RESEARCH ARTICLE

Staff perspectives on transformational needs at a South African higher education institution

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Abstract

Transformation reflects the government's engagement and policies in restructuring higher education to cultivate the country's communal economy. Higher education is challenged in providing tertiary education to students from diverse environments, and staff transformation is needed. This cross-sectional study establishes the staff's perception of transformation in the School of Healthcare Sciences of a selected South African university. Staff were purposively sampled and were surveyed using an electronic questionnaire. The survey included aspects of equity, transformation, management, recognition, the social environment, the physical environment and general satisfaction. Demographic variables, including the perspective on transformation in the institution, the student body and transformation management, were descriptively analysed. Most staff members perceived the university as committed to transformation despite racial tensions and past injustices. Over two-thirds of the staff support the university's goal of increasing a diverse student body. Additionally, the management is comfortable with diversity and demonstrates equity for all. The implementation of transformation was actively considered and aligned with policies.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Transformation in higher education institutions is a global and complex phenomenon (Du Preez et al., 2016; Gilken & Johnson, 2019), requiring a fundamental change in thinking and practice. The transformation process should be seen as transitioning from a set of negative social structures to a new set of favourable, desirable social structures through intentional and unintentional social action by social actors (Cerna, 2013). In South Africa, the post-apartheid government inherited an inequitable and unjust higher education system in 1994, which included preferential access to higher education for whites and limited higher education opportunities for the black majority. Apartheid inequalities were redressed by adopting policies that widened access to higher education for all South Africans (Sehoole & Adeyemo, 2016).

Transformation in South African universities should promote equity for all, eradicate all forms of discrimination and meet development needs through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes (Bengu, 1997). Transformation should be reflected in all facets of an institution, including governance, management and leadership, the student environment, equity in staffing, institutional cultures, progressive and inclusive teaching and learning, research and knowledge systems, institutional equity and the political economy of higher education funding (SAHRC, 2016). In South Africa, universities are required to enrol students from diverse backgrounds, helping more people from underrepresented groups to participate successfully in higher education.

Diversity is a vital component of the transformation process and encompasses a wide range of factors, including different genders, races, ethnicities and educational and economic backgrounds (Mitiku et al., 2014). In the United States of America (USA), peer feedback has demonstrated that supportive peer relationships and a compassionate faculty result in a 'sense of belonging' (Gilken & Johnson, 2019). Consequently, a sense of belonging, which includes academic and social engagement, leads to academic success (Ahn & Davis, 2020). In this context, academic engagement encompasses interactions between students and academic staff (Thomas, 2012).

Through transformation, higher education institutions aim to be relevant and aligned with current trends and needs. Transformation and institutional culture are interconnected as the patterns of values and practices that guide the behaviour of individuals in higher education institutions and are essential components of transformation (Luvalo, 2019). Whilst transformation in higher education has many dimensions, this paper focusses on whether a selected university is addressing the needs of diverse staff and student bodies and, specifically, whether transformation has been addressed in the School of Healthcare Sciences.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

In South Africa, the democratic government had to ensure equal access to resources and equity and a non-discrimination approach for all citizens by repelling the Group Area Act. The Bill of Rights in South Africa enshrines the rights of all people and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom (Carpenter, 2004). The Tirisano document was developed as a framework to guide the merger or integration of universities (South Africa & Training, 2014) and opened doors for previously excluded racial groups in all institutions. Higher education institutions were challenged to provide tertiary education to students from diverse environments, cultures, and economic statuses, including those in other countries. Some of the staff employed in these higher education institutions grew up in the pre-democracy era, where social legislation promoted segregation. The pre-democracy legacy was a reported challenge in the Council of Higher Education report during the first 10 years of democracy (Hall & Symes, 2005). In 2008, the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions reported a range of inadequacies in addressing curricula and knowledge creation (Gumede, 2020). It was assumed that there might be challenges in the newly

created work environment among personnel from different backgrounds. To mitigate these challenges, higher education institutions provided support such as workshops to discuss common challenges and concerns, mediate conflicts and clarify organizational issues and other interventions (South Africa & Training, 2014). For the higher education sector to become more inclusive, obstacles to education associated with the apartheid system need to be removed (Nkomo & Sehoole, 2007). Early in the new millennium, under the Thabo Mbeki government, significant discussions were held, and working groups comprising the vice-chancellors of all the institutions and the Council on Higher Education leadership were formed. The Higher Education Working Group was primarily concerned with reform in the higher education sector (Gumede, 2020). This suggests that people have been thinking about this problem for a while.

