ABSTRACT:** In 2024 the South African was drawn into an intense celebration of the 30 years of the democratic era since the ushering of the first elections as held in 1994. The intense celebrations that were across the land was against the backdrop of the national election which resulted in the governing party losing the majority vote in the election. As a consequence of the outcome, they could not form a government as per prescripts of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996. The moment of the ruling party losing the elections was seeing as coming due to formation of the different political parties in the last 30 years of democracy. In turn after the debates the political parties came together, and the best option was to form a Government of National Unity (GNU). Such a move towards establishing the government of national unity, left the higher education institutions with many thoughts to reflect on the gains of democracy in the transformation of higher education. This article presents in short, the Acts, policy, regulations and guidelines enacted in the post 30 years. The purpose being to get the views of the practitioners in higher education space in terms of the impact that this had had in the past 30 years. Further, to get views in terms of the possible critical legislation that will ensure continuation of the trend enacted since 1996. Furthermore, how will higher education continue in providing the opportunity to create a path that promotes economic growth, nation-building and role in geopolitical contexts. In this context, I argue that the higher education sector will play a pivotal role in the next 30 years to come despite global trends and challenges.

**Keywords:** Acts; Geopolitical; Global trends; Higher education institutions; Legislation

**Inclusive Education Policies and their Implementation in Higher Learning Institutions in Zimbabwe: A case study of a selected university.**

**Mrs Kuda Moyo**

**ABSTRACT:** Inclusive education is a topical issue not only in Zimbabwe but in the world over. In the Zimbabwean context, inclusive education involves the identification and minimization or elimination of barriers to students' participation in the learning environment. It also means the maximization of resources to support students' leaning. The study sought to examine the existing Inclusive Education Policies and their implementation in Institutions of Higher Learning in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by

the interpretivism paradigm within the qualitative approach and a case study design was adopted. Purposive sampling and snowballing was used to draw up a sample of twenty (20) respondents who are knowledgeable on the subject and directly affected by the policies in place. Data was collected using direct observation, face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions. Thematic data analysis and NVivo Qualitative software analysis was used. Although students with disabilities were enrolled in the university there was no enrolment procedure that clearly points out on student differences. It was further established that although the university was adequately equipped in terms of infrastructure for inclusivity, there is no readiness among the lecturing staff nor the curriculum to cater for people living with disabilities of a varied nature. Recommendations included the in-service training of lecturers on inclusive education that caters for people with disabilities.

Keywords: inclusive education; inclusive practices; inclusivity

### Evaluating interactions in module 4 of UNESWA's online course Artificial Intelligence for Educators

Prof Karen Ferreira-Meyers

**ABSTRACT:** This poster examines student engagement patterns and interaction quality within Module 4 of the University of Eswatini's (UNESWA) online course "Artificial Intelligence for Educators." Through analysis of learning management system data and qualitative assessment of discussion forum contributions, the research evaluates both student-student and student-instructor interactions for the first cohort of 100 participants. The study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative metrics of participation frequency and duration with qualitative content analysis of forum posts and peer responses.

Results indicate that while overall participation rates met course expectations, the depth and quality of interactions varied significantly.

The findings suggest several recommendations for improving interaction quality in future iterations of the module, including implementing structured peer review activities, establishing clear rubrics for discussion contributions and increasing instructor facilitation in asynchronous forums. This research contributes to the growing body of literature on effective online teaching practices in African higher education contexts and offers practical insights for designing engaging AI-focused professional

development courses for educators.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, Short online course for educators, Eswatini, Online interactions

Enhancing professional development for the 21st century university teachers: identifying key focus areas

Dr Matjhabedi Mazibuko and Prof Nonhlanhla Maseko

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the essential areas of focus for professional development initiatives aimed at preparing 21st-century university teachers. There is the need for university teachers to develop a student-centred approach to teaching and learning. It highlights the importance of pedagogical strategies that promote active learning, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. Additionally, it emphasizes the integration of technology and digital tools in the classroom to enhance student engagement and facilitate innovative teaching methods. Furthermore, this paper suggests the significance of fostering inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices. It emphasizes the need for university teachers to be aware of and sensitive to the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities of their students. Cultivating an inclusive classroom environment that celebrates diversity, encourages open dialogue, and values student perspectives is crucial for promoting equity and enhancing student success. Moreover, the importance of fostering students' higher-order skills, such as creativity, adaptability, and resilience, which are essential in preparing them for the challenges of the 21st century is encouraged. It advocates for professional development programs that equip university teachers with strategies to nurture these skills through project-based learning, experiential learning, and interdisciplinary approaches.

In addition, the paper highlights the significance of fostering effective communication and interpersonal skills among university teachers. Building strong relationships with students, providing constructive feedback, and cultivating a supportive learning community are essential for creating an optimal learning environment that promotes student engagement and achievement.

Keywords: professional development, university teacher, 21st century, student support, teaching and learning

## Using Imagination to Overcome Social Injustices in a Medical Educational Context

Dr Wade Cesaree Cafun and Ms Karlien Cillie

**ABSTRACT:** This paper introduces and explores the possibility of transcending the limitations of medical students' material realities in their journeys towards becoming competent physicians. The paper highlights the experiences of three medical students from disadvantaged backgrounds and their use of imagination to overcome disadvantages associated with their backgrounds and learning contexts. Each of the participants reflected on their experiences as well as wrote imaginative narratives focussing on how they may have preferred to learn. Analysis of the data resulted in the emergence of three themes, 1) Medical students from socially unjust contexts experience fear in their learning environments, 2) Low expectations of one is common and, 3) imaginings are limited by repeated exposure to material realities of fear and low expectations. Findings revealed that imaginings ultimately served as a point of departure towards the liberation of these medical students. In essence, imagination proved invaluable in the dematerialising of these students otherwise limiting realities.

**Keywords:** imagination, social justice, inclusive education, higher education, medical education

## Breaking Barriers in Open, Distance and e-Learning: Designing Accessible and Inclusive Online Learning Spaces for All Students

Dr Mantsose Jane Sethusha

**ABSTRACT:** The rapid expansion of Open, Distance, and e-learning (ODEL) has brought unprecedented opportunities for education access. However, it has also revealed significant barriers to equitable participation for diverse student populations, including those with disabilities, socio-economic challenges, and limited digital literacy. This research explores strategies to design accessible and inclusive online learning spaces that cater to all students, emphasizing the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Drawing on the interpretivism research paradigm, the study examines the technological, pedagogical, and institutional barriers faced by students in ODeL environments. It identifies best practices for creating adaptable digital content, fostering meaningful interactions, and incorporating assistive technologies. The research highlights the critical

role of policy frameworks, faculty training, and continuous feedback mechanisms in supporting inclusive online learning. Case studies of successful implementations highlight best practices and challenges, providing actionable insights for educators, instructional designers, and policymakers in building inclusive digital ecosystems. Furthermore, this study contributes to breaking barriers in ODeL by proposing evidence-based solutions and ensuring that online education becomes a catalyst for equity, diversity, and lifelong learning. By addressing barriers to accessibility and inclusivity, this research contributes to the broader goal of creating online learning environments that promote engagement, equity, and success for all students. Open Distance and e-Learning, Accessibility, Inclusivity, Universal Design Approach, Digital Literacy, Assistive Technology

**Integrating Sustainable Development Goal 5: Advancing Gender Equality in Human Geography Education** Mbali Pewa Dr Not Applicable This paper examines the integration of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) specifically focusing on gender equality, into the curriculum of a second-year human geography module. As global challenges such as climate change, gender inequality, and access of basic essential services increases, it is crucial to equip students with the knowledge and skills to address immediate challenges they face within an academic framework. Women students often shoulder the burden of domestic responsibilities, which not only disrupt their education but also provide a critical insight into the disparities related to gender in accessing fundamental services such as water, electricity, and healthcare. Therefore, embedding the SDG 5: gender equality into human geography education enables students to develop a deeper understanding of sustainable development in geographic contexts. This study outlines a pedagogical approach that incorporates case studies, and interdisciplinary collaboration to enhance student engagement and comprehension of SDG's. By analysing case studies derived from both urban and rural contexts, wherein students engage in a mapping exercise, students can recognize the ways in which local socio-economic factors impact the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Students are equipped to challenge existing inequalities and envision a more inclusive future that aligns with SDG 5. This research contributes to the discourse on education for sustainable development by demonstrating advantages of aligning curriculum design with complex

socio-environmental challenges. The study highlights the importance of human geography education in preparing students with the essential skills needed to address local sustainability challenges and gender inequality. Sustainable Development Goals, Gender Equality, Human Geography Education, Open Distance Learning, Curriculum Integration

Integrating educational technology during and after COVID-19: Challenges and opportunities faced at a historically disadvantaged University in South Africa Grasia Chisango Dr N/A The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the adoption and integration of educational technology in higher education institutions (HEIs). The pandemic exposed challenges faced by historically disadvantaged HEIs in South Africa that emanated from pre-existing inequalities exacerbated by emergency online learning. This study explored the challenges and opportunities of integrating educational technology during and after the pandemic at a reimagining university in South Africa. Focus group discussions were used to collect qualitative data from heads of departments (HODs), and a thematic approach was used to analyse the data. Data was gathered from two focus groups, each comprising four HODs. Research ethics were considered. The findings revealed that integrating educational technology during and after COVID-19 presented intrinsic and extrinsic challenges. Intrinsic challenges included lecturers' attitudes towards educational technology and concerns about the effectiveness of teaching and learning online. Extrinsic challenges included lecturers' attitudes towards educational technology, student engagement, limited technological knowledge, insufficient technological pedagogical knowledge, technology content knowledge, academic integrity concerns, and inadequate access to information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, including the Internet. These challenges highlight the need for curriculum redesign and pedagogical and infrastructural changes. The post-pandemic era thus presents opportunities for innovation in curriculum redesign and digital transformation, paving the way for a technologically advanced educational landscape.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, digital transformation, educational technology, higher education, South Africa

Innovation trends in the Great Zimbabwe University teaching methodologies and practices

Dr Evans Mandova

**ABSTRACT:** Digital technologies prevail in many departments of contemporary organisations. In Zimbabwe, Education 5.0 is a new curriculum reform which focuses on five pillars of research, innovation and industrialisation and community engagement and teaching. On innovation the key issue is to proffer an environment where students explore new ideas, develop creative solutions and embrace risk-taking. Education5.0 further seeks to integrate technology seamlessly into all aspects of teaching and learning, empowering students with digital fluency and critical thinking skills. This paper is therefore a discourse on innovation trends in the Great Zimbabwe University teaching methodologies and practices. The study investigates the current state of teaching methodologies at Great Zimbabwe University, ascertain innovative trends and practices and assess their impact on student learning. A qualitative approach was engaged to gather data from lecturers and students. The results show that Great Zimbabwe University is incorporating innovative teaching methodologies including blended learning which have improved students' engagement, motivation and academic performance. However, the research notes that there are significant impediments that include limited digital resources and inadequate infrastructure. This study notes that digital technologies proffer opportunities for repositioning, revitalising and revamping teaching methodologies and practices. This paper contributes to the emerging discourse on innovation in teaching methodologies and practices in Higher education in Africa. Innovation Trends, Teaching Methodologies, Student learning experiences, Higher education

Evaluating the impact of the digital divide on eLearning among Extended Curriculum Programme Students at a selected South African university Masithembe Kafile Dr Palesa Makhetha-Kosi Technology has been recognised not only as a driving force to facilitate teaching and learning but also as an essential tool and medium for its transmission. With the adoption of blended learning, students became increasingly reliant on digital platforms and tools to access educational materials, engage with course content, and participate in virtual classrooms. Despite this reality, it could be argued that widespread technology usage and adoption was still growing in several developing economies. To this end, this article evaluated the impact of the digital divide on eLearning among Extended

Curriculum Programme (ECP) students at a selected university in South Africa. The study investigated how disparities in access to technology and digital literacy affected students' ability to engage effectively in online learning environments. The study adopted a mixed-methods approach by using the purposive sampling method for quantitative data collection and the convenience method for the qualitative phase. A total of 300 students were selected from the study population, which consisted of three faculties that offered ECP within the institution, namely: the Faculty of Law (FL), the Faculty of Science and Agriculture (SA), and the Faculty of Management and Commerce (MC). Quantitative data was gathered through an online survey administered to a representative sample of students. Subsequently, qualitative data was collected through interviews with a subset of the participants. A convergence approach was then applied to integrate findings by combining validated scales for technology access, digital literacy, and academic performance assessment in the surveys and thematic analysis in interviews.

**Keywords:** Digital divide, eLearning, access disparities, educational inequality, Higher education, Connections between GenAI use and humanisation: AI-humanising pedagogy perspective

Prof Micheal van Wyk

**ABSTRACT:** Globally, generated AI tools have significantly changed the operations of higher education. The application of AI has impacted considerably the episteme and inquiry within the higher education sector, as studies have confirmed that progressively more modern computerised platforms yield more humanlike results. This exploratory narrative-based research argues, from a theoretical perspective, the AI-humanising pedagogical frame (AIHP) to explore academics applying AI-generated tools to humanise interactions and processes within online humanised pedagogical spaces. This narrative-based research is a way of understanding and investigating the experience of academics. Findings reported that AI-generated tools promoted personalised learning, fostering empathy through realistic simulations, generating specific learning content to meet students' needs, facilitating collaborative learning to ensure that AI is used to augment human capabilities as a critical directive fostering et, building a sense of community learning and creating an awareness of ethical and responsible use. However, challenges emerged that loss of human interaction and over-reliance on AI-generated tools for grading



and feedback could diminish the personal role of lecturers, which creates a sense of alienation and biasedness and poses dehumanised risks to human dignity and privacy. Thus, the proposed AI-humanising pedagogy (AIHP) model provided an alignment in support of dimensions from the narrative-based inquiry depicted in the study. It is recommended that higher education institutions develop institutional AI policies and guidelines for ethical practices, transparency, accountability, and inclusivity in developing and deploying AI.

**Keywords:** AI-humanising pedagogy, AI-generated tools, personalised learning, ethical considerations, narrative-based research, case study design

Consultation on combating ethical considerations of AI in education  
Ms Motlatso Mokadikwa

**ABSTRACT:** We are rapidly moving from writing on paper to using our laptops, phones and tablets

just to write, which is a clear indication that the times are changing and technology has

taken over the education territory thus this paper will tap more into Artificial Intelligence

(AI). This AI in teaching and learning is simply the use of artificial intelligence

technology to personalize learning experiences for students by adapting content while

providing immediate feedback, automating grading and creating interactive learning

environments with the aim to improve student engagement and learning outcomes at

the same time assisting teachers with various tasks. With this alone one would tend to

think that AI is really a good tool to be used by students and their teachers but

unfortunately that's not the case as it raises ethical questions about plagiarism, human

centered designs, data privacy, academic integrity and accountability. My paper will

focus on how these ethical considerations of AI can be combated mainly

looking at

ensuring educator training and awareness, data privacy and security not excluding

transparency and explainability by AI tools, the paper will further foster further dialogue

about the implications of AI in education essentially trying to ensure that it is used

responsibly in the learning environment. This consultation of guidelines that might assist

in combating the ethical considerations of AI while either shows that artificial intelligence

is good or bad for both students and educators.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, education, plagiarism, data privacy, academic integrity, transparency.

Frameworks for continuous professional development: Testing praxis against available frameworks for purposeful fit

Dr Ingrid E Marais

**ABSTRACT:** Professional development is imperative for the currency and relevancy of academics that teach in online environments. Professional development isn't just a nice to have or an annoyance – it is essential to successful teaching and student success. A critical factor for student success in distance and online education is the capacity for academic staff to teach effectively online using available technologies. At a large open distance e-learning university in South Africa academic development is offered through a unit called the Centre for Professional Development (CPD). The university does not have a framework for professional development, despite this being identified in 2017 as a shortcoming already. Until 2020 most of its training was offered face-to-face, but the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 changed the mode of providing professional development. In 2021, new leadership and the migration to a new learning management system changed the manner and focus of CPD offerings.

The lack of a clear framework means that training offered is necessarily 'on the fly' and may not be planned in terms of a roadmap that a framework could offer. I consider different models that could serve as a guiding framework for academic development. In this research, I consider three possible frameworks for academic development at a

large distance open university – the technological pedagogical content knowledge framework (TPACK), the 10 roles of a distance educator, and the six categories of competence for online learning namely pedagogical, content, design, technological, management and institutional skills and social and communication skills. This paper will unpack each of these possible frameworks and their dimensions and then compare training offered from 2020–2024 against these frameworks to judge what framework closely resembles current practice and whether that is fit for purpose going into the future. I end this paper by recommending a continuous professional development framework for future training offered by the CPD.

**Keywords:** Continuous professional development, TPACK, roles of distance educators, competence in online learning, distance education, e-learning

### A Comparative Study of the Impact of Traditional and No-Code Mobile App-facilitated Blended Learning Approaches to students' learning achievements in Practical Biology: A Case Study of two Colleges of Education in Katsina State

Mr Abdullahi, Ibrahim Maikaita

**ABSTRACT:** This study investigates the comparative impact of traditional versus an Adalo® no-code-mobile-application facilitated blended instructional approach, on students' performance, attitudes, and engagement in biology practical, at Isa Kaita College of Education, Dutsinma, and Federal College of Education, Katsina, from 8th March to 17th May 2024. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design. The study examined cognitive, problem-solving, and critical thinking skills, as well as student grades, attendance, and engagement. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions were conducted to further explore learners' perceptions and experiences for both instructional methods. The results indicated that mobile app-facilitated instruction significantly enhanced overall students' performance compared to traditional methods. Statistical analysis revealed significantly ( $t(99) = 14.653$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) higher post-test achievement scores for the mobile-facilitated instruction group (mean score =  $60.95 \pm 1.885$ ) compared to the control group (mean score =  $37.85 \pm 1.402$ ), with 82.7% of the variance in scores ( $p^2 = 0.827$ ) accounted for by the mobile-app instruction treatment.

Additionally, the study found a 34% improvement in engagement with course materials for the blended learning group over the traditional instruction group. Qualitative thematic analysis identified themes such as improved understanding, easier comprehension, increased interactivity, heightened motivation, and technical challenges. The study concludes that mobile apps facilitated instruction have significant potential to enhance educational outcomes and actively engage students, with internet accessibility being a major barrier. The study recommends the wider adoption and optimization of mobile app-facilitated blended learning practices to improve student learning outcomes.

**Keywords:** Blended-learning instruction, traditional instruction, Adalo® no-coding mobile applications, higher education, cognitive skills, student engagement

### Mitigating the Socioeconomic Impacts of Energy Crisis on Children Higher Education Students Support in North-Western Nigeria

Dr Ibrahim Abdullahi

**ABSTRACT:** The energy predicament in Northern Nigeria is a significant challenge to the region's ongoing economic hardships. Chronic electricity shortages, mobility Fuel hikes, overdependence on non-renewable, non-sustainable energy sources, and inadequate provision for energy infrastructure characterize the crisis. This menace impacts the number of children's education from basic, secondary and higher level. This invariably, affects the general higher education level, bearing low support to learners. Northern Nigeria's economy is heavily dependent on agriculture and small-scale industries which suffer from limited access to reliable and affordable energy. It leads the majority of households to be poor with subdued economic activities which leads to students' poor support for education. The region's fragility aggravated poverty levels which render poor support to education low. The disparity between the northern and southern regions is not comparable with northern having disproportionately lower education. Key factors contributing to this need to be further studied beyond inefficient power generation and distribution systems. Widespread vandalism of energy infrastructure, and governance policy as inconsistencies and corruptions may also contribute to menace. Region's overreliance on traditional energy sources, such as firewood, contributes to poverty elevation, environmental degradation which

raises health risks. Efforts to address the crisis have been insufficient as limited investments in higher education among the majority. Community engagement in addressing the crisis is required with multifaceted approaches such as fostering public-private partnerships and implementing policy to prioritize equitable-sustainable energy distribution. Sustainable energy development in Northern Nigeria could unlock more economic potential, improve living standards, and contribute to higher education attainment.

