

PROFESSIONALLY ORIENTED CURRICULA DESIGN: A UOT¹ CASE STUDY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents a critical interpretive analysis of the transformation of undergraduate professionally oriented curricula (POC) at a transitioning UoT, foregrounding the integration of general education (GE) as both a catalyst and a site of institutional and curricular change. Situated within South Africa's differentiated higher education landscape and the broader global context of polycrises, characterised by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), the study explores how curriculum reform operates as a space for institutional identity-making, ethical engagement, and pedagogical renewal. It interrogates how internal institutional dynamics intersect with external socio-economic, political and geopolitical, technological, and ecological forces to reframe the purposes and practices of POC, with the goal of cultivating T-shaped graduates who combine deep disciplinary expertise with broad, interdisciplinary, and civic competencies.

Adopting a qualitative single case study design, the research focuses on two faculties, Engineering and the Built Environment, and Health Sciences, which were selected for the scale and significance of their curriculum change. Framed within a critical interpretive paradigm, the study draws on institutional and faculty level document analysis and semi-structured interviews with executive management and academic staff identified as curriculum champions. Data generation was shaped by the constraints of the COVID-19 pandemic, requiring adaptive strategies to ensure breadth and depth of participation. Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), initially supported by NVIVO software, was employed to surface key themes and synthesise findings, enabling a rich interpretation of how actors navigate curriculum change in a complex institutional ecology.

The study draws on multiple theoretical lenses. Two central and interrelated theoretical frameworks, namely, *currere* and *instituire*, are deployed to conceptualise curriculum and institutional identity as dynamic, reflexive, and political processes of becoming. Currere conceptualises curriculum as a lived, ethical and disruptive project. Instituire theorises the institution as always in the process of becoming, shaped by socio-political, historical, and ideological forces. These frameworks are complemented by the notion of university chronotopes, the Force Field Model and the African philosophical lens of ubuntu and glo-ubuntu. Together, these framings provide the theoretical scaffolding to explore the structural, ideological, and experiential dimensions of change. They allow for a critical reading of the UoT, in the global South, as a dynamic institution grappling with tensions between its Technikon legacy and its aspirations toward a socially engaged, future-facing identity.

The findings reveal persistent tensions between global and local imperatives, professional body requirements and shifting institutional identity, mediated by the agency of leaders, curriculum champions, and faculty cultures. While GE was

embraced as a means of broadening POC, its conceptualisation and implementation varied considerably across programmes, reflecting divergent understandings of its purpose and value. The analysis highlights how curriculum reform in this context is simultaneously a compliance-driven exercise and a space of possibility for rethinking the purposes of higher education in the Global South.

Drawing on the dual conceptual lenses of *currere* and *instituire*, the study advances the *Synaptic Currere* framework as both a metaphorical and theoretical contribution to reimagining the relationship between professional and general/liberal education in sub-Saharan Africa. Conceived as a relational, ethically charged, and interdisciplinary process of institutional and individual becoming, the framework promotes holistic, contextually grounded, and transformative curricula that transcend entrenched dichotomies, align with glo-ubuntu and rhizo-currere principles, and prepare graduates to be critically engaged, adaptable, and socially responsible glocal citizens. In doing so, the study contributes to the theorisation of curriculum transformation in differentiated higher education contexts, and in the Global South, affirming the UoT not as a lesser imitation of traditional universities, but as distinctive, becoming institutions capable of reimagining higher education in response to glocal imperatives. The study calls for curriculum transformation as an ethically grounded, context-sensitive, and future-facing practice that foregrounds both professional relevance and broader societal purpose.

Key words: *curriculum studies, higher education, professionally oriented curriculum, university of technology, general education, curriculum transformation, institutional identity, institutional transformation, Force Feld Model, currere, instituire, glo-ubuntu, rhizo-currere, Global South, synaptic currere.*

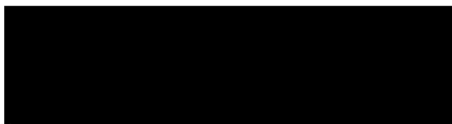
ABSTRACT (isiZulu)

DECLARATION

I, **Roshnee Sunder**, do declare that:

1. The research reported in this thesis, except where otherwise indicated, is my original research.
2. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university.
3. This thesis does not contain other persons' data , analysis, graphs, pictures, tables or any other information, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from said persons.
4. This thesis does not contain other persons' writing, unless specifically acknowledged as being sourced from other authors. Where other written sources have been quoted:
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6. Kindly refer to the Turnitin report (Appendix 9).

Signed



Supervisor: Professor Michael Samuel



DEDICATION

For my children and their children...

I hope this thesis inspires you to believe that you can do anything that you put your mind to and that one is never too late to pursue an education.

I hope this inspires you, as you continue to inspire me. I love you always and forever.

It is never too late to be what you might have been (George Elliot).

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The completion of this thesis would have also not been possible without the love, influence and unwavering support of some special people, that I owe a debt of gratitude to:

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

4IR	: Fourth industrial revolution
5IR	: Fifth industrial revolution
AAC&U	: American Association of Colleges and Universities
AEM	: Academic executive management
BEngTech	: Bachelor of Engineering Technology
BHSc	: Bachelor of Health Sciences
BTECH	: Bachelor of Technology
CATEs	: Colleges of Advanced Technical Education
CE	: Citizenship education
CELT	: Centre for Excellence in Teaching and Learning
CHE	: Council of Higher Education
CQPA	: Centre for Quality Promotions and Assurance
CRP	: Curriculum Renewal Project
CS	: Complementary studies
CTP	: Committee of Technikon Principals
DHET	: Department of Higher Education and Training
DoE	: Department of Education
DVCTL	: Deputy Vice Chancellor of Teaching and Learning
ECSA	: Engineering Council of South Africa
ECTS	: European Credit Transfer and Accumulation
EHEA	: European Higher Education Area
ERTL	: Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning
FEBE	: Faculty of Engineering and the Built Environment
FFM	: Force Field Model
FGE	: Faculty General Education
FHS	: Faculty of Health Sciences
GCE	: Global citizenship education
GE	: General Education
GETT	: General Education Task Team
GLEI	: Global Liberal Education Inventory
GUR	: General University Framework
HE	: Higher Education
HEIs	: Higher Education Institutions
HEQF	: Higher Education Quality Framework
HEQSF	: Higher Education Quality Sub-Framework
HOD	: Head of Department
HPCSA	: Health Professions Council of South Africa
IBE	: International Bureau of Education
IGE	: Institutional general education
KZN	: Kwa-Zulu Natal
LAE	: Liberal arts education
LE	: Liberal education
MENA	: Middle East and Northern Africa
MST	: Microsoft Teams
NMU	: Nelson Mandela University

NQF	: National qualification framework
OED	: Oxford English Dictionary
PD	: Professional development
PL	: Professional learning
PIRLS	: Progress in International Reading Literacy Study
PoC	: Professionally oriented curriculum
POCM	: Programme overview and curriculum map
PoE	: Professionally oriented education
PQM	: Programme qualification mix
QEP	: Quality Enhancement Project
RTA	: Reflexive thematic analysis
SA	: South Africa
SACMEQ	Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational : Quality
SAHE	: South African Higher Education
SAQA	: South African Qualifications Authority
SATN	: South African Technology Network
SDGs	: Sustainable Development Goals
SERTEC	: Certification Council for Technikon Education
STEM	: Science, technology, engineering, mathematics
TA	: Thematic analysis
THENSA	: Technological Higher Education Network South Africa
TIMMS	: Trends in International Mathematics and Sciences Study
UK	: United Kingdom
UKZN	: University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
UNESCO	: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UoT	: University of Technology
US	: United States
USA	: United States (of America)
USAf	: Universities South Africa
UWN	: University World News
VC	: Vice Chancellor
VUCA	: Volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS AND PRESENTATIONS

1	Garraway, J., Vahed, A., Sunder, R., Reddy, P., Maharaj, M., Walters, M. & Seedat, N. (2019). Time Travel through the Polytechnic to University Nexus: From Heartfelt Difficulties to New Possibilities. <i>Alternation</i>, 28 (Special Edition), 116-144.  Alternation_Special_Edition_28_2019_116-144116Prin.pdf
2	Sunder, R., and Samuel, M.A. (2025). <i>Chronotopes of Possibility: Reimagining the UoT as a Counter-Institution in Response to the Polycrisis</i>. 12th SAERA 2025 Conference, Durban, South Africa. UKZN.  SAERA2025_Abst ract_presentation_Ros  Letter of acceptance SAERA 2
3	Sunder, R., Brown, C. and Samuel, M.A. (2025). <i>Supervision and institutional typologies: Supervision as relational and institutional</i>. TUT workshop, 31 July to 01 August 2025.  TUT_Workshop_Being +Becoming-a-Supervi Co-presented a session at the “<i>Being and Becoming a Supervisor: Developing a Research Career Academic Identity</i>” workshop at Tshwane University of Technology.
4	Forthcoming book chapter/s: Sunder, R. (2025/6). From Technician to Citizen: A Case Study of General Education Reform at a South African University of Technology. In Rantz, et al. <i>Rethinking General Education in Higher Education</i>. IGI Global Scientific Publishing.

	Sunder, R. (2025/6). The Synaptic Bridge: A 'Glo-Ubuntu' Framework for Reimagining General Education in the Global South. In Rantz, et al. <i>Rethinking General Education in Higher Education</i>. IGI Global Scientific Publishing. Draft abstracts:  ABSTRACTS FOR FORTHCOMING BOOK Link: https://www.igi-global.com/publish/call-for-papers/call-details/9171 Call for Chapters Proposals Submission Deadline: September 7, 2025
5	Forthcoming Journal articles: i. Suggested Title: The Synaptic Bridge: A 'Glo-Ubuntu' Framework for Reimagining General Education in the Global South ii. Suggested Title: A Curricular Vaccine for a Fragile Democracy: Rethinking General Education's Purpose in a Post-Apartheid Context Draft abstracts:  ABSTRACTS FOR FORTHCOMING JOUR Possible Journals for consideration: • <i>Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning</i> • <i>Education as Change</i> • <i>Journal of Education</i> • <i>Perspectives in Education</i>

PROLOGUE

Throughout my academic career in higher education, I saw myself in a processing of becoming, from radiographer to teacher and an academic. Embarking on this doctoral journeying has been my 'coming undone', with the constant flow/movement challenging and breaking done old rigid ways, creating space for new connections and new lines of flight and the possibilities not thought of before. It has been a long journey, the becoming of a scholar is about the journey, and the journeying and not the destination. The greatest accomplishment is not having to say it is done! It is really about the disruptions, and the unlearning and the relearning that has taken place. I believe that growth happens in disruption.

This journey took longer than it should have. But as a wise friend constantly reminded me, *'it will happen when it is supposed to happen.'* At first, I did not take these words seriously. However, as I look back, I realise the truth in those words. Guest et al., (2012, p. 13) avers, "[t]o an interpretivist, the story one tells, and its effect on the intended audience, is the centrepiece of the method." The story told in the thesis required me to first understand my own 'becoming' as a researcher before I could authentically narrate the story of an institution in its own state of becoming. The prolonged journey was not a delay, but a necessary period for immersion and reflection, allowing me to move from a practitioner's desire for answers to a scholar's comfort with complexity and ambiguity. It is the story told not with the certainty of an expert, but with the interpretive humility of one who has learned to listen.

My journey through this institution has been one of many hats, academic curriculum champion, department head, and now, academic staff development practitioner. In each role, my core identity has remained that of someone deeply invested in the art and science of curriculum. I was fortunate to arrive at a pivotal moment, joining the UoT at the very seam of its historical remaking, just before the merger of the Technikons. It was a time of national conversation in fields like mine, radiography, as we collectively navigated the monumental shift from diploma to professional degrees.

A decade later, this conversation had evolved into an institution-wide marathon. I found myself not just a participant, but an integral player in the change happening at every level, departmental, faculty, and institutional. I was captivated by the human element of this structural upheaval: the complex, often fraught, responses of my colleagues to the maelstrom of internal and external change. It was clear for many; the sheer pace and scale of transformation left them in a state of flux. This was uncharted territory for the UoT, an endeavour undertaken with minimal internal support, and I was drawn to understand how this grand project would unfold.

One could say my story is inseparable from the institution's history and ethos. It is precisely this embeddedness that made my positionality as a doctoral scholar so critical to the integrity of this project. I began this study acutely aware of my 'insider' status. I assumed that this would grant me easy passage, that doors would open readily, Reality, however, proved more complex. I encountered deep reluctance from academics to participate, many of whom relegated the 'task' of curriculum to the designated curriculum champions, 'the ones who did the curriculum anyway.' This unexpected barrier forced a crucial methodological pivot, compelling me to broaden the study's scope to ensure richer participation. In a strange twist, the design decision to exclude my own faculty also cast me as an 'outsider' to the programmes I studied, providing a necessary and balancing distance. The subsequent challenges of the COVID-19 lockdown further tested my resolve, yet despite these hurdles, the interviews that were completed yielded profoundly rich data.

This duality of being both the inside and outsider demanded a constant state of vigilance. I had to consciously navigate the blurred lines between practitioner and researcher, guarding against the temptation to make assumptions based on shared institutional knowledge. My greatest challenge was to remain an objective scholar, to honour the data without colouring it with my own experiences.

Perhaps it is fitting, then, that one of the many hats I wear is that of a health professional. This background may explain my choice of the synapse as the conceptual metaphor for this work. When the idea was pitched, I embraced it immediately. It resonated on many levels, offering a language to articulate the very

interconnectedness, the gaps, the tensions, and the transformative potential I had witnessed and lived firsthand.

In the end, this doctoral journey was not simply about adding another 'hat' to the collection. It was the crucible in which the practitioner, the curriculum champion, and the insider academic were forged into a single entity: the researcher. The challenges and tensions described here were not obstacles to the work; they *were* the work. It is from this uniquely integrated and sometimes contradictory vantage point, of knowing an institution from the inside while striving to see wit with new eyes, that the following story is told.

CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

"The task of the modern educator is not to cut down jungles, but to irrigate deserts."