Gumede (2020) further stressed the importance of taking stock of interventions to ensure robust transformation of the higher education sector, but there were several challenges. The Tirisano document lacked clarity regarding how comprehensive universities would function and multicultural environments were created in the higher education institutions, which was challenging for staff and students, as they were not informed about different cultures. In healthcare science faculties, staff members needed to teach students to provide healthcare to patients from different cultural and economic backgrounds. In addition, South Africa has 11 official languages and immigration from neighbouring countries has added to the burden of care and language proficiency during the provision of care (Mfusi, 2004). The provision of care impacts both educators and healthcare staff, as multilingual communication is imperative for patients. Despite educators taking extra language lessons to create a client-friendly working environment, speaking all 11 South African languages is virtually impossible.

Adjusting to new working environments reportedly led to negative outcomes in merged universities. Universities were confronted with reduced staff commitment, lower outputs and less collegial relationships (Nkhukhu-Orlando et al., 2019). Countries facing higher education institution transformation, due to high numbers of immigrants, may face similar challenges. These challenges are exacerbated when intercontinental cultures and racial and religious practices share the same habitation. Therefore, integrating different population groups is seen as a global, continental, national and local challenge (Davies & Thate, 2017).

In South Africa, the Racial Group Areas Act was repelled in 1994 during the inception of a democratic government and was followed by departments and institutions. In 2007, the integration of higher education institutions was almost complete, thus cementing racial integration (Pandor, 2018). The transformation in higher education institutions was characterized by integrating universities from previously disadvantaged, middle- and higher income groups. A new cultural context was initiated, as these institutions had to adopt indigenous language policies and streamline tuition languages to benefit all students and lecturers (Makae, 2019). Some universities maintained a dual language policy as an educational medium, resulting in student dissatisfaction and riots, as evidenced in 2016 (Fomunyam, 2017). Transformation in higher education institutions has led to multiple challenges regarding leadership, research and lecturing, resulting in disbandment in some merged universities.

Institutional culture encompasses deeply embedded patterns of organizational behaviour, shared value assumptions and beliefs or ideologies that educators and students have about the institution (Suransky & Van der Merwe, 2016). Institutional culture can be changed by transformation methodologies such as the Africanization of the institution, indigenizing knowledge, diversification and decolonization (Luvalo, 2019). The selected higher institution implemented policies regarding staff equity and development. Staff and students must perceive institutional culture as supportive to enhance their sense of belonging. The researchers assumed that there might be challenges in the new multicultural work environment and different backgrounds after the merger. Therefore, this study aimed to describe the diverse perspectives and needs of staff and, specifically, whether transformation was addressed in a selected university school in the era of transformation. The areas of transformation addressed within the School of Healthcare Sciences included staff diversity, student admissions, hybrid teaching and learning, curriculum, alternative assessment and workload.

3 | METHODOLOGY

The desired future of the selected institution as a transformed, inclusive and equitable university community is captured in its strategic framework. The holistic and integrated transformation philosophy demonstrates diversity, inclusion and fairness at an institutional level, with teaching, learning, research and community engagement playing a societal role to create conditions for all to reach their full potential. Key performance areas include transformational leadership, a culture of engagement, collaboration and innovation, employment equity, curriculum renewal, reform and transformation, high-quality research that resolves critical societal issues and diverse procurement to create a university environment that is welcoming, enabling and future-oriented in a language understood by all (UP, 2023). This study, therefore, focused on the perspectives of staff on transformation in the institution, the transformation of the student body and the management of transformation areas being addressed within the School of Healthcare Sciences of the selected institution.

A cross-sectional descriptive survey was conducted among staff at the School of Healthcare Sciences at a selected university in South Africa to establish their perspectives on university transformation. The university has seven campuses. Each campus consists of different faculties. Within the faculties, there are schools consisting of different departments. The Faculty of Health Sciences comprises four schools, and one of the schools was included. The selected school has approximately 56 staff members. The total population included a purposive sample of all staff (academic and administrative staff) employed for more than 1 year at the university. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant school and the ethics committee of the selected university ethics and research committee (65/2018). Informed consent was obtained prior to participation in this research. An electronic Qualtrix® questionnaire was distributed to all the staff of the School of Healthcare Sciences. The questionnaire was adapted with permission from the Rhodes University Institutional Culture Survey of 2014. The questionnaire utilized a 5-point Likert scale to rank statements regarding transformation presented to the participants. The statements ranged from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The sections included aspects of equity and fairness, transformation, management, rewards and recognition, social environment, physical environment and infrastructure and general satisfaction. At the end of each section, an open-ended space was provided for additional comments. The data were analysed descriptively for demographic variables, perspective on transformation in the institution, the student body and management on transformation. The findings are depicted in tables and charts and described below.