## Integrating Indigenous Knowledge Systems to Promote Sustainable Development Practices in Higher Education

Ms Sbongimpilo Mdabe

**ABSTRACT:** While western knowledge systems are essential in knowledge production, the promotion of sustainable development practices requires an integration of local approaches. This calls for approaches that based on local experiences that provide an ecological balance and cultural wisdom like Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS). The integration of western knowledge and IKS in institutions of higher learning bridges the gap between local practices of living and global sustainable goals. This paper will examine the integration of IKS as a transformative strategy for advancing sustainable development practices in higher education. While the western paradigms are dominant in knowledge transfer and production, it would be critical to explore the holistic approach of environmental stewardship through indigenous epistemologies. By taking this stance the paper advocates for IKS in fostering sustainability-oriented mindsets among students and promoting contextually relevant solutions to environmental and social challenges. The paper will employ a comparative analysis to identify strengths, weaknesses and opportunities for integration. Through this approach the paper seeks to uncover potential synergies and innovative pathways for fostering sustainability in institutions of higher learning by juxtaposing the two knowledge systems. **Keywords:** Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Sustainable Development, Higher Education, Knowledge Integration

The impact of online tutor site allocation on student engagement and academic performance at an Open Distance and E-learning institution  
Ms Mitchelleen Mohlala and Prof Eeva Rapoo

**ABSTRACT:** The Integrated Tutor Model (ITM) in the University of South Africa was implemented to enhance student support in an Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) environment. This paper compares the impact of two different ways of implementing e-tutor support, namely e-tutors working on the main lecturer teaching platform (main-site) compared to having e-tutors working on a separate e-tutor teaching platform (e-tutor site). The study investigates student engagement / participation and academic performance across four computer science modules. Two groups of students were tested: students who participated on the main-site and those who participated on the e-tutor site. A quantitative approach was used, incorporating participation data and pass rates. As such, this study aims to provide insights into optimizing student support through e-tutoring in an ODeL environment, ensuring improved student engagement and academic performance.

**Keywords:** Integrated Tutor Model (ITM), Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL), e-Tutors, Student Support, Student Engagement, Academic Performance

Assessing the impact of ETutiring program as support mechanisms for student with special educational needs in ODeL

Dr Thembaliphi Jerome Ntshingila, Prof Lindokuhle Mkhonza and Dr Sfiso Mbelu

**ABSTRACT:** The educational landscape of students with special educational needs has evolved, necessitating extensive support mechanisms, including technical, academic, and emotional support. This paper aims to establish well-rounded research on e-tutoring programs tailored to students with special learning need in ODEL. Specifically, the study assesses the impact of support that e-tutoring has on students learning and explores the current state and future possibilities of digital learning, including accessibility and equitable quality education for all. The researchers adopted Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as the theoretical benchmark, focusing on eliminating barriers and promoting inclusivity. This study employs a qualitative research approach using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Data will be obtained through a survey questionnaires administered to both students and e-tutor from a distance learning institution and analysed using the NVivo data analysis process. This research intends to contribute to the development

of effective e-tutoring programs that enhance educational outcomes for students with special needs in ODEL environments.

**Keywords:** E-tutoring, ODeL, Special Educational Needs, Students, Support

Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria's Integrated Vocational Education Programme for Student support in Higher Education

Dr Musa Tsagem Muhammad and Dr Ikwuakam Osca T

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of this study is to systematic review and analyze the implementation of Nigeria's Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) curriculum within the country's Integrated Vocational Education Programme for students support. Through a comprehensive examination of existing literature, the study evaluates RANA's integration into vocational education contexts and assesses its effectiveness in meeting intended objectives particularly in Nigerian higher education. The analysis reveals several significant implementation challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and uneven resource distribution across different regions. The review highlights substantial variations in RANA implementation approaches across Nigerian, resulting in inconsistent outcomes. A notable finding is the limited research on RANA's long-term sustainability within vocational settings and its influence on students' employment prospects after programme completion. The study also identifies a critical oversight in existing research regarding the role of mother-tongue instruction in RANA implementation, despite its fundamental importance in developing basic literacy and numeracy skills. To address these gaps, the review emphasizes the need for a robust framework that can enhance understanding of RANA implementation specifically within vocational education contexts for supporting students' learning. This framework would help stakeholders better to understand and address implementation challenges while providing a structured approach for future research and programme development. The findings suggest that a more systematic approach to RANA implementation, combined with targeted research on key areas such as mother-tongue instruction and employment outcomes, could significantly improve the programme's effectiveness in vocational education settings.

**Keywords:** RANA curriculum, vocational education, literacy

implementation, numeracy education, challenges.

## Impact of Technology Integration Instructions in the Delivery of Foundational Education Courses in Higher Teacher Training Institutions in Northwest Zone Nigeria

Dr Hannatu Ado Ahmad Hannatu

**ABSTRACT:** Technology integration in Higher Education is an innovative pedagogical strategy for delivering effective pre-service teacher training. The foundational education courses (Educational Psychology, curriculum, and Philosophy) are critical in teacher production. Using a quasi-experimental-pretest-post-test, non-equivalent, randomized, comparison groups design, the study investigated the impact of instructional practice using computer-assisted instruction and mobile-based learning on students learning outcomes in foundational Education courses. Three higher education teacher training institutions were purposely selected for the study. In each college, the NCE two-student was randomly selected and assigned to treatment and control groups. Each treatment group received 5-week instructions using a differentiated technology-mobile learning platform and computer-assisted instructions in all three foundation education courses. The students in treatment and control groups were tested at baseline before the intervention and at the endline after the intervention. Analysis of Covariance was used to analyze the scores using pretest scores of each of the groups as covariance. Results: after controlling for gender and location, there was a statistically significant difference in the learners' performances taught with technology-integrated instructions in foundational Education Courses. However, post hoc analysis showed no significant effects of Teacher Educators' educational qualifications on learning performances. In the same vein, the study found that additional training in the pedagogical skills of female Teacher Educators explained 34% variations in the academic performance of learners (male and female). The key implication of these findings is teacher production should be technology-driven with more targeted pedagogical refreshers for teacher educators. Additional implications were discussed, and actionable recommendations were offered.

**Keywords:** Technology integration, Pedagogy, Learning performance, Foundation education courses, Colleges of Education



## The Impact of Online Learning Modules on Curriculum Transformation in Public Institutions in South Africa

Ms Makhosi; Lethabo Maphanga; Ms Ledwaba Lethabo Ledwaba

**ABSTRACT:** The integration of online learning modules in South Africa's public higher education institutions has reshaped traditional curricula, addressing accessibility and engagement challenges. This study explored the impact of online learning modules on curriculum transformation in South African public universities. The primary research question examined how online learning modules contributed to curriculum transformation in these institutions. The study aimed to assess how their adoption influenced curriculum structure, delivery, and inclusivity while addressing barriers such as technological infrastructure, digital inequality, and faculty preparedness. A desktop study, incorporating a systematic review of literature and case studies published between 2014 and 2024, was conducted to identify key benefits and challenges. Findings indicated that online modules enhanced access to education, offering students greater flexibility and improved learning resources. However, significant challenges remained, including limited internet access, disparities in digital literacy, and inadequate faculty training. The study recommended increased investment in digital infrastructure, faculty development programs, and policies that promote equitable access to online learning tools. The paper concluded that, when strategically implemented, online learning modules could play a crucial role in transforming South Africa's higher education landscape, enhancing both accessibility and quality. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders seeking to advance curriculum transformation through digital education in public institutions. Online Learning Modules, Curriculum Transformation, Public Institutions, Digital Divide, Educational Access, Faculty Development

**Keywords:** Curriculum Transformation in Higher Education: A Firsthand Account of Stakeholder Collaboration, Challenges, and Pathways Forward

Prof Florah M Teane Title of presentation

**ABSTRACT:** A collaborative approach to curriculum transformation is essential for developing educational programs that are both effective and responsive to community needs. This transformation agenda must be recognized as a collective and dynamic process that requires input from

multiple stakeholders to ensure that higher education curricula remain inclusive, future-ready, and contextually relevant. However, concerns have been raised regarding the effectiveness of curriculum transformation programs in higher education institutions, highlighting significant challenges.

This study examines the experiences of Curriculum Transformation (CT) champions at a South African university who led efforts to reshape the existing curriculum by integrating key transformation principles. These principles include curriculum responsiveness, Afrikan epistemologies, pedagogical renewal, online teaching and learning, diversity and inclusion, multilingualism, innovative assessment practices, the scholarship of teaching and learning, work-integrated learning, student-centered scholarship, and monitoring and evaluation.

Using a qualitative critical ethnographic design, the study purposefully sampled one curriculum transformation head, five champions, six lecturers, and three students. Data were collected through individual and focus group interviews, as well as document analysis. The findings indicate that while stakeholder involvement enhances the transformation agenda, several concerns impede progress and require targeted interventions. Addressing the challenges faced by each stakeholder group is crucial for the successful implementation of curriculum transformation initiatives.

Curriculum transformation, champions, challenges, principles, stakeholders

## Supportive Spaces in the Call to Traditional Healing: Narratives from Tertiary Students

Dr Sibulelo Qhogwana

**ABSTRACT:** This study presents a thematic analysis of students' experiences with support systems as they navigate their spiritual calling while managing academic responsibilities. A purposive sample of ten students, with a calling to divine healing, participated in the study through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The findings highlight the crucial role of support systems in enabling students to balance their spiritual journeys with academic demands. Participants identified a wide array of support sources, including ancestral protection and guidance, family

support, understanding friends and peers, and university resources such as psychological services, social clubs, and academic departments. The study also highlights the necessity of collaboration and mutual understanding among various stakeholders to foster students' holistic development, ensuring their spiritual and academic needs are met in a harmonious and supportive environment. Student support, African spirituality, academic responsibilities, ancestral guidance, spiritual calling

Advancing lifelong learning through establishing flexible curricula Lorette Jacobs Prof Lifelong learning plays a crucial role in career advancement, adaptability, personal growth, and overall quality of life, enabling individuals to stay relevant in a rapidly changing world. However, in many developing countries, access to lifelong learning opportunities is often constrained by traditional approaches to formal education. To address this challenge, higher education institutions must reconsider how curricula are designed and delivered. As per the Proposal for Undergraduate Curriculum Reform in South Africa (2012), the National Policy on Credit Accumulation and transfer (2013), the policy on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer and Assessment in Higher Education (2016) and the Policy and Criteria for Credit Accumulation and transfer within the National Qualification Framework (2021), higher education institutions should consider the introduction of flexible curricula to advance lifelong learning. Flexible curricula provide alternative entry points, accommodate diverse levels of preparedness and varied progression pathways hereby promoting educational equity, social justice, and holistic development. Opportunities to create flexible curricula include the applications of credit accumulation and transfer, recognition of prior learning, offering certificates related to micro credentials and creating curricula that offer opportunities related to progressive pathways and alternative duration opportunities. Supporting lifelong learning through flexible curricula requires a collaborative effort with higher education institutions working with government and industry in creating opportunities for individuals to keep growing and thriving in a rapidly changing world. The aim of the presentation is to explore the variety of ways that flexible curricula can create lifelong learning opportunities, focusing specifically in determining how curricula can be deconstructed to provide expanded opportunities to support lifelong learning. Flexible curricula; lifelong learning; micro credentials; recognition of prior learning; credit accumulation

“Understanding Academic Resistance to Digital Transformation: A Case Study Nishani Harinarain Prof N/A The digital transformation of higher education is an inevitable progression that has been further accelerated by global trends such as the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the COVID-19 pandemic. Institutions worldwide, including the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), have recognised the potential benefits of integrating digital technologies into teaching, learning, and research. These benefits include increased accessibility, improved student engagement, streamlined administrative processes, and enhanced research capabilities. However, despite its benefits, the adoption of digital transformation in education faces significant resistance from academics.

This study aimed to explore the underlying causes of academic resistance to digital transformation at UKZN and provide practical recommendations for addressing these challenges. The study adopted a qualitative research approach in which semi-structured interviews with 15 engineering academics were conducted to comprehensively understand their experiences, attitudes, and challenges in integrating digital technologies into their teaching practices. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and emerging themes from the qualitative data.

The study identified factors such as time constraints, increased instructional workload, and competing professional responsibilities that often hinder the successful implementation of digital transformation. Strategies such as professional development programmes, clear institutional policies, and support structures to ease the transition were proposed as possible solutions to overcome the resistance.

By addressing these issues systematically, this study will contribute to the ongoing discourse on digital transformation in academia and provide actionable insights for institutions seeking to navigate the complexities of technological change effectively.

**Keywords:** Digital transformation, education, resistance, student engagement, workload.

“Students’ experiences and perspectives regarding undergraduate

## research in Speech-Language Pathology

Dr Roux Jeanne Vermeulen, Dr Fatima Haffejee

**ABSTRACT:** Background: Research is crucial in developing evidence-based clinical practice, particularly in fields such as Speech-Language Pathology. However, disparities in research engagement persist, especially in low- and middle-income countries, where barriers such as resource limitations and inadequate mentorship impact students' research experiences. This study explores the experiences and perspectives of undergraduate Speech-Language Pathology students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as they navigate their final-year research projects.

**Method:** Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, data were collected via semi-structured questionnaires at two key stages—before data collection and post-research completion.

**Results:** Findings indicate that while students acknowledge the importance of research in clinical practice and knowledge expansion, challenges such as time constraints, inadequate supervision, and group dynamics affect their overall experience. **Conclusion:** Despite initial anxieties, many students developed a more positive perception of research over time, with some considering postgraduate studies. The study highlights the need for improved supervision structures, research training, and institutional support, such as financial aid, to facilitate improved research experiences at the undergraduate level for Speech-Language Pathology students.

**Keywords:** Teaching and learning; undergraduate research; student experiences; student perspectives; Speech-Language Pathology.

## An Induction programme for first-year students in a Higher Education Institution: Perspectives of managers

Prof Parvathy Naidoo, Prof Ms Kershnee Nair

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of this research study was to delve into the intricacies of leading and managing an Induction Programme at Private Higher Education Institution (PHEI), aiming to facilitate the seamless transition of first-year students into Higher Education. Employing a qualitative case study approach grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, this investigation illuminates the leadership styles and management practices pivotal to the programme's success. Through thematic content analysis of semi-structured interviews with six managerial-level participants, we uncover the layered complexity of administering such a

programme, underscoring the critical roles of distributed, servant, and transformational leadership in creating a supportive, collaborative, and adaptable learning environment. Our investigation was motivated by the recognition of the transitional challenges first-year students faced, ranging from adapting to a new academic and social culture to managing personal and academic responsibilities. Our investigation contributes to the scholarly discourse by identifying effective leadership and management practices, highlighting the prominence of distributed leadership among participants, suggesting its efficacy in fostering a sense of community and collaboration. However, a notable gap was identified in the integration of transformational leadership, which the study proposes could further enhance the adaptability and responsiveness of staff and students to evolving educational demands. Furthermore, the research surfaces other significant engagement challenges such as technological proficiency, adaptation to academic environments, and effective cooperation while underscoring the importance of adopting a multi-faceted leadership approach that integrates distributed, servant, and transformational leadership styles to enhance the effectiveness of induction programmes. We argue for Induction Programmes to be dynamic, responsive, and capable of addressing the diverse needs of the student body. This study not only sheds light on the leadership and management practices that contribute to the effectiveness of Induction Programmes but also sets the stage for further research in this vital area of educational leadership. Keywords: induction programme; managers; senior leadership; students' experiences; cultural diversity

### Assessment in Higher Education versus the Job market needs

Dr. Emmily Sitati and Dr. Susan Wandera Sitati and Wandera Dr Wandera Susan

**ABSTRACT:** Higher Education in Kenya is rapidly undergoing transformation to align with the needs and employability opportunities of 21st Century. Assessment strategies are critical in determining the graduates that are produced to the market from the Higher Education. This paper is an exploration of assessments in Higher Education Institutions in Kenya. This study is an analyses of assessment designs and the distinct roles they play, the evolution of Higher Education assessments, and the level of integration of advanced technologies as well as the

adoption of flexible assessment strategies.. The paper used document analysis of various assessment modes at Daystar University, a private university in Kenya over a period of 10 years. The study was guided by the following objectives: Analyzing assessment designs in Higher Education in Kenya. Trace the evolution of Higher Education Assessments and the extent of adoption of flexible assessment strategies. The findings show the need to reflect and establish a broader trend of re-imagining and re-strategize assessment in higher education in Kenya. The need to align assessment designs with the job market opportunities of the 21st century and ensure that institutions improve on the quality, relevancy and responsiveness in a rapidly changing global trends. The emphasis of innovative ways of assessment to enhance 21st Century skills in assessments: and the position of the learner in determining assessment designs in Higher Education in Kenya is a paradigm that Higher Education assessment have to embrace. Higher Education, Assessment, job market, 21st skills.

Global Trends in Curriculum Reforms In Higher Education. The Kenyan situation. Susan Wandera, Emily Sitati Wandera. S Dr Dr. Susan N. Wandera Higher education curriculum should be responsive to societal challenges certifying that graduates are equipped and possess requisite knowledge , skills and attitudes to thrive in a fast dynamic world. The contemporary Global challenges ought to inform curriculum Reforms in Higher Education in Kenya. This paper interrogates global Trends in Education Reforms and how this influences Curriculum Reforms in Higher Education in Kenya. The study conducted systematic Review to analyze significant globe reforms in Education and how it has shaped curriculum Reforms in Kenya's Higher Education. The study main aim was to interrogate Global Trends in Education and the influence in Curriculum Reform in Higher Education in Kenya. The focus was on Integration of sustainability in Curriculum, the shift to experiential Learning and adoption of Flexible Learning modes in Higher Education in Kenya and also the incorporation of Technology and Digital Competencies. The findings clearly show the need for Higher Education Curriculum to focus on Interdisciplinary Approaches that address global challenges that are ever-increasing across multiple fields. Curriculum reforms ought to enable students integrate concepts from diverse multidisciplinary to improve problem solving skills. The study concluded that Global trends are a

reflection a Worldview perspective and effort to ensure that higher education globally is addressing societal challenges, thereby ensuring that Higher Education Curriculum equips graduates with the necessary competencies, skills and knowledge to thrive in fast dynamic World.

Keywords: global trends, Curriculum Reforms, Higher Education

“ Enhancing Lecturer Support in Online Course Development: Towards an Effective ODeL Support Model

Dr Poomoney Govender, Dr Anneke Venter

ABSTRACT: As the largest provider of open distance e-learning (ODeL) in South Africa, the University of South Africa (UNISA) is transitioning towards full digitalisation of its learning environment by 2030. This shift necessitates comprehensive support for lecturers in designing and delivering online courses. While collaborative course development teams have been established to provide assistance, little systematic research has explored how lecturers perceive this support and its effectiveness.

This study investigates UNISA lecturers' experiences with course development support, aiming to inform a more effective ODeL support model. This study employs a qualitative research methodology, incorporating focus group interviews and open-ended questionnaire responses for data collection.

Findings highlight key areas for improvement, including the need for reliable systems, adequate resources, targeted training, peer collaboration, and hands-on learning opportunities.

Building on these insights, the study proposes a lecturer-centred support model designed to enhance institutional support structures for online course development. This model provides a practical framework for ODeL institutions to enhance lecturer support, ultimately fostering more effective online teaching and learning outcomes.

Keywords: Lecturer support model; lecturer support in higher education; faculty support; distance education; lecturers' perceptions; academic professional development

Leveraging Artificial Intelligence for Academic Support: Advancing Academic Literacy in Higher Education – A Case Study of UNISA

Mr Asanda Kafle, Mr Thobile Miya and Mr Ian Lushaba

ABSTRACT: Academic literacy is critical for student success at Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) institutions such as the University of South



Africa (UNISA). Many students struggle with academic writing, critical thinking, and information literacy skills, which have an impact on their retention, academic performance, and graduateness. Institutions can improve student support by leveraging Artificial Intelligence (hereafter referred to as AI)-powered tools such as Natural Language Processing (hereafter referred to as NLP) applications, Intelligent Tutoring Systems (hereafter referred to as ITS), and adaptive learning platforms.

This study will investigate the impact of AI-powered tools on improving academic literacy at UNISA. Using a case study strategy, the project will examine how AI technologies automate feedback, promote self-regulated learning, and increase engagement. The study will employ a multimethod approach by collecting data using questionnaires and interviews with students and other key stakeholders. The multimethod approach will assist the researchers in triangulating the data.