(C.S. Lewis)

1.1 Introduction

We are living in unprecedented times marked by an extraordinary pace of change in the technological, economic, geopolitical and societal spaces, in what is captured as the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) era. Leaders need to adapt to this new reality of an increasingly VUCA¹ world. Marope (2017) declared that the pace and intensity of change in the current century will have a more profound impact on curricula than all previous centuries combined. This holds significant implications for contemporary higher education (HE), particularly for the university of technology (UoT) sector in South Africa (SA). Traditionally, universities of technologies (UoTs) in SA have been closely associated with preparing graduates for specific workplaces, operating within the confines of tightly prescribed technical and vocational curricula. The VUCA era calls for individual citizens and organisations to be more agile, resilient and adaptable, demonstrating the ability to embrace change, unlearn and relearn, think critically and creatively and innovate to solve the complex challenges facing global society. The VUCA world is looking for citizens with what is called a 'T-shaped' education, who are able to demonstrate an integration of specialised knowledge and expertise (the vertical stroke of the letter 'T') with a comprehensive grasp (the horizontal stroke) of diverse disciplines and their interconnectedness (Brown, 2009; Santos & Bae, 2022; Saviano, et al., 2016).

The research project in this thesis constitutes a critical interpretive analysis of how one UoT in SA, in its transition from a Technikon to a university, deliberately and intentionally resisted the temptation to re-create a model for professionally oriented education (PoE) committed to specialisation alone. It did this by mandating an

¹ VUCA – the term was popularised by Bennis and Nanus (1985) in their book, *Leaders: The Strategies for Taking Charge*. VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity, describing the unpredictable and fast-changing nature of the world and the new reality in the 21st century. Volatility refers to the unpredictable changes make long-term planning difficult. Uncertainty refers to the lack of clarity about the future. Complexity refers to the interconnectedness of global events makes predicting impacts challenging. Ambiguity refers to the meaning of events is unclear, even when information is available. [VUCA - Leaders with Vision, Understanding, Clarity, Agility! %](#)

integration of general education (GE) into all undergraduate curricula, thereby embodying a commitment to renewal and transformation. This came with the recognition that UoT graduates need a T-shaped education to be properly equipped to tackle the problems of/in a VUCA world. To begin, the study examines institutional driving forces in its responsiveness to re-imagine professionally oriented curriculum (PoC). While examining the internal institutional dynamics, and its curricula as forces of change/influence (reform, transformation and disruption even), the analysis also considers that curriculum planning and decision-making is influenced by both national and global pressures. The study explores how the curriculum players at the UoT navigated these competing forces in their curriculum planning and decision-making, as well as their commitment to the new GE ideology.

Curriculum change, like any systemic change, is complex and messy and not always easy to achieve. Curriculum design is never neutral and is “based on the choice of subjects interpellated by hegemonic discourses” (Amin, 2017, p. 295). This author asserts that this involves an interplay of institutional imperatives, coupled with the global and national drivers of change, which results in different discourses, strategies and trends. Similarly, the concept of GE in higher education (HE) is equally complex and highly contested; it also involves an interplay of institutional imperatives that entwine with global and national drivers of change in/for the VUCA world. Creating a balance between these complex arrays of glocal (both local and global) trends and agendas has particular relevance for a transforming society like SA. As Kraak (2004) argued, high skills and efficiency discourses have the potential to undermine the role of higher education institutions (HEIs) in strengthening democratic practices and critical citizenship.

This study examines the multiple levels of responsiveness engaged contextually, methodologically and theoretically. It provides new perspectives on curriculum change by examining the interplay between ideologies and influences on curriculum change within UoT contexts. It also contributes to further probing what would be an African epistemology for GE or what critical citizenship education could be, in a sub-Saharan context.

1.2 Chapter overview

This chapter begins with introducing the differing conceptualisations of curriculum and makes clear the view taken in the study. It then moves into problematising curricula for PoE in VUCA times and argues why GE, as a new ideology, is necessary. Multiple key drivers (change forces), which influence curriculum practices for PoE within the UoT sector, are discussed. This is followed by introducing the differing discourses on professional education and/versus GE or liberal arts education and strengthens the rationale for the study (further elaborated in Chapter Three). This is followed with an outline of the research purpose and critical questions of the study. The chapter ends with a structure of the thesis.

1.3 Background and rationale to the study

Throughout the UoT sector's history, the dominant view of a technical education was about preparing non-academic students for specific jobs, emphasising practical skills and applied knowledge. From technical college to Technikon to UoT, these institutions grew in numbers and played a crucial role in addressing the skills shortage in various industries through its national diploma curriculum. The Technikon Act of 1993 sought to enhance their status and integrate them into the broader educational framework alongside universities, and formally established Technikons as degree-awarding institutions within the South African higher education (SAHE) landscape. Despite this, Technikons were seen as less prestigious HEIs compared to traditional universities, leading to challenges in graduate recognition by professional bodies. A relevance to the study, is the disparity in prestige and recognition of erstwhile Technikon qualifications or programmes, despite the status as degree-awarding institutions for two decades.

More importantly, all Technikons offered a national curriculum was driven by the convenor system². In the early 2000s, as part of the policy reforms aimed at creating a more equitable system, Technikons were merged and restructured into UoTs or

² Convenor system in Technikon education in South Africa, in the prior dispensation, was an administrative framework in place until 2003, aimed at standardising qualifications across various Technikons. This system designated one Technikon as the 'convenor' for a specific national qualification, which facilitated collaboration among institutions offering similar programmes. Its eventual dissolution marked a significant shift towards more adaptable and responsive educational frameworks within SAHE landscape. (CHE, 2010)

comprehensives universities. The dismantling of the convenor system, coupled with the implementation of the revised Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is of primary importance to this study. These national policy changes had implications within the SAHE, where all higher education institutions (HEIs) had to re-align to the revised HEQSF. This implications for the UoT were more profound and led to UoTs having to rethink their programme qualification mix³ (PQM) and the kind of curricula that it wanted to offer. The UoT became an interesting site for exploration, as institution-wide curriculum change (reconceptualisation and decision-making) was a new experience at the UoT that was fraught with tensions, contestations and vulnerabilities. How the curriculum workers navigated the multiple levers of forces in their curriculum decisions is the focus of this study.

Apple (1993) declared that:

“[E]ducation is deeply implicated in the politics of culture. The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always part of a selective tradition, someone’s selection, some group’s vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political and economic conflicts, tensions, and compromises that organize and disorganize a people.” (1993, p. 1)

This study will unpack this argument, illustrating through the context of a UoT, how the curriculum decisions/choices are neither neutral nor objective, but emerge from historical, socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics, tensions and negotiations. This study is concerned with understanding how the undergraduate PoC is shaped by deliberate decisions/choices made by specific individuals and groups, reflecting their perspectives on what counts as legitimate knowledge. The study will show that curriculum is always political, as it represents what knowledge is considered of most worth, at a given time (Amin, 2017; Apple, 2018). The curriculum also embodies the values, priorities, and interests of those in positions of influence. Consequently, the curriculum can be seen as a powerful tool that sustains the visions and ideologies of the ‘dominant’ force, either entrenching or transforming particular knowledges, and/or ways of knowing, being and becoming.

³ Programme qualification mix (PQM) – in SAHE refers to the range and types of academic programmes and qualifications offered by institutions, aligned with the HEQSF. The framework categorises qualifications according to their level and type, ensuring a structured approach to higher education (see Nel, 2014; see also Chapter 2)

Chapter Two expands on the context of one UoT that opted to renew its PQM as part of its alignment processes and examines the background of the UoT leading up to the institution-wide curriculum change. This section provides a broader background and rationale for the study. It provides an overview of the changing conceptions of curriculum and curriculum change and the key drivers of curriculum change. Lastly, the section makes an argument for why liberalising PoC is necessary in VUCA times. This study is concerned with understanding the potential of curriculum to i) move beyond the technocratic rationality that has been prevalent in curriculum discourses and, ii) foreground the ethical and political question about curriculum content, of ‘what and whose knowledge’ should be official and ‘which forms of experience are of most worth’, as it applies to a UoT context (Apple, 1993, 2018).

1.3.1 Changing conceptions of curriculum and curriculum change

Curriculum conceptualisations, in both schools and higher education, have evolved over time, shaped mainly by contextual factors and intellectual endeavours. Notwithstanding, a universal definition of curriculum is still lacking, although it is progressively gaining mainstream recognition (Lange, 2017; Le Grange, 2006). Globally, various expressions have been employed, such as syllabi, teaching subjects, programmes and courses, with the latter two being more commonly used at a tertiary level. One enduring and pervasive conceptualisation traces its roots to the Latin word ‘*currere*’ (hereafter *currere*) meaning a ‘racecourse’ or a ‘course to be run’ (Pinar, 1994, 1975). From these roots, curriculum is commonly perceived as a systematic and intentional planning of educational experiences to achieve specific educational goals (Tyler, 1949, 2013); a course of study or a plan for learning (Taba & Spalding, 1962); or a more dynamic and collaborative process-oriented perspective, open to critical scrutiny (Stenhouse, 1975).

Despite widespread criticism from scholars (Taba & Spalding, 1962; Eisner, 1985; Apple, 1983; Freire, 2000) the Tylerian model still dominates curricula, globally and in South Africa today; its structure is often outlined across four dimensions, including the official, implemented/enacted, experienced and assessed curriculum. This has bearing on the study as the South African higher education curricula policy aligns with the core principles of this model and its predefined objectives and outcomes. This preoccupation with what Lange (2017, p.33) calls the “exoskeleton of the curriculum”,

which is the “structure and purpose of qualifications as presented in the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)”, has dominated the South African curriculum discourses and practices. Lange (2017) critiques that the SAHE policy has avoided deep and critical engagement with the ‘actual’ curriculum, namely, the knowledge, pedagogy and identity formation at the heart of learning. I argue, as Lange and others do, that this objectives-first, outcomes-based approach has failed to bring about genuine transformation in SAHE. The reasoning is multifaceted and relates to this study—it is linear/rigid and stifles curriculum transformation; it overemphasises measurable outcomes at the expense of more complex, creative and affective aspects of learning; it fails to address decolonisation and Africanisation (the student-led #MustFall movements); and most importantly, it supports the lack of examination of institutional cultures as it relates to academic and student identity (Lang, 2017). In his rehabilitative defence of the Tyler Rationale, Du (2024) re-examines the original work and posits that it remains a beneficial and practical model for curriculum development. This is elaborated further in Chapter Three. The focus in this study is on the official curricula within a UoT context. The study explores how these were reconceptualised within a changing higher education and institutional landscape.

Marope (2017) offered another conceptualisation of curriculum that is driven by globalisation and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this way, curriculum is categorised by levels:

- i) the supra curriculum at the global/international level driven by globalisation/international issues and agencies;
- ii) the macro curriculum that is driven by national policy and regulatory bodies including societal forces;
- iii) the meso curriculum at the institutional level is mainly driven by university management and curriculum leaders/designers or champions as they are called in this study;
- iv) the micro curriculum at the classroom level, is driven by teachers and students;
- v) the nano curriculum is driven by behaviours, needs and aspirations of individual students (outside the scope of this study).

The IBE proffered definition of curriculum is used in this study, namely, “as a dynamic and transformative articulation of collective expectations of the purpose, quality, and

relevance of education and learning to holistic, inclusive, just, peaceful, and sustainable development, and to the well-being and fulfilment of current and future generations” (Marope, 2017). Within this definition, specialised curricula alone will not suffice to adequately prepare future generations of active, critical and responsible citizens.

Curriculum reflects societal expectations, serving as a collaborative effort that encapsulates the ‘why’ or the objectives of education and learning as envisioned by society (Kelly, 2009; Stabback, 2016). The IBE extends this notion of curriculum as ‘a roadmap for achieving socially agreed development and education goals.’ Recognising curriculum as an indicator of societal values, as argued by the Marope (2017), introduces exclusion/inclusion as an alternative means of expressing value. This broadens the understanding of curriculum to encompass what is included as well as what is excluded, omitted, or neglected. Eisner (1985) referred to this as the ‘null’ curriculum. This position has a bearing on the UoT sector and its engagement with its publics, and is pulled in multiple directions by the professions, industry, communities and societies (see Chapter Two for more detail on the UoT context).

This study is primarily concerned with (i) how PoC was reconceptualised/envisioned through the liberal arts/GE agenda, (ii) how it was planned for, and (iii) implemented. The (re)conceptualisation and decision-making are interpellated by these multiple levels of forces at the supra, macro, meso, micro and nano levels. The study excluded the enacted/experienced curriculum, although curriculum champions were likely to draw from the micro/implemented or experienced curriculum when reflecting on their original intentions and declared positionings about the curriculum. While the institution, or the meso level, was seen as a formidable force, with all the changes occurring during the study period (2010 to 2019), the data show that national and regulatory forces, or the macro curriculum, were seen as dominant in the curriculum decision-making processes at the UoT.

1.3.2 Key drivers of curriculum change in the 21st century

Global society faces a complex array of challenges or a polycrises marked by (i) the rapid advancement of technologies that bring both benefits and threats to work and life, (ii) escalating inequalities, political instability, social fracture, and geopolitical

conflicts, and (iii) the impending ecological catastrophe (Le Grange, 2020; Terblanche & Waghid, 2023). The current technological, societal and planetary conditions pose multifaceted crises, prompting profound existential questions related to living in ‘troubled’ times and the possibility of a planet without humans (Le Grange, 2020; Marope, 2017). This complex backdrop also raises crucial educational or curriculum questions. The age-old questions of ‘what and whose knowledge is of most worth’ still prevail (Le Grange, 2014). Moreover, with the ubiquitous nature of information and knowledge, the current higher education landscape now grapples with the question of whether knowledge alone is sufficient and how learning should be/could be re-imagined (Le Grange, 2020).

