

AUTHOR:

Prof C De Wet¹ 

AFFILIATION:

¹ Acting Editor-in Chief,
University of the Free State,
South Africa

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.38140/pie.v40i4.7003>

e-ISSN 2519-593X

Perspectives in Education

2022 40(4): 1-3

PUBLISHED:

23 December 2022

Editorial

During a meeting of the South African Parliament's portfolio committee on Higher Education, Science and Technology, held on 1 December 2021, Professor *Ahmed Bawa*, in his position of Chief Executive Officer of *Universities South Africa* (USAf), identified eight challenges facing South African universities: the continued impact of COVID-19 on higher education; the sustainability of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme funding (NSFAS); the so-called 'missing middle' students, i.e. students who do not qualify for financial aid, but cannot afford fees outright; unpaid student debt; insufficient affordable student accommodation; electrical power instability and loadshedding; social unrest and gender-based violence; and lastly the impact of the faltering South African economy on higher education. In this edition of *Perspectives in Education* (PiE), the first nine articles focus on challenges faced by students and academic in higher education in South Africa.

In the opening article, Ruswa and Gore use the capabilities approach to explore the extent of poverty, as well as the way various dimensions of deprivation interplay to effect the wellbeing and success of students in universities. The study highlights the complex relationship between the dimensions of deprivations that affect students and the destructive consequence of the lack of finances. The authors argue that providing funding not only addresses student poverty insufficiently; they also recommend that universities should consider devising robust measures to identify those financially deprived and provide them with adequate funding.

A reading of subsequent articles on higher education reveals that students need more than adequate financing to be successful. Olaitan, Nosipho and Mavuso's investigation into the challenges faced by female students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) focuses on the role the environment, goals, behaviour and self-efficacy factors play in the success of these students. The study found that female students possess the self-efficacy to excel in their studies, despite overt and covert hostilities. The study furthermore found that family support is key in female STEM students' success. Die importance of applying systems principles to improve student support is central in Sithaldeen and Van Pletzen's case study. They found that the four support functions used by students within the faculty



Published by the UFS

<http://journals.ufs.ac.za/index.php/pie>

© Creative Commons

With Attribution (CC-BY)



under investigation lack cohesion. This creates challenges in communication, continuity and efficacy of student support. Ontong, Bruwer and Schonken's article on the effectiveness of a first-year module presented as an accelerated learning programme to repeating students for subsequent learning contributes to the debate on whether or not accelerated learning programmes only lead to surface learning. The next two articles focus on the possible effect of COVID-19 on students and academics. Angelo Finn's cross-sectional survey on academic burnout among Open Distance e-Learning (ODEL) students during the COVID-19 pandemic revealed relatively low levels of burnout and high levels of student engagement among the respondents. This despite the fact that most respondents reported being employed while studying. The qualitative narrative approach, supported by a feminist lens, provides Juliet Ramohai and Somarie Holtzhausen with a critical, in-depth understanding of the real-life stories of academic women in leadership positions when making sense of their challenges in working in a virtual environment. Applying the Capabilities Approach as an analytical tool, they found that functioning and freedoms are inextricably intertwined with institutional ethnographies. According to them, these ethnographies might support or hamper the coping capabilities of women leaders in academic institutions, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Whereas the above articles focused on higher education within a South African context, Oparinde, Govender and Moyo's article is an attempt to locate the role of internationalisation at African higher education institutions. They argue that comprehensive international, intercultural and global dimensions in the affairs of African tertiary institutions provide for a more nuanced and diversified higher education landscape.

The next group of articles explore several perspectives on initial teacher training and teacher professional development. Du Preez and West explored 155 student-teachers' experiences of blended learning at a South African institution for higher education, by using the Community of Inquiry as theoretical framework. Whereas Nel reports on mathematics teachers professional learning prospects through video-simulated recall, Verster reports on the development of future teachers' mathematics knowledge in an initial teacher education programme.

Four articles in this issue of PiE focus on important role-players within the South African education dispensation, namely learners, teachers and parents. Utilising the theoretical framework of power and theory of performativity, Vandeyar explored how learners exercise agency in the construction of their identity in school discourses. The study focused on how disciplinary power functions in the disciplinary space of the school. Findings from semi-structured interviews were twofold: (1) Schools used Foucault's mechanisms and instruments of constructing learner identity. (2) Learners became agentic in schools and asserted their own identities. De Villiers and Barnard write on South African Grade 1 teachers' experiences of supporting learners living with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The study found that teachers were innovative in developing effective support strategies to support Grade 1 learners with ADHD in their classrooms. The purpose of Gloria Marsay's grounded theory study was to investigate how teachers view the efficacy of social and emotional learning (SEL) in the learning environment. Marsay's study found that the majority of participating teachers believe SEL skills would have a positive impact on the learning environment, would be essential for learners to become future ready, and would be beneficial to themselves as teachers both personally and professionally. The last article in this section explored perceptions of parents in supporting learning during COVID-19 at a South African school.

The last four articles in this issue of PiE explore issues in education policy, leadership and law. René Terhoven's article focuses on the prevailing discourses in the enactment of governmental curriculum policy via the leadership practices of school management teams. Fourie and Naidoo's article reports on a study on middle leaders and managers' perspectives of disruptive leadership during COVID-19. The impetus for Clark and Trichardt's study was the digital divide and the low socio-economic status of many South African school communities. They emphasise the importance of technology and digitisation in building 'future-ready' schools led by neuro-leaders as future-fit leaders. In the last paper of this issue of PiE, Kruger, Beckman and Du Plessis discuss the changing role and functions of school principals with the introduction of the participatory decision-making process in South African schools from an Education Law perspective. They highlight the tension between school governing bodies (SGB) and school principals because of the perceived encroachment on the profession management function of the principal and SGB and vice versa.

A golden thread that links most of the articles in this issue is the importance of educational, psychological and/or financial support for students, academics, school leaders, teachers, learners and parents. This support may be as heart-breaking and covert as a university providing 24/7 access to its library for students who have nowhere else to spend the night or as hands-on as providing research-based findings on leadership, technological and subject-specific training to, amongst others, school principals, parents and mathematics teachers. It is thus important that researchers move beyond the identification of problems in the South African education system, but to act as advocates for the use of research-based solutions for what may sometimes seem to be irresolvable problems.

We hope that you will find this volume of PiE insightful and inspiring.