It is expected that AI-driven academic support can positively impact student learning outcomes, though ethical considerations, data privacy, and human-AI collaboration will be critical factors in implementation. The study will offer practical recommendations for integrating AI-based support within UNISA's Learning Management System (LMS) to create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Open Distance e-Learning, Learning Management Systems, Academic Literacy

A sense of place and Ubuntu in open distance e-learning institutions: a case of LMS migration Prof Prof Piera Biccard, Dr Phumza Makgato-Khunou

**ABSTRACT:** Open distance e-learning institutions are plagued by low throughput and high dropout rates. A supportive and inclusive digital environment is crucial to fostering engagement among both students and lecturers. We explore the integration of a sense of place and the African Ubuntu philosophy to understand lecturer experiences of a learning management system migration. Through an online open-ended question, we analyze 124 responses to lecturers' experiences of the migration that took place from one learning management system to another. We used the sense of place framework as well as characteristics of Ubuntu to code the data, focusing on aspects such as belonging, identity, and communal values. We found that the participants did not experience high levels of compassion, respect, or dignity during the migration process while

their personal identity was lost, and they experienced strong emotions caused by fear and frustration. The lack of transparent communication and institutional support further exacerbated these challenges. We recommend more human-centered migration processes when staff are introduced to new forms of technology, emphasizing participatory decision-making, emotional support, and collaborative learning to foster a more inclusive and empowering transition.

Keywords: open distance e-learning; LMS migration; Ubuntu; Sense of place

Towards inclusive student support: integrating health promotion in higher education for sustainable learning learning

Dr Tshifhiwa Mashau

**ABSTRACT:** The development of Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODEL) in Africa has created new opportunities for higher education institutions, but has also exposed critical gaps in student support, especially in health promotion. Several students face challenges such as limited access to healthcare, mental health struggles as well as digital fatigue, all of which can hinder their academic success. This paper investigates strategies to integrate health promotion into student support approaches, ensuring inclusivity and sustainability in higher education. By embedding health and well-being programs into institutional policies and digital learning platforms, universities can establish holistic support structures that provide to the diverse needs of students. This paper engages a systematic literature review approach to investigate existing research on health promotion and student support in Open, Distance, and e-Learning (ODEL) settings, particularly in Africa. The paper also emphasises the value of inter-sectoral collaboration between universities, healthcare providers, and policymakers. The research question underpinning this paper is: How can health promotion be effectively integrated into student support systems in African ODeL institutions to enhance inclusivity, resilience, and academic success? The results recommend that sustainable, equity-driven health promotion strategies can bridge existing gaps in student health and well-being, eventually leading to enhanced academic performance, decreased dropout rates, and improved overall student experience. ODeL institutions must, therefore, re-imagine student support throughout an inclusive lens, ensuring that every student has access to the resources

suitable for academic and personal success.

Keywords: student support, well-being, inclusivity, resilience, health promotion, sustainability

Adaptive supervision of post-graduate students in an online learning environment

Prof Zurika Robinson, Prof Thea Uys

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the Honours in Economics research report module at the University of South Africa (Unisa) is to guide students in putting together a research paper that demonstrates their ability to conduct guided research in the local and international context. It also serves as a preparatory measure for further masters and doctoral (M and D) studies. This paper analyses supervision in this module as adaptive support for connected online learning that best explains student research skills post-COVID. The study used a mixed method, triangulation sequence-specific survey and interview questions regarding the factors influencing student success and supervisor support, confirming the importance of an online learning environment following the COVID-19 pandemic. The study illustrated how supervision and study material can be improved as significant factors of student success. A manual thematic analysis was done, following up the interview questions. We found that proactive supervision, with good examples from the Honours research report, and more contact and communication through for example Microsoft (MS) Teams could be one of the enabling and/or success factors in the preparation for M and D studies. Post-graduate, economics, preparation, supervision

Evaluating the Bridging the Gap (BtG) Initiative: An Academic Support programme for Higher Certificate Students' Success Seshen Brijmohun Mr This paper presents a comprehensive evaluation of the 'Bridging the Gap' (BtG) initiative implemented for Higher Certificate students at a private higher education institution. The programme was designed to provide overall academic support in bi-weekly sessions where lecturers, who served as mentors in the BtG initiative, met with the respective students to reflect on their challenges with the transition into Higher Education, navigating the Learning Management System, managing assessment deadlines, and other academic expectations, as well as work through possible solutions. Through a combination of document and reflective

analyses, this study aims to assess the effectiveness of the initiative, while highlighting areas for improvement, so as to provide suggestions for effective academic support programmes for Higher Education students. The central discourse of this paper is that a thorough analysis of the BtG lecturer reports and documentation reveal valuable insights into the effectiveness of academic support initiatives and student well-being. The framework for this study is grounded on reflective practice. The findings highlight that while the BtG initiative provided valuable support and helped many students transition successfully into higher education, there were areas requiring refinement: key insights include the need for more personalised support strategies and increased alignment between programme objectives and student needs, as well as motivation to engage in these initiatives.

Keywords: student motivation; success; well-being; support initiatives

Nurturing Digital Citizenship among Great Zimbabwe University students: Hopes and Impediments Dr Evans Mandova

**ABSTRACT:** The challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic engendered the digitalization of Institutions of Higher Learning. This proffered a landscape to reconsider opportunities and impediments for the development of Digital Literacies even in the post Covid era. This paper is a discourse on the application of digital literacy skills to teaching and learning with particular reference to Great Zimbabwe University. It probes how technology integration impacts research, teaching and learning in an endeavor to assess student learning outcomes. It highlights the significance of integrating Digital Technologies into teaching and learning. In that regard, the study investigates Great Zimbabwe University undergraduate students' opinions on Digital Literacies, its significance in their learning and lives in general and the institution's policies relating to the integration of technologies. Motivated by the prominence of technologies in today's digital age, this research aims to contribute to the current discourses on the establishment of digitally literate communities. It engages a qualitative analysis approach by collecting data from students, lecturers and administrators. The data is analysed to ascertain the objectives of this research viz to assess Great Zimbabwe University students Digital Literacies, identify hopes and impediments in nurturing Digital Citizenship among the students and proffer possible strategies to

enhance student learning outcomes. The results of this research show some variances in students' Digital Literacies and inadequate institutional support. The study stresses the importance of equipping staff with Digital Literacy skills to enable them to integrate technology effectively into Great Zimbabwe University learner-centric curriculum.

Keywords: Digital Literacies, Digitalisation, Digital Citizenship, Hopes, Impediments, Digital age

### Motivation as a Bridge to Success: Supporting Adult Learners in a South African Distance Higher Education

Ms Ruth Patricia Nkomo & Dr Geoffrey Pinagase Tshephe

**ABSTRACT:** Globally, higher education faces the persistent challenge of increasing access and ensuring student success, particularly due to low graduation rates and high attrition. In South Africa, efforts to rectify historical inequities have expanded access to higher education, significantly increasing enrolments among diverse student populations, including adult learners. However, student success remains a critical issue despite increased access, especially in distance education. Among the various factors influencing student performance, motivation has been identified as a key psychological determinant of persistence and completion. Thus, this study examines the role of motivation factors that support adult learners' success in South African distance higher education. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the study explored the lived experiences of eight adult graduates from historically marginalised communities who successfully completed a Bachelor of Education degree through a South African Open Distance eLearning institution. Data was collected through semi-structured individual interviews and focus groups. The findings reveal that a combination of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation orientation factors, such as personal growth, career goals, and self-efficacy, including family support, financial aid, and institutional support structures, played an important role in student success. Understanding these motivation factors is crucial to improving Open Distance eLearning institutions' student retention and completion rates. The study highlights the need for targeted student support initiatives, including mentorship programmes, financial assistance, and enhanced academic resources, to bridge the gap between access and success in distance higher education. Furthermore, this study makes a multi-dimensional contribution to motivation theories

in distance education, informs targeted student support strategies, enhances equity in higher education, and contributes to lifelong learning research.

Keywords: Motivation, Adult Learners, Distance Higher Education, Success, Student Performance

Social Science Education in the Era of 'Social Distancing': Reflections from students at the University of KwaZulu-Natal

Ms Khayelihle Busisiwe Ngxongo

**ABSTRACT:** The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically changed education, forcing higher education institutions to quickly adapt to the use of online teaching and learning platforms. For students undertaking social science education where dialogue and collaboration are key to learning, the absence of face-to-face interaction posed unique challenges. This paper examines how students from the School of Social Sciences at the University of KwaZulu-Natal navigated online learning during the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. This study adopted a qualitative research approach to collect and thematically analyse data from in-depth interviews conducted with 14 students who were registered for various social science disciplines between 2020 and 2021. Data collected reveals that while online learning offered flexibility to students, it disrupted the interactive, discussion-based pedagogy essential to social science education. The lack of face-to-face engagement hindered collaborative learning and limited students' ability to engage interactively with course material. Additionally, structural barriers such as unstable internet access, unconducive home environments, and difficulties obtaining academic resources and support compounded the disruptions levelled against students during this time. As such, the paper proposes that online learning, implemented during the pandemic, did not simply replace face-to-face education, it changed the nature of social science learning with the loss of interactive discussions and intellectual exchanges compromising the foundational characteristics of learning in these disciplines. The paper emphasises the need for new ways to support students' diverse learning needs, including creating virtual platforms that preserve collaborative learning and improving access to digital resources to ensure that online learning remains inclusive and effective.

Keywords: Higher Education; Social Sciences; COVID-19; UKZN; Sociology

## Decolonizing Academia: Bridging Gaps through Indigenous Knowledge and Local Languages

Mr Tapiwanashe Mutonhori and Mr Admore Mashokoh

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the initiatives undertaken by a Zimbabwean university to decolonize and Africanize its curriculum, resonating with the conference theme “Connecting Minds and Bridging Gaps.” The institution has implemented a university-wide Heritage and Culture module and intends to integrate local languages into the teaching of core disciplines, such as medicine and engineering. The objective of the study is for the inclusion of local languages and indigenous knowledge in university academic curricula of Zimbabwe as a means of decolonizing. The study employed a qualitative research methodology, through interviews and focus groups involving a sample size of 50 participants, drawn from students and lecturers. The findings underscored that incorporating indigenous knowledge systems and local languages not only enriches the learning experience but also strengthens students’ sense of identity and belonging. Participants noted an increase in collaborative learning opportunities, improvements in comprehension and engagement, reflecting a greater alignment with their cultural contexts. The study concludes that by embracing decoloniality and Africanisation, universities can create educational environments that enhance student outcomes while contributing to local development and innovation, ultimately bridging the gaps in higher education and fostering a more inclusive academic landscape. The study offers practical recommendations for other higher education institutions, advocating for the promotion of heritage-based teaching and learning programmes that emphasize local relevance, collaboration with community organizations for experiential learning, and the establishment of mentorship programmes that connect students with local professionals in their fields.

**Keywords:** Decolonization, Africanisation, IKS, Local languages, Curriculum transformation,

## Enhancing First-Year Student Orientations at a University in Zimbabwe: Addressing Challenges and Improving Strategies

Mr Tapiwanashe Mutonhori and Mr Admore Mashokoh

**ABSTRACT:** This research paper investigates the enhancement of first-

year student orientations at a university in Zimbabwe, aligned with the theme of “Connecting Minds and Bridging Gaps.” The primary objective is to identify the challenges faced by new students during their transition to university life and propose actionable strategies for improving the orientation programme. This study utilized a qualitative methodology. In-depth interviews and focus group discussions with first-year students, lecturers, and student affairs staff were used to evaluate the current orientation’s effectiveness. Key findings of the study revealed significant barriers, namely: orientations are often conducted hurriedly, lack personalization, and fail to provide adequate follow-up for students facing challenges. Many new students miss orientation due to the urgency of securing accommodation in high-density areas, while the traditional one-week programmes does not sufficiently address ongoing needs, particularly for those from diverse backgrounds, including those unfamiliar with modern technology and sanitation facilities. The paper concludes with specific recommendations to enhance the orientation experience, such as extending the programme into an ongoing support system, offering personalized sessions that cater to different backgrounds, and implementing follow-up strategies to monitor student progress and challenges. Furthermore, it is recommended that the university develop a peer mentorship program, where upper-class students guide first-year students through their transition, providing relatable support and facilitating a sense of belonging. By adopting these strategies, the university can foster a more inclusive and supportive first-year experience, ultimately enhancing student retention, success and wellbeing in higher education.

Key words: student support, first-year orientation, qualitative analysis, transition challenges, ongoing engagement

Reflective Practice as a Collaborative Student Support Strategy: Fostering Pre-Service Teacher Well-being in Higher Education

Shannon Bishop-Swart Dr Dr Elzahn Rinqwest

**ABSTRACT:** This paper examines the efficacy of reflective practice, specifically through reflective writing, as a collaborative student support strategy for enhancing the emotional well-being of pre-service teachers (PSTs). Addressing the unique challenges faced by PSTs in the diverse higher education contexts of two different African countries, this study investigates how collaborative well-being workshops, incorporating guided



reflective writing, can foster emotional resilience and community. Drawing on a poststructuralist approach and Hargreaves' (2001) "emotional geographies of teaching" framework, we analyse the reflective writings of PSTs from Stellenbosch University (South Africa) and Makerere University (Uganda). These reflections provide rich insights into the PSTs' emotional experiences, revealing the complex interplay between emotions, context, and the impact of the workshops. Preliminary analysis highlights the prevalence of stress, anxiety, and burnout in PSTs, alongside the powerful role of shared reflection in developing coping mechanisms and fostering a sense of belonging. This paper demonstrates how our collaborative approach, as educators in higher education, leverages reflective practice as a targeted student support strategy, promoting PST well-being and subsequently contributing to our own professional development through shared learning. By showcasing the use of reflective writing within collaborative well-being workshops, this study offers valuable insights for developing culturally responsive and impactful student support strategies for PSTs in diverse higher education contexts, ultimately benefitting both current and future educators.

**Keywords:** Student support, educator well-being, reflective practice, higher education, pre-service teachers

**Re-imagining legal education in South Africa by cultivating technological agency: towards ubuntu-gogy**

**Siyabulela Sabata Mr Mr. Mfundo Zwane**

**ABSTRACT:** This study is part of the bigger decolonial praxis at a historical disadvantaged South African university (HDU) which seeks to facilitate enactment of Curriculum Transformation Renewal (CRT) policy framework by embedding graduate attributes (GAs) in curriculum. This is a deliberate subversive and transcendent curriculum enactment approach which is a direct response to what we view to be manifestation of the neoliberal and technicist curriculum reforms espoused by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa. This particular paper zooms into the intricacies of policy enactment in the faculty of law, with particular focus towards quest to equip legal agents with requisite technological skills for the 21st century. We therefore engaged with the myth of digital transformation and the notions of generic global skills for the 21st century. We argued that calls for development and advances in new technologies and machines is inextricable linked with the global

colonial project. We demonstrated this dialectical relationship through engagement with literature to expose how machines are always serving the interests of dominant actors in society. We delved into the history to demonstrate how technology was manipulated to serve the interests of the notorious apartheid regime in South Africa. We move on to show how courts and the South Africa's legal system was always complicit with the apartheid's technological dehumanising practices. Taking this history into consideration, we use ubuntu-gogy to show how the conceptualisation of 'technological agency' as a UWC graduate attribute is a direct response to the contextual realities. We demonstrate through case studies, how cultivation of technological agency as the attribute, can be used to rehumanise and heal society in the present. In conclusion, we argued for the adoption of graduate attributes (albeit framed as identities) as the central curriculum design feature to enable decolonisation of curriculum. Keywords: Ubuntu-gogy, decolonial praxis, graduate attributes, subversive, digital transformation, technological agency

Implementation of Assessment and Timely Feedback in Higher Education  
Simangaliso Bayabonga Zulu Mr N/A

**ABSTRACT:** The implementation of assessment and timely feedback in higher education is pivotal for enhancing student learning outcomes and academic performance. This study investigates the strategies and practices employed by higher education institutions to integrate effective assessment methods and provide prompt feedback to students. Through a systematic review of current literature and empirical studies, the research highlights the benefits of formative assessments, continuous feedback loops, and the use of technology in facilitating timely feedback. The findings indicate that timely and constructive feedback not only improves student engagement and motivation but also aids in the development of critical thinking and self-regulation skills. The study also addresses the challenges faced by educators, such as balancing workload, ensuring consistency in feedback, and addressing diverse student needs. Recommendations for educators and policymakers include adopting a student-centered approach, leveraging digital tools for efficient feedback delivery, and fostering a culture of continuous improvement in assessment practices. This research underscores the importance of a well-structured assessment and feedback system in higher education to support student success and institutional effectiveness.

**Keywords:** Assessment, timely feedback, higher education, student learning outcomes, continuous feedback, student engagement.

**“Enhancing Postgraduate Supervision through Social Media Feedback: A Thematic Analysis of UNISA Students’ Facebook Experiences**

Tshegofatso Massa Ramothale Ms Dr Ayobami Adekola

Social media platforms have become critical tools for universities to engage with stakeholders, particularly students. Many postgraduate students use social media to share their supervision experiences, both positive and negative. However, there is limited understanding of how universities manage, respond to, and use these feedback mechanisms to improve the quality of supervision. By analysing student experiences shared on UNISA’s Facebook page, the study seeks to understand how this feedback can be systematically used to improve supervisory practices, improve student satisfaction, and reduce dropout rates at UNISA. We ask how postgraduate student feedback on social media can be effectively utilised to improve the quality of supervision in an ODeL institution. This study will use qualitative thematic analysis to examine the feedback of UNISA postgraduate students on Facebook (2022-2025) using a purposive sampling of relevant posts and comments. Data will be analysed to identify recurring themes related to postgraduate supervision experiences, including challenges, successes, and suggestions for improvement. This approach will provide actionable insights into how institutions can better manage and respond to student feedback.

The study will reveal key themes, gaps in current supervision practices, and common challenges. The study could provide evidence-based recommendations for improvement, demonstrating the potential of social media feedback to enhance supervisory practices, student satisfaction, and learning environments at UNISA and similar institutions. The findings could guide establishing a structured system to monitor and analyse student feedback on social media platforms, thus strengthening student support mechanisms and integrating social media feedback into institutional quality assurance frameworks.

**Keywords:** Postgraduate Supervision, Open Distance e-learning, Social Media Feedback, Thematic Analysis, Student Experience, Student Support”

**Africanising Soil Science: A Constructivist Grounded Theory For Advancing Curriculum Transformation**

Milton Milaras Mr

In Africa, social and epistemic justice imperatives call for the transformation of the western-style university, into an Africanised university. Ample literature exists as to the reasons that canonically-western university curricula should be Africanised to suit African needs. However, there is a lack of guidance on the process of Africanising scientific curricula, including in the discipline of soil science. To develop a useful theory in this regard, constructivist grounded theory (CGT) was applied as a methodology and method. In-depth interviews were conducted with experts in soil science, curriculum transformation, and indigenous knowledge studies. Transcripts were iteratively coded and abstracted to develop a CGT of a (South) Africanised soil science curriculum-transformation process. This theory encompasses interconnected personal, institutional, and national transformation processes, in a synergy of African (ubuntu) and Western (individualistic) approaches. The principles and process developed may usefully extend to support Africanisation of curricula in other environmental sciences.

**Keywords:** Africanisation; Constructivist Grounded Theory; Soil Science; Curriculum Studies; Decolonisation; Indigenous Knowledge Systems; Ubuntu; Ethnopedology; Transformation Process; Epistemic Justice.

## UTILIZATION AND ACCESS OF DIGITAL INFORMATION RESOURCES BY SCIENCE STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN KATSINA STATE

ABIDINA ABUBAKAR Dr MR. KABIR IBRAHIM YAR'ADUA

This study is aim to investigate utilization and access of digital information resources by Science students in Colleges of Education in Katsina State. The study aim to find the science students level of awareness, accessibility and utilization of digital information resources for their academic work and to find out if there is a significant relationship between the awareness, accessibility and utilization of digital information resources and science students' performance in Colleges of Education in Katsina State. The study will employ quantitative research and survey design, with a sample of 224 science students which will be randomly selected from two Colleges of Education in Katsina State. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on the utilization and access of digital information resources by science students

in Colleges of Education in Katsina State. Once the data is collected in this study it will be organized and presented, it can be analysed to make. The data analysis for this research was the use of descriptive statistics techniques to provide answers to the research questions while the t-test and correlation were used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance for rejection or otherwise. The findings of the study have implications for science education, library services, and educational policy in Nigeria.