When looking at the exponential permeation of technology, and the rapid rise of the 4th and 5th industrial revolution (4IR/5IR), its powerful catalytic force on all forms of life and living is visible. Human lives, increasingly intertwined with advanced technologies continue to lead to the collapse of secure boundaries between humans, animals, and machines (Le Grange, 2020): signifying what Harraway (as cited in Le Grange, 2020) called the inception of a post-Anthropocene⁴ era. Relevant to the study, the unpredictable nature of 4IR/5IR, powered by artificial intelligence (AI), is transforming workplaces from task-based to human-centred characteristics, blurring the lines between science, technology, humanities, and social sciences (Marope, 2017). This author added that this revolution disrupts traditional competence demand patterns in the labour market and calls for capabilities in handling new technologies, smart factories, and cyber-physical systems. In addition to being astute to these technological advances, additional competencies are required to drive further innovation and advancements. This is compounded by the disappearance of current jobs and the emergence of unknown ones and necessitates individuals to acquire new competencies not only for employment but also for life. This push for work readiness, which is distinct from work competence, yields tensions in curriculum decisions and design, with employers expressing concerns about graduates not being adequately

⁴ post-Anthropocene – refers to the speculative future geological epoch that follows the current Anthropocene, which is characterised by significant human impact on the planet’s geology, climate and ecosystems. While the Anthropocene highlights humanity’s dominant role in shaping the planet, the post-Anthropocene envisions a world where human influence diminishes or transforms drastically, either due to societal collapse, environmental recovery, or a shift toward a more sustainable co-existence with nature (Harraway, 2015).

prepared for the evolving world of work (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; McKinsey & Co, 2021).

Modern workplaces necessitate expertise in specialised fields and sophisticated technologies, and curricula must ensure mastery of foundational and advanced content. More importantly, curricula must advance 21st century skills, including creativity, communication, collaboration, critical thinking, technology proficiency and digital literacy (Marope, 2017; McKinsey & Co, 2021). Globalisation and interconnectedness also require communication and collaboration across borders, and an understanding of social and cultural change. Modern careers deviate from traditional linear paths, demanding increased agility and more transferable skills, as millennials change jobs three to four times more in the first-decade post-college, emphasising the need for agility and adaptability (Berger, 2016). Employers compete fiercely for top talent, offering competitive pay and enhanced benefits. Graduates face the challenge of navigating personal and societal uncertainties when defining their 'purpose'. In this dynamic landscape, universities must go beyond dispensing facts and actively engage students in developing enduring skills, contributing to the societal fabric for future generations (Adams & Dudley, 2018). The need for transdisciplinary or interdisciplinary approaches to undergraduate curricula arises, requiring increased foresight and anticipatory capacity in curricula to remain relevant. These present further implications for UoT curricula preparing graduates for the evolving industries.

Marope (2017) argued that the curriculum is highly valued for its role in aligning a country's developmental goals with the substance of learning and holistic student development. While economic growth is acknowledged as a critical component of the evolving concept of development, this expanded view includes political stability, social equity, peace, sustainability, human capabilities, human rights, culture, and more. This broadened understanding of development is reflected in the SDGs. Concerns for these global issues have led to calls for global citizenship education. SDG4 focuses on equity in education, quality and lifelong learning for all, hence placing direct demands on university curricula. In a country like SA, which is grappling with its own fragile democracy, the impact of the above-cited societal conditions is more profound.

Further, the inequalities in SA's higher education systems mirror broader societal disparities (Le Grange, 2020). For example, participation rates are significantly lower for African and Coloured students compared to White and Indian students (not the focus of the study). A more relevant example is the decolonial movement, sparked by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall campaigns⁵, which forcefully highlights the epistemic violence suffered by Black staff and students within a western hegemonic higher education system (Hlatshwayo, 2021; Le Grange, 2016). This evoked calls for the undoing of colonisation (decolonisation) of the South African university curriculum. Several scholars claim that decoloniality extends beyond dismantling Western knowledge conceptions and requires a legitimisation of the lived curriculum experiences of students and staff (Hlatshwayo, 2021, 2022a; Le Grange, 2016; Mbembe, 2015). This perspective broadens the understanding of the curriculum beyond the explicit curriculum, emphasising the need to consider the hidden/null curriculum, as expressed in section 1.3.1. Within the study site, decolonisation discourses that followed the 2015/2016 student protests emerged towards the tail-end of the study period, after the curricula reconceptualisation, planning and decision-making phase. Although the transformation agenda was included in the revised university Strategic Plan 2.0, the decolonisation and decoloniality discourses were not foregrounded at the onset of the Curriculum Renewal Project in 2011. Notwithstanding, the transformative efforts in this study period foregrounded the shifts towards broadening the technical and narrowly prescribed curriculum and curriculum practices. This is explored in Chapters Five and Six.

The persistent disruption of human livelihoods is intensifying vulnerabilities and necessitating an education for sustainable development, implicating formal education (Le Grange, 2020). Contrary to the assumption, those contributing more significantly to environmental harm are often individuals with university degrees rather than those with limited formal education and lower socioeconomic status (Orr, as cited by Le Grange, 2020). Ironically, formal education perpetuates a sense of hypocrisy, teaching

⁵ #FeesMustFall was a student-led protest movement that began in mid-October 2015 in South Africa. The goals of the movement were to stop increases in **student fees** as well as to increase government **funding of universities** ([FeesMustFall, 2023](#)).

#Rhodes Must Fall was a protest movement that began on 9 March 2015, originally directed against a statue at the University of Cape Town (UCT) that commemorates Cecil Rhodes. The campaign for the statue's removal received global attention[2][3] and led to a wider movement to 'decolonise' education across South Africa ([Rhodes Must Fall, 2023](#))

students about environmental issues without necessarily encouraging them to take meaningful action, as argued by Le Grange (2020). Notwithstanding, there is a prevailing belief (Baughan, 2015; Le Grange, 2011; Palekhov, 2016) that education should play an active role in addressing environmental degradation. This involves fostering critical global citizens who exhibit exemplary environmental stewardship and embrace sustainable lifestyles. Such endeavours necessitate the integration of specific competencies into 21st century curricula.

Environmental change and disturbances in the ecosystems give rise to emerging health risks and most pandemics (McKinley, 2020). The recent COVID-19 pandemic (hereafter pandemic) is one such example that wreaked havoc on a global scale. The presence of virulent viruses is attributed to poor agricultural practices and land use. To avert the escalating climate crisis and to respond to the calls for a “reframing of human consciousness and practices” that are planet-centred, higher education’s contribution to environmental education and ecological justice is mandatory (McKinley, 2020). This requires an active and critical citizenship education.

Bringing the argument back to the global pandemic period, the lockdown period profoundly impacted education locally and globally, which resulted in the closures of schools and all higher institutions of learning. Many contact educational institutions transitioned from traditional face-to-face mode to what is commonly referred to as ‘emergency remote online teaching and learning (ERTL) to allow continuity with the academic project. I concur with Le Grange (2020) that lines of connection between the pandemic, the economy and labour, education and technology (ERTL), and inequality have a bearing on the higher education sector.

While the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on higher education is outside the scope of this study, it remains important to include an interlude on this unexpected force of influence that continues to disrupt living and learning spaces in profound ways. Several scholars have written about the rethinking of teaching and learning during and post the pandemic (Cahapay, 2020; Courtland, 2021; Mbhiza, 2021; Hlatshwayo, Khumalo & Nzimande, 2021; Samuel, 2022). The establishment of the ‘new normal’ in higher education embodies online spaces for teaching and learning during periods of disruption (Davids, 2021). This mode of delivery serves as a catalyst for profound

curriculum changes and opens opportunities for new learning pathways. However, this cannot happen by osmosis. It requires deliberate and strategic negotiation and investment of both physical and theoretical resources.

Contrastingly, the pandemic also exposed the gross inequalities concerning the 'digital divide' that are apartheid legacies in South African higher education (Samuel, 2022). Davids (2021) argued that the 'new normal' during and post the pandemic seems to have scant regard for the disparities between the historically advantaged and/or disadvantaged institutes of learning. Samuel (2022, p.136) opined that these "social justice agendas are offered only as symbolic rhetorical ideals" unless further scrutiny into "whose interests the old or the short-term curriculum strategies actually serve". Le Grange (2020, p. 122) also cautioned against the "darker trajectory" of "platform pedagogy" (ERTL) that "morphs into "platform capitalism"⁶ (a topic for another day).

The discussion above highlights the multiples forces in the technological, socio-economic and ecological spaces. Their forces of influence on the supra-curriculum are underscored in terms of calls for active and critical citizenship education. This study explores how one UoT is responsive to these forces (see Chapter Six). Chapter Two explores the multiple levers of forces at the macro/institutional level that shape the curriculum reconceptualisation and decision-making within a changing SAHE landscape. The next section examines the challenges with PoE and the need to rethink and reconceptualise the curriculum that provides graduates with the relevant knowledge, skills and values required critical 21st century citizens.

1.3.3 'Liberalising' professionally oriented education for an indeterminate future

The purposes of university education have sparked longstanding curriculum debates and are often framed through a 'discourse of polarities' (Shay, 2016). While some argue that universities primarily serve to offer professional/vocational education, measured in terms of socio-economic utility, others emphasise the significance of

⁶ Le Grange in his article, *The (Post)human Condition and Decoloniality*, argues that platform-capitalism can arise "when for-profit intermediaries, such as platform-based businesses, become involved in delivering higher education, radically changes in institutions like universities, resulting in the casualisation of labour and the deprofessionalisation of academics" (Le Grange, 2020, p.122).

universities in the liberal development of intrinsic qualities of mind and intellect. Preparing graduates for a complex and uncertain future, equipped with the critical 21st century skills, is somewhat entangled in this false dichotomy between the liberal/general and professional and/or vocational education. Many proponents (Katz, 2015; Nevo, 2016; Rust, 2011; Shinn, 2014; Stiles, 1974) have long argued against perpetuating this 'false choice'. Their primary concerns about the devaluation of a general/liberal education (GE/LE) have great bearing in an ever-changing and super-complex world. The previous section articulated the rationale for a reconceptualising and repositioning of PoE in the 21st century. Against this backdrop of the global concerns for curriculum, it is worth recognising that there have been other concerns about the general failure of higher education evidenced by poor attrition rates, the theory-practice gap or employability and skills gap, high unemployment rates and meeting the needs of the knowledge society (Shay, 2016) globally and in SA.

Put simply, PoE within the UoT sector, or polytechnic as it is known globally, provides specific professional/vocational and practical knowledge and skills in specific contexts. This is often closely linked with work-integrated learning (WIL), which includes workplace-based learning and direct links with industry. However, it is important to note that changing demands in the different occupations due to technological advancements driving knowledge economy warrants higher-order thinking and not just occupational/specific work skills. Evidence in the literature and the data also suggests that there is a general failure of higher education to meet the demands of the knowledge society; the skills possessed by new graduates in many professional fields have been criticised, calling for a 'liberalising' and/or broadening the curriculum. The UoT in the study, in its responsiveness to the external environments, considered the liberal dimensions and aspirations as critical to transforming, disrupting even, the entrenched curriculum practices in POE.

To strengthen the need for this study three questions are posed. What is liberal/general education? What does liberalising/broadening the PoC entail? What significance is this, within UoT contexts? The challenge of defining and conceptualising GE is evident in the diverse terms and terminologies employed across different countries and contexts. Although the study does attempt to provide the various conceptions of GE globally (see Chapter Three), it is not pre-occupied with what GE is or what scholars

refer to as “an *a priori* image of a pedagogical life” (Le Grange, 2014, p. 1287). Rather, the concept of *currence* is used to think about GE as an active conceptual force and what it can do or should do. Thinking in this way means thinking that it “does not have fixity”; “implies newness, the creation of things unforeseen, experimentation, and the expansion of difference and movement” (Le Grange, 2014, p. 1287-1288; Wallin, 2010). This is covered in Chapter Five.

It is acknowledged that the idea of incorporating general/liberal education (GE/LE) into vocational and professional curricula is not a novel concept. Globally, various versions or models of GE exist in different contextual settings, contributing to the complexity of this ‘ideological’ framework, as pitched in this study. This can be seen in the Global North contexts, in the American (US) models (Bourke, Bray & Horton, 2009; Brint, et al., 2009; Cuseo, 2016; Dorman & Brown, 2018; Nevo, 2016; Roth, 2013; Wehlburg, 2010); and the British and/or European traditions (Aldegether, 2015; Dekker, 2021; Kovačević, 2022; Shen, 2016). Further adoption of the US models is visible in East-Asian contexts (Huang, 2017; Logan & Curry, 2015; Ma, 2018; Wang & Xie, 2018; You, Craig & Oh, 2019;), and the Middle East & Northern Africa (MENA) contexts (Al-Hendawi, Ahmed & Albertine, 2019). This is expanded in Chapter Three. These contextual variations introduce nuanced conceptualisations, interpretations, and implementation of GE. However, despite these distinctions, it is crucial to underscore the significance of GE as a subject and subfield of study in higher education. In the context of SA, and the UoT in particular, research-informed approaches and perspectives to GE could provide direction and inform a relevant African-based direction to follow in this regard.

For Schneider (2004, p. 6), liberal education (LE) “has always been concerned with important educational aims: cultivating intellectual and ethical judgment, helping students comprehend and negotiate their relationship to the larger world, and preparing graduates for lives of civic responsibility and leadership”. General education she avers, is seen to be “part of a liberal education curriculum” that is shared by all students, often referred to the ‘core curriculum’. It provides a broad study in the liberal arts (humanities, arts, social sciences and sciences) and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities, fostering critical thinking and broadening students' awareness (Schneider, 2004).

It is important to recognise that in the early twentieth century in America and other parts of the world, including South Africa, the growth of scientific research saw the widening of the professional and vocational education divide (Summer, 2006). Vocational education was/is narrow and more technically focused whereas professional education began to include aspects of 'liberal' thinking. The professions themselves joined in this distinction as they developed codes of ethics as guiding forces for each profession. So, to be a professional is to be a 'thinker' and adhere to the code of ethics for said profession. These distinctions have great bearing on UoTs (erstwhile Technikons) in SA, as historically their primary offerings were 'vocational' in nature. This meant that all national diplomas offered at the previous Technikons served a particular purpose in preparing diplomates for the workforce, mostly as 'technicians'. Meanwhile, traditional universities were preparing graduates with professional degrees in the same or similar fields, for example, as 'professional' engineers, physiotherapists, pharmacists, and so on. All diplomas in the Technikon education system followed a three-year national curriculum, including a strong workplace-based component. Evidence in the data and in the literature suggests that the diploma was seen as an 'inferior' qualification; diplomates were not given the same recognition by professional associations and the public service (CHE, 2010). It is within this context that the study explores how one UoT navigates its way towards rethinking and repositioning PoC, beyond the technical skills agenda and beyond workplaces, to offer its students a curriculum of difference. The context of the UoT is expanded in Chapter Two.