4 | RESULTS

In total, 21 of 56 participants responded. The participants consisted of both academic and non-academic staff. The low response rate of 21 (38%) limits the generalizability of the findings. However, this is a sensitive matter and evokes post-apartheid memories as well as fear from participants. Additionally, the study was conducted just after intense conflict resolution of the #FeesMustFall movement, which occurred throughout South Africa. The movement's goal was to stop the increase in student fees and increase public funding for universities. The students disrupted classes and shut down campuses, which increased racial conflict (Andestad, 2018). Others felt that it was a waste of time and resources. The higher education institution (HEI) studied was historically advantaged in terms of infrastructure and funding (Temoso & Myeki, 2023), which made it more targeted to radical transformation and diversity (Africa, 2015). Therefore, the low response rate was not surprising given that staff members feared disclosing their perspective about transformation during the aftermath of violence. Despite the low response rate, key issues identified are presented. The mean age of the sample was 47 years (48 ± 11.08 years). Among the respondents, 90.5% were South African nationals, 57.1% were African, 33.3% were White, 4.8% were Coloured and 4.8% were of Indian descent. The dominant languages spoken at the time of data collection at the institution were Sepedi (28.6%) and Afrikaans (28.6%), followed by English (19.5%). Most participants (76.2%) were permanently

employed, working on a full-time basis. Among the employees, only 23.8% of respondents indicated that they were members of a trade union, which is important for promoting and protecting the various rights of employees (Botha, 2015). Additional demographic information about the participants is provided in Table 1.

4.1 | Perspective on institutional transformation

Regarding institutional transformation, most participants (62%) perceived the institution to be committed to transformation; however, 57% indicated that a more rapid transformation is required to better reflect South Africa's diversity. A similar percentage of the respondents indicated that immediate curriculum transformation is needed to accommodate changes in the external environment. Although the institution appears to embrace diversity (62%), only 52% agreed that it is committed to reducing inequality. This response was demonstrated by racial thinking during the #FeesMustFall movement, with some seeing the movement as a waste of resources and time. In contrast, others felt the need because they were at risk of financial exclusion. Most staff (52%) understood how their role contributed to transformation, but implementing transformation appeared problematic (48%). This was supported by the comment made in the open response section of the survey by a participant stating that "Some people act confused about transformation because they don't want to challenge themselves and implement it; this slows the process".

From the responses, it was also clear that issues around transformation are still underpinned by racial tensions and the injustices of the past from the following quotes in the open commentary section: 'Some academic members of staff still influence students to the old systems of thinking across racial lines' and 'the focus of the academic environment is to develop world citizens who can make a meaningful contribution to society through the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are shaped by a 'global village' institutional culture of the university. We need to move away from the narrow political South African agenda of transformation that is primarily race-based.' This was evident when other school members encouraged students to complain about a school member from another colour to bolster his/her perception of the colleague's incompetency. Therefore, a primary area of concern appears to be the lack of platforms to verbalize issues concerning transformation despite the consensus that the institution seeks to understand the current campus climate and

TABLE 1 Demographic details of the participants.

Construct	n = 21	%	Duration/position	n = 21	%
Highest qualification			**Years employed at HEI**		
PhD	5	23.8	1–4 years	9	42.9
Masters	13	61.9	5–9 years	2	9.5
Honours	1	4.8	10–14 years	6	28.6
Diploma	1	4.8	15–19 years	1	4.8
Post-grade 12 qualification at NQF Level 5	1	4.8	20 or more years	3	14.3
	Frequency n = 21	**%**		**Frequency n = 21**	**%**
Academic or support staff			**Level of employment (academic staff)**		
Academic	16	76.2	Senior Lecturer/ Researcher	4	19.0
Support	4	19.0	Lecturer/Researcher	12	57.1
Both	1	4.8	Junior Lecturer	1	4.8

practices regarding diversity and inclusion. This is evident from a statement by one participant: 'It's through discussions that you pick up that there are issues of consistency, transparency and fairness.' Some of the inconsistencies and poor transparencies were work allocation, where a staff member who met the requirements might be denied the position because of colour, and the position was given to another staff member with fewer qualifications, who argued about the balance in the racial appointment. Two-thirds of the participants indicated that training on how to work in a multicultural environment and recognizing significant contributions to implementing transformation would increase job satisfaction. Table 2 displays the general perceptions of staff regarding transformation at the institution.