**Keywords:** Digital Information Resources, Science Students, Colleges of Education, Katsina State, Nigeria.

**Beyond Academic Advising: The Role of Holistic Psychosocial Support in Enhancing Student Success in Higher Learning Institutions**

**Nelson Nciweni Mr**

Student success in higher education extends beyond academic performance to include mental health, emotional resilience, and social integration. While academic advising is well-documented, university counselling services' role in student well-being is less examined, particularly in historically disadvantaged institutions like Walter Sisulu University (WSU). This study examined the effectiveness of the WSU Counselling Unit in providing psychosocial support and its impact on student success. Using a qualitative research approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants, including Counselling Unit staff and students who had accessed the services. Thematic analysis identified key patterns and insights. Findings indicate that the Counselling Unit plays a crucial role in supporting student mental health and academic resilience, but various barriers hinder its effectiveness. However, challenges such as stigma around mental health, insufficient resources, and limited awareness of available services negatively affect its impact. Staff highlighted the need for more resources and stronger institutional commitment to mental health initiatives. The study underscores the importance of enhancing psychosocial support to improve student retention and academic achievement. Universities should prioritise mental health awareness campaigns, expand counselling services, and integrate psychosocial support into broader student success strategies. This research contributes to the limited literature on psychosocial support in South African higher education by exploring the challenges and benefits of counselling services. It recommends increasing funding, training academic staff in mental

health awareness, and establishing peer support networks to create a more supportive learning environment.

Key words: Psychosocial support, student well-being, higher education counselling, mental health in universities, academic resilience.

Beyond the official student guide: A qualitative observation on the role of peers in the 'unofficial' orientation for first year students in residential university.

Kelsey Nebbe Ms

Orientations have become a key part of the student journey into higher education. Often, fellow students have played important roles in the orientation of new students. The current body of literature includes the role student volunteers help implement the official university orientation programs as well as the role of peer socialisation in the transition to higher education (Tinto, 1988). There is also a wealth of research into hazing, the peer-led by senior student dangerous and illicit activities first year students undergo to obtain social group affiliation and social belonging. Hazing, however, is but a part of what if the peer-led 'unofficial' orientation based in social interaction both during and outside of the official university program. This author would like to argue that these peer-led and unaffiliated to the official orientation also have a role to play in a successful transition to university. Based on ethnographic research into the impact of COVID-19 on orientation process and student life at a small residential university in the Eastern Cape, the research findings found that in the absence of social distancing highlighted the importance of peer interactions during orientation and into the semester. In addition to the importance of peer connections in Orientation to foster a sense of connection between incoming students and the university, the connections did not result in the transference of institutional knowledge in the student body. The importance of which should encourage expanding studies into orientation beyond the impact the official program has on student transition into higher education.

Keywords: Orientation, student, institutional knowledge, hazing, orientation programs, first-year student ""I was like, 'Oh, okay, cool.'"": Minecraft as a Gamified Tool for Situated Learning in Architectural and Spatial Design Education

Jolanda Morkel Dr Marga de Vos

This study explores the use of Minecraft as a gamified learning tool in

spatial design and architecture education. Framed by constructivism and situated learning, it examines student experiences with a Minecraft-based project designed to expand learning beyond the classroom and simulate aspects of the professional world. Data was gathered through a focus group interview with student representatives, and thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and key insights from the interview transcripts. Findings reveal Minecraft's affordances in providing engaging and fun learning experiences, developing unintended key skills, such as time management and teamwork, and enabling experiential learning, particularly in understanding professional roles. Students suggested integrating Minecraft more broadly into the curriculum for design tasks or even virtual lectures while highlighting the importance of industry-standard software. The research found that Minecraft can be a valuable tool for engaging students, developing important skills, and providing a situated learning experience that connects the classroom to the world of work. Careful consideration should be given to student experience levels, assessment incentives, project structure, and integration with the existing curriculum. Further research is needed to explore the potential of Minecraft and other gamified approaches to enhance architectural education and prepare students for the workplace.

Keywords: Gamification, Higher Education, Design Education, Situated Learning, Professional Development”

“We have a challenge regarding the calibre of students we get”: Narratives of Student Developers from Historically Black Universities in South Africa.  
Simbongile Ntwasa Mr

This study is part of a larger study which applies Margaret Archer's Social Realist Theory to analyse how black students at Historically Black Universities are constructed primarily as products of their impoverished past, while the structural and systemic conditions shaping their experiences remain unexamined. Participants in this study largely ignored the historical legacy of higher education's global inequalities and the enduring impact of apartheid in South Africa in conceptualizing and implementing student development programmes using the University Capacity Development Grant. Instead, they accounted for students' low throughput rates and high dropout rates to them as individuals. Reducing student development to programmes like Academic Literacies and Computer Literacies to fix them for the mainstream curriculum. Drawing on Archer's concept of

analytical dualism, this study critiques the reductionist perspective that views students solely through the lens of individual deficiencies while neglecting the emergent constraints imposed by structural, and social-cultural conditions. The misappropriation of theories such as student-centeredness and holistic student development further contributed to an individualized approach that overlooked systemic barriers. Furthermore, participants overlooked the university as a structure which conditioned student success. By failing to recognize these broader conditions, participants reinforced a deficit in understanding student challenges in higher education rather than acknowledging the multiple interplay between structure, culture, and agency. This research calls for a shift towards a more reflexive and structurally aware approach that accounts for the ongoing impact of multiple aspects that affect student development and success in higher education.

Keywords: Student success, Student development, Curriculum development, Curriculum transformation, Analytical Dualism

“From Isolation to Integration: Leveraging Technology to Enhance Teaching, Learning, and Student Support

Zimkhitha Nokuzola Mathunjwa Ms

This presentation explores the transformative potential of technology in higher education, focusing on the transition from isolation to integration. This study's primary research question is: How can technology be leveraged to enhance teaching, learning, and student support in higher education, particularly through open distance e-learning (ODEL)? The objective of this research is to identify and analyse innovative strategies that utilise digital technologies to create more inclusive and effective educational environments. The novel idea presented in this paper is incorporating comprehensive digital tools and platforms to bridge educational gaps and foster a connected learning community.

Using a qualitative research methodology, this study employs interviews, focus groups, and case studies to gather in-depth insights from educators, students, and administrators. The approach involves analysing the experiences and perceptions of these stakeholders to understand the impact of technology-enhanced education. Anticipated outcomes include a detailed understanding of the benefits and challenges associated with instructional design for online and virtual learning in higher education.



The research is expected to highlight successful implementations of ODeL, showcasing best practices and innovative approaches that enhance engagement, collaboration, and accessibility.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform policy and practice in higher education. By demonstrating how technology can bridge gaps and support diverse learning needs, this study aims to contribute to the development of more equitable and effective educational systems.

Keywords: Digitalisation, Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL), Higher Education, Student Support, Digital Learning Tools, Educational Technology Integration”

Re-imagining legal education in South Africa by cultivating technological agency: towards ubuntu-gogy

Siyabulela Sabata Mr Mr. Mfundo Zwane

This study is part of the bigger decolonial praxis at a historically disadvantaged university in South Africa which seeks to facilitate enactment of Curriculum Transformation Renewal and Transformation framework by embedding Graduate Attributes in curriculum. This study explores the intricacies of policy enactment in the faculty of law, with particular focus towards quest to equip legal agents with requisite technological skills for the 21st century by engaging with the notions of digital transformation and generic global skills for the 21st century. We argue that calls for development and advances in new technologies and machines is inextricably linked with the global colonial project. We demonstrate this dialectical relationship through engagement with literature to expose how machines are always serving the interests of dominant actors in society. We delve into the history to demonstrate how technology was manipulated to serve the interests of the notorious apartheid regime in South Africa. We proceed to show how courts and the South Africa's legal system were complicit with the apartheid's technological dehumanising practices; and by taking this history into consideration, we use ubuntu-gogy to show how the conceptualisation of 'technological agency' as a UWC graduate attribute is a direct response to the contextual realities. We demonstrate through case studies, how cultivation of technological agency as the attribute, can be used to rehumanise and heal society in the present. In conclusion, we argued for the adoption of graduate attributes (albeit framed as identities) as the central curriculum design feature to

enable decolonisation of curriculum.

Keywords: Ubuntu; Pedagogy; Curriculum Transformation; Digital Transformation; Technological Agency

Towards Equity and Inclusivity in Higher Education Access in Zimbabwe: Exploring Possible Sustainable Models for Student Tuition Support at Three Higher Education Institutions in Masvingo City.

Tapiwanashe Mutohori Mr

Colonial education in Zimbabwe was modeled on the bottleneck system where non-White (African) students had limited access to access Higher Education. This was meant to sustain racial discrimination and a two-tier development model. At independence in 1980, the new regime ushered Education for All by subsidizing education in the Tertiary level, bonding students through Grant support systems. The support did not go for long as it was later abandoned post 2000, causing students from disadvantaged poor backgrounds to struggle to access Higher Education. Accordingly, this paper explores possible student tuition support models which are sustainable. The study explores possible ways and strategies to promote education access for students from disadvantaged backgrounds in colleges and universities in Masvingo City. The study adopts an exploratory case study design, using a sample of 60 student participants from three selected institutions. A questionnaire was administered to fifty (50) people, while four (4) participants were interviewed and six (6) others engaged in focus group discussions. The study noted that Government could re-introduce student loans in partnership with banks; Social Welfare Department should support struggling college or University students; students could equally begin off by getting self-funds post high school through Government entities and support systems from other business entities. The study respondents also noted that the introduction of a work for fees programme to disadvantaged students is a sustainable model for student tuition support. To ensure sustainability, it was envisaged that there be financial discipline and monitoring of tuition support schemes, alongside massive investments in these projects.

Keywords: equity; inclusiveness; Higher Education; access; student support  
“Investigating Academic Perspectives on Student Evaluation Response Rates: Insights from the School of Engineering

Nishani Harinarain Prof Thiruvani Moodley

Student evaluations of teaching are critical for assessing instructional

effectiveness and informing pedagogical improvements. However, persistently low response rates undermine their validity and impact. This study adopts a two-phase approach to examine response rate trends and explore academic perspectives on student evaluations within the School of Engineering.

The first phase involves a quantitative analysis of three years of evaluation data (2022–2024) to identify patterns and trends in student participation. The second phase employs a qualitative inquiry through semi-structured interviews with eighteen purposively selected academics to investigate the factors influencing their engagement with the evaluation process. A mixed-methods methodology is employed, integrating descriptive statistical analysis of the quantitative data and thematic analysis of qualitative findings to capture emerging patterns and insights.

Preliminary findings from the quantitative analysis are expected to reveal variations in response rates across departments, while qualitative data will provide deeper insights into barriers to academic engagement with evaluations.

Based on the findings, this paper would recommend strategies to increase engagement, including clearer communication on how evaluations inform teaching improvements, providing training for academics on encouraging student participation, and integrating evaluations seamlessly into the learning management system. These interventions aim to promote a culture of feedback, enhance response rates, and ensure that evaluations contribute meaningfully to teaching quality.

Keywords: evaluation, response rates, resistance, student engagement.”

“A Teacher Educator’s Experience in Enhancing Teaching and Learning through Digital Literacy in a BEd Undergraduate Classroom

Omar Esau Dr

This paper explores the research journey of a teacher-educator’s attempts to enhance online teaching and learning in a Bachelor of Education (BEd) undergraduate programme. The rapid digitalisation of education presented both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the post-pandemic era. In response to these shifts, Stellenbosch University (SU) adopted a differentiated teaching and learning model known as ARTLA (Augmented Remote Teaching, Learning, and Assessment), which integrates contact sessions for smaller student groups with online learning components to ensure flexibility across diverse academic contexts.

Against this backdrop, I conducted an action research study to develop my digital literacy and online teaching competencies, aiming to improve pedagogical practices in my BEd classroom. Grounded in a critical emancipatory research framework, this qualitative study investigates how a teacher-educator engaged with digital knowledge to enhance teaching and learning during COVID-19 and beyond within the BEd programme at Stellenbosch University.

The main research question guiding this study is: “How did I, as a teacher-educator, set out to improve my digital and online teaching skills during and after COVID-19?” The study aims to investigate and understand the experiences and challenges of teaching and learning in a digital age, with the objective of enhancing pedagogical practices.

Data collection methods included field notes, questionnaires, interviews, and a focus group session. Findings indicate that online teaching fosters active and engaged learning among students. However, several challenges emerged, including technological barriers, unequal access to digital resources, and the impact of South Africa's load-shedding crisis. Despite these obstacles, the action research project generated a positive impact on teaching and learning within the selected module. This process remains ongoing, emphasising the need for continuous collaboration between educators and students to improve digital teaching and learning practices.

**Keywords:** Digital literacy in higher education, Teacher- Educator, Online teaching and learning, BEd undergraduate classroom, Post COVID-19 “Factors that Facilitate and Hinder Continuous Quality Improvement in Higher Education Institutions in South Africa

Ms Sibabalwe Kela , Ms Nosiphiwo Nkonki, Ms Fundiswa Shwababa  
South African higher education has a solid foundation for quality assurance through internal and external mechanisms. Nonetheless, the sector's rapid evolution requires a more sophisticated approach to ensure coherence with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), emphasising inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning. This study adopts a comprehensive literature review to explore the factors that promote and obstruct continuous quality improvement in higher education institutions in South Africa. Thematic analysis was utilised to uncover recurring themes and patterns within the literature, offering a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics that impact quality enhancement in

higher education. The results indicate that strong institutional leadership, effective quality assurance frameworks, technological advancements, faculty development programs, and sufficient financial backing are essential for improving quality. Nonetheless, financial constraints, inconsistent policy implementation, stakeholder resistance to change, socioeconomic disparities, and limited research output present considerable hindrances to advancement. This study concludes that consistent quality enhancement necessitates a cohesive strategy emphasising governance, innovation, and inclusivity. To tackle these challenges, the study recommends bolstering institutional governance, improving quality assurance mechanisms, augmenting investment in digital transformation, obtaining additional financial resources, and advocating for inclusive education strategies. This study provides relevant insights for decision-makers, institutional heads, and educators to improve governance, equity, and sustainable growth in South African higher education. This will create a framework for quality improvement, innovation, and competitiveness in higher education while aligning with global and national development agendas.

**KEYWORDS:** Quality Improvement, Higher Education Institutions, Quality Assurance, Quality Education, South Africa”

“Mitigating the Writing Transition Gap from Secondary School to Higher Learning Institutions: Strategies and Innovations

Aluncedo Zikhali Ms Sibabalwe Kela Matjhupe Tshidiso Muroa Rutendo Nesta Mutukwa

The transition from secondary to higher education poses significant challenges for first-year students, particularly in academic writing. The “writing transition gap,” characterised by disparities in writing proficiency and expectations between secondary and tertiary education, remains a key barrier to student success. To address this issue, many institutions, including Walter Sisulu University (WSU), have established Writing Centres to support students in navigating academic discourse. However, the effectiveness of these centres in mitigating the writing transition gap remains underexplored. This study examines the role of the Writing Centre in addressing first-year students’ writing challenges at WSU. Using a qualitative research approach, data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires with open-ended questions from second-year students who had utilised the Writing Centre during their first year in 2023. Convenience and snowball sampling ensured representation across

diverse academic backgrounds. Thematic analysis of the data revealed that students struggled with academic writing conventions, structuring essays, and engaging critically with sources. Findings indicated that the Writing Centre played a crucial role in improving students' writing skills through personalised feedback, workshops, and peer consultations. However, challenges related to accessibility and awareness were identified. This study concludes that Writing Centres are instrumental in bridging the writing transition gap. It recommends expanding outreach efforts, integrating structured writing workshops into first-year curricula, and enhancing collaboration between Writing Centre staff and faculty. This study contributes practical insights into enhancing writing support mechanisms. Scientifically, it provides evidence-based recommendations for institutional policies aimed at improving writing proficiency and academic success in higher education.

Writing transition gap, Academic writing, Writing centre support, Higher education, First-year student success”

“Bridging the Gap: A Scoping Review of Peer-to-Peer Facilitation in Higher Education

Simbongile Ntwasa and Mr Miss Johara Khan; Dr Anthea HM Jacobs

As higher education in South Africa continues to expand access and embrace increasingly diverse student cohorts, the need for inclusive, impactful teaching and learning strategies has never been more urgent. This study aimed to investigate how systematically embedding peer-to-peer (P2P) facilitation of learning in module design can narrow disparities in student success and promote greater inclusivity and resilience in massified higher education contexts. Drawing on a scoping review grounded in Arksey and O'Malley's framework, this study analyzes existing literature on P2P facilitation of learning approaches.

Key findings highlight that integrating P2P facilitation of learning from the outset of module planning—including clear learning outcomes for facilitators, structured activities that promote reciprocal engagement, and ongoing support—can better align student capabilities with disciplinary demands. Moreover, providing formalized training for P2P facilitators ensures coherence with module objectives, reduces the risk of misinformation, and strengthens the quality of academic support. By foregrounding active learning and inclusive design principles, P2P facilitation of learning can serve as a conduit for “connecting minds

and bridging gaps,” particularly for students who may otherwise feel marginalized by traditional lecture-based instruction.

In sharing these insights, this presentation invites South African higher education academics, practitioners and policymakers to reimagine module design so that P2P facilitation is not a peripheral add-on but a central pillar of teaching, learning, and assessment—thereby positioning students as co-creators of knowledge and key drivers of their own academic journeys. Peer-to-Peer Facilitation of Learning

Design for learning

Student Success

Massified Higher Education

Teaching, learning, and assessment”

Addressing the supervision capacity crisis in South African higher education institutions through the adoption and incorporation of artificial intelligence Sabelo Velenkosini Msweli Mr It has become a norm in many institutions of higher learning in a South African context to reject prospective postgraduate students due to the lack of supervision capacity. Despite that, some students meet the minimum requirements for the intended qualification they want to enroll in. Similarly, I am one of those applicants who was once denied pursuing a postgraduate qualification because the university I applied to could not accommodate me since no one was going to supervise me. However, as this study acknowledges, many supervisors employed by the higher education sector are intradisciplinary researchers, whilst some belong to the interdisciplinary family. However, even to date, the supervision capacity remains unresolved in South Africa’s tertiary sector. The institutions of higher learning should rethink their approach to adopting artificial intelligence to supervise students. By doing so, many students will be admitted to the programs of their choice without any obstacle, such as the shortage of a supervisor, and it will increase the research outputs as many researchers will explore different topics without the limitation of conducting research that only complements interests of the researchers’ supervisors that the institutions employ. This study is centered on a qualitative inquiry, solely dependent on secondary data gathered through official documents extracted from various educational institutions. The recommendations that were made in this study include the hiring of academic staff that possess diverse skills and knowledge in numerous fields. Another recommendation includes

using an artificial intelligence supervision model to supervise students.

Keywords: artificial intelligence; supervision; higher education; South Africa and students

“Building Graduate Attributes Through Project-Based Learning: A Case Study in Higher Education

Antje Hargarter Dr Bhavisha Jaga

In today's rapidly evolving world of work, competencies and skills are increasingly valued over static knowledge, which is readily accessible and quickly becomes outdated. As a result, higher education institutions must adapt their teaching philosophies to better prepare graduates for professional environments. Project-based learning, as a form of work-integrated learning, offers a dynamic approach to developing essential graduate attributes, equipping students with problem-solving abilities, critical thinking, and teamwork skills. However, for such initiatives to be effective, institutions must identify and understand the key factors that drive success in project-based learning.

This research employs a case study approach, examining the teaching and learning philosophies used in a private higher education institution's third-year module as part of a Bachelor of Commerce in Project Management. The study explores how real-world projects, as opposed to simulated ones, impact student engagement and learning outcomes. Additionally, it assesses the role of formal mentoring, group collaboration, and industry involvement in fostering meaningful educational experiences. The findings are expected to highlight the significance of these elements in ensuring the success of project-based learning initiatives within higher education. In particular, the study investigates how project complexity, student collaboration, and assessment strategies influence attribute and competency acquisition and retention. Insights gained will contribute to refining pedagogical strategies and enhancing graduate employability outcomes.

Keywords: Project-based learning, Work-integrated learning, Project management, Graduate attributes, Competencies”

“Evaluation of blended learning in higher education: a case of an institution of higher learning in Limpopo province

Tinayeshe Shumba Shumba Dr Tiisetso Mogane; Roland Mbeba

Abstract

Blended learning has gained widespread research attention and has



been found to have a significant impact on tertiary education. It has been widely adopted to improve learner experience by providing flexible options by combining both face-to-face and online learning. Technology has significantly contributed to the growth and direction taken into blended learning. There is increased emphasis on the use of technology in blending learning tools to balance the expectations of learners. The study sought an in-depth understanding of the student perception of blended learning, by adapting a qualitative research design, informed by the interpretivism paradigm. An open-ended interview questionnaire was used to collect data. The data was analysed using thematic analysis. The study established that effective learning takes place during online and offline sessions. The learners noted that blended learning expands their knowledge, enhances the learning experience and allows for growth. The effectiveness of the learning management system contributed to the success of blended learning, as it facilitates feedback from lecturers. The lack the technological gadgets to use for online interaction, connectivity issues, and lack of computer skills, inevitably affect the blended learning experience. The study recommends that learners must be oriented adequately. lecturers must be equipped with the desired skills which enable them to engage with learners both online and during contact classes. Lecturers' computer literacy skills and competencies must be improved through further training.