The relationship between professional education and GE/LE has strengthened over time yet concerns persist that professional curricula have become excessively narrow and overly technical (Summer, 2006). This trend is attributed in part to the massification of higher education (Summer, 2006; Paisey & Paisey, 2004). Compounding this issue is the knowledge explosion, which, as discussed above, poses significant challenges for new graduates who struggle to engage with the breadth and depth of knowledge required in a knowledge-based curriculum. Within disciplines themselves, competing pressures emerge: the need for a broad curriculum to produce well-rounded graduates often conflicts with demands for specialised practical knowledge and research. Moreover, professional bodies, as additional stakeholders, influence the design and purpose of curricula through regulatory

requirements and codes of ethics introducing tensions among liberal education vocational training and professional accreditation (Ramrathan, 2016). These dynamics raise critical questions about what knowledge is of most worth in an era of super-complexity. Addressing these challenges necessitates a fundamental rethinking and re-imagining of curricula to equip graduates with the relevant, critical knowledge, skills and values essential for navigating the demands of the 21st century as both professionals and responsible citizens.

1.4 Research purpose, critical research questions and objectives

This study explores the changing nature of curriculum through the GE imperative for select engineering and health sciences programmes at a transitioning university, within the broader context of the socio-economic, political, technological and planetary imperatives for change. The study focuses on understanding how GE was conceptualised, interpreted, planned for and implemented at one UoT in SA. It adopts a two-pronged approach by firstly examining how the institution and the curriculum exert their own forces of influence in catalysing renewal and a re-imagining of the undergraduate curriculum through the 'liberal' agenda (through changing ideologies and strategies). In other words, how does the institution determine what is fit for purpose regarding a PoE in a VUCA world? Secondly, it examines how these internal institutional forces compete with supra- (global/international), macro-, (national/quad helix partners), meso- (other local factors) and micro- (programmatic and biographical) forces within a higher education landscape that remains in flux.

Presently, the UoT features a distinctive undergraduate curriculum, setting it apart from the twenty-six public universities within the SAHE landscape. Although it is not without challenges, it does position itself as a GE pioneer and innovator for others to follow. The study focusses specifically on the official curriculum and not the enacted or experienced curriculum. The case of the UoT contributes to an understanding of the historical nature and peculiarity of the sector as a new emerging university, especially as it relates to curriculum and curriculum practices.

The case study is underpinned by the below two main questions.

- i. How are undergraduate professionally oriented curricula at a UoT transforming?
- ii. Why does it happen in the way that it does?

More specifically, the study addresses the following objectives:

- a. To explore the practices for reconceptualising professionally oriented curricula at a UoT.
- b. To examine the multiple forces at the micro, meso, macro and supra levels that influence these practices.
- c. To understand the participants' experiences of these forces and its impact on their curriculum planning and decision-making.
- d. To understand the implications for curriculum change within the UoT sector.

To address these questions, the study adopts a qualitative single case study design within a critical interpretive paradigm. Two faculties, Engineering and the Built Environment and Health Sciences, were selected for their significant engagement in curriculum change. Data were generated through institutional and faculty level document analysis and semi-structured interviews with executive management and curriculum champions. The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated adaptive strategies to ensure meaningful participation, shaping the scope and depth of data collection. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), initially supported by NVivo software, was employed to interpret the data, using the Force Field Model (Samuel, 2008), the active conceptualising of currere (Wallin, 2010), and the African philosophy of ubuntu, providing the analytical and interpretive framework (Le Grange, 2019; Waghid, 2020). This approach enabled an exploration of the structural, ideological and experiential dimensions of curriculum transformation, situating institutional practice within broader national and global change imperatives.

1.5 Thesis organisation

The structure of the thesis is presented in this section. The seven chapters are organised to present the research journey from the rationale and purpose of the study, the methodologies chosen for data production, to the findings of the study through analysis and abstraction. A description of each chapter is presented below.

Chapter Two positions the study within the national and institutional context, examining the macro- and micro-contextual influences on curriculum. It begins by drawing attention to the UoT sector (erstwhile Technikons) with its unique history and the particular characteristics that differentiate it from other higher education institutions (HEIs) in SA. This includes a brief overview of the developments within the SAHE sector over the last two decades, leading up to the curriculum implications under the new dispensations. The chapter then takes a closer look into one newly established UoT that was undergoing multiple changes in its attempt to not only adjust to the disruptive forces buffeting the sector but to 'champion a new way' for curriculum (re)conceptualisation and (re)positioning. In addition to highlighting significant events, this chapter also provides insight into those discourses and practices that have influenced its restructuring. The purpose of this the chapter is to provide this overview to situate the study within its broad macro-level context and also to provide a platform for understanding some of the possible influences upon curriculum conceptualising and reform.

Chapter Three continues the discussion on vocational/professional and liberal dimensions of university education and its implication for curriculum. This review includes examining the competing paradigms of liberal and general education, marking its distinctions. The discussion then moves onto a more detailed study of the changing conceptions of curriculum and curriculum decision-making and development curriculum, making explicit my own assumptions to provide insight into the understandings guiding my research approach and design. The next section provides insight into the theoretical underpinnings for this study and begins by examining the role of influences in shaping curriculum reconceptualisation and decision-making, adapting Samuel's (2008) force field model (FFM) for teacher development. The discussion moves onto Wallin's (2010) extension of Pinar's '*currere*' as an 'active' conceptual force and lastly, includes an examination of the different curriculum ideologies and its role in shaping curriculum decisions. The idea being to integrate the FFM and *currere* in a way that creates a dynamic framework that addresses the structural and institutional aspects of curriculum transformation and also acknowledges the personal, ideological and experiential dimensions of the actors/individuals involved. This dialogue promotes a more holistic understanding of the curriculum change.

Chapter Four begins with a discussion of the qualitative approach taken, including the justification for the use of a critical interpretive paradigm and the research design selected. The chapter includes a discussion of my selection of a single case and a description of the sampling undertaken. It describes the data production techniques used and provides a detailed account of the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) that served as the methodological framework for this study. The chapter also includes a reflective discussion on the initial use and subsequent move away from the NVIVO software package, explaining the rationale for favouring a more immersive and less-tool driven analytical process to ensure depth and conceptual flexibility.

Chapters Five and Six provide a descriptive analysis of the fieldwork/ and attempt to make sense of the data. The methodology employed for data analysis is holistic, fluid, and relational to the other data sets generated during the fieldwork. The chosen approach in presenting the fieldwork findings is purposeful, designed to illuminate the nuanced, often conflicting, and occasionally complementary perspectives across the various stakeholders engaged in data production. The rich findings encapsulate multi-layered dimensions of responsiveness, notions of curriculum transformation and change, as well as individual and collective narratives, organically emerging from the analytical process.

Chapter Five presents an understanding of the participants' experiences about how the institution (micro-contextual or meso-) as a dominant and transformative force and how this force influences and shapes their curriculum (re)conceptualising and decision-making. In particular, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of how the imperative to include GE in all of its undergraduate curriculums was planned for and implemented in the select programmes in the two faculties. Detailed analyses, integrating the FFM and currere, provides the varied responses to the GE imperative and the range of decisions made by executive management (curriculum planners) and the academics (curriculum designers/champions). This includes an analysis of the driving forces and restraining forces to this imperative. The findings suggest that the variations in curriculum decision-making were informed by the changing ideologies, identity, ethos and culture of the institution. Tensions among the members of the academic community spiked considering that the conception of self, identity and roles draws strongly on the lived biography of an institution that was in a high state of flux.

Chapter Six presents an analysis of the participants' experiences about the external contextual (supra- and macro-) forces that influence and shape their curriculum (re)conceptualising and curriculum decisions. The analysis meticulously examines each external force of influence to elucidate participants' experiences with these forces and to delineate how each aligns with their diverse curriculum decisions. The data are presented and analysed thematically, using the FFM and *curre*. While the responses were not homogenous, participants ranked the influences from the socio-political and regulatory contexts as a critical and dominant external force of influence, followed by the world of work. The findings also show that while the planning included the key drivers for curriculum change in the societal, technological and ecological spaces, the curriculum designers viewed these influences as being less important.

Chapters Seven and Eight provide a reflective meta-analysis that revisits the field data and initial analyses through further abstraction, drawing on the insights of influential theorists who have explored curriculum transformation and institutional change in higher education. Chapter Seven examines the concept of *institute* as a transformative and dynamic force shaping the identity of UoTs within the context of SAHE. Drawing on Deleuzian concepts such as deterritorialisation, reterritorialisation, difference and becoming, the chapter explores how UoTs can navigate institutional differentiation and resist homogenisation by asserting distinctiveness. It highlights the importance of breaking away from entrenched practices to forge new identities through strategic, ideological, historical, and cultural shifts. Leadership and systemic literacies are positioned as pivotal in managing these transformations and balancing competing pressures. Additionally, the chapter highlights the tensions faced by curriculum workers as they grapple with institutional change, social conditioning, and resistance to new roles. Ultimately, the chapter provides a nuanced understanding of UoTs as evolving spaces of/for innovation and transformation, setting the stage for further exploration of curriculum-making processes in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Eight explores the transformative potential of *curre* as a dynamic and disruptive conceptual force in re-imagining POC within a UoT. It highlights how *curre* challenges entrenched institutional norms and deterministic curriculum practices, particularly through the GE integration. By examining the tensions between institutional mandates and professional imperatives, the chapter underscores the

value of GE/LE in fostering critical thinking, creativity and ethical reasoning. This reconceptualisation of curricula aims to transcend utilitarian paradigms and align PoE with broader socio-political and ethical imperatives, particularly in the Global South, where HEIs grapple with complex socio-political and ecological realities. The chapter focuses on key themes: the paradoxical role of GE both as a disruptive and disrupted force in curriculum decision-making and transformation; the integration of concepts such as *ubuntu-currere* glocalisation/glo-ubuntu, citizenship education, and *rhizo-currere* to propose a contextually relevant GE/LE framework for sub-Saharan Africa. The synaptic *currere* model advocates for fluid, interconnected and innovative approaches to curriculum design that transcend linear compliance-driven approaches. These perspectives collectively aim to inspire curricula that are transformative, equitable, and responsive to both societal and professional demands.

Chapter Nine provides a synthesis of the study findings, offering critical reflections on the research journey and its contributions to understanding institutional and curriculum transformation with the context of SAHE. The chapter revisits key concepts such as *instituire* and *currere*, situating them within the broader goal of re-imagining a differentiated and socially responsive HE system. and forward-looking perspective on curriculum transformation. The chapter outlines the noteworthy contributions of the study, including its theoretical and practical insights into navigating institutional change and fostering curricular innovation in VUCA environments. It highlights the potential for UoTs to assert their distinctiveness and engage in transformative practices that align with societal and global contemporary imperatives. Recommendations for practice emphasise the importance of leadership, systemic literacies, and collaborative efforts in driving meaningful change while addressing structural inefficiencies and historical inequalities. The chapter also acknowledges the study's limitations, identifying areas for future research to deepen understanding and inform practice. Concluding remarks underscore the evolving nature of HE and the necessity for institutions to embrace uncertainty, creativity, and openness as they -re-imagine their roles in a rapidly changing world. Through this reflective synthesis, this final chapter reinforces the study's contribution to advancing socially just and contextually relevant HE and curriculum practices.

1.6 Chapter synthesis

The study aims to provide insights into the repositioning of curricula to meet the demands of the evolving educational landscape. This chapter covers the background, physical and historical contexts, and the rationale for the study. An insight into my personal interests in the study was presented. The chapter explores the evolution of curriculum conceptualisations, emphasising the absence of a universal definition and the increasing recognition of curriculum's significance. It centres on the official curricula within a UoT context, focusing on reconceptualisation amid changing higher education landscapes. Key drivers of curriculum change for a complex future, including technological advancements, societal challenges and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), are discussed. The unexpected impact of COVID-19 on higher education is explained. The final section introduces the debate on the purposes of university education, emphasising the false dichotomy between liberal and PoE. The chapter concludes by outlining the research purpose, two main questions, four sub-questions, and objectives.

A thesis outline of the subsequent chapters is presented in terms of the specific aspects of the study. In summary, the challenges and dichotomies in university education, particularly in PoC, set the stage for a comprehensive exploration in the subsequent chapters. The next chapter covers in broader detail the context of a UoT and the associated implications for curriculum change.

CHAPTER TWO: THE CONTEXT OF A UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

"Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself." (John Dewey)

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins by locating the study within its macro- (national) and meso- (institutional) national contexts. I take the position that curriculum is socially constructed and, therefore, "issues of curricula are intertwined with the social and historical contexts of universities and the wider world within which they are situated" (Coate & Barnett, 2005, p.28). Over the last two decades, Universities of Technology (UoTs) in South Africa (SA) emerged from technical college-type institutions that typically focussed on technical/vocational and, to a lesser degree, professional education, combining theoretical knowledge with practical skills. Similar to the polytechnics, institutes of technology, university colleges, and universities of applied sciences in other parts of the world, the emphasis is on applied sciences, technology, and engineering with a practical orientation. They are more closely linked with industry than their counterparts are. The impact of these institutions is multifaceted, encompassing educational, economic, and societal dimensions. They contribute significantly to the development of human capital, technological advancements, and the overall well-being of communities and nations. The profound impact of the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) world on the higher education sector globally, and the importance of remaining relevant, proactive, innovative, and adaptable, were presented in Chapter One. This has far-reaching implications for a sector that was focused on preparing graduates for specific jobs. This chapter expands on the context of the UoT in SA and take a closer look at one UoT, in particular; and explores how it navigates the challenges of preparing its students for the dynamic and unpredictable future, ensuring that their education remains a valuable asset in a VUCA world.