4.2 | Transformation of the student body

As demonstrated in Figure 1, 50% of the participants indicated that they are neutral that clinical platforms align with the transformation policies of the university, 40% agreed/strongly agreed, 10% disagreed and the same number did not know if these clinical platforms align with transformation policies for the selected higher education institution. The inconsistency in responding to this question was due to a discrepancy in policy implementation. Most of the participants (70%) felt respected by the students irrespective of student or staff gender. Fortunately, student respect is armed from home, although there was a trend for individual colleagues to use other students to contest their encounters. More than half of the staff (55%) noted that the student body embraced diversity. Just more than two-thirds of the staff (62%) supported the university's goal of increasing a diverse student body.

4.3 | Management of transformation

Approximately 70.0% of participants indicated that management supports career development. The management is also comfortable with diversity (75.0%) and treats everyone fairly in the department (50.0%). Only 30.0% of participants agreed that the university promoted a culture of transparency. Similarly, 35.0% agreed that the university employs a culture of accountability in implementing the transformation. Only 10.0% of the participants agreed that the university consulted them before making decisions on matters that affected them. Of the participants, 30.0% agreed that staff members' thoughts about the implementation of transformation were actively considered. In addition, 50.0% of the participants agreed that the School of Healthcare Sciences' implementation of transformation aligned with institutional policies. The same number (50.0%) agreed that transformational policies were clear and concise. Of the participants, 80.0% agreed that the institution provided a transformational policy, but only 30.0% of the same participants agreed that the transformation policies are applied uniformly across all campuses. Regarding the management of the transformation process, there are issues regarding transparency, consistency and fairness. Only 30.0% of participants agreed that the university promoted a culture of transparency and accountability in implementing transformation. The management of transformation is depicted in Figure 2.

4.4 | Areas of transformation being addressed within the School of Healthcare Sciences

The primary areas of transformation that departments are addressing are illustrated in Figure 3. Transformation towards hybrid teaching and learning, curriculum transformation, staff and student diversity are high on the agenda within the School of Healthcare Sciences, although it remains unclear what approaches and methods are used to plan and implement such a transformation. This area requires further investigation since it was stated that 'Practices within departments are not aligned with university policies' and 'Transparency and consistency in applying policies among staff and students must improve'.

TABLE 2 Perspective on institutional transformation.

| Construct	Strongly agree/ agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Strongly disagree/ disagree (%)	Not applicable/ do not know (%)
Rapid transformation is required to better reflect South Africa's diversity	57	29	14	0
Institution committed to transformation	62	28	10	0
Rapid curriculum transformation implementation is required to accommodate the changes in the external environment	57	38	5	0
Institution is committed to redressing inequality	52	24	24	0
Institution embraces diversity	62	24	14	0
Suggestions of new ways of doing things are given fair consideration	43	19	38	0
I understand how my role contributes to transformation	52	29	19	0
I know how to implement transformation in my academic role	48	33	14	5
The institution seeks to understand current practices regarding diversity and inclusion	57	19	19	5
Institution seeks to understand campus climate regarding diversity and inclusion	52	33	10	5
Training on how to work in a multicultural environment will increase job satisfaction	81	5	14	0
Staff should be recognized for significant contributions to implementing transformation	66	24	5	5
There are platforms to verbalize issues concerning transformation	34	19	47	0