**Keywords:** Blended learning, learning management system, learning experience, interpretivism; interpretivist paradigm”

**“Integrating the ACRL Framework for Information Literacy into Higher Education Curricula: A Scoping Review**

**Refilwe Phala Ms**

This scoping review explores the integration of Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Information Literacy (IL) in higher education. It identifies strategies for embedding ACRL in university curriculum and courses, examining faculty-librarian collaboration models. The review investigates curriculum mapping and assessment approaches to ensure comprehensive IL instruction and addresses barriers to IL integration, providing insights into institutional challenges. Additionally, it explores the role of emerging technologies in enhancing IL instruction, highlighting innovative tools and practices.

The study will use a systematic methodology to map existing literature on ACRL-based IL integration, identifying research gaps and understanding the topic's breadth. A comprehensive literature search will be conducted using databases such as LISTA, ERIC, Google Scholar, and SciSpace, with a specific search strategy. Inclusion and exclusion criteria will ensure the quality and relevance of the literature considered. Key data points related to IL integration will be extracted and analyzed using the PRISMA protocol and diagram for transparency and replicability. Zotero will be used for reference management, and Covidence for screening, followed by a synthesis of findings to draw conclusions about the current state of ACRL-based IL integration and its implications for higher education.

Keywords: Information Literacy, ACRL Framework, Higher Education, Faculty-Librarian Collaboration, Curriculum Integration, Digital Literacy, AI in Information Literacy”

“Integration of UN Sustainable Development Goals at tertiary institution of higher education in the Global South

Tinayeshe Shumba Dr Edmont Pasipamire

Abstract

Sustainable development, as outlined in the 2030 Agenda, emphasizes the need to balance social, economic, and environmental aspects for a fairer, healthier, and more equitable global society. While higher education institutions contribute significantly to the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) through their research, education, knowledge dissemination, campus operations, partnerships, and advocacy efforts, playing a vital role in advancing global sustainability and societal well-being there remains ambiguity regarding the extent of engagement in the tertiary institution of higher learning (TIHL). The tertiary institutions of higher learning in the Global South are characterized by a lack of integration of the SDGs into their academic projects, hindering progress towards sustainable development in the region. This gap limits the potential impact TIHLs have on addressing pressing global challenges and undermines efforts to promote sustainability within the education sector. Despite the significance of sustainability goals, there is a notable scarcity of research demonstrating how PHEI integrate the UN SDGs into their strategic plans. The study aims to explore how TIHL incorporates UN SDGs into its practices and informs the academic programmes. An interpretivism paradigm will be employed and in-depth interviews will be

conducted with multiple stakeholders within the TIHL who will provide valuable information. Thematic analysis will be used to analyse the data.

**Keywords:** Education, Global South, Higher Education, Sustainable Development Goals.

“Effects of supervisor personality traits as predictors of research output at post graduate level

Tinayeshe Shumba Dr

**Abstract:**

There is a confluence of factors attributable to the supervisor-student relationship in the research journey, yet there is a paucity of scholarly work focusing on this aspect. The complexity of supervisor-student relationship affects research output and delayed completion rate by postgraduate students and this is a cause of concern and worth investigating. Academic supervision requires both human and technical skills to ensure completion in record time. The study investigates the impact of supervisor personality traits on research completion in higher education institutions. The results showed that three personality traits are predictors of research completion whilst two personality traits, i.e., openness and neuroticism are not significant in predicting research completion at institutions of higher learning. The institutions of higher learning must set deadlines for each chapter of the research study as this accounts for consistent behaviour in research completion. There is a need to establish social integration platforms like research symposiums where postgraduate students present their work to peers, lecturers, industry leaders and other experts to get insights that motivate them to complete groundbreaking research projects thereby addressing real problems faced by the industry and society.

**Keywords:** Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Neuroticism, Openness, Personality Traits.

“Strategies to a Successful Academic Career at Wits: An Early Career Roadmap – From Novice Academician to Established Scholar

Cathrine Malau Dr, Dr. Sibongile Zwane, Dr. Tshidi Lelaka, Dr. Ramesh Pandian, Dr. Aldo Siteo

**ABSTRACT:** Early-career academics at the University of the Witwatersrand

(Wits hereafter) face diverse challenges as they navigate their professional development. This study aims to create a comprehensive roadmap to support their success by addressing institutional expectations, leveraging mentorship and collaboration, cultivating academic identity, and balancing professional and personal well-being. It explores strategies for meeting requirements in teaching, research, and academic citizenship while highlighting the role of mentorship and interdisciplinary collaboration in career progression.

Using a mixed-method approach, the research combines surveys and semi-structured interviews to gather data from established academics at Wits. Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS, while qualitative insights will undergo thematic analysis. The quantitative study will target academic staff from five Wits schools, with a sample of 163 from a population of 280, calculated using the Raosoft sample size calculator. For the qualitative approach, 10–20 senior academics will be interviewed using non-probability sampling, with final numbers determined by data saturation. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained, and ethics clearance has been obtained. Confidentiality and anonymity will be maintained throughout the research project. Ethics clearance has been obtained.

The findings are expected to reveal a lack of clarity in institutional expectations and the need for transparent guidelines. Mentorship is anticipated to emerge as vital in reducing isolation and guiding early-career academics, while interdisciplinary collaboration is likely to encourage innovation and professional growth. Strategies for aligning research interests with institutional priorities to build a strong academic identity will also be identified.

The study seeks to empower early-career academics with actionable recommendations to navigate academia, achieve career milestones, and maintain well-being, contributing to a supportive and thriving academic environment at Wits. Work-life balance can be promoted through time management training, flexible workload planning, and mental health resources.

**Keywords:** Early career academics, professional development, career progression, mentorship, academic identity.”

Pre-service Teachers' Attitude towards Teacher-made YouTube Videos at Post-COVID 19 Era in a Federal University in Nigeria

Israel Abayomi OLASUNKANMI OLASUNKANMI Dr

**ABSTRACT:** Teaching and learning at all levels of education have experienced more innovative strategies in place of teacher-centered methods of instruction employed covid-19 era. Stakeholders' rethinking of higher education, especially, focuses on leveraging trending technologies that students could relate to to enhance classroom instruction and improve learning outcomes. Therefore, this study investigated undergraduate pre-service teachers' attitude towards teacher-made YouTube videos used to support a large class course, concerning gender, age, level of study, teaching subject, and area of discipline. The study adopted a survey method with 472 participants from 8 departments in the Faculty of Education of a federal University in Nigeria. Data collected using Pre-service Teachers' Attitude to YouTube Videos Questionnaire (PTAYVQ) were analyzed using percentages, means, and ANCOVA. Findings showed that participants have a positive disposition towards the innovation, and there was no significant difference between male and female counterparts. The study concluded that lecturers should adopt the strategy, and recommended that institutions should provide adequate training and technical support for lecturers to produce and effectively use videos deployed on YouTube for instructions.

Emergency Remote Teaching, YouTube Videos, Higher education, COVID-19, Pre-service Teachers.

Exploring the effectiveness of Recognition of Prior Learning for access to postgraduate qualifications in an ODeL university in South Africa

Dr MJ Hadji, MR Legodi, S Mamadisa, GT Marebane & E Nkhwashu Dr,

**ABSTRACT:** This paper focuses on evaluating the effectiveness of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process for students admitted to Master's and Doctoral programs at an Open Distance e-Learning (ODeL) university in South Africa through RPL. RPL compares a learner's previous experiences and learning against the required outcomes for a qualification and determines if they meet those requirements for admission. It can lead to more inclusive and flexible educational opportunities. The research aims to assess how RPL candidates perceive the process and its role in preparing them for postgraduate studies within the ODeL framework. This study will adopt a constructive approach, which recognizes the learner's prior knowledge and experiences. It emphasizes the active role of the learner in constructing meaning from these experiences. The study

will gather data through a web-based survey targeting students who entered their Master's or Doctoral programs via RPL between 2017 and 2021. The goal is to improve the RPL process based on insights from this survey to enhance student success in completing their studies.

Keywords: Learner support, lifelong learning, student success, alternative pathway, social justice

"Where are South African universities with the transformation agenda in 2025?

Asimise Zulu Ms

**ABSTRACT:** Along with discussions of redressing societal past imbalances inherited from the colonial and apartheid regimes, South African universities continue to grapple with transformation. The stipulations stress a need of changing universities from past regimes' practices to a more democratic dispensation where the injustices of the past are being redressed. The apartheid regime was almost a reflection of a similar way of understanding society from a White's privilege perspective, through which South African universities also implicated some of the globalisation's understanding. These, were especially the universities privileged along the Whites' race which had embodied the notion of globalisation in the core of those 'Whites' Only Institutions.' That embodiment can be witnessed in curricula, while the previously disadvantaged universities, although they have it, but they are subsidiary because of inequitable resources. So, South African society still finds itself in that socio-economic disparity, hence transformation even in universities is trying to balance such issues. Beyond a need to address a quest for global recognition universities, along with other counterparts, South African universities are yet to fully embrace necessary transformation, which is also embedded in curriculum transformation. In this article, three things can be read. First, is an exploration of the South African universities' transformation processes. Second a Ricer-inspired approach to interpret how the nature of universities texts are crafted to underpin anticipated form of transformation along with the country's policy on the matter. Third, the paper presents transformation and transformative curriculum which could be practised to position underprivileged discourses of the South.

Keywords: Transformation; Universities, Disparities; Inequity; Transformative curriculum; Higher education institutions"

A Pedagogical Stylistic Evaluation of Creative Writing Studies in the

Department of Communication and Languages at NUST

Sonio Haitangomwene Kalimbo Mr Haileleul Zeleke Woldemariam

**ABSTRACT:** This study was driven by the critical need for creative writing skills through creative writing studies. It has been observed that the current literature teaching methods do not contribute to the enhancement of students' creative writing skills. A mixed research approach following a concurrent triangulation mixed method design through a pragmatic paradigm was employed in this research. A questionnaire was utilised to collect data from twenty-three (23) English third-year students and two (2) undergraduate literature course facilitators. Furthermore, a classroom checklist, students' tests, and a review of the current literature syllabus were also used as part of the data collection tools. The collected data were analysed in line with the study objectives following a thematic analysis method. The key findings of the study specified the significant role of pedagogical stylistic approaches towards the enhancement of students' creative writing skills through literature studies. Creative writing skills enhance students' abilities to develop character, enrich their vocabulary, and understand language context. It also enhances students' second language acquisition. The results suggested that challenges such as poor literature teaching methods, failure to use technology for creative writing, and being a creative writing beginner are impeding students from enhancing their creative writing skills through literature studies. The study further shed light on several linguistic strategies that could be implemented in order to enhance students' creative writing skills, namely using technology for creative writing, introducing creative writing courses, reviewing and updating the current curriculum, as well as teaching literature with specific goals contributing towards language learning.

**Keywords:** Stylistics, literature, pedagogy, creative writing, pedagogical stylistics, and applied linguistics

**Adoption of AI, big data, and analytics in Higher Education: A bibliometric and systematic analysis**

Nicky Tjano Dr and Mrs Mmakgantse Mmerekhi

**ABSTRACT:** The rapid advancement of technology has transformed various sectors, including education. In recent years, Artificial Intelligence (AI), big data, and analytics adoption in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have emerged as a crucial factor in providing a number of

benefits. From enhanced student support services, personalised learning experiences, and data-driven insights to administrative efficiency among the few. With the increasing volume of data generated by students' interactions, academic performance, and behavioural patterns, there is a pressing need to harness these technologies towards tailored support to teaching and learning. Notwithstanding these developments, the current state of knowledge on the adoption of AI technologies in education settings from African HEIs remains scant. Following bibliometric and systematic analysis, the objective of this paper is two-fold – first, to map the evolution of the field, trends and patterns in adopting AI, big data, and analytics in enhancing student support services within African HEIs. Secondly, from the mapping exercise, the aim is to identify key challenges and opportunities associated with the adoption. The findings will provide insights into the current state of research on AI, big data, and analytics adoption, identify gaps in the literature, and propose a structured approach for AI integration in education. This research is expected to contribute to the body of knowledge by offering a comprehensive accord of how advancements in AI can be leveraged to enhance educational practices in the African context.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, bibliometric analysis, big data, enhanced learning, personalised learning, higher education institutions, systematic literature review

**“Teaching and Learning for What in Africa? Afrocentric meditations**

Lehasa Moloi Dr

**ABSTRACT:** The past 500yrs since the rise of modern Europe in 1492 has re-shaped the history of the world in service of the interests of modern Europeans. The colonialists used colonial education as a tool of control to unleash what Ngugi WA Thing'o labeled as the “cultural bomb”. This bomb has dislocated African people from the knowledge of themselves and has instead turned them against themselves as the imps and imitators of their colonial oppressors. In the light of this historical brokenness the critical question remains: How do we rethink the role of education in our societies in Africa for Africa's liberation? What are the practical implications of decolonizing knowledge and where do we need to start?

I will subdivide my reflections into the following sections: Firstly, I will provide a critical reflection on modern colonial/neocolonial education



system and its political agenda.

Secondly, I will share my reflections on the significance of the Afrocentric paradigms in decolonizing teaching and learning in Africa.

Lastly, I will reflect on how do we practicalize the advancement of our own agency through education for our freedom?

Keywords: Colonization, Eurocentrism, Culture , Domination Coloniality”  
The Role of Simulation-Based Education in Open Distance and E-learning (ODEL)

Tebogo MALOBA Ms and Dr. Malebo Matlala

Technology-enhanced learning primarily relates to the use of computer-based technology such as smartphones and other smart gadgets to enhance learning. It includes computer-based learning and assessments, virtual learning, collaborative learning, and open e-learning, as well as simulation-based learning. Simulation based learning is an emerging approach within TEL aimed at improving student engagement and retention. Despite extensive research on technology enhanced learning and its impact on student retention, there is a notable gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) initiatives, focusing on simulation-based teaching and learning initiatives, particularly in Open Distance and e-learning (ODEL) institutions. Access to higher education is often hindered by financial constraint, making traditional campus-based learning unattainable for many South Africans. ODeL institutions close the gap by offering comprehensive qualifications that are financially accessible. Simulation tools can provide immersive, interactive learning experiences that bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical applications, making them especially valuable for open-distance and e-learning students. This study provides in-depth insights into how simulation tools can be integrated into the curriculum to foster active learning, enhance student engagement, and reduce attrition rates. Moreover, by integrating findings from studies conducted across the globe, this paper seeks to highlight the potential of simulation-based education to create sustainable educational practices in remote learning environments.

Keywords: Attrition, Higher Education, e-Learning, Retention, Simulations, Technology Enhanced Learning

“Transforming Higher Education through Community-Centred and Service Learning

Leon Roets Mr and Prof Karen Biraimah

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores the transformation of universities into engaged organizations through community-centred and service learning. By shifting from an academic-content centric focus to active community engagement, universities can foster meaningful partnerships and social impact. This strategic alignment of higher education's role and positioning in communities, workplaces and societies also emphasizes the importance of integrating community engagement into all university operations and strategies. This approach promotes active citizenship, social responsibility, and critical thinking among staff, students, and communities. It also links the curriculum to real-life experiences, incorporating indigenous knowledge and lived experiences. Service learning enables students to apply their discipline knowledge and social skills with learning- and assessment-guided activities while gaining practical experience and personal development. The integration of these elements into the curriculum supports student-centred and transformative learning, creating a collaborative and transformative learning environment between community, student, and the university. The Model of Community Inquiry illustrates how reflective teaching, learning, and impactful learning can be achieved through meaningful relationships between communities and universities through community-centred and service learning. Ultimately, this approach enhances the social, cognitive, and teaching experience, addressing community needs and fostering sustainable positive social impacts. The paper is also based on a collaborative project between the Directorate of Curriculum Development and Transformation and the University of Central Florida under a Fullbright Fellowship, and shares some of the project's key findings to illustrate the need for the integration of community-centred and service learning into all curricula.

**Keywords:** Community-centred and service learning, real life learning, curriculum transformation, employability, equity, wellbeing"

**Navigating the Digital Divide: Rural students' Perceptions and Preparedness for Online Learning**

Motlokwe Thobejane Dr Dr Eva Makwakwa

**ABSTRACT:** The shift to online learning has transformed the educational landscape, but rural students' experiences and perceptions of online learning remain understudied. This systematic literature review aims to synthesize the existing research on rural students' perceptions of online

learning, using the PESTEL and TPCK frameworks to identify the key factors influencing their experiences and outcomes. A comprehensive search of major databases and journals yielded 60 studies that met the inclusion criteria. The findings highlight the complex interplay of external factors (PESTEL) and teacher knowledge and practices (TPCK) in shaping rural students' perceptions of online learning. The review identifies patterns, themes, and gaps in the literature, including policy gaps and inadequacies, digital divide due to cost; perceptions and attitudes; infrastructure deficiencies and teacher and student technical skills. The study further provides recommendations for improving rural students' experiences and outcomes in online learning environments including policies to support digital tools, improve students' digital literacy, improve infrastructure, Address technical challenges among others. The study's findings have implications for practice, policy, and future research in online learning, particularly in rural contexts.

Keywords: online teaching, higher education, perceptions, rural, political, economic, social, environmental, technology

Exploring the Usability, Accessibility and Effectiveness of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in Enhancing Self Directed Learning in Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) Environments

Ntombikayise Nkosi Dr Professor Mncedisi Christian Maphalala

**ABSTRACT:** The study examines the usability, accessibility, and effectiveness of Learning Management Systems (LMS) in promoting self-directed learning within Open Distance and e-Learning (ODEL) environments. It employs a systematic literature review (SLR) following PRISMA protocols. The analysis focuses on peer-reviewed empirical research published from 2014 to 2024 and identifies key themes such as LMS design, learner engagement, technological accessibility, and the support mechanisms for self-directed learning. The findings indicate that while LMS platforms can enhance learner autonomy and flexibility, challenges persist regarding accessibility for diverse learner populations, especially in under-resourced regions. Furthermore, the usability of LMS platforms significantly affects the success of self-directed learning; user-friendly interfaces and integrated support systems are crucial for achieving positive learning outcomes. Integrating self-determination theory and constructivist learning frameworks, the study highlights the need to align LMS functionalities with learners' needs to foster autonomy, competence,

and relatedness. The recommendations advocate for the development of more inclusive, accessible, and user-centric LMS designs and targeted training programs to equip learners with the skills necessary for effective self-directed learning in ODeL environments.

Keywords: social justice, online pedagogy, higher education, transformative education, inclusive learning, digital equity

“The Voice of the African Postgraduate Student in addressing Fear of Research for Sustainable Development: A Wellness Perspective

Theresa Lydia Badiktsie Manzini Dr

**ABSTRACT:** At the postgraduate level, the student experiences challenges of fear of research for sustainable development and enhanced wellness. This study seeks to understand the voice of the postgraduate student in addressing the fear of research at a postgraduate level to pursue lifelong learning in a higher education.

The theoretical framework for the study integrates Hettler's (1980) wellness model and Ubuntu African philosophy (Mbiti, 1992). The research is embedded in an interpretive paradigm, using a qualitative design and narrative approach because the participants told their stories about the fear of research and how to overcome them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Purposive sampling was used since I knew the participants (Henning, van Rensburg & Smit, 2004). Three participants who study at the Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) higher education were sampled.

Ethical measures were observed, participants were informed and permission was obtained to capture interview data in the tape recorder. Participants signed consent forms and were assured confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Data was collected through interviews, for 30 to 40 minutes at their homes to allow the participants to narrate their stories in their natural setting.

Data analysis indicated that the three participants experienced fear in their research journey. Findings reveal that building resilience is of utmost importance in addressing the fear of research. Recommends that the higher education institution can engage postgraduate students in regular training and workshops, to develop social, emotional and intellectual wellness for sustainable development and lifelong learning.