2.2 Chapter overview

This chapter begins with an overview of the national policy shifts and changes such as the establishment of the revised HEQSF and its implication for curricula at UoTs. The purpose is to provide insight into curriculum reform policies and practices within

the South African UoT sector that extends beyond the current supra and macro-contextual influences. This is followed by an examination of the chronological shifts that have occurred within the UoT sector as a consequence of a changing South African higher education (SAHE) landscape. Much has been written on the UoT sector (Baloyi & Naidoo, 2016; Garraway & Winberg, 2019, Garraway, et al., 2019; Kraak, 2004; McKenna & Powell, 2009; Mthembu, 2012; Ntshoe, 2012; Ntshoe & Malebo, 2021; Perumal, 2010; Sattar & Cooke, 2010; Thathiah, 2013; Winberg, 2005, 2012; Winberg & Makua, 2019). The intention here is not to detail the history of the sector, but rather to focus on the implications of the national policy changes on curriculum within the UoT sector. In order to understand how the curriculum at a UoT is transforming, one has to look at the current contextual influences as well as consider all the curriculum actors'/players' assumptions, values and practices from the past and how that might still impact their world views, epistemologies and ways of working. To this end, the chapter takes a closer look at how one UoT's attempts to (re)define itself, to (re)think its purpose and responsiveness to the socio/geo/political changes and 'champion a new way through curriculum change and renewal. The 'Curriculum Renewal Project' (CRP), as it is/was called at the study site, was seen as one of its main thrusts towards achieving its strategic goals and addressing the "epistemological transformation" that is argued to be at the heart of transformation agenda within SA. My intention is to explore the data in a later chapter to consider the extent to which the changes discussed here have challenged the academic identity of the study participants and brought into question existing curriculum assumptions, values and practices.

2.3 Institutional differentiation

In SA, institutional differentiation is based on institutional types, their missions and academic programmes and is currently predicated on a "recognition that higher education has to fulfil many functions and that no single institution can serve all of society's needs" (DHET, 2014:82; Ntshoe & Malebo, 2021). The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was committed to this system of differentiation over the proposed function-based model of the Council of Higher Education (CHE), having reservations that the latter would reinforce existing inequalities and impede transformation (CHE, 2022a, 2022c; DHET, 2014; Ntshoe & Malebo, 2021;). The desire was that institutions would capitalise on their strengths and respond to evolving

social, economic and labour market needs within rapidly changing regional, national and global contexts (DHET, 2014). These shifts were brought about by key milestones in post-apartheid SA, including the dissolution of Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC), the establishment of the CHE, and the introduction of the revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) (Sattar & Cooke, 2012; Winberg, 2005).

The policy of purposeful differentiation established the UoT, a new university, to specifically prepare graduates for targeted occupations, distinguishing their focus on applied knowledge compared to traditional universities that primarily advance disciplinary knowledge and award research-based qualifications. This distinction and duality were captured in the HEQF/HEQSF and reflects its varied implications across different institution types within the SAHE landscape. van Koller (2010, p.157) argued that for the UoT sector, whose curricula were significantly impacted by these policy changes, the HEQF/HEQSF served as a “sword of Damocles”, representing a looming threat that disrupts established practices and forces substantial changes (to be expanded further in section 2.5). This was extensively evident in this study as discussed in Chapter Six.

2.4 Emerging characteristics of UoTs: new generation universities

UoTs in SA have a distinct historical background that shaped their establishment (Winberg, 2005). Pre-1994, SA had a dual higher education system, with universities primarily focusing on academic and theoretical education, and erstwhile technical colleges addressing more practical and vocational aspects. In the post-apartheid era, there was a recognised need to restructure and transform higher education to address the socio-economic challenges facing the nation. The White Paper on Higher Education Transformation played a pivotal role in shaping the trajectory of UoTs. It identified the need for a more diversified and responsive higher education system that could contribute directly to economic development (DHET, 2013). This recognition marked a departure from the traditional university model and laid the foundation for the emergence of a differentiated higher education sector (DHET, 2013; Ensor, 2006). This policy document laid the groundwork for the merger of Technikons (erstwhile technical colleges), leading to the creation of institutions known as universities of technology. Other Technikons merged with traditional universities to become

comprehensive universities. The goal was to bridge the gap between academic and vocational education, fostering a more integrated and responsive higher education system. This marked the initial recognition of the unique role UoTs could play in addressing the skills gap and fostering innovation in the country.

Prior to 1994, UoTs as erstwhile Technikons focussed on training skilled workers at the pre-professional/vocational level in a range of fields including applied sciences, accounting and informatics, creative arts and design, engineering and the built environment, health sciences, and management sciences. The role of the Technikon system, like the polytechnics in the United Kingdom (UK) prior to 1992, was clear and somewhat singular/"unitary" in that it produced employees for industry, with industry being a dominant stakeholder (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p. 39). Since their inception in 2003, the UoTs lack such clarity; several authors allude to what a UoT is, and what it is not (Du Pré, 2010; Garraway & Winberg, 2019; McKenna & Powell, 2009; Ntshoe, 2012; Reddy, 2006; Winberg, 2005;).

The structure of the SAHE system is designed with a hierarchy: where research-intensive universities are positioned at the highest level, comprehensive universities concentrate on providing mass higher education, and UoTs retain their focus on technology-oriented qualifications (Engel-Hills, Winberg & Rip, 2019). The initial mission of the former Technikon sector was to spearhead the technological aspects of South Africa's ambitious reconstruction and development plan. However, there was resistance from this sector, and from the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), in particular (Garraway & Winberg, 2019). The CTP believed that the sector had made significant progress since 1995, even surpassing some traditional universities in research output, notably the historically disadvantaged universities that were underdeveloped during apartheid. The role and positioning of UoTs within the National Plan for SAHE remained a subject of ongoing debate (Garraway & Winberg, 2019).

According to Thathiah (2013) and others, the concept document on 'The Place and Role of Universities of Technology in South Africa' was drawn up by a working group of CTP. It has been widely recognised as the blueprint for establishing UoTs in SA and a notable characteristic of the text is its reliance on international models (Garraway & Winberg, 2019; Thathiah, 2013;). Thathiah (2013) highlights two critical issues

emerging during this process. One was the lack of broader institutional consultation during this process and the predominantly top-down approach that was used, which resulted in potentially leaving staff and students at erstwhile Technikons bewildered, as they transitioned overnight into the roles of UoTs' lecturers and students without a clear understanding of the implications. Of greater concern was "the lack of importance paid to the [h]umanities, [s]ocial [s]ciences and the [c]reative [a]rts in the proposal (Thathiah, p. 45). This was in direct contrast to the view taken by other proponents advocating for this inclusion as the critical component of a 21st century technology-centred education (Imenda, 2005; Winberg, 2005;). This inclusion plays a vital role in "developing character and focus but also to enrich the ongoing conceptualisation of the institutional type by their inherently critical disposition" (Thathiah, 2013, p. 47).

It seems that the move from Technikon to UoT, in the first decade, was seen largely as a hasty 'rebranding/marketing ploy' (McKenna & Powell, 2009; Thathiah, 2013) or 'political lobbying' (Kraak, 2004) to align with national policy directives of the transition from Technikon models, rather than a substantive change in a new identity. These authors argue that many of the old Technikon characteristics and practices still persist. At the time, Jansen bluntly asserted that Technikons are "nothing more than glorified high schools" and need to lift themselves up from that low base to be fully recognised as emerging universities (as cited in Reddy, 2006, p. 25). Perhaps a concern may be raised about the lack of national policy guidelines with regard to the new identity and attributes of UoTs, as there was for the newly formed comprehensive universities.

It is important to recognise that the SA UoTs are 'not fully-fledged' universities due to their histories and, therefore, pose challenges for the sector. Garraway and Winberg (2019) refer to staff and student issues. Firstly, they argue that these institutions traditionally employed staff with technical expertise rather than those with academic and research-oriented backgrounds. Further, the research output of the academic staff is approximately one third of that in research-intensive universities, according to a CHE 2019 report. Historically, techniques focused on undergraduate programmes (mostly diplomas), with a knowledge base oriented towards the principles of practice rather than the theoretical orientations typical of a university. This had a two-fold impact: i) this attracted fewer postgraduate students and research-oriented staff and, ii) required lower minimum entrance requirements compared to traditional universities.

A further concern was around the branding and the reputation of these institutions, as the diplomas were often seen as inferior to the degrees offered at traditional and comprehensive universities. Notwithstanding, this was not always true, as some academically gifted students preferred to study in career-oriented fields like radiography, fashion, design, drama studies and screen arts technology. There were further claims during the early transition period that the curriculum approaches and practices within UoTs were largely mechanistic and technical (Bozalek & Boughey, 2012; McKenna & Powell, 2009; McKenna & Quinn, 2012; Ntshoe, 2012).

Conversely, Garraway and Winberg (2019, p. 42) stated that the sector was experiencing a “number of aspirational pressures from THENSA/SATN to take on a more expansive identity, one that is well beyond the narrow preparation of graduates for specific workplaces”. They posit that the UoT, as a sector, has considerable internal diversity, as is common in higher education systems under development and is “still under construction” with each one being left largely to try to identify their uniqueness or “distinctiveness” (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p. 41), and to develop a set of attributes. UoTs are “still learning about what they can be and should be” (Engel-Hills, Winberg & Rip, 2019, p. 3). It is within this context that this study considers ways in which a new UoT organises itself, through its new philosophies, ideologies, strategies and through its curricula. This is expanded later in the chapter.

During these transitioning periods, South African UoTs bear a deeper responsibility to move beyond operation by compliance; as they, like our fragile country itself, are undergoing a process of re-inventing and re-conceptualising. ‘Operation by compliance’, as argued by Engel-Hills, Winberg & Rip (2019, p. 3), is “a response to an expanding regulatory context in which there is a lack of understanding about what exactly is required”. They aver that this has now led to a debate currently engaging the sector, namely, how a new university of technology, in a context of development and increasing managerialism, could replace compliance and superficial imaginings of quality, excellence and technology with practices that promote critical reflection and engagement (Engel-Hills, Winberg & Rip, 2019). The Garraway and Winberg (2019) paper asked vexing questions of what constitutes the identity of a UoT and shows fundamental contradictions between desirable vision and actual/current practices. The struggle with identity, both institutionally and in the broader context, forms a pivotal

aspect of this ongoing endeavour (Thathiah, 2013). Later in the chapter the importance of critical leadership is discussed in terms of what is required in the sector to take these institutions to where they ought to be in a VUCA world.

Winberg's conceptual framework combines the concepts of genealogy (influenced by Nietzsche and Foucault) and chronotope (adapted from Einstein by Bakhtin), which she developed for the analysis of the evolution of technical higher education in SA (Winberg, 2005; Garraway & Winberg, 2019). The concept of genealogy⁷, whether real or metaphorical is complex and paradoxical and implies "continuities" in passing on the elements over generations influencing beliefs and practices across time (Winberg, 2005). However, on the other hand, it also focuses on the "discontinuities" in the passing on of elements over generations, aiming to disrupt the present by highlighting differences from the past. Winberg (2005) writes:

Genealogies show how the past was different from, strange in relation to, or even threatening to the present ...They show that the present is foreign and constitutes a break – often a violent break – with the past ...The goal of a genealogy is to disrupt the present. The genealogist begins with a present phenomenon (such as a Technikon) and tries to explain how it arose, developed and gained legitimacy (Winberg, 2005, p. 189-190).

Chronotopes⁸, Winberg (2005) adds:

resemble cultural formations ... historically formed/informed and socially distributed modes of engagement with particular sets of practices for particular purposes. To understand and describe a chronotope thus requires a reconstruction of its context: the field of objects, practices, and agents by which the specific configuration reproduces itself across time and space (Winberg, 2005, 190-191).

By analysing chronotopes, one can gain insights into the core values, beliefs, and practices that have shaped the identity and norms within technical education institutions over time. For the UoT (erstwhile Technikon) sector, Winberg (2005) illuminates three chronotopes that emerged from the genealogy of changes from the previous technical college system to the current UoT system. The first chronotope

⁷ Genealogy - Foucault borrowed the term 'genealogy' from Nietzsche's 'The Genealogy of Morals' to illustrate how historical contexts shape the acceptance of values as 'common sense.' Preferring 'genealogy' for its descriptive nature in intellectual history over 'archaeology,' Foucault expanded its use in analyzing institutions and discourses (Winberg, 2005).

⁸ Chronotope - Bakhtin introduced the term 'chronotope,' derived from Einstein's concept of 'time-space,' in 1981, applying it to the analysis of language and literature. According to Bakhtin, chronotopes connect specific times, spaces, and events, creating intricate layers of themes, agents, objects, intentions, ideologies, and value orientations within narratives and texts (Winberg, 2010).

emerged from the Colleges of Advanced Technical Educations (CATEs) that focused on educating for the needs of specific industries. Skill shortages for technically skilled workers to meet the needs of commerce and industry motivated the change of the CATE system to a Technikon system. Technikon lecturers were largely drawn from industry and many identified themselves strongly with their professions. This often constrained their curriculum and pedagogical practices, leading to little or no changes to their legacy/inherited national curriculums. Winberg claims that earlier manifestations of Technikon programmes resembled school curricula with “dense content” and very little time for independent study (Winberg, 2005, p. 192). This might explain Jansen’s blunt assertion about Technikons being “nothing more than glorified high schools” and need to lift themselves up from that low base to be fully recognised as emerging universities (Jansen, as cited in Reddy, 2006, p. 25).

Winberg (2005, p. 193) called chronotope two an ‘imitation’ period that indicated a lack of systemic change, but evidence of ‘borrowing’ from traditional universities. However, entrenched or “naturalised practices in the Technikon system” persisted. She affirms the so-called ‘academic drift’ of former Technikons from professional practice towards theory and research, was at odds with the prior culture of Technikons, in the second chronotope (Winberg, 2005). What she calls chronotope three is typified by the thrust of Technikons as UoTs, claiming that UoTs had to rediscover ‘technological education’/social efficiency ideology by developing students as independent, creative and responsible thinkers. It is a period when the UoTs engaged in processes of reinvention, realignment, and enhancement as the original mission of technical higher education was reconsidered in the light of changing contexts and needs, both locally and globally as well as the preparation of a new generation of critical thinking citizens and lifelong learners (Garraway, et al., 2019).