Transformation of the student body
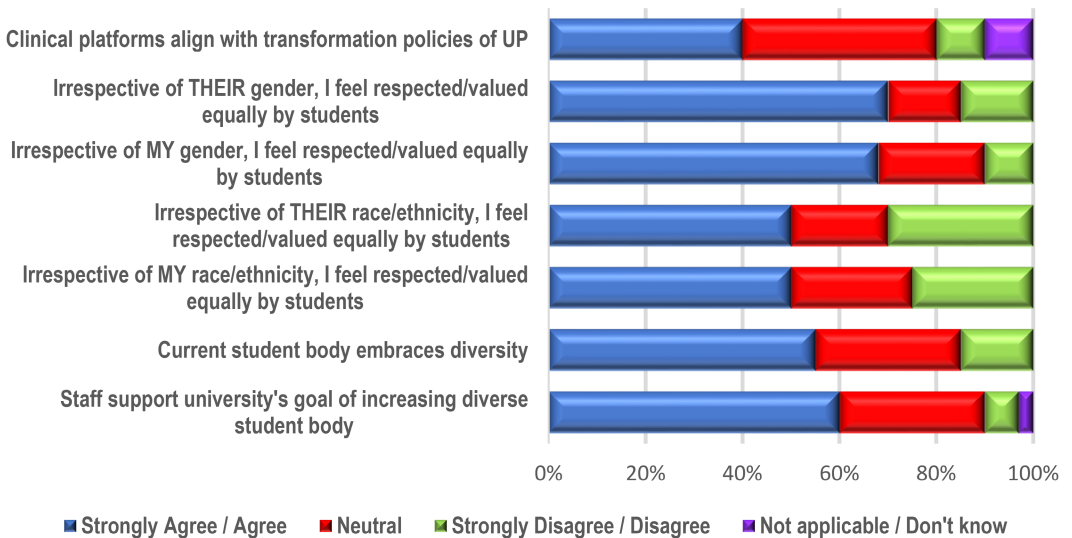
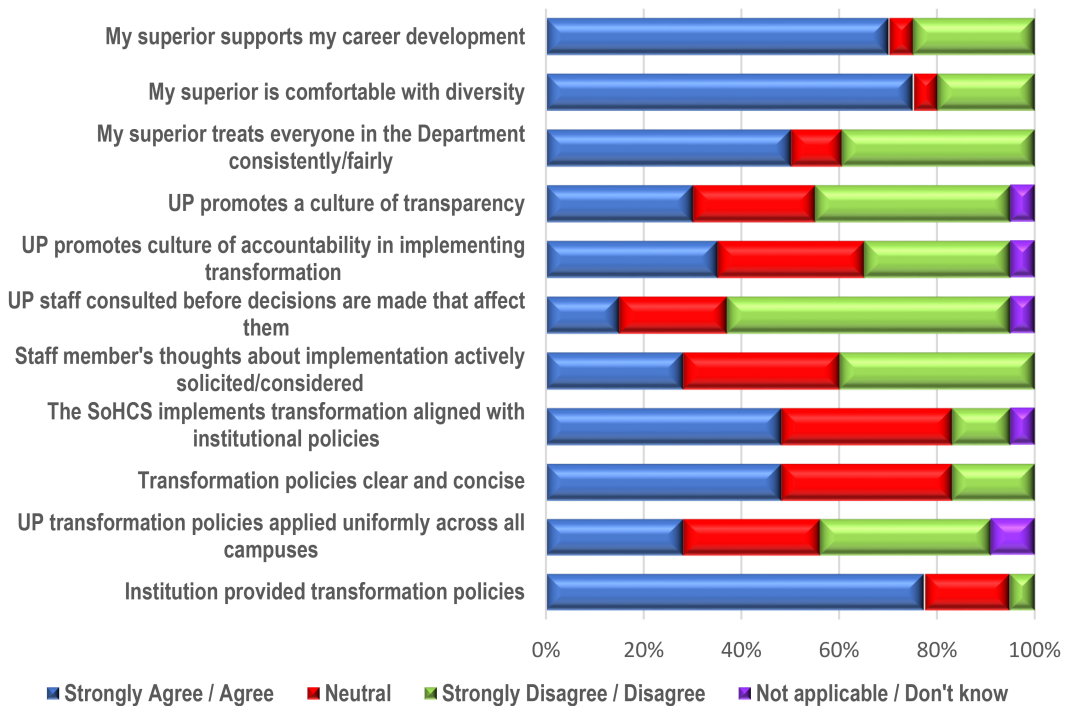**FIGURE 1** Transformation of the student body.

FIGURE 2 Management of transformation.

4.5 | Healthcare Sciences

Although the move towards transformation has been made with various focus areas being addressed, the impact of the drive towards transformation is not clear. The respondents identified the areas of transformation addressed by departments as staff diversity (85.7%), student admissions (81.0%), hybrid teaching and learning (81.0%), curriculum (71.4%), alternative assessment (52.0%) and workload (42.9%). As demonstrated by the respondents, the HEI worked on recruiting diverse staff in terms of race, although working together was still a challenge. Similarly, regarding student admission and teaching, the HEI welcomed different races and introduced hybrid learning. The workload at the time was challenging, as adjustments between new and old employees were still needed.