Keywords: postgraduate student, research fear, intellectual, emotional

wellness; sustainable development”

### “Bridging the Gap between the Academic Lecturer and Student Support: Insights from the University of South Africa

Bernadine Benson Prof and Adv Nandipha Ntsaluba; Ms Rirhandzu Hlungwane

**ABSTRACT:** Higher Education (HE), as a primary role player in the global pursuit of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), has been severely impacted by COVID pandemic, which necessitated the transition to a fully-fledged online format. At the University of South Africa (Unisa), the transition process was challenging despite being simplified with the availability of an electronic Learning Management System (LMS). This paper presents findings from a study conducted in 2022 at Unisa, whose aim was to reflect on the extent of readiness for, and effects of Remote Working (RW) on the Academic Lecturer (AL). The qualitative data highlights the significant impact of the transition on the AL. The demands of online teaching resulted in the blurring of boundaries between work and personal life, impacting work-life balance and mental well-being. Some effects experienced include feelings of isolation, frustration, workload challenges, and increased stress levels.

In 2011, Subtozky and Prinsloo designed the Socio-Critical Model to explain, predict, and enhance student success. This model situates the Academic Lecturer (AL) as the Institutional Agent (IA), co-responsible for the student’s success. The paper contributes to the broader discourse on the advancement of teaching and learning in the CODEL environment by highlighting and analysing the challenges and implications of the transition to RW using the Model mentioned earlier. Bridging the gap between policy promises of student-centered tuition and student support may only be realised by acknowledging the importance of an enabled and empowered Academic Lecturer.

**Keywords:** Digital Literacy; Higher Education; Mental Health; Remote Working; Work-life balance; United Nations Sustainable Development Goals”

### “Evaluating Trends in Student Satisfaction with Online Tutoring Services in Open Distance eLearning (ODEL)

Salome Mamadisa Ms; Ms Mudanagundo Victoria Rakgase

**ABSTRACT:** The study focuses on online tutoring services in Open Distance eLearning (ODEL) as an integral component of ensuring

quality in teaching and learning. Understanding student feedback allows institutions to identify areas for improvement and ensure that the support provided enhances the learning experience. The study aims to analyse student feedback on e-tutor satisfaction in an ODeL institution to identify key trends, challenges, and areas for improvement in online tutoring services as part of quality assurance measures. The study will follow a quantitative research approach through an online evaluation questionnaire. The study targeted the University of South Africa's students from the College of Economic and Management Sciences and the College of Science, Engineering, and Technology who were linked to e-tutors for the period 2021 - 2024. The goal is to determine whether e-tutors provided students with effective teaching and learning support and identify areas of improvement and intervention strategies for the overall quality of online tutoring support.

**Keywords:** Online Tutoring, Open Distance eLearning (ODeL), Student Satisfaction, Student Support, Quality Assurance in High Education, Teaching and Learning Support

“Internal quality assurance practices in public higher education institutions in Botswana

Marien Alet Graham Prof, Mr Tefo M. Phiri, Prof C Combrinck

**ABSTRACT:** The purpose of the study is to investigate how effective the institutional quality assurance structures are in autonomous public institutions in Botswana and how the quality assurance structures carry out the quality assurance activities within the institutions. An interpretive paradigm and a qualitative research approach were used to understand the participants' perceptions of the phenomenon. A multiple case study research design was carried out in three institutions to gather in-depth, rich data, and the data were compared amongst the institutions. The target population was autonomous public institutions; a total of five members participated from each institution. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews using semi-structured questions and through the review of institutional documents. The main findings revealed that although quality assurance structures were in place, they needed to be enhanced in several areas to make them more effective. Areas for enhancement included the need for a culture of quality assurance and awareness of quality assurance, which should be supported by management. The study

contributes knowledge in the field of quality assurance in higher education and provides recommendations to improve practice and inform policy in the Botswana higher education sector.

Keywords: Botswana, higher education institutions, quality assurance, quality assurance structures, regulatory bodies”

**“THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE COLONIALITY STAYS THE SAME: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF AI, EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION, IN SOUTH AFRICAN LEGAL EDUCATION.**

Thabang Monyela Ms

**ABSTRACT:** While progress and evolution are necessary and unavoidable, an evolution that outpaces governance may prove detrimental. The emergence of terms such as “AI Hallucinations” compel that academic integrity be protected, and with significant urgency. The University of South Africa (UNISA), as the largest institution in Southern Africa, leading in open, distance, and e-learning education, bears an innate obligation, to facilitate the discourse and, more importantly, training on the development and use AI tools in education, in a manner that does not seek to disintegrate the progress made in the decolonisation and “ubuntu-fication” of knowledge or curriculum.

This paper will analyse how the existing AI tools, developed on prescripts predominantly originating from the “Global North” perpetuate an epistemic disconnect through, inter alia the deliberate or systemic fabrication of legal precedent based on ‘analysed trends’ and which undermine of South African legal systems, despite an existing need to advance decoloniality and Afrikanisation in teaching and learning in South African legal education. A desktop analysis of the existing legal and curriculum transformation frameworks in conjunction with AI tools and its “responsiveness,” exposing practical examples of AI failures support the expedient need for further AI governance and highlight its negative impact on legal education. This paper contributes to addressing pedagogical gaps by considering the prospects of AI training models that support Afrikan epistemology and ubuntu and the need for an “ubuntu-centered AI audit”, while further proposing the support and integration of the unavoidable use of AI in legal education.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, legal education, decoloniality, open distance e-learning, AI governance, ubuntu-centered AI.”

## Student Support: Reflections of lecturers teaching first-year student teachers in an ODEL Institution

Nontobeko Khumalo Prof Matshidiso M. Moleko

**ABSTRACT:** The number of students registering for Higher Education continues to grow in South Africa. There are also many programmes implemented in different universities to deal with student support. However, many students still find it challenging to survive, leading to high dropout rates. This is even more pronounced in ODEL institutions, partly because students cannot walk to the lecturer's office and converse face-to-face. The aim was to develop strategies to assist first-year students in the learning and teaching of two compulsory modules offered in the Bachelor of Education Programmes, thus contributing to students' retention. This research was done by using a qualitative, descriptive case study approach. Using Gibbs' reflective cycle, a framework for reflective practice, four researchers reflected on their own experiences of what they did to support the first-year students they were teaching. The data analysis was a combination of an inductive and deductive analysis. The results revealed that the lecturers were able to reflect on their teaching practices directed at assisting students and have a sound theoretical understanding of the basic concepts of reflection in teaching. Furthermore, the lecturers developed strategies to support students and most likely improve student performance and retention in their modules. The use of Gibbs' reflective cycle may help develop effective strategies that can be used to help first-year students succeed.

**Keywords:** First-year students, higher education, student support, strategies, retention, reflection, ODEL

**“Assessing the impact of E-Tutoring program as a support mechanism for students with special educational needs in Open Distance e-Learning Environment**

Thembaliphi Jerome Ntshingila Dr Prof, L. O Makhonza and Dr SE Mbelu

**ABSTRACT:** The educational landscape for students with special educational needs has evolved, necessitating extensive support mechanism, including technical, academic and emotional support. This paper aims to establish a well rounded research on E-tutoring programs tailored to students with special learning needs in ODeL. Specifically, the study assess the impact of support that E-tutoring has on students' learning and explore the current



state and future possibilities of digital learning, including accessibility and equitable quality education for all.

The researcher adopted Simpsons' model of Students Support Services for Success in ODeL as the theoretical benchmark, focusing on eliminating barriers and promoting inclusivity. This study employs qualitative research approach using interpretative phenomenological analysis. A convenient sampling was employed to recruit participants.

Data will be obtained a survey questionnaire administered to both students and ETutor from distance learning institution and analysed using the NVivo data analysis process. This aims to contribute to the development of effective E-tutoring programs that that enhance educational outcomes for students with special needs in ODeL environments.

Keywords: E-tutoring, ODeL, Special Educational Needs, Students, Support mechanisms “

Technological tools in academic writing for English second language undergraduate ODeL students: Challenges and opportunities - A Scoping review

Bernadictus Plaatjies Prof

**ABSTRACT:** This scoping review aims to explore the challenges and opportunities of technological tools in academic writing instruction for English second language undergraduate ODeL- students. The study systematically examines existing literature to identify common obstacles faced by these students, such as language proficiency, cultural differences, and access to resources. Additionally, it evaluates the impact of various technological tools, including grammar checkers, writing software, and online learning platforms, on improving academic writing skills. The review highlights both the benefits and limitations of these tools, providing insights into their role in enhancing writing proficiency and confidence among non-native English speakers. By synthesizing current research, this study offers recommendations for lecturers and policymakers to optimize the use of technological tools in academic writing instruction, ultimately supporting English second language students in achieving academic success.

Keywords: Technological Tools; Academic Writing; English second language; Open Distance e-Learning; Undergraduate students; Scoping Review

The impact of student co-creation on student engagement and active

learning Winnie Wai-Ling CHIU

Dr Dr. Sandy SABAPATHY; Dr Annie KO

**ABSTRACT:** The online learning platform has been widely adopted in global university education, particularly after the outbreak of COVID-19. The issue is how the educator can make good use of the online learning platform to encourage the students to actively learn and co-create course learning materials with peers and educators. The adoption of co-creation in higher education has been emerging and developing, though rare, in tertiary education (Pee 2019; Doyle, Buckley and McCarthy 2021). The research indicates both educators and students can gain the benefit from co-creation practice. The construction of Multiple-Choice Questions (MCQ) designed by the students is considered one of the co-creation activities (Doyle, Buckley and McCarthy 2021). Palmer and Devitt (2006) suggest designing MCQ can be a learning method to stimulate students to learn and understand a topic. Students need to understand the relevant learning material before and during the drafting process of MCQ (Draper 2009; Galloway and Burns 2015). The student engagement in the content generation facilitates deep learning and their comprehension of the learning concept (Draper 2009). This study attempts to examine the degree to which student co-creation in the content generation of MCQ can enhance student active learning, student engagement and student learning experiences by adopting an online learning platform connected to tokenised incentive.

Co-creation; multiple choice questions; student engagement; active learning

“Bridging the teaching and learning gap: Connecting and collaborating with students teachers through the use of Padlet

Valencia Tshinompheni Mabalane Dr –

**ABSTRACT:** For a long time students in distance education and those who were in contact institution but part time, especially those who came from remote areas experienced challenges in accessing education in higher education. Most of them had to depend on notes and other form of learning which sometimes were difficult to understand on their own without explanation. Students had no connection with their lecturers and could not engage and interact with their fellow students and peers resulting in poor results or dropping out of the university. With the advent of technology, especially teaching and learning tool like

Padlet, the gap has been bridged and student teachers regardless of their creed have been afforded the opportunity to access active and life classrooms, interact and engage with the lecturers, fellow students and peers. Students, through the facilitation of the lecturer and other students can actively participate in a life classroom.

Thus the paper looks at extent to which the use of the Padlet as a means to collaboration, accommodating student teachers who are in remote area is viable. The paper also looks at the affordances and disadvantages of Padlet as a teaching tool. The Computer-Supported Collaborative learning (CSCL) served as a lens through which Padlet can be used to bring the classroom life and accommodate all student teachers to enhance collaboration, teaching and learning. This theory has to do with how technology can support teaching and learning in groups of people in this case student-teachers who are located in remote areas. This theoretical framework was used to show how student- teachers from remote areas can collaborative actively from where they are, in sharing and building knowledge together to enable high-level cognitive achievements during WIL. 18 part time Post graduate Certificate History students who live in remote areas were purposely selected. Qualitative research methods and the interpretivist paradigm were used. Thus, content analysis was employed. The findings revealed both positive and negative issues such as affordances, bridging the distance and disadvantages such as affordability, inability to use technology among others.

Keywords: Collaboration, Teaching and learning, technology, Padlet, classroom, student teachers.”

“Bridging Education and Industry: The Role of the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework in Building a Knowledge-Based Economy in South Africa

Nathanael Govender Mr Dr Pinagase Tshephe Abstract

**ABSTRACT:** The Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework represents a transformative shift in South Africa’s occupational education and skills development landscape, particularly in workplace-based learning. Designed to formalise and standardise pathways for occupational progression, the framework establishes a structured pipeline of qualified learners who can seamlessly transition into industry roles while acquiring the 21st-century skills necessary for knowledge-based economic participation. Learning institutions are critical in facilitating this transition

by expanding access to occupational qualifications through flexible learning pathways, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), and technology-enhanced learning. Using a Critical Literature Review methodology, this study synthesises existing research, policy documents, published reports and international best practices to assess the positioning of the framework in building a knowledge-based economy. The study emphasises the role of learning institutions in leveraging digital learning innovations, industry partnerships, and tailored student support mechanisms to bridge the gap between academic preparation and real-world occupational demands. Through occupational and part qualifications for workplace-based learning, the OQSF aligns with global trends in skills development and industry-driven education, making it a crucial tool for lifelong learning. This paper argues that the OQSF, when effectively implemented, is a strategic tool for cultivating the knowledge workers essential for driving knowledge-based economies. The discussion contributes to the broader discourse on international teaching and learning by highlighting how structured occupational education supported by RPL, flexible student engagement strategies, and industry-driven competency development can advance individual career trajectories and national economic growth. Education institutions must ensure that occupational learning translates into sustainable workforce integration and long-term economic resilience by prioritising student support and innovative delivery models in this newer OQSF framework.

**Keywords:** Occupational Qualification Sub-Framework; Occupational Qualifications; Knowledge-Based Economy; Workplace-Based Learning; Occupational Education and Training; RPL”

“The Role of Artificial Intelligence in Enhancing Teaching and Learning

Neil Sukran Mr

**ABSTRACT:** Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the educational landscape by reshaping traditional teaching and learning methodologies. AI is making the personalised learning experience possible. Coupled with automated assessments, intelligent tutoring systems and adaptive curriculum design, AI-driven technologies are enhancing student engagement. These technologies are improving learning outcomes, and optimising educator workloads.

This presentation explores the impact of AI on education, examining both opportunities and challenges. It highlights case studies showcasing

AI-driven innovations in adaptive learning platforms, natural language processing tools, and predictive analytics for student success. Furthermore, we will briefly cover ethical considerations, data privacy, and the evolving role of educators in AI-integrated classrooms will be discussed. By critically analysing the balance between AI automation and human pedagogical expertise, this paper aims to provide actionable insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers.

Attendees will gain a deeper understanding of how AI can be leveraged to create more inclusive, efficient, and effective learning environments while addressing key concerns related to bias, accessibility, and ethical use.

**Keywords:** Artificial Intelligence, Teaching and Learning, Personalised Learning, Automated Assesments, Tutoring Systems, Student Engagement, AI-driven Innovation, Predictive Analytics, AI-Integrated Classrooms, Inclusive Learning Environments.”

“Nexus of cookies and data privacy within CoDeL: The impact Generative AI on balancing access with privacy within CoDeL education provisioning  
Nandipha Ntsaluba Adv; Dr Davy Rammila

**ABSTRACT:** Collection and tracking of personal data without explicit approval have become a privacy concern. To enable such consent for tracking personal information, cookies were developed as click wraps to provided variable access platforms. Cookies have emerged as gate keepers on various platforms. Whilst cookies are designed to provide platform for compliance with Data Privacy laws that require strict compliance with consent as well as informed consent. The Consent Management Platform (CMPs) provide the consent labels which inform the web crawlers to enable specific various consent categories. These requirements flow from international legal instruments the EU Directive on data Privacy,95/46/EC accorded specific powers to the EU Commission that led to the existence of the Working Party that signalled the need for cookies. The strengthening of compliance has resulted in the development of the General Regulation of Data Protection (GDPR) EU Directive 2016/679 of the European Parliament and later the Privacy and Electronic Communication Directive 2002/58/EC9 referred to as EPrivacy Directive. GDPR strengthened the role of the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) in so far as development of Directives to develop norms and standards that relate to management of cookies. Various states have utilised the GDPR to

develop their Privacy law, with the exception of South Africa where POPIA predates GDPR. This is manifesting in the lawful data processing that are seven within the GDPR and all states that utilised GDPR as the base. POPIA has distinctively situated lawful processing in eight principles. The research question that the paper addresses relates to the implications of cookies are on the data privacy requirements. Further, the Paper dissects the implications for CoDeL provisioning. The intrusive nature of generative AI has further created more interest on cookie platforms. The critical question relates to implications for the due diligence process on the Service Provider selection process for provisioning of learning programmes. Lastly the Paper serves as an input to home grown Africa rooted emerging technologies. Driven by global sovereignty imperatives that promote technology sovereignty to enable data sovereignty, the Paper dissects these in relation to the nexus between innovation, data privacy within the cookie discourse within CoDeL programme delivery.

**Keywords:** Learning support material, emerging technologies Cookies, GDPR, Learning Programmes. technology sovereignty Generative AI

**Reflections of Women Aspiring to Become Principals on Their Development After Attending an Advanced Diploma in School Leadership Programme**  
Pinkie Mthembu Dr

**ABSTRACT:** This presentation shares personal reflections on the transformative journey of three women aspiring to school leadership roles after completing an Advanced Diploma in School Leadership. It delves deeper into the experiences, challenges, and personal growth encountered throughout the programme, focusing on key insights gained about effective leadership, developing resilience, and navigating the complex gender dynamics often present in educational settings. Framed by Donald Super's Career Development Model (CDM), these aspiring leaders' reflections highlight the invaluable support systems, meaningful mentorship, and practical leadership skills provided by the programme. The presentation explores in detail how these elements have profoundly shaped the participants' confidence, self-awareness, and overall readiness for principalship (Super, 1990; Super et al., 1996). Super's career development theory offers a useful framework for understanding the career paths of women aspiring to become principals.

This model illuminated the dynamic and evolving nature of participants' professional development throughout their careers as teachers and leaders and the interplay between personal and situational factors. CDM is particularly relevant for women facing unique challenges in educational leadership roles, such as gender-role stereotyping and balancing family responsibilities, which can hinder their career advancement. CDM offers a comprehensive perspective that can assist women in navigating these challenges by acknowledging the significance of blending their personal and professional identities (Coogan & Chen, 2007; Greyvenstein & Westhuizen, 1991; Hong-lie, 2010). Furthermore, the leadership styles of women principals often emphasise collaboration, nurturing, and community building, which align with Super's emphasis on personal growth and self-concept development (Hebert, 2022; Morojele et al., 2013). By applying Super's model, women these aspiring principals better understood and articulated their career paths, leveraging their distinct leadership styles to overcome barriers and succeed in principal roles. These in-depth reflections aim to inspire and inform women pursuing similar leadership development paths, shedding crucial light on the empowering and transformative impact that can result from dedicated school leadership programmes for women aspiring leaders.

Keywords: women leadership, mentoring, aspiring women leaders, Advance Diploma in Leadership for Aspiring women principals

How effective is it? Assessing student support in reducing academic exclusion in Higher education institutions in South Africa

Basetsana Mokwite Ms

**ABSTRACT:** This study assesses the role of student support systems in reducing academic exclusion in higher education institutions in South Africa with a focus on a historically disadvantaged university. Academic exclusion, often as a result of poor performance, socio-economic challenges and lack of institutional support, remains a significant barrier to student success. Drawing on recent data and case studies from students at risk with N+2, this study evaluates the role and impact of various support mechanisms, such as academic advising, financial assistance, mentorship and mental health counselling and peer mentorship programmes on student retention, performance and overall success. Additionally, the review highlights both success and limitation, pointing out areas where student support programmes have effectively reduced academic exclusion.

Primary data is collected through surveys and interviews with students, faculty, and administrators from the University of Venda to understand their experiences with these support initiatives. Institutional data is also analysed to explore the correlation between the use of student support services and academic outcomes. The study anticipates identifying the key support systems that effectively reduce academic exclusion and improve retention. A positive correlation between the use of student support services and improved academic outcomes is expected. The findings will offer recommendations for improving student support and increasing inclusivity. The study aims to contribute to the development of more effective and accessible student support, especially in similar historically disadvantaged institutions of higher learning.