Winberg (2005) developed her typology framework to analyse the erstwhile Technikon sector and how they reflect the changing needs of industry needs. This is a useful framework to gain insights into how various phenomena in higher education have been influenced by past practices, societal demands, and educational philosophies. Sattar and Cooke (2012) extend this chronotope discourse by reflecting on its implications for curriculum design and quality assurance.

As shown in Figure 2.1, they adapted the framework to show four chronotopes:

- Chronotope 1: a very controlled and prescribed national curriculum with limited institutional autonomy
- Chronotope 2: the development of CTP led curricula that allowed a thirty percent flexibility
- Chronotope 3: the establishment of Certification Council for Technikon that led to increased institution autonomy
- Chronotope 4: the establishment of the CHE and transition to provider-based qualifications.

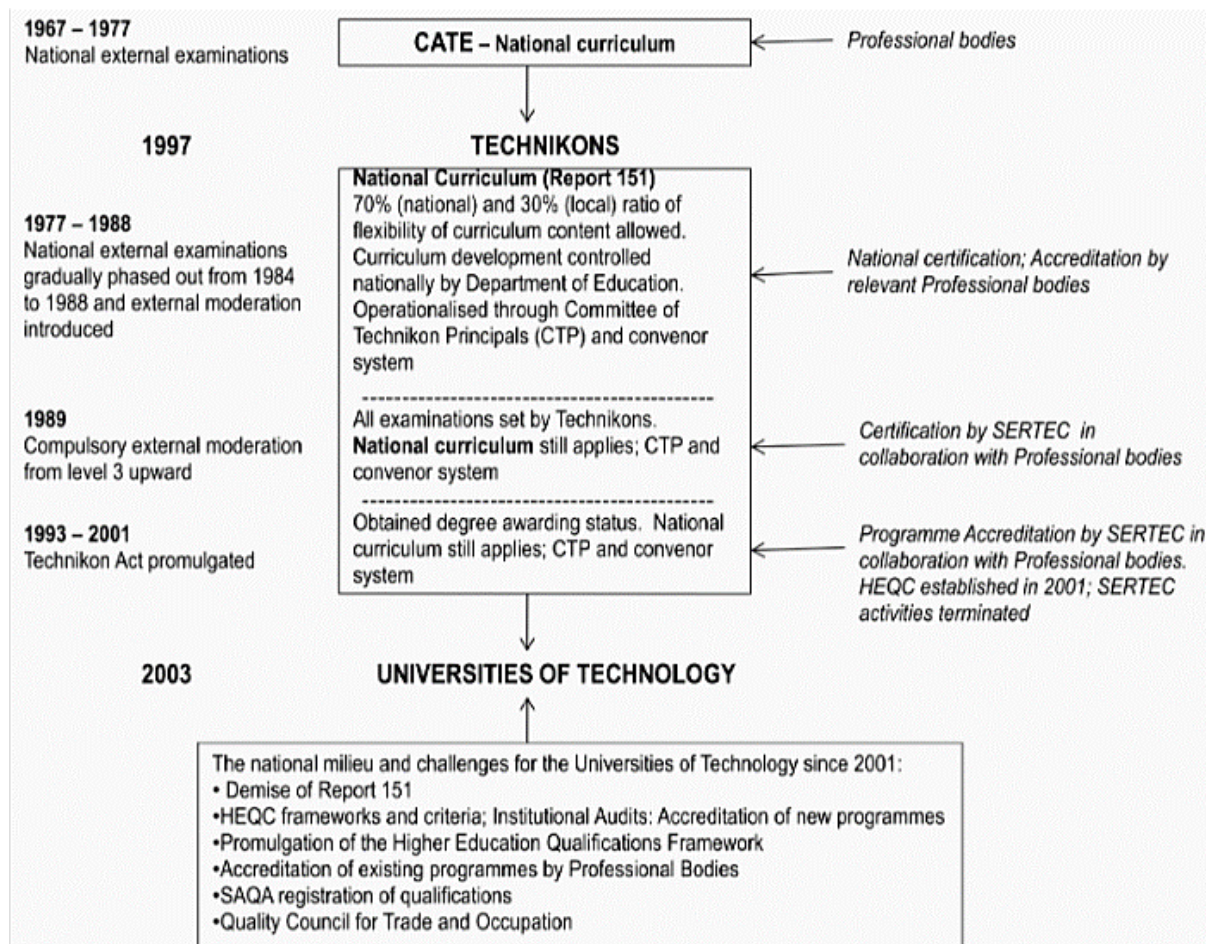


Figure 2.1: The evolution of UoTs as it relates to curriculum (Sattar & Cooke, 2012, p. 373).

Sattar and Cooke (2012) suggest that the fourth chronotope was heralded by the demise of the CTP and SERTEC⁹ and the establishment of the CHE¹⁰ that meant that UoTs were no longer bound to the old convenorship and re-curriculation practices with a falling away of ‘lead institutions’ and ‘common curricula’. It is important to note that while the convenor system served to ensure uniformity in curriculum and quality standards among Technikons, several significant issues arose from its implementation to its disbandment. Firstly, the convenorship limited the autonomy of individual Technikons, as they were required to adhere to a centrally managed curriculum dictated by the convenor Technikon. This centralisation stifled innovation and responsiveness to local industry needs. Technikons, at the time, had little flexibility to adapt their programmes based on regional, societal, and student needs. Secondly, critiques argued that the curriculum under the convenor system lacked depth and rigour, resulting in a more practical curriculum, potentially leaving students with insufficient theoretical grounding for higher studies. The rigid structure of the convenor system sometimes led to a disconnect between educational outcomes and industry requirements, leaving both employers and students disgruntled with this misalignment. A further challenge was that many of the academics in Technikons were largely drawn from industry, rather than academia, which meant that they potentially lacked the experience in research and curriculum development. This gap in expertise impacted the quality of education and capacities for advancing postgraduate education. (Sabela, Masuku & Qwabe, 2020; Sattar & Cooke, 2012; Thathiah, 2013).

In their paper, (Sattar & Cooke, 2012, p. 375) proposed “the hallmark of a fifth chronotope that saw the emergence of a new culture for curriculum development and quality assurance”, one that focused on student-centred approaches and quality enhancement. These chronotopes reflect the evolving landscape of technical higher

⁹ The Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) was established in SA in 1986 under the Certification Council for Technikon Education Act (Act 88 of 1986). Its primary role was to ensure quality and standardisation of education provided by Technikons, which were institutions focused on vocational and technical education. It was responsible for accreditation of programmes and quality improvement. Following its dissolution, this role was later taken over by the CHE’s Higher Education Quality Council. [CHE, 2000.](#)

¹⁰ Council of Higher Education (CHE) in SA is an independent statutory body established under the Higher Education Act of 1997. Its primary role is to oversee and enhance the quality of HE in the country. The CHE’s key responsibilities include quality assurance, research and monitoring and promoting discourse. It operates as a quality council, ensuring that HEIs meet national standards and contribute positively to the SAHE landscape - [CHE, 2025.](#)

education, moving from centralised control to increased autonomy for institutions in curriculum design. The implications for curriculum design include a shift towards flexibility, quality enhancement, and responsiveness to changing educational contexts and quality assurance requirements. It is important to note that these chronotopes are not fixed, bounded demarcations since elements of one type may flow into and/or co-exist with other later manifestations. The focus of this study locates itself within this chronotope discourse and proposes a further evolution for the UoT with the introduction of the 'liberal agenda' as part of its transforming identity in providing innovative curricula and a distinctively UoT education. Clearly, curriculum underpins a university's identity and core functions as it reflects leadership, teaching and learning, research, community engagement as well as differentiation/typology through its Programme Qualification Mix (PQM). This is expanded in the next sections.

2.5 HEQSF¹¹ alignment: implications for the UoT curriculum

As alluded to above, the new structure of the higher education system (introduced by the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997) set up the formation of a differentiated higher system, comprising traditional universities, universities of technology, and comprehensive universities. UoTs, in particular, were designed to align formal academic education and vocational training, as well as facilitate mobility and transparency across new institutional higher education institutional types (Ensor, 2006). This section focuses on the second major policy reform that was the simultaneous decoupling of qualification pathways into a single co-ordinated system National Qualification Framework (NQF). In 2007, the DHET, in collaboration with the CHE and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), various professional bodies, and industry representatives, introduced the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). The primary objective was to establish a unified qualifications framework for higher education (HE) and to facilitate the creation of a cohesive national higher education system, as outlined in the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) White Paper 3 (DHET, 2013). The DHET promulgated three sub-frameworks for qualifications: the General and Further Education and Training Sub-

¹¹ The HEQSF is a critical component of the SAHE system, designed to ensure a coherent and integrated approach to qualifications across public and private institutions. Established under the National Qualifications Act of 2008, the HEQSF was officially promulgated in August 2013, following a revision of the earlier Higher education Qualification Framework (HEQF) introduced in 2007 - [CHE, 2013](#).

framework, the HEQSF, and the sub-framework for Trades and Occupations (DHET 2013). The HEQF underwent a revision in 2013 as a sub-framework, Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF), aimed at addressing existing gaps, incorporating new types of qualifications and addressing the restricted qualification pathways at the postgraduate level (van Koller, 2010; DHET, 2013; Moosa, 2018).

QUALIFICATION TYPES & CREDITS	NQF LEVEL	QUALIFICATION TYPE & CREDITS	NQF LEVEL
Doctor Technologiae (D Tech) Doctoral Degree (PhD) (240 credits)	NQF Level 8	Doctoral Degree (360 credits)	NQF Level 10
Magister Technologiae (M Tech) Master's Degree in Business Administration (MBA) Master's Degree (120 credits)	NQF Level 8	Master's Degree (180 credits)	NQF Level 9
<i>No equivalent Non-HEQSF aligned qualification exist</i>		Bachelor Honours Degree (120 credits)	NQF Level 8
Professional Bachelor's Degree (480 credits)	NQF Level 7	Professional Bachelor's Degree (480 credits)	NQF Level 8
Bachelor Honours Degree (120 credits)	NQF Level 7	Postgraduate Diploma (120 credits)	NQF Level 8
<i>No equivalent Non-HEQSF aligned qualification exist</i>		Advanced Diploma (120 credits)	NQF Level 7
Baccalaureus Technologiae (B Tech) (120 credits)	NQF Level 7	<i>No equivalent HEQSF aligned qualification exist</i>	
Bachelor's Degree (360 credits)	NQF Level 6	Bachelor's Degree (360 credits)	NQF Level 7
National Diploma (360 credits)	NQF Level 6	Bachelor of Education (480 credits)	NQF Level 7
<i>No equivalent Non-HEQSF aligned qualification exist</i>		Diploma (360 credits)	NQF Level 6
National Higher Certificate (120 credits)	NQF Level 5	Diploma (240 credits)	NQF Level 6
		Advanced Certificate (120 credits)	NQF Level 6
		Higher Certificate (120 credits)	NQF Level 5

Figure 2.2 non- HEQSF aligned NATED151 and HEQSF-aligned qualifications

The primary purpose of the revised HEQSF was to enable transfer and articulation between programmes across all HEIs. (see Figure 2.2). In addition, this single framework made it possible for UoTs to consider programmes in any of the three distinctive qualification pathways: a general formative, professional and vocational programme. These multiple possibilities extended the previously historical vocationally oriented national diploma (which was separate and parallel), as a primary offering of UoTs (Council of Higher Education - CHE, 2013). These national policy changes are similar to how the implementation of the Bologna Process has affected university curricula around Europe). The Bologna Process encouraged the adoption of student-centred learning approaches and the integration of research and innovation into the curriculum (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016).

While these policy changes intended purpose was to bring about the critical transformational changes that were necessary for post-apartheid SA , the HEQSF has serious unintended consequences for the UoT sector, in particular. van Koller (2010) outlined six implications for the HEQF/HEQSF, especially as it pertained to the UoT sector.

- i. All higher education institutions, particularly UoTs were compelled to revisit and redesign all their qualifications and programmes
- ii. UoTs had to develop a number of new qualifications, including the advanced diploma and the bachelor's degree.
- iii. Some faculties had to choose between a diploma and a bachelor's degree to ensure continued vocational/professional focus. Some qualifications, such as bachelor's degrees, are clearly not intended to be of a vocational nature.
- iv. Downgrading of the diploma against the bachelor's degree signifies compliance with international trends, especially with the differentiated system.
- v. UoTs had to align their qualifications and curricula to the HEQSF, as the framework no longer makes provision for early exit qualifications and does not support the convenor system for curriculum development.
- vi. The changes resulting from the HEQSF impacted on the teaching and learning practices at UoTs, requiring adjustments in teaching and learning outcomes and practices to fit in with the new qualification levels.

In his 2010 paper, van Koller (2010, p. 157) posed the question of whether the HEQF, at the time, was a “tool or a sword?” In an attempt to answer his own question, he posits:

For some higher education institutions (HEIs), whose curricula would not be much affected by the prescriptions of the HEQF, it could be a tool for further entrenchment existing academic practices and traditions. However, for others whose curricula would be substantially affected, it could be regarded as the sword of Damocles¹² (201, p. 157).

¹² The sword of Damocles – is a moral parable by Cicero that depicts a king who has a razor-sharp sword hanging by a thread over his head. It is an allusion of imminent and ever-present peril faced by those in positions of power (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Damocles>). It is used metaphorically to describe a situation of impending danger or threat that could strike at any moment.

van Koller (2010) obviously viewed the HEQF/HEQSF as a potential threat to the curricula of the UoT sector and saw the framework as causing significant disruption to the UOTs' programmes/qualifications and its operations. All of these changes had an impact on the UoT in the study, and most notably, the withdrawal of the BTech¹³ qualification. However, similar to the Bologna Process, the UoT in my study saw the changes happening in the socio-political spaces, as opportunities for academic departments to critically reflect on their existing offerings. With a goal of re-envisioning programmes to move beyond the workplace and be responsive to the dynamics of a VUCA world, the time had come for a renewal and reconceptualisation of the PoE beyond just policy alignment and compliance.