5 | DISCUSSION

In this study, we surveyed staff from the School of Healthcare Science to establish the perceptions of transformation and needs within the school. Universities that focus on the demands and requirements of society emphasise people-oriented relationships, group work and collaborative teaching and learning environments (Rizvi et al., 2016). Transformation offers an opportunity for universities to create safe, welcoming and conflict-free workplaces constituted by people of diverse backgrounds (Rudhumbu & Chawawa, 2014). An assessment of transformation strategies used in South Africa revealed that transformation strategies are driven by the development of skills in human resources to redress historical imbalances and provide equal opportunities
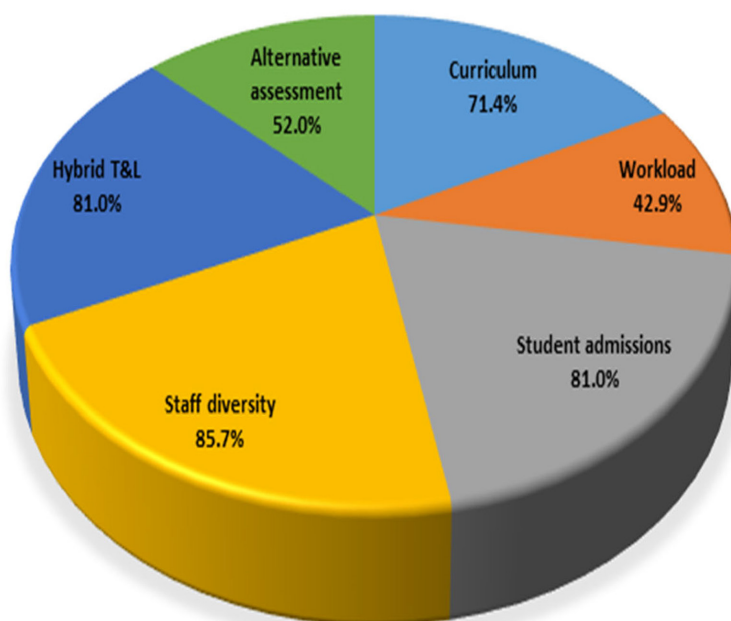
FIGURE 3　Areas of transformation being addressed within the School of Healthcare Sciences.

(Musonda et al., 2019). Transformation is viewed as the catalyst for addressing the country's socioeconomic problems to improve the quality of life of all citizens. The National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) recommended that transformation in South African universities should be reflected in all facets of an institution (CHE, 2022). As the conceptual framework of the institution and NCHE included aspects such as governance, management, equity in staffing, progressive and inclusive teaching and learning and knowledge systems, the study focused on the perspectives of staff on transformation in the institution, transformation of the student body and the management of transformation areas being addressed within the School of Healthcare Sciences of the selected institution.

5.1 | Perspective on transformation in the institution

More than half of the staff strongly agreed that rapid transformation is required to better reflect South Africa's diversity. Transformation in higher education institutions was firmly recognized by the post-1994 democratic government (Mzangwa, 2019). Transformation in higher education institutions comprises the creation of new systems (Badat, 2010) that will meet the diversity needs of institutions. Higher education systems are separated by race, culture, social and geographic diversity and are discriminatory regarding sex and linguistics (Adonis & Silinda, 2021). In 1994, the democratic government was devoted to reforming unfair and inequitable institutional structures and practices intended for the privileged whites of apartheid South Africa to generate a more unbiased culture (Pattman & Carolissen, 2018). Transformation aims to eliminate discrimination in all systems.

In this study, approximately two-thirds of staff members perceived that the institution was committed to transformation. This contrasts with a meta-ethnographic study conducted in the United Kingdom, where poor institutional support was highlighted as a barrier to transformation (Hoover & Harder, 2015). The transformation process imposes the management of cultural diversity, which leads to diverse team support (de Klerk & Radloff, 2010) among the staff, who agree that the institution embraces diversity. Education within a diverse

setting prepares students to become good citizens in an increasingly complex, pluralistic society, fosters mutual respect and teamwork and helps build communities whose members are judged by the quality of their character and contributions (Rizvi et al., 2016). However, less than half of the staff in this study agreed that suggestions for new ways of doing things should be given fair consideration. Unfortunately, collaboration among staff members was not observed. Another review suggested collaborative approaches for successful transformation (Leal Filho et al., 2018). If faculty staff members are not allowed to implement change, it is unlikely that it will be successful (Givens, 2018). A study in the USA recommended nurturing a culture of human respect between faculty and staff (Devereaux et al., 2019). Human respect promotes reconciliation and high-quality teaching (Hénard & Roseveare, 2012).

Half of the staff understood how their role contributed to transformation and knew how to implement transformation in their academic role. More than half of the staff strongly agreed that the institution seeks to understand current practices regarding diversity and inclusion. Understanding the role of transformation empowers staff to be active partakers in the transformation process. Implementing transformation can involve restructuring the curriculum so that educationally and financially disadvantaged students can access social inclusion and address gender and racial inequality (Luvalo, 2019).

5.2 | Transformation of the student body

Most of the participants felt respected by students irrespective of student or staff gender. A lack of respect in staff-student relationships can create a barrier to student learning and undermine teaching (Kessi & Cornell, 2015). Mutual engagement between teachers and students in decision-making is a dominant element of fostering respect between the two parties and affects students' academic performance (Thompson, 2018). In contrast, a study conducted in Australia demonstrated that the ethnicity of students influenced the attributes and behavioural traits contributing to respect for their teachers based on qualifications and work experience (Evans et al., 2014). Higher education institution teachers need to demonstrate pedagogical, methodological and human attributes to earn respect from students (Martín, 2019).

