# ACCESS, SUCCESS AND RETENTION OF STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA’S HIGHER EDUCATION: SEARCHING FOR INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

Based on the report, the massification of the higher education sector (by increasing student enrolment) served as a yardstick for social transformation. Issues of race or colour which hitherto, were the cornerstones of apartheid were replaced with a system that promoted racial equity. Subsequently, a series of reforms were put in place to try to redress this imbalance of an education system that was based on segregationist policies with regards to allocation of educational resources, including funding. Due to this fact, institutions of higher learning (universities) in South Africa witnessed this increased diversity which included an increasing number of students from outside the middle class and a large number with poor schooling. In order to clarify what transpired then, the Council on Higher Education (2014: 24) asserts that the transformation of higher education was informed by the principles of equity, effectiveness, and efficiency: First, the system had to be transformed to redress inequalities of access, participation, and success within higher education; and to reduce radically deeply- embedded inequalities between higher education institutions (HEIs), which included their resources, staff complements and student bodies. Second, the higher education system had to produce effectively and efficiently, with limited resources, the range of graduate, research and service outputs required to drive national development in a global knowledge-driven economy. The aim of this desk top paper is to deliberate on the challenges mitigating against access, success and retention in the institutions of higher learning. The paper argues that, although access to higher education is virtually universally available, many students who start in a higher education programme dropout prior to completing a degree or achieving their individual academic and social goals. It seems that these impediments are only symptomatic of a more fundamental problem and a failure to respond to higher education imperatives could be detrimental to education success. The main contributory factors seem to be largely attributed to, inter alia, the low entry level competences by students, financial problems, lack of resources for lecturers and students, large overcrowded classes, and lack of enthusiasm. While there could be reasons for this, the implications seem to relate to lack of academic engagement, lack of motivation to study and eventually dropping out. It emerged from the findings of the study that institutions do experience challenges in this regard.

**Key Words**: Higher Education, student access, success, retention, drop out, repeater rate,