Firstly, the removal of the BTech qualification led to confusion over progression routes for students who previously relied on that qualification to advance their postgraduate studies or the advancement of their professional careers. This was compounded by the uncertainties with the introduction of the new qualification types, namely the Advanced Diploma. While the aim was to provide more options for students, this came with unintended consequences for the students in the UoT sector. The recent CHE review of the HEQSF (CHE, 2022d) flagged other concerns from the sector that have bearing on the study site. There were a range of concerns as presented below.

- Impact of qualification changes – introduction of new qualification types like the Advanced Diploma created uncertainty
- Complexity and confusion as it pertains to programme differentiation
- Misalignment with vocational focus and inadequate reflection
- Challenges in articulation

While the curriculum renewal processes at the UoT were institutionally led, in most instances, faculties were given the discretion to choose their new first-time offerings based on collaborations with their relevant stakeholders. The decisions made at faculty levels were varied, with the engineering faculty opting for three-year bachelor's degrees, whereas the health sciences faculty opted for four-year professional degrees. This diploma to degree shifts will be extracted from the fieldwork and analysed and

¹³ BTech qualification – in the old NQF, the BTech was available as a top-up qualification on a national diploma to allow articulation into higher studies. In the revised HEQSF, this qualification was removed.

presented in Chapter Six). The remaining faculties had a mix of diplomas and degrees, with one faculty choosing to align the new diploma to the revised HEQSF.

Resistance was also experienced at a national level, as there were “many voices” arguing that the curriculum at UoTs should not change its diploma focus and that UoTs should continue to work with some commonality. There are UoTs that opted for all their diploma offerings to remain: a 100% Category B¹⁴ alignment. And it was not about taking the ‘easy road/path of least resistance’, as it was clear that each institution was driven by its own mission and mandate. While there was some tension and a lack of clarity in the vision of what these institutions should become post-transition, many UoTs chose to retain their qualification offerings, as they aligned to their university mission and the community they serve.

Historically, curricula and pedagogy at UoTs tended to be driven by instrumentalist outcomes and/or standards and/or competences. These were usually established by external regulatory bodies, for example, the professional councils to which the institution is aligned and /or the receiving prospective employers within the world of industry/ business/ practice. These exit-level outcomes were often framed as pragmatic and skills-oriented rather than broad and holistic. These traditions follow Tyler’s (1949, 2013) behaviourist model or linear model (Taba & Spalding, 1962), which underestimates the kinds of complex requirements of a graduate of a changing HE landscape, which requires more than the training of skilled technicians. Even in the interpretations of the new regulatory curriculum frameworks of post-apartheid SA, UoTs were perhaps enacting mechanistic worldviews about the kinds of competences being expected in a restructured and reconceptualised higher education system. Ntshoe & Holzbaur (2012) contend that UoTs should be wary of using in rather technicist ways, the HEQSF as well as outcomes-, standards- and competency-based models as drivers of curriculum and pedagogy. These authors affirm the position taken by the UoT in my study, where the curriculum itself, and the reconstruction of the

¹⁴ Categorisation of programmes for HEQSF Alignment – institutions were requested to categorise their programmes in the alignment process. As a general rule:

Category A: programmes that were requiring only technical changes

Category B: programmes requiring some curriculum development/change

Category C: programmes requiring substantial re-curriculation such that a new programme is necessary

[Registration of Technologists at ECSA](#)

curriculum itself, are the starting point of change that is enabling it to redefine its identity and be proactive instead of reactive to the external demands that aim to regulate its operations. Ramrathan (2016) calls this the third wave of curriculum reform in SA and bemoans its instrumental nature and location within the counting [numbers] rationality. He argues that there is a call for deep curriculum transformation, beyond metrics. The next section zooms into a UoT that attempts to disrupt the status quo and calls for a deep curriculum 'renewal', and one that is associated with a changing epistemology and ontology, a concept developed by Samuel (2010) from the notion of deep teacher professional learning¹⁵. In this way, students are offered opportunities to participate in a different form of preparation for the future. This will be presented in Chapter Five.

2.6 A closer look at a post-merger university of technology

The UoT has transcended two decades in its genealogy as an emerging university: an institution with a rich history as a place of vocational/technical and professional higher education. One that is relevant and responsive to its public contexts (contributing to improving lives and livelihoods). The study site is now a 'university', and the institution continues on its journey of rethinking and reimagining its strategy and trajectory of 'becoming'. Since its inception as a UoT in the post-apartheid landscape in SA, the UoT context has been one of reconstruction, development and transformation as it confronts similar conditions buffeting all higher education institutions (HEIs) operating within local and global contexts. The transformation process at the UoT is shaped by a complex interplay of various drivers that are externally imposed and lie outside, beyond the university's control, and those internal, where the university can make informed decisions within its own sphere of influence.

The internal drivers encompass innovative initiatives unique to UoT, notably the Curriculum Renewal Project (CRP), along with associated efforts such as enriching

¹⁵ 'Deep teacher professional development', defined by Samuel as a comprehensive approach that recognises and embraces the complexities and various forces influencing teaching/professional practice, in other words 'becoming a professional' and the many forces that shape a teacher education/PoE curriculum. In his article, he proffers the importance of understanding the socio-political and ideological influences on teacher/professional practices. He advocates for a commitment to transformation in the curriculum and education system, that goes beyond superficial skills transference; aiming to foster a SA identity that is both locally grounded and globally aware, preparing the next generations of thinkers and doers. ([Samuel, 2010](#))

the curriculum through general education, a shift towards student engagement and student-centeredness, and the formulation of generic graduate attributes. Simultaneously, the concurrent emphasis on enhancing quality through improvements in the student experience has profound implications for quality assurance within the institution.

2.6.1 Becoming a university: Forging a new identity, changing culture

“Institutional cultures, identities, and images share an inextricably linked” and serve as the “personality of an institution” (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p. 42). These authors argue that the evolution of institutional culture occurs gradually over time; “culture is omnipresent, existing within every organization, department, and informal work team (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p. 42). Individuals and organisations both “contribute to its creation” and are “simultaneously influenced and shaped by it (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p. 42). Several scholars allude to its complexity and the lack of a singular ‘characteristic’ (Ensor, 2006; Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p.42). In higher education, institutional culture encompasses the prevailing ethos, a deeply rooted set of norms, assumptions, and values that permeate the environment. Institutional culture represents the dominant ethos, comprised of deeply rooted norms, assumptions, and values that permeate the university environment (Steyn & Van Zyl, as cited in Garraway & Winberg, 2019). This collective framework encompasses attitudes, interaction styles, and shared memories, shaping the overall ‘way of life’ experienced by individuals within the institution.

It is important to note that with the diverse applications of the term, there is increasing awareness that institutional culture might either be an enabler of successful transformation of SAHE or, its main constraint. It is important to remember that the previous Technikon sector aimed to balance maintaining its vocational training focus while exploring postgraduate degrees and an expanded research agenda. However, due to the historical emphasis on practical training, the culture of the Technikons did not adequately support the development of disciplinary knowledge and research capacity, hindering the success of this transition, in some (Kraak, 2009). Garraway and Winberg (2009) aver that cultures can be changed and it can shape change. Usually invisible, institutional culture becomes apparent when attempts are made to introduce changes within an institution (Jansen, 2005; Garraway & Winberg, 2019).

This was evident at the UoT as it was transitioning towards realising its identity as a new emerging university, capitalising on the changes occurring in the socio-political spaces and interpreting these external climatic spaces/forces including the alignment to the HEQSF as a springboard for internal change and transformation (expanded later).

Garraway and Winberg (2019) caution against the concomitant ‘academic drift’, raised by Kraak (2006), that could arise when UoTs seek to transform their cultures by emulating other institutional types. They highlight the likelihood of facing resistance, especially when the changes are implemented without proper consultation or consideration of potential unintended consequences. This is evidenced in the data of my study that show the resistances and frustrations experienced by academics due to the perceived drifts. The complex roles of academics at UoTs, meant that they already had high workloads and tried to balance their classroom teaching with WIL outcomes. Their new roles seem to be increased by demands of other institutional imperatives like research (outputs and staff PhDs), community engagement and entrepreneurship.

Earlier sections covered the socio-political and structural shifts within the post-apartheid SAHE landscape that have had the greatest impact on the undergraduate offerings at UoTs. These institutions have had to engage in ‘recurriculation’ exercises to align all its qualifications to the revised HEQSF¹⁶. At the institutional level, there was consensus that transforming the university’s PQM and curricula would bring about some of the radical change that was needed in ‘becoming’ a UoT, an institution ‘still under construction’ and attempting to ‘identify its institutional distinctiveness’ (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p.41). An institution's identity emerges from its culture and can be viewed as a collective process of sense-making that evolves through conversational exchanges of ideas. It is often perceived as open, dynamic, relational, and subject to evolution over time (Hardy, Lawrence & Grant, 2005). The development of a university's identity occurs gradually and tends to resist deliberate attempts to introduce new philosophical or cultural attributes, or values that overshadow well-

¹⁶ HEQSF – the 2013 revised version of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) promulgated in 2007, provided for the establishment a single qualifications framework for higher education. Its key objective was to enable the articulation of programmes and the transfer of students between programmes and HEIs, which the then separate and parallel qualifications structures for universities and the erstwhile Technikons (now UoTs) were perceived to preclude (HEQSF, 2013).

established sources of meaning. Universities typically encompass a plurality of identities, some of which may be hidden (Garraway & Winberg, 2019). They add that understanding the university's identity involves examining the narratives individuals construct about themselves and their institution. An institution's curriculum is also inextricably linked to its identity. Therefore, understanding how the curriculum at a UoT is transforming and therefore, how this culminates into a new institutional identity, which is the focus of this study, is about examining the narratives that its people construct about themselves, their practices and the plurality of forces that they operate within.

2.6.2 Curriculum renewal for a 'distinctive' education

The curriculum renewal strategies developed at UoT marked a significant departure from its former Technikon identity, guided by a commitment to various national and university sector-level transformation objectives. Section 2.3 examined how the university responded to the socio-political and structural shifts in post-apartheid SAHE to address the imposed challenges. These shifts ushered in 'recurriculation' exercises to ensure qualification alignment with the revised HEQSF.

In 2010, one of the objectives of the UoT operational plan was to review the PQM, with the aim of developing a new qualification profile. The academic executive management (AEM) team had several options. One option involved taking the 'path of least resistance', opting for a technical approach in developing a new PQM. However, a potential drawback in this approach was the likelihood of minimal or no alterations to the design and delivery of learning programs, with no 'concomitant' advantages for the university. Alternatively, renewing or developing a new qualification profile will bring about some of the radical change that was needed in 'becoming' a UoT, an institution 'still under construction' and striving to 'identify its institutional distinctiveness' (Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p.41). The AEM was cognisant that a renewed PQM will offer tremendous opportunities for transforming curricula and pedagogy throughout the institution.

The consensus to be radical in its responses gave rise to what was called the Curriculum Renewal Project (CRP) at the UoT. The CRP was officially launched at the beginning of 2011 as a strategic initiative and springboard to bring to fruition the

following strategic goals: i) PQM renewal, ii) GE inclusion into all the undergraduate curricula; iii) develop a profile of graduate attributes, and iv) transition towards a student-centred university. The CRP processes were underpinned by the various transformative goals internal and external to the university. The CRP was conceptualised as a strategic initiative to move the university towards enhancing its PQM through the identification of new qualification types, changes to existing qualifications, and developing new programmes for accreditation and implementation. In the HEQSF-PQM alignment process, the UoT revised its offerings to a range of new diplomas, bachelor's degrees, advanced and postgraduate diplomas, as well as bachelor honours degrees, following its liberation from the convenor system (CHE, 2017a).

More importantly in terms of the primary focus of this study, was the key imperative of the CRP to infuse general education (GE) or the liberal arts into all the undergraduate programmes across the institution. There was a growing recognition that UoT's curriculum and pedagogy needed intentional design. The imperative arose from the recognition that the VUCA world necessitates the cultivation of "globally portable citizens" (Kift, 2008, p.2), capable of effective engagement with knowledge generation and management in increasingly diverse and globalized workplaces. This demand for graduates to possess skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values, enabling them to participate fully as both citizens and professionals align with the vision of UoT, thereby prompting a critical paradigm shift in the UoT's envisioned mandate (DUT, 2012). To increase the breadth required to achieve the aspirational goals of preparing future-ready graduates, the plan was that thirty per cent of the curriculum for each undergraduate programme/qualification should be assigned to GE. General education/liberal arts broaden students' perspectives and deepen their understanding of their relationships with themselves, their families, professions, communities and society as critical, active and responsible global citizens.

A GE task team (GETT) was constituted in 2012 to develop guidelines and to provide a framework for/in alignment with the university philosophy for programme design. The GE guidelines provide a framework for programme design with a particular philosophy. The GE agenda at the institution is underpinned by a humanistic philosophy, incorporating social justice concerns or issues, that is holistic and integrative. The

primary objective of the GE modules is to develop well-rounded graduates, reflective about their beliefs and choices, more self-conscious and critical of their presuppositions and motivations, more perceptive of the world around them, and more informed about the issues that arise in their lives, personally, professionally and socially. The GE task team was also responsible for conceptualising and implementing thirty institutional GE (IGE) modules in 2014 as core distribution requirements for all undergraduate programmes. How this was planned for and implemented is the primary focus of the study and is explored in detail in Chapter Five.

A further critical imperative of the CRP was the aspiration to develop a suite of five graduate attributes. The university took the decision that GE inclusion will endeavour to help students develop the relevant graduate attributes. Following consultation with the academic community and a series of workshops, the university adopted Bowden's definition of graduate attributes as a useful working definition to reflect the unique UoT context.

'The qualities, skills and understandings a university community agrees its students would desirably develop during their time at the institution and, consequently, shape the contribution they are able to make to their profession and as a citizen. These attributes include but go beyond the disciplinary expertise or technical knowledge that has traditionally formed the core of most university courses. They are qualities that also prepare graduates as agents of social good in an unknown future' (Bowden et al. as cited in McCabe, 2010).