More than half of the staff noted that the student body embraced diversity. By embracing diversity in higher education institutions, the interaction and knowledge of a variety of races can build a bridge between cultural exclusion and racial inclusion (Gündemir et al., 2019). Experiencing diversity at the university level prepares students for the diversity they will be confronted with in the future. Diversity in higher education institutions in South Africa depends on numerous factors, including political and economic factors. Previously disadvantaged students experienced barriers such as financial or language constraints to accessing the university. Prior to the 1994 democratic government, it was a criminal offence for a non-white student to register at a white university without state permission (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). The policies changed drastically after 1994, but non-white students were still hesitant to join previously white university institutions. A qualitative study in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, confirmed the barriers experienced by black working-class students in academic development, where they still prefer that university lecturers obtain assistance in accessing or completing documents required for their success (Hlatshwayo & Fomunyam, 2019). Language competency underpins the weaknesses of students in expressing themselves and gaining access to self-help in university systems (Mdepa & Tshiwula, 2012). It is, therefore, the institution's role to meet the challenges experienced by previously disadvantaged students to meet the diverse needs in South Africa. Approximately two-thirds of the staff in this study supported the university's goal of increasing the diverse student body. Although the diverse student body of the institutional community is approved, it may be seen as an opportunity or a threat (Shaw, 2009). The threat may be that policy transformation is costly to implement. The opportunities may be related to the admission of a high number of non-white students, which will aid in improving the subsidies the university receives per student of colour.

5.3 | Management of transformation

With respect to the management of transformation, most participants indicated that management supported their career development, was comfortable with institutional diversity, and felt that everyone was treated fairly in the department. It is vitally important that management support the career development of their employees. Support can be expressed as helping employees achieve their career goals and motivation and incorporating equality in the workplace irrespective of race. An employer, according to the Employment Equity Act, which was last amended in 2013, should treat all employees equally without discrimination from gender, race, socioeconomic status, ethnic origin or sexual orientation (Dahanayake et al., 2018). The inequalities and inequities that currently characterize South Africa's higher education sector are due to the systematic political oppression, social discrimination and economic exploitation of black people during colonial and apartheid rule (Adonis & Silinda, 2021). Since 1994, there have been concerted efforts to build an inclusive education system that reflects a democratic society as envisioned by the constitution. Due to higher institutions being inhabited by discriminatory and authoritarian agencies (Badat, 2010), the Department of Higher Education, through a white paper published in 1997, called for education at universities to be coordinated and ensure diversity (South Africa & Training, 2014). The education system is also expected to include both non-racist and non-sexist (Badat, 2010). This was in line with the government's proposal to reduce inequalities in terms of race and gender as well as increase access for educationally and financially disadvantaged students (Fourie, 1999).

A third of participants agreed that the university promoted a culture of transparency and agreed that the university had a culture of accountability in implementing the transformation. Accountability at universities is a measure of a reporting system that strengthens fairness and democratization (Sułkowski, 2016). While transparency improves injustice, inequality and imbalances from different racial groups in universities are observed (Badat, 2010; Sułkowski, 2016). In addition, only half of the participants agreed that the School of Healthcare Sciences' implementation was aligned with institutional policies. A South African study agreed with the findings of low agreement with the alignment of transformation with institutional policies (Ngcamu & Teferra, 2015). Staff felt that they were not consulted before decisions were made that affected them. Although staff were aware of the institutional transformation policies, they felt that the policies were not applied consistently across all campuses. Furthermore, the School of Healthcare Sciences' implementation of institutional policies may not be entirely well aligned. The drive towards transformation requires strong leadership that embraces the African concept of 'ubuntu', which can give a competitive advantage to companies and thus institutions that incorporate their principles and practices (Ncube, 2010). As such, transformation management within institutions should be transparent, fair and uniformly applied where accountability is an integral component of its success. It is imperative that the institution considers the 'voice' of the staff, as ultimately, they play a key role in implementing strategies to address transformation in areas of teaching and learning, research and community engagement. Therefore, staff are key stakeholders in implementing institutional policy. Change management is a structured process of managing people, processes and technology in a changing environment to align business strategies with external changes (Teczke et al., 2017). Change management requires knowledge of different perspectives, models and approaches, and this study's findings can inform management regarding staff needs and the implementation of change.