Keywords: Student support initiatives, Academic exclusion , Higher education

Navigating Academic Writing: Postgraduate Students' Experiences with Writing Centre Support at selected UoTs in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa  
Patience Mutsvairigwa Ms Dr. Nereshnee Govender

**ABSTRACT:** Academic writing is a critical skill for postgraduate success, yet many students face significant challenges, particularly in multilingual and diverse contexts such as South Africa. Postgraduate students in Universities of Technology (UoTs) often encounter challenges in mastering academic writing, particularly in structuring arguments, engaging with disciplinary conventions, and meeting institutional expectations. Writing Centers are increasingly recognised as vital resources for developing academic writing skills, but their effectiveness and the specific experiences of postgraduate students in UoTs remain underexplored. This study explores the experiences of postgraduate students with Writing Centre support at selected Universities of Technology (UoTs) in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Using a qualitative, interpretivist approach, this research draws on semi-structured interviews with 10 postgraduate students at the selected UoTs to examine the perceived benefits and challenges of Writing Centre support. Findings suggest that consultations enhance academic confidence, improve writing strategies, and promote independent learning. However, challenges such as limited awareness of services, disciplinary differences, time constraints, and the risk of over-reliance on tutors are also evident. The study highlights the need for tailored interventions that address the unique needs of postgraduate students, particularly in UoTs where



diverse linguistic and academic backgrounds are prevalent, ensuring a balance between guidance and self-sufficiency. These insights contribute to the broader discourse on student academic writing support in higher education, particularly in the South African context and offers practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of Writing Centre in South African UoTs.

**Keywords:** Postgraduate students, academic writing, Writing Centres, Student Support, Universities of Technology

**“Afrikanising Higher Education: Integrating Afrikan Ontology, Afrocentric Philosophies, and Diverse Teaching Styles in a Second-Year Botany Practical Module**

**Pearl Kedibone Tlakula Ms Prof PH duToit**

**ABSTRACT:** The Afrikanisation of higher education requires a deliberate transformation in andragogical processes, particularly in the sciences, where Western epistemologies have long dominated. The study explored how Afrikan ontology, Afrocentric philosophies, and diverse teaching styles were integrated into the Botany II Practical (BOT2604) module at the University of South Africa to promote curriculum transformation, inclusivity, and epistemic justice.

Grounded in Ubuntu (community-centred learning), Ukama (relational ethics), and Sasi (sustainability, ecological responsibility, and customary laws), the research examines how these indigenous knowledge systems were embedded into teaching to create a more inclusive and contextually relevant learning experience. A fusion of educational theories, including whole-brain learning, transformative learning, social constructivism, critical andragogy, and student-centred andragogy, was implemented to enhance engagement, knowledge co-construction, and develop 21st-century skills in Botanical education.

Using a qualitative research design, the study employed participatory action research, action learning, focus groups, reflective journaling, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis to assess the impact of Afrocentric andragogies on student identity, critical thinking, and ecological stewardship. It further examined the integration of Botanical science with Agriculture, Biochemistry, Microbiology, Phytochemistry, and Freshwater Ecology, addressing socioeconomic and health challenges that could be mitigated through plant-based solutions.

The findings reveal that integrating Afrikan epistemologies strengthens student agency, bridges historical gaps, and fosters socially responsible scientific education. The study advocates for a fundamental shift away from Eurocentric frameworks, urging higher education institutions to embrace Afrocentric, inclusive learning environments that honour diverse ways of knowing and being.

**Keywords:** Afrikanisation of Higher Education; Afrocentric Philosophies; Afrikan Ontology, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Ubuntu Learning, Ukama (Relational Ethics), Sasi (Sustainability and Ecological Responsibility), Andragogy in Science Education, Curriculum Transformation, Epistemic Justice, Whole-Brain Learning, Transformative Learning, Social Constructivism, Critical Andragogy, Student-Centred Andragogy, Participatory Action Research, Action Learning, Botanical Science Education, Interdisciplinary Scientific Integration, Biochemistry and Botany, Microbiology and Phytochemistry, Freshwater Ecology, Socioeconomic and Health Challenges, Ecological Stewardship, Knowledge Co-Construction, Inclusive Learning Environments, Decolonisation of Education, Afrocentric Science Curriculum, Scientific Identity Formation, Higher Education Inclusivity and Diversity”

“Hybrid Work Arrangements And The Quality Of Higher Education: Challenges And Potentials For Work-Life Balance Among Female Academics At A University Of Technology In South Africa

Humairaa Tar-Mohamed Ms Ms. Patience Mutsvairigwa; Mrs Mercillene Mathews, Dr. Ashnee Rajlaal, Dr. Obianuju Okeke-Uzodike

**ABSTRACT:** The shift to hybrid work arrangements, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic and technological advancements, has reshaped work practices in South African higher education. This study explores the challenges and opportunities of hybrid work for female academics at a University of Technology in Durban, focusing on its impact on work-life balance. Using a qualitative approach, data were collected through a focus group discussion with 10 purposively selected female academics and analysed thematically with NVivo software. Findings reveal that hybrid work enhances flexibility, autonomy, and productivity but also introduces challenges such as blurred boundaries between personal and professional life, increased workload, and unequal access to resources. These issues, if unaddressed, may compromise teaching, research, and student engagement quality. The study recommends structured institutional

policies, clear guidelines, and boundary-setting to ensure accountability and prevent abuse of hybrid work arrangements. A well-managed hybrid model can foster an inclusive, high-quality academic environment that supports both staff well-being and student academic excellence.

Keywords: Hybrid work arrangement, work-life-balance, female academics, higher education, South Africa.”

“Gender Transformation and Its Impact on the Quality of Higher Education: A 30-Year Review of Selected South African Institutions (1994–2024)

Zamagbe Siphokazi Vuthela Ms Ms, Sive Mbangiswano

**ABSTRACT:** This theoretical paper examines how education has evolved over time by reviewing the progress made by South African Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in advancing gender transformation between 1994 and 2024. This period marks a significant political and social shift towards inclusive quality education practices, driven by a commitment to address historical injustices that marginalised substantial segments of the population. HEIs continue to face gender disparities despite the implementation of gender equity policies; this is visible in academic institutions, particularly in traditionally male dominated fields like STEM. These disparities reveal a gap between intended policy objectives by HEIs and actual the outcomes which ultimately impacts the quality and inclusivity of education and research outputs within these institutions.

The paper applies feminist theory, which argues that gender equality can be achieved by providing equal opportunities to men and women. The transition from gender segregated system to a more inclusive framework has made it necessary for HEIs to re-evaluate policies and pedagogical approaches. Through a scoping review of relevant literature, we analysed scholarly literature addressing gender transformation in HEIs and the impact it has on quality higher education.

Preliminary findings reflect courageous transformation by the democratic South Africa and an increase in enrolment figures from previously disadvantaged groups. Despite this progress, systematic challenges such as resource constraints and socio-economic inconsistencies persist. To address this, the research highlights the need for ongoing reforms such as teaching strategies to integrate feminist principles. These can assist in ensuring sustainable quality improvements in the South African higher education sector.

Keywords: Gender transformation, higher education, socio-economic

challenges, institutional policies, pedagogical innovations.”

Sustainable educational practices for motivating masters and doctoral students in ODeL institution: A wellness Perspective

Annah Ndlovu Nkomo Dr and Prof. Dinah Meahabo Magano

**ABSTRACT:** This article focuses on sustainable ways by which master's and doctoral students can be motivated to successfully complete their programmes of study in an Open Distance and e Learning institution. The article explores the case of a supervisor and students whom the same supervisor mentored from masters through to PhD successfully with no gap year in between in an Open Distance and e Learning (ODEL) institution in South Africa. Underpinning this study is the African Ubuntu philosophy, Transactional distance theory and Hettler's (1976) wellness theory, particularly, the social wellness dimension. The study is qualitative in nature and therefore used the interpretivist paradigm and case study design. An open-ended questionnaire was used to collect data. Collected data from five participants was analyzed using Creswell's (2009) sequential steps for data analysis. Interpretation of data was based on the viewpoints of participants, and the findings were discussed in relation to relevant literature. Five themes that emerged were as follows: motivating students through high but achievable expectations, students' personal academic goals led to high sustainable academic achievement, mutual acceptance of each other's cultural background led to sustainable relationship and successful degree completion, knowing each student and showing care motivates students and makes them resilient and promotes their wellness, constant, relevant communication between supervisor and supervisee is a strong motivation for students. The study proposes that relationships that are guided by Ubuntu principles leads to successful completion of master's and doctoral degrees.

**Keywords:** motivation, supervisor-supervisee relationship, sustainable development, inclusivity, social wellness

Is Artificial Intelligence (AI) ChatGPT a credible tool for post-graduate student academic research writing?

Smangele Nzama Ms and Mr Thabiso Sthembiso Msomi

**ABSTRACT:** Several institutions in South Africa have prohibited students from using AI tools in their projects due to plagiarism infringement policy. Artificial intelligence has made it increasingly difficult to determine a source's credibility because its sources are designed to think and behave

in a human-like manner. The use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in academic research writing has transformed, providing powerful tools such as ChatGPT to help academics with content development and concept refinement. While the potential benefits of generative AI tools for academic research writing are apparent, ethical questions have emerged alongside the enthusiasm. ChatGPT posed a challenge to academic integrity as its advancement has made it nearly impossible to detect whether certain content was generated by a human or AI. It appears that ChatGPT is changing the current education practices in South African higher learning, hence, it is met with ambivalence among educators and researchers. This is exploratory research that synthesizes current existing literature to provide some possible benefits and limitations of ChatGPT in academic research writing. This study also highlights inherent shortcomings of ChatGPT such as generating incorrect information and biases in data training which may exacerbate existing biases. The paper makes recommendations on how ChatGPT might be used to enhance academic research writing. A collaborative initiative between academics, researchers, government, and technology specialists is suggested to discuss and determine the quintessential manner in which AI ChatGPT can be utilized to advance academic research writing.

**Keywords:** Academia, AI, ChatGPT, Research Writing, Content generation, Research ethics and integrity

**“The Declining Engagement in Journaling: Exploring Barriers to Reflective Learning in an Economic Management Module**

Shaun Peens Mr, Dr. Kimanzi, MK Me; Vuthela, ZS.

**ABSTRACT:** Integrating journaling as a pedagogical strategy proves to be a valuable and viable approach to enhance critical reflection and self-assessment. Reflective practice, a cornerstone of professional growth, involves a deliberate process of self-assessment, enabling individuals to retrospectively examine their learning to foster continuous improvement. This study investigates the utilization of journalizing to foster deeper reflection on the understanding of academic content within an economic management sciences module, while exploring the factors contributing to students' reluctance to engage in self-reflection through this method; investigating the factors which influence students' choices to engage. The study followed a mixed-methods design, which incorporated an analysis of responses from journal activity submissions (n=127) after completion

of study units, with sequencing enabled whereby students had to go through certain content requirements before they could journal their learning experiences. The results indicated that only 30% of the students followed through to journalizing as part of their learning engagement with a noticeable decline as the course progressed. Furthermore, majority of the students were merely journalizing statements which were vague, and showing lack of understanding of the units covered. It is recommended that the importance of writing journals in an academic context to be emphasized, and lecturers should look for ways of motivating students to do a self-reflection through meaningful journalizing.

Journalizing, assessment, willingness, education, barriers, reflection”

Beyond the Red Flags: Predicting Student Success with Data-Driven Insights

Annie Mafunganyika-Ndlovu Dr Mr Innocent Mamvura

**ABSTRACT:** Early warning systems (EWS) in higher education play a crucial role in identifying at-risk students and enabling timely interventions. At one university, a Student Support Unit used the Persistence Model as an EWS to assess 120 readmitted humanities students' (1st-4th year of study) likelihood of success or exclusion based on historical academic performance and socio-economic factors. The Persistence Model leverages statistical and machine learning approaches to assign probability scores for persistence, ranging from very low to high. By analysing key indicators such as course pass/fail rates, course average trends, and student engagement patterns on the Learning Management System (LMS), the model generated a risk profile that predicted Humanities readmitted students' academic trajectory monthly, quarterly and yearly. Critical factors influencing predictions include the number of failed courses, and average marks. Beyond prediction, the Persistence Model provides actionable insights, guiding tailored interventions such as academic counselling, tutoring, and additional support programs. An integrated framework was used to guide this study. The initial findings indicate that the readmitted students tend to exhibit lower LMS engagement and persistence scores, demonstrating the predictive power of behavioural and academic data. By integrating predictive analytics with academic support strategies, the predictive model strengthens institutional efforts to improve student retention. Further research on predictive models should focus on incorporating various socio-economic

variables to enhance the model's accuracy and effectiveness in predicting readmitted students' likelihood to succeed.

Keywords: Predictive model, At-risk students, Early warning system, Engagement, Student retention

“University Dropout Rates: An analysis of Humanities Undergraduate Students at a South African University

Lindiwe Tshuma Dr Prof Thabisile Nkambule; Dr Raazia Moosa, Mr Innocent Mamvura; Ms Hale Modau; Dr Annie Mafunganyika Ndlovu

**ABSTRACT:** South Africa is one of the countries that face a significant challenge of high university dropout rates, particularly among first time, first-year students. Approximately 50-60% of students do not complete their studies. Factors affecting university dropout rates include socio-economic factors such as lack of funding, institutional factors such as inadequate academic preparation, and individual factors such as incorrect course selection. While contemporary university policies prioritise the provision of student support services through academic advising, it is a cause of concern that these efforts have not resulted in significant reductions in university dropout rates. Guided by the Heublein Model of Drop out Process, this study interrogates the drop out phenomena, the reasons behind university drop out patterns from a national, institutional, and individual perspective before discussing the academic support initiatives provided by the student support unit at the university under study. This study employs a quantitative approach to examine the dropout rates and patterns among Humanities undergraduate students at an urban South African university between 2020-2024. The data is analysed through descriptive analysis. Based on the findings, this study highlights the determinants of student drop out patterns that may lead to new insights to support students to complete their degrees. Drop out trend analyses from this study will be beneficial in developing Higher Education Institutions' early warning systems to identify students who are most likely to drop out and equip University Academic Advisors to meaningfully support students at risk of not completing their degrees.

Keywords: Drop out rate, drop out trend analyses, academic advising, course selection”

“Designing an AI-Augmented LMS integrated large language model and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) chatbot Platform for an ODEL Institution in South Africa

Dr Khanyisile Twabu and Mr Stanford Mphahlele

**ABSTRACT:** The development of an AI-augmented Learning Management System (LMS) integrated with a large language model and Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG) chatbot represents a significant advancement in the provision of academic assistance. This paper explores the implementation of such a system at an Online Distance eLearning (OdeL) Higher Learning Institution (HLI), aimed at increasing knowledge retention and enhancing the student experience. Leveraging the OdeL's unique data as a differentiator, the AI-augmented LMS offers 24/7 academic support and curriculum-specific answers, setting a new standard in distance education. The system particularly benefits students from marginalized communities and diverse backgrounds, including those with different abilities, by applying an inclusive approach grounded in virtue ethics. Potential risks, including data privacy, system reliability, and ethical considerations, are also discussed. The importance of managing risk, maintaining trust, and building responsibly with strong compliance and governance is emphasized. Additionally, the use of services designed to enable innovation and scale is considered crucial for the success of the initiative.

**Keywords:** AI-augmented LMS, Retrieval-Augmented Generation (RAG), 24/7 academic support, Online Distance eLearning (OdeL)"

Transitioning from High School University: A case study of 1st year students at a South African University

Ms Hale Modau and Professor Thabisile Nkambule

**ABSTRACT:** The transition from secondary school to tertiary education presents significant challenges for first-year students, impacting on their academic engagements, performances, and overall well-being. The Teaching and Learning Unit (TLU) in the Faculty of Humanities has observed first year students' academic and psychosocial challenges that impact the attendances of lectures and tutorials, submission of assessments, and performances. To paint a picture of the first-year students, we analysed three years (2023-2025) datasets that represent the students at risk, excluded students, and readmitted on condition students, to highlight key interventions that TLU has developed to support first years' well-being and academic performances. We used integrated reporting. The interventions provided structured support to facilitate a smoother adjustment process. Based on the analysed dataset, we have designed



different intervention programs which include academic skills workshops, to equip students with essential competencies. We further provide psycho-social counselling, to proactively address the students' emotional and social challenges, and lunch time workshops to interact and discuss topics relevant to the students' needs. This paper discusses the findings of the analysed three years dataset in relation to the introduced intervention programs, to highlight practices that can be replicated and/or improved to strengthen first-year students' support. The findings will contribute to the existing literature and broader discourses on first year students' success, emphasising the importance of a holistic approach to support first years' transition process in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** Transition, psychosocial, Intervention, competence, student success.

**Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) Curriculum Implementation in Nigeria's Integrated Vocational Education Programme for Student support in Higher Education**

**Musa Tsagem Muhammad Dr Dr. Ikwuakam O. Titus**

**ABSTRACT:** The aim of the study is to systematically review the implementation of Nigeria's Reading and Numeracy Activity (RANA) curriculum within the country's Integrated Vocational Education Programme for students's support. Through a comprehensive examination of existing literature, the study evaluates RANA's integration into vocational education contexts and assesses its effectiveness in meeting intended objectives particularly, in Nigerian higher education. The analysis reveals several significant implementation challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and uneven resource distribution across different regions. The review highlights substantial variations in RANA implementation approaches across Nigerian resulting in inconsistent outcomes. A notable finding is the limited research on RANA's long-term sustainability within vocational settings and its influence on students' employment prospects after programme completion. The study also identifies a critical oversight in existing research regarding the role of mother-tongue instruction in RANA implementation, despite its fundamental importance in developing basic literacy and numeracy skills. To address these gaps, the review emphasizes the need for a robust framework that can enhance understanding of RANA implementation specifically within vocational education contexts for supporting students'

learning. This framework would help stakeholders better to understand and address implementation challenges while providing a structured approach for future research and programme development. The findings suggest that a more systematic approach to RANA implementation, combined with targeted research on key areas such as mother-tongue instruction and employment outcomes, could significantly improve the programme's effectiveness in vocational education settings.

Keywords: RANA curriculum, vocational education, literacy implementation, numeracy education, challenges

Exploring the Academic Language Proficiency Challenges of First-Year-African-Languages-Speaking-Students at an English (LoLT) University

Nelisiwe Nokubonga Sithole Ms Dr Simba Yafele

**ABSTRACT:** 1st-year bi/multilingual students in English monolingual higher-education curriculums – for whom English is an additional language – typically experience transition difficulties, including mastering academic language proficiencies. This article identifies poor academic language proficiencies in academic Discourse as a pressing problem among originally rural, African-language-speaking students in their initial year of study at a South African university. It adds to the expanding body of student-transition scholarship, focusing on language barriers and their links to knowledge access, academic achievement and success issues in higher education. The investigation addresses and explores first-year African students' language-barrier challenges in acquiring academic proficiencies, including critical thinking and academic language proficiencies, when using institutional English LoLT (Language of Learning and Teaching) in academic activities. It researches their struggles in mastering academic language proficiencies and Discourses and developing critical thinking. The interview-based qualitative study was framed around sociocultural theory and used multilingualism theories in data analysis. We conclude that any mismatches or clashes between students' bi/multilingual identities and higher education institutional monolingual identities are educationally harmful to the African bi/multilingual student. Denying students' cultural and linguistic identities and voices in universities can deny them success, learning joy, self-esteem and voice, perpetuating their academic struggles and marginalisation.

Keywords: Speakers-of-African-Languages, English LoLT, monolingualism, multilingualism, Higher Education, Academic language proficiency,

Academic Discourses, Academic enculturation, student-transition

Keeping up with the Joneses: assessment authenticity in the era of AI  
Malefa Rose Malefane Prof

**ABSTRACT:** Not Applicable Assessments form an integral part of a leaning journey, be it for degree or non-degree purposes. In the context of open distance e-learning (ODEL) institutions such as University of South Africa, assessments are more vital since they present an opportunity for the lecturers to have a 'closer look' at their students, hence the importance of authentic assessment. In the context of the present study, authenticity of assessments refers to the validity and reliability of the assessment tool. With the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI) by both the learners and lecturers, the resultant shift from conventional methods of setting assessments suggests a need to revisit the critical learning outcomes underpinning the modules offered at ODeL institutions. Motivated by the question of authenticity of assessments in the era of AI, this study explores the implications of the dwindling use of conventional methods vis-à-vis the growing use of AI generated assessments. The study questions whether authentic teaching and learning are still enforceable and whether graduate competencies, necessary to address broader societal challenges, can still be nurtured within the current system of AI dependency. Using bibliometric analysis, this study will analyse existing literature on the use of AI in assessments, and the scope of the study will cover both the evidence obtained from the developed world and the developing world. Two main data bases, namely Scopus and Web of Science will be consulted for the purposes data collection. The findings of this study are expected to inform the stakeholders in higher education institutions.

**Keywords:** assessment criteria, learning outcomes, authentic learning, critical thinking, graduate competencies

A delightful frenzy of problem solving in the mathematics classroom

Michelle Erasmus Dr

**ABSTRACT:** An empirical qualitative experiment was conducted after an engineering student posed the timeworn question "Why must we do mathematics?" in the mathematics classroom. In the past, the equally timeworn answer is given that the journey of mathematical problem solving entails the acquisition of tools, the skills to deploy them and the increasingly more complex problems they can solve. What was never

shared was that problem solving in the real world relies on the same principles and that knowing which combination of tools from the basket will solve a problem requires a touch of innovation. With the realization that the underlying problem-solving philosophy is lost on students, it was decided 2024 to include a compulsory real-world problem-solving assignment in engineering mathematics III content. Students were tasked to solve two real world problems, firstly they had to design a coffee mug of volume 250 ml with one unique feature that will either make it more desirable or improve functionality, secondly, they had to manufacture a cement building brick with the stone component replaced with a repurposed material to reduce cost without compromising strength. The 270 mathematics III class comprising of mechanical, electrical and civil engineering students soon realized they required real world tools and skills to solve these problems and embarked on a skills acquisition adventure to the Central University of Technology's (CUT) technology and innovation stations which, amongst many other skills, instruct computer aided design, 3D printing and cement construction, free services to CUT students and staff. A frenzy of Fusion 360 designing, measuring, 3D printing, molding cement potions and strength tests followed. The results were above expectation changing "Why must we do mathematics?" to "Why we must do mathematics".

Keywords: Mathematics, tools, skills, innovation, problem-solving

"From Star Seeker to Space Commander: Gamification as a Catalyst for Student Success

Amanda Lee Dr Dr Jolanda Morkel

**ABSTRACT:** This paper explores Quest4Success (Q4S), an integrated gamified induction programme designed to enhance the effectiveness of first-year student orientation through technology-enabled, student engagement. This study investigates how gamification can help bridge gaps in student transition, engagement, and support through innovative digital learning design.

Q4S incorporates elements of blended learning, social interaction, and narrative-based progression to support students in their transition to higher education while fostering a sense of belonging and empowerment. Anchored in Self-Determination Theory and Constructivist Learning Theory (Khadidja, 2020) the study focuses on key elements and skills essential to student success: competence through contextual learning,

relatedness through social connection, communication, self-reflection, and digital engagement.

This longitudinal study draws on feedback from students, lecturers, and developers collected after each implementation of the programme to explore the perceived value and impact of the intervention. The findings from the first round informed significant enhancements to the second iteration, demonstrating a responsive, evidence-based approach to programme refinement. Thematic analysis across both rounds revealed improved student engagement, stronger peer and institutional connections, and enhanced motivation—key factors in cultivating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The paper also critically examines challenges encountered, including technical, logistical, and communication barriers, and the iterative strategies used to address them. By showcasing a dynamic, technology-enhanced approach to first-year induction, this study offers practical insights for academics and support professionals seeking to improve student success and engagement. It demonstrates how gamification and pedagogical innovation can effectively connect minds and bridge gaps in the evolving landscape of higher education.

**Keywords:** Gamification; Student Engagement; Blended Learning; Self-Determination Theory; Digital Learning; Student Transition

**Photovoice as decolonial praxis: Transforming higher education curricula through visual storytelling**

Sharon Auld Dr

**ABSTRACT:** Higher education in South Africa remains shaped by Eurocentric paradigms that marginalise African epistemologies and reinforce epistemic inequality. To challenge these dominant frameworks, decolonial approaches to curriculum transformation are essential. This article explores Photovoice as a pedagogical tool that centres student agency, lived experience, and African ways of knowing, thereby disrupting traditional hierarchies of knowledge. Photovoice, a participatory visual method, enables students to document and critically engage with their realities through photography. This study examines its role in university learning spaces, particularly in revealing the impact of Fromm's social

unconscious on identity formation and academic experiences in the global South. Through photographic inquiry, students articulate how historical, social, and cultural forces shape their educational journeys, fostering a deeper engagement with decolonial thought. This qualitative research involves postgraduate psychology students in a Photovoice project that captures their lived experiences within a postcolonial and neoliberal higher education system. Thematic analysis of their images and narratives provides insights into their challenges and resistance to dominant knowledge structures. Findings suggest that Photovoice fosters critical consciousness, enhances student engagement, and disrupts hierarchical power relations in the classroom. By legitimising visual narratives as academic discourse, it challenges the privileging of text-based scholarship. The study has significant implications for higher education in South Africa and beyond. Embedding Photovoice into curricula promotes more equitable, contextually relevant, and decolonised learning environments. This research positions Photovoice as a transformative methodology that empowers students, challenges epistemic injustice, and advances Africanisation in higher education.

Keywords: Africanisation, curriculum transformation, decolonial pedagogy, epistemic justice, higher education, Photovoice

Financial Literacy in Higher Education: Examining Student Competency at a South African University.

Mathew Kimanzi Dr Mr Shaun Peens

**ABSTRACT:** Financial literacy education plays a crucial role in empowering students to make informed financial decisions, particularly within South Africa's diverse economic landscape. Universities serve as key platforms for equipping students with essential financial skills, enhancing their understanding of budgeting, saving, investing, and debt management. This study assesses the financial literacy levels of students at a university in South Africa using a quantitative research approach. A structured questionnaire was distributed to students across various academic disciplines, yielding 131 responses. The findings indicate that students' overall financial literacy level was moderate, averaging 66%. Specifically, literacy in savings and borrowing was high (86%), while knowledge of investments and risk was moderate (65%). Understanding of insurance and credit was also moderate (60%). The study recommends that higher education institutions integrate structured financial literacy programs into

their curricula to improve students' financial competence. Policymakers should revise academic programs to incorporate financial literacy courses, particularly for students outside business-related disciplines. Additionally, financial seminars and workshops should focus on imparting fundamental financial principles, while students should be encouraged to utilize digital and technological platforms to enhance their financial knowledge.

Keywords: Financial literacy, education, universities, South Africa

“Assessing First-Year University Student’s Conceptual Understanding of DC Circuits: Challenges and Curriculum Implications in South Africa

Moreen Coetzee Ms

**ABSTRACT:** This study investigated first-year university students' conceptual understanding of simple DC circuits across various physics courses at a South African university. The research was prompted by consistently poor Physical Sciences results in the National Senior Certificate (NSC) examinations, with electric circuits often being the most poorly answered topic (DBE, 2013). In 2013 a total of 815 students participated, with data collected using the Determining and Interpreting Resistive Electric Circuits Concepts Test (DIRECT) (Engelhardt & Beichner, 2004). Results revealed that more than half of the students exhibited weak comprehension of fundamental electrical concepts.

Findings in the 2024 NSC Diagnostic Report still highlight persistent conceptual difficulties despite prior exposure in Grades 10 and 11. Many students still struggle to grasp the holistic functioning of a simple circuit due to weak foundational understanding, indicating gaps in knowledge retention and application (DBE, 2025). The study also identified curriculum inadequacies, emphasizing the need for continuous revision and assessment of electric circuits throughout Grade 12. To address these challenges, teachers should move beyond rote memorization of definitions, laws, and principles, focusing instead on effective learning strategies and problem-solving skills.

These insights are valuable for teachers, subject advisors, curriculum planners, and university lecturers aiming to align instruction with students' needs. The study provides a broader perspective on secondary school learners' conceptual struggles with electric circuits, underscoring the necessity for improved pedagogy and curriculum adjustments to better prepare students for tertiary-level physics.

Keywords: DC-Circuits; Conceptual Understanding; DIRECT-test”

Residence Advisors (RAs) and Holistic Student Support in living and learning environments: A Case Study of a University of Technology

Patience Mutsvairigwa Ms

**ABSTRACT:** Residence Advisors (RAs) play a pivotal role in shaping living and learning environments within South African universities. As key figures in student residences, RAs bridge the gap between academic and social spheres, fostering a holistic university experience. This study will explore the multifaceted responsibilities of RAs, including their role in promoting academic success, facilitating community building, and addressing the diverse needs of students in a culturally rich and often challenging context. By examining the strategies RAs employ to support students—such as mentorship, conflict resolution, and programming—this research seeks to highlight the significance of their contributions to student well-being and retention. Furthermore, the study will investigate the challenges RAs face, such as balancing administrative duties with personal academic demands and navigating the complexities of their roles. Through qualitative interviews with RAs at a selected University of Technology in Durban, the research will collect data on the experiences of RAs in living and learning environments and the challenges they face. The research seeks to underscore the critical role RAs play in creating inclusive, supportive, and academically enriching living environments and to advocate for enhanced training and institutional support for RAs, positioning them as essential agents in the broader mission of transforming higher education in South Africa.

Keywords: Residence Advisors; holistic student support; living and learning environments; academic success; university of technology

From at Risk to High Pass Rates: The Story of a Mega Module

Josephine Olufunmilayo Alexander Prof

**ABSTRACT:** This is an interpretative qualitative case study that explains how a mega module, previously identified as “at risk”, progressed to a high pass rate module within five years. The purpose of the case study is to demonstrate how well-intentioned and purposively implemented intervention strategies can enhance the quality of teaching and learning in an Open, Distance and e-Learning environment (ODEL). The objectives are to describe and provide reasons for the strategic interventions, discuss their implementation, analyse their impact on student pass



rates and highlight practical lessons emanating from the findings. Data instruments consist of semi-structured interviews with five lecturers, one administrative officer and five markers, observations from online lessons and activities, document analysis of XMO statistics and analysis of data collected from Power BI on the module. The data were analysed against the background of Community of Inquiry Theory. The findings show that students gained a better understanding and mastery of the content of the module, an overall incremental improvement in pass rates, a reduction of transactional distance through the promotion of student support, increased student centeredness and the promotion of teacher, cognitive and social presence. The paper concludes that technologically mediated online lessons and motivational teaching can provide significant impetus for achieving success in teaching and learning in a Comprehensive Open, Distance and e-Learning environment (CODEL).

Keywords: CODEL, mega module, strategic interventions, technologically mediated online lessons, motivational teaching, student pass rates

Cracking the code: key drivers of an effective transition to fully online learning at a South African open distance eLearning institution

D Govender Dr

**ABSTRACT:** The effectiveness of strategy implementation is a crucial determinant in the successful transition from blended to fully online learning, particularly within Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) institutions. This study examines the strategic approaches adopted by a South African ODEL university in facilitating this transition, focusing on the key factors that influence successful implementation. Through an analysis of institutional frameworks, faculty readiness, technological infrastructure, and student support mechanisms, the study evaluates how effectively planned strategies translate into practice. The research highlights critical enablers such as leadership commitment, faculty training, policy alignment, and adaptive digital pedagogies. Findings indicate that while strategic planning plays a vital role, challenges such as digital access disparities, student engagement, and assessment integrity require ongoing refinement. The study concludes that an iterative, data-driven approach to strategy implementation—combined with continuous stakeholder engagement—enhances the effectiveness of transitioning to fully online learning. These insights provide valuable lessons for higher education institutions undergoing similar digital transformations.

**Keywords:** Strategy Implementation, Online Learning, Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL), Higher Education, Digital Transformation, South Africa

Listen to the voices of postgraduate health studies' students at an open distance learning institution: student support perspective!

Prof Kefiloe Adolphina Maboe

### Abstract

Being a postgraduate student, studying part time and having multiple roles is challenging, specifically in an Open Distance Learning context. The researcher was curious to know what support PG students needed to address the encountered challenges. This curiosity was based on their experiences after the lessons they have learned during the COVID -19 pandemic. This study explored the support needed by PG students in health studies at the University of South Africa after COVID-19 to address research-related challenges. A qualitative, exploratory, phenomenological design was used. Master's and Doctoral students were purposefully selected and interviewed via Microsoft Teams. Tesch's coding technique was adopted for data analysis.

Challenges were revealed of non-response or delay in responding from university departments, including libraries, bursaries, registration offices, and even research supervisors. This delayed their progress during their research activities. They recommended increased support related to online communication by adopting query management systems. Each faculty to have a relevant query management system in relation to PG student's challenge of non-response from the university. It is essential to strengthen research and student support policies, including contingency plans for unforeseen circumstances, which might negatively impact their studies. Collaboration with other stakeholders to enhance information and communication technology is valuable. This study will offer insight to global education institutions in both residential and open distance learning context to support both undergraduate and PG students during future crises.

**Keywords**

Challenges, Postgraduate students, Open Distance Learning (ODL), research, supervisors, support.

Fostering Inclusive Pedagogies: Bridging Generational Gaps in HR Learning Through Mindful Connection and Collaborative Knowledge Sharing

Ms Linda Paul and Prof Ravinder Rena

**ABSTRACT:** This research evaluates the efficiency of inclusive teaching approaches to unite different age groups in HR education through the identification and evaluation of educational methods that foster connection and cooperative learning. A secondary data analysis consisting of scholarly articles and HR case study evaluation as well as industry report analysis from 2015 to 2024 investigates modern HR learning practices and workforce adaptability. Digital software tools and statistical programs allowed researchers to identify the main trends regarding inclusive pedagogical practices. Laboratory-based instruction peer guidance and computer literate education with team-based instruction effectively improve educational outcomes and knowledge sharing between professionals from different generations. Organizations committed to such inclusive methodologies create stronger employee adaptation capabilities uniting workplaces and better learning achievements. For effective workforce development organizations must implement redesigned HR curricula that incorporate these pedagogical methods to reduce skill deficiencies. Research findings lead to advancements in contemporary knowledge through an extensive data-based process that establishes thoughtful human connection as the foundation for successful intergenerational learning methods. The research draws its unique value from compiling and integrating multiple secondary data sources spanning one decade to generate original findings that guide educators and HR practitioners in intergenerational knowledge dissemination.

**Keywords**

Inclusive Pedagogy, Generational Learning, HR Education, Collaborative Learning, Mindful Connection.

Digital Dexterity and Human Capital: Connecting Diverse Learning Styles

## to Bridge Skill Gaps in Modern HR Education

Ms Linda Paul and Prof Ravinder Rena

**ABSTRACT:** The research examines how digital dexterity combines with various learning styles to advance human capital education within modern HR training programs for closing essential competency gaps. Fast technological changes demand that workers must adapt to new situations as well as maintain continuous learning practices. The paper investigates the way diverse learning approaches affect human capital growth by introducing digital dexterity into HR education programs to prepare employees for the future. The research analyses secondary information sources which include literature reviews and industry reports as well as academic frameworks and educational databases between 2015 and 2025. The three main analytical methods used to analyse data patterns in this study are thematic analysis alongside qualitative synthesis and comparative analysis. The research establishes that workers who possess adaptable digital expertise demonstrate strong learning results when teaching methods match their personal learning characteristics. The combination of learner-specific educational routes along with digital systems and automatic learning modules contributes to better employee performance levels. Current learning models require reform through technology adoption because HR education needs adaptable teaching techniques that support students with various learning habits. The research generates new knowledge through its complete model between digital dexterity and learning style diversity while strategizing human capital development at best practice levels for both educators and practitioners. The study achieves its originality by combining digital literacy with human capital theory and educational psychology to address workforce requirements. This research stands distinct because it provides functional knowledge to close skill gaps between employees through human capital advancement in digitized work environments.

Format

Paper Presentation

Keywords

Digital Dexterity, Human Capital, Learning Styles, HR Education, Skill Gaps.

## Bridging Gaps in Tourism Education: Innovative Pedagogies and Support Strategies for Future Industry Leaders

Ms Thulisiwe Solontsi and Ms Linda Paul

**ABSTRACT:** This research explores the evolution of tourism higher education in response to dynamic international tourism trends, focusing on innovative teaching methods and robust student support. It investigates how educational institutions can bridge critical education gaps by implementing novel instructional approaches and strengthened support systems, ultimately cultivating future tourism industry leaders. Employing a qualitative approach using secondary data, the study analyses peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, government policies, and institutional case studies. Content analysis and thematic synthesis, utilising NVivo, are conducted on data from 2015-2025 over six months. Findings underscore the necessity of diversified curricula, experiential learning, technological integration, and industry partnerships to enhance student engagement and employability. Additionally, developed mentorship frameworks and mental health support pathways are crucial for holistic student development. The research advocates policy-level support from university executives, industry leaders, and students to foster collaborative learning and adaptable educational approaches. This study uniquely harmonises pedagogical innovation with comprehensive student welfare, providing practical strategies to develop a future-ready tourism workforce, and contributing significantly to academic knowledge in tourism education.

### Keywords

Tourism Education, Pedagogical Innovation, Student Support, Industry Leadership, Curriculum Development.

Connecting Minds in Tourism Studies: Enhancing Learning, Research, and Student Support for a Sustainable Future

Ms Thulisiwe Solontsi and Ms Linda Paul

**ABSTRACT:** This research investigates the synergistic relationship between innovative teaching methodologies, robust research practices, and comprehensive student support systems within tourism studies, aiming to foster sustainable industry development. It explores how educational institutions can adapt their frameworks to cultivate graduates capable

of addressing contemporary tourism challenges. The primary objective is to identify and analyse creative pedagogical approaches and support mechanisms that enhance student engagement, research outcomes, and academic well-being, ultimately aligning graduates with industry needs. Employing a qualitative methodology approach using secondary data, the study analyses peer-reviewed articles, industry reports, and policy documents from 2015-2025. Content analysis and thematic synthesis, utilising NVivo for qualitative data coding, are conducted over six months. Findings validate the efficacy of interdisciplinary collaboration, experiential learning, digital integration, and mental health resources in promoting student academic and professional sustainability. Academic-industry partnerships are found to enhance research applicability and relevance. Implications extend to educational institutions, tourism educators, industry leaders, policymakers, and students, highlighting the need for increased research funding, innovative curricula, and holistic student welfare programs. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by integrating tourism education with sustainable learning models and research approaches. Its originality lies in the comprehensive fusion of academic excellence, student wellness, and industry collaboration, providing a framework for developing sustainable tourism practices.

#### Keywords

Tourism Education, Research Innovation, Student Support, Industry Collaboration, Sustainable Tourism, Research Collaboration

#### PANOPTICISM-PROCTORING IN ONLINE ASSESSMENT IN AN OPEN DISTANCE AND E-LEARNING CONTEXT: A SCOPING REVIEW TOWARDS WELLNESS

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#### Abstract

Covid-19 necessitated changes in the education sector at all levels and that forced a paradigm shift and a new way of doing things in teaching, learning and assessment. The paper reports on a scoping review on online assessment in higher education landscape, diverse practices of how to

administer it and challenges that surround online assessments. The lens used to view online assessments is the wellness theory of Hettler – its presence or absence as experienced by academics or students during online assessments. The paradigm followed was interpretive in the sense that more of interpretations were needed as the explorations which were done on online assessments and how they were applied in various contexts. The methodology followed in this paper is the scoping review which explored articles focusing on proctoring tools used in online assessments. Data from google scholar from 2020-2025 extracted 2760 articles only eleven satisfied the inclusion criteria on proctoring and wellness perspective. Apart from quality, validity and authenticity determine the academic integrity during assessment processes whether formative or summative. The scoping review reveals that most institutions of higher learning opted for proctoring tools which are viewed as panoptic towers in this paper. The paper recommends alternative forms of assessment, teaching and learning which will not compromise the wellness of students and academics. A paradigm shift in teaching, learning and assessment is recommended where a more constructivist approach will be used to allow students' engagement in the learning process, which enhances their wellness.

Key words: Panopticism; proctoring; online assessment; constructivist; alternative assessment; wellness.

## An Investigation into the Readiness of Doctoral Students Enrolled at an ODeL Institution

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Readiness is preparedness to accomplish a task in the required manner. Doctoral students must be mentally ready to embark on the highest degree-level study. In the ODeL environment, they must have the necessary skills for the current technology. Doctoral students in Ethiopia enrolled in an ODeL university complain about the lack of supervision and support. This study, therefore, aims to investigate this allegation by measuring the students' readiness to establish whether the students' level of readiness to study for the doctoral degree through the ODeL mode of education is sufficient or causes the complaints.

The design of this research is quantitative. After ethical clearance approval, a Likert scale multi-dimensional questionnaire was sent to the newly enrolled students in the 2024 academic year. Based on a convenient sampling method, data was collected from April to June 2024 from students willing to respond. The results were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. A total of 78 students responded to the questionnaire. The findings show that the mean score of the students' responses was 101.83, with a standard deviation of 19.5. The result shows that the students' readiness level was high. According to this finding, the supervision support challenges claimed by the students were not related to the student's lack of readiness. The findings were further observed using one-way ANOVA against demographic variables like age, gender, college, sponsorship and country of origin. No statistically significant relationship was found between any of the variables with readiness.

Keywords: ODeL, Doctoral students, Readiness, supervision support, Ethiopia