This definition encompasses attributes which pertain to an individual's capacity for citizenship (including involvement in democratic processes, social cohesion, equity and human rights & ecological sustainability) and thus ability to contribute towards a well-functioning society. And to obtain & maintain work & thus contribute to economic productivity (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2005).

The institution's 'BIG5', as it was called at the institution, comprises the five graduate attributes that the UoT aimed to nurture:

1. Critical and creative thinkers who work independently and collaboratively
2. Knowledgeable practitioners
3. Effective communicators
4. Culturally, environmentally and socially aware within a local and global context
5. Active and reflective learners

The assertion made by Smith (as cited by Hay & Marais, 2011, p. 233) that the “curriculum can rightfully be described as a system based on an institution’s ideological purposes” has reference to the UoT context. The call for deep fundamental change within the university is to ensure that the newly aligned curriculums are not superficial and only addressing the socio-political demands. The UoT, driven by its own interpretation and understanding of transformation within the local and global context, served as an institutional force to foster critical debates about what is taught, how it is taught and why it is taught. Curriculum is traditionally an individual academic endeavour, so I was interested in understanding the nature of curriculum change as a collective and collaborative institutional enterprise.

2.6.3 Leading curriculum change

Leading institutional curriculum reform is an arduous undertaking. Those tasked with guiding this process face varying degrees of interest and enthusiasm and, in particular, the complex issue of established identities of academics. As discussed earlier, the new strategic direction undertaken by the new leadership left the entire institution grappling with current conceptions of the elusive concept of curriculum. From the outset of the CRP, all stakeholders were required to take responsibility, be accountable, collegial and demonstrate professionalism in line with the UoT’s core values, while engaging with this paradigm shift in curricula change (DUT, 2012). However, any kind of curriculum reform is not likely to be accomplished by single individuals. Gano-Phillips, et al., (2011) argue that successful GE reform usually requires a team of ‘leaders’ at various levels within the institution to move forward. They referred to, what Spillane, Halverson & Diamond (2004) call, ‘distributive leadership. A model that involves i) sharing responsibilities among various stakeholders, and ii) promoting collaboration and shared ownership. Effective leadership can address these challenges by emphasising collaboration, building trust and promoting collegiality, and promoting a unified attempt by all ‘leaders’ and ‘followers’ to act as stewards of the institution.

At the institutional executive level, two types of leadership styles seemed to emerge from the study site during the study period. The liberal agenda as it was happening at the UoT, seemed to be emerging from a visionary or transformational leadership. I share this view as both the UoT’s Vice Chancellors, during the study period, articulated very clear visions and strategies for curriculum (reform) transformation. Further, these

‘charismatic leaders’ with their ‘theoretical and passionate insight’ and aspirational ‘visions and directions’ aligned with the broader educational and long-term goals of the UoT (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2015). Similar to distributive leaders, transformational leaders are able to share a clear vision, which inspires and motivates stakeholders and fosters a shared commitment to curriculum change. At the institutional level, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching and Learning (DVCTL) provided leadership for the curriculum renewal and transformation projects. The Executive Deans were expected to carry this responsibility at the faculty level and the Head of Department (HoDs), at the department or programme level. Curriculum ‘champions/leaders’ were also identified in each academic department to provide curriculum support at the operational levels. They also played a key role as liaisons between the operational and executive levels and, importantly, managing resistance to change.

Additionally, the UoT provided funding to reduce the workload of these champions, in order to allow them to focus on providing curriculum support. While there was an attempt to build the curriculum development capacity of academic staff across the UoT, this approach was not as successful as what was planned (DUT, 2011). The central unit for quality promotion and assurance developed the project plan, taking cognisance of the current realities at the university described earlier. Paramount in the rationale for the approach adopted in the project was the need to ensure that all staff and key stakeholders were actively involved. In addition, to overcome the unintended consequences of both the merger, and the previous reliance on the convenor Technikons, the plan foregrounded staff engagement with curriculum design as a strategy for enhancing capacity. Therefore, a critical success factor was the nomination of a ‘Curriculum Champion’ for each department to enhance capacity (DUT, 2011). The plan was that the curriculum champions would support the HOD in the implementation of the project plan, conduct workshops with relevant academic staff, and ensure that informed decisions are made through the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders. The university provided funding for the duration of the project to ‘buy-out’ five hours per week teaching time for each champion through the appointment of part-time lecturers. Whilst the project had a defined timeframe, and resources were specifically earmarked to support all curriculum development and renewal activities (CHE, 2017a; Sattar & Cooke, 2012).

The imperative was to foreground staff engagement, and to enhance capacity for curriculum reform, especially when considering where academics at UoTs come from. Aside from the post-merger issues, which seemed to still plague the university at the time, the ‘notion of curriculum ‘renewal’ [within the UoT], signalled an important departure from old Technikon practices of re-curriculation and convenorship¹⁷” (CHE, 2017a, p.6). However, this new scenario presented challenges for staff involved in the HEQSF alignment processes; many academics at the institution are, like me, recruited industry experts from their respective professions with limited or no prior exposure to educational theory and curriculum design processes. Many had also received their qualifications from the Technikon system. An important rationale for the institution’s CRP was to ensure that all staff and relevant stakeholders were participating fully in the ‘curriculum renewal’ processes. There was also a strong position that the development of new and/or aligned professional programmes by academic staff would enhance, transform even, teaching, learning and assessment practices (CHE, 2017a). From my own engagements at department, faculty and institutional levels, some academics were floundering in their new roles as curriculum champions. The participants in the study were selected from a range of professional programmes within three faculties. This is elaborated further in Chapter Five.

Good leadership is critical to nearly all reform challenges and that institutions can begin to identify and establish a strong, visible leadership necessary for achieving success in the reform efforts (Gano-Phillips, et al., 2011). Their article highlights the importance of developing trust among constituents through a collaborative leadership approach, which allows for understanding differences and searching for common ground. Additionally, they stress the significance of building a sense of institutional stewardship and trust among colleagues, as well as the need to place responsibility for success in the hands of a larger group of faculty and staff. This redefined approach to leadership focuses on engaging a wide variety of campus constituents to achieve meaningful reform and emphasises the development of trust and a common purpose

¹⁷ Convenorship prevailed in the old Technikon era where curriculum conceptualisation and development were limited to a few senior academics from the ‘convenor Technikon’ consulting with the relevant stakeholders when designing national outcomes-based curricula (McKenna & Powell, 2009). This presented challenges for many academics at UoTs and for staff involved in the HEQSF curriculum review processes, as they did not actively participate in curriculum development.

in revitalising the general education curriculum. The importance of good leadership during times of change or disruption is further expanded in Chapter Five, section 5.5.3 (post fieldwork) and Chapter Seven, section 7.5.3 (dialogue with theoretical framings).

2.7 Chapter synthesis

The evolution of South African UoTs reflects a complex interplay of historical, policy, and identity-related factors. The transition from Technikons to UoTs was initially perceived as a hasty rebranding effort, and challenges persist in defining their unique identity. The HEQF, introduced to align with national policy directives, inadvertently disrupted UoT curricula, prompting a need for critical reflection and renewal. While challenges such as a lack of clarity in identity, resistance to change, and concerns about neglecting certain disciplines persist, there are aspirational pressures urging UoTs to embrace a broader identity. The ongoing struggle with identity, both institutionally and in a broader context, underscores the need for critical leadership to guide these institutions in a VUCA world.

The HEQSF alignment, while intending to create a cohesive national higher education system, had led to unintended consequences for UoTs. The alignment required a re-evaluation of qualifications, leading to varied responses at the institutional and faculty levels. Some resisted change, opting for continuity, while others saw the disruptions as opportunities for reflection and renewal. The importance of moving beyond compliance and superficial imaginings of quality, excellence, and technology is unpacked in terms of the aims of the study. It calls for practices that promote critical reflection and engagement in response to a changing socio-political landscape. The ongoing curriculum renewal at the UoT reflects a proactive approach, redefining its identity beyond external regulatory demands.

This chapter underscores the dynamic nature of UoTs in South Africa, navigating challenges and opportunities in their quest for a distinctive identity. The interplay of historical legacies, policy changes, and institutional responses shapes the ongoing evolution of UoTs within a broader context of higher education transformation.

Chapters One and Two provide the background, context and rationale for the study and culminate into the next chapter that develops a theoretical lens for the study.

CHAPTER THREE: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL LENS FOR THE STUDY

"Curriculum is a complicated conversation." (William F. Pinar)

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter highlighted the evolution of the university of technology (UoT) sector that is shaped by historical legacies, policy shifts, and identity related changes, particularly in the trajectory from Technikon status. The purpose of this chapter is to make sense of the field of curriculum studies as it relates to the transformation of professionally oriented curriculum (PoC) at UoT, though the general education (GE) imperative. Building on Chapter One, which highlighted curriculum as central to the academic project, guiding the educational system and shaping individuals to be nurtured within society. This chapter extends deeper into the processes, ideologies and institutional contexts that influence curriculum reconceptualisation.

Reconceptualising curriculum entails addressing fundamental questions of the purpose and value of knowledge, such as ‘what knowledge is of most worth?’ and ‘whose knowledge?’ and ‘for what purpose?’ These deliberations, shaped by sociopolitical contexts, institutional histories, and cultural ideologies, are crucial in re-imagining curricula to meet the challenges of an evolving and volatile world. Recent debates extend beyond knowledge acquisition, questioning whether knowledge alone is sufficient to foster adaptability, agility, and critical citizenry (Le Grange, 2014, 2020; Yaşar & Aslan, 2021). Answering these questions requires intense contemplation and thoughtful deliberation.

The International Bureau of Education (Marope, 2017, p. 15) proffers a new definition of curriculum:

[A]s a dynamic and transformative articulation of collective expectations of the purpose, quality, and relevance of education and learning to holistic, inclusive, just, peaceful, and sustainable development, and to the well-being and fulfilment of current and future generations.

Curriculum is rooted in values, beliefs, and ideologies, which are deeply shaped by institutional contexts (their histories and cultures), socio-economic factors, and global-local tensions. In SA, the historical divide between historically White and Black

institutions further complicate curriculum decisions, underscoring the need for inclusive and context-sensitive frameworks.

Drawing on literature, it interrogates the various curriculum conceptions and the philosophical underpinnings of curriculum traditions. It examines how competing purposes, such as the public versus private good debates, shape curriculum practices. It also considers the dynamic tension between internal disciplinary conceptions and external demands for curriculum change, advocating for an approach that treats curriculum as praxis—integrating theory, reflection and action—rather than mere regulation or process. It also examines the tensions between liberal/general and professional/vocational education. It provides an in-depth examination of the theoretical frameworks necessary for navigating the evolving landscape of curriculum change in a globalised and interconnected world. Grounded in critical, theoretical and contextual analyses, the chapter seeks to reconceptualise the curriculum as both a product of the socio-historical forces and a transformative tool for fostering contextually relevant and inclusive, equitable, and future-oriented practices.

3.2 Chapter overview

The chapter begins with an expansion on the changing conceptions of curriculum and curriculum change, outlining historical and philosophical shifts. This is followed by a brief outline of the varying curriculum paradigms and/or traditions as it relates to this study. Section 3.5 expands on the contestations of what it means to be educated in the 21st century. It does this by unveiling the false dichotomy between professionally oriented education (PoE) and GE; illustrating that an institution's philosophy, values and culture is reflected in its curriculum. Section 3.6 outlines a comparative analysis of GE, liberal arts education and liberal education, with a focus on global trends, regional adaptations. Section 3.7 advocates for a 'third way'—based on the need to reconcile breadth with specialisation/depth—emphasising the integration of GL/LE with PoE through interdisciplinarity and holistic pedagogical practices. The last section draws on three theoretical framings—force field model (FFM), currere as an active conceptual force and the ubuntu philosophy—to understand curriculum change and the interplay of forces that shape curriculum planning and decision-making, within a UoT context.

3.3 The changing conceptions of curriculum and curriculum change

Curriculum definitions, like the curriculum itself, represent a highly contested space, encompassing a wide range of meanings. Interestingly, the earliest documented use of the word 'curriculum', according to the OED, dates back to 1633, when it was found in the records of the University of Glasgow (Wyse, Hayward & Pandya, 2016). According to Le Grange (2016) although the term originated in higher education (HE), it has historically received more attention in school settings. However, in the last decade, there has been a notable increase in global attention in HE. In the field of curriculum studies, scholars have studied the moral, political, philosophical and ideological aims underlying various curriculum conceptualisations (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021; Pinar 2022; Pinar et al., 1995). This includes institutional (meso), national (macro), or international (supra) reviews and changes, such as the Bologna Process across Europe and other university types globally (Blackmore & Kandiko, 2012; Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021; Pegg, 2013; Roberts, 2015), and in South Africa (Shay, 2015; Shay, Wolffe & Clarence-Fincham, 2016).

The demand for curriculum change arises from discrepancies between intended goals and the actual implementation of the curriculum, as well as their connection to outcomes (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). Consequently, there is a growing demand for more empirical analysis of curriculum reform/change. Curriculum quality comprises two main components: intent/planning and implementation, with intent focusing on rationale, concepts and desire (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). This emphasis on intent addresses concerns about high-stakes outcomes-based environments (Ofsted, as cited in Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). This study is concerned with exploring the top-down imperatives and coordination and bottom-up engagement to plan for and implement institution-wide curriculum changes at a UoT.

Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen (2016) suggest four frequent conceptions of curriculum that are employed in studies over the last two decades. These are 'syllabus', 'product', 'process', and 'praxis' and reflect varying understandings of knowledge and learning, the roles of individuals, and the underlying rationale of the curriculum. The syllabus approach focuses exclusively on content and views curriculum as valuable knowledge to be transmitted, with ownership held by those in authority. It often involves identifying

knowledge and skills gaps to define core curriculum and guide curriculum design. While these approaches catalogue skills and competencies, critical perspectives also address the power dynamics related to the established canon of knowledge (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). This approach is criticised for its limitations in effectiveness and its hindrance to curriculum change.

Curriculum, as a product, is rooted in the Tyler rationale, with four main principles of defining objectives, content, teaching methods and assessment. Tyler (1949, 2013) describes the curriculum as a systematic