5.4 | Areas of transformation being addressed within the School of Healthcare Sciences

Although rapid impactful changes have been experienced within the School of Healthcare Sciences to transform practices for sustainable development, respondents identified specific areas in which transformation was addressed. Education plays a vital role in the existence and development of nations, and there is a need for diversity at all levels, including multicultural education in teaching programmes (Rizvi et al., 2016). Staff diversity was regarded as the most important factor, followed by student admissions, hybrid teaching and learning, curriculum, alternative assessment and workload. Classrooms in Europe and the United States are composed of students with heterogeneous

cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic characteristics, but this diversity is reflected to a limited extent in the teacher population (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2021). This underrepresentation was ascribed to a lack of students from diverse backgrounds in teacher education programmes (Pit-ten Cate et al., 2021). Among the respondents in this study, 90.5% were South African nationals, 57.1% were African, 33.3% were White, 4.8% were Coloured and 4.8% were of Indian descent. The selected university met its set objectives regarding the diversity of staff. As university educators increasingly face students from different backgrounds with diverse academic levels, a 'one size fits all' approach is challenging. Educators may not be trained to handle this challenge (Jørgensen & Brogaard, 2021).

Learning and education are valued in transformation and require the commitment of faculty, academics and curriculums. To foster sustainable learning, academic staff must reflect on their values, develop a collaborative approach and redesign their own disciplines (Leal Filho et al., 2018). Barriers to remodelling educational methods include a conservative mentality, resistance of some university members, limited financial rewards and bureaucratic systems hindering flexibility and integration of activities (Fisher & McAdams, 2015). Digital transformation through technological advancement and social e-trends has taken place rapidly worldwide and has led to changes in higher education, such as educational standards, quality, decentralization and virtual and independent learning (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022). Technological transformation in higher education in South Africa occurred through the implementation of e-learning (Musonda et al., 2019). Although the selected university used a hybrid teaching model, virtual learning was used during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teaching and assessment currently take place face-to-face and virtually. Virtual learning creates a window of opportunity for inclusiveness and diversity and enables universities to cater to a wide range of transnational students and gain a strategic position in the global education industry (Mohamed Hashim et al., 2022).

The workload of an academic comprises a complex mix of teaching, research and service and administration duties that can vary considerably between individuals according to their experience level and discipline (Kenny & Fluck, 2022). In addition, academic staff are pressured with various official duties and responsibilities (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019). Workload goes beyond academics' time in classroom teaching or research activities (Kyvik, 2013). Teaching ratios should be as robust as research, publication and consultation ratios. An excessive workload influences the quality and performance of teaching. Academics should be fully involved in developing and operating workload, performance and related policies (Kenny & Fluck, 2022). Capturing academic work is difficult, and the sample was not fully representative of the staff of the School of Healthcare Sciences in the current study.

6 | CONCLUSIONS

This article revealed the complexities of transformation in the School of Healthcare Sciences at the selected HEI. This paper contributes new knowledge on staff perceptions regarding transformation, transformation of the student body, management of transformation and areas of transformation being addressed within the selected HEI. The study allowed staff to critically examine each of these areas of transformation by completing an anonymous questionnaire. The institution was perceived to be committed to transformation; however, a more rapid transformation is required to better reflect South Africa's diversity. In general, staff members felt respected by students irrespective of student or staff gender. Management was found to support career development, be comfortable with diversity and treat everyone fairly. Areas of transformation addressed by the university include staff diversity, followed by student admissions, hybrid teaching and learning, curriculum, alternative assessment and workload. Despite the positive perceptions, transformation should be structured to eliminate discrimination in all systems. Support can be expressed by helping employees achieve their career goals and motivate and incorporate equality in the workplace irrespective of race. The university initiated several changes supported by policies and regulations to improve the quality of higher education and research and to overcome unfair discrimination. Although the transformation is consistent with most of the country's needs, the institution and curriculum could further benefit by taking the perspectives and needs of staff into consideration and be further decolonized and democratized to move to a just and equable future.

7 | RECOMMENDATIONS

We recommend that the study be repeated in the same population, as different management practices in the deanery led the institution and several changes were implemented. We further recommend a phenomenological qualitative study to explore the experiences of the staff of the selected HEI with regard to transformation and how it affects their academic progress. Additionally, a continuum of mental health observations of the staff of the selected HEI is recommended because the low response rate may have been related to the fears of opening up and race-related conflicts.

8 | LIMITATIONS

The researchers acknowledge that using a self-report questionnaire allows self-report bias, and some staff may have answered dishonestly despite the use of an anonymous questionnaire. Using a self-report questionnaire also allows staff to misinterpret the questions or the rating scale, despite both being adapted to be as simple as possible. The limited number of responses allows for sampling bias, and the data collected more than 3 years ago may not represent the current transformation perspectives of higher education institutions among staff.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The researchers declare no conflicts of interest pertaining to the study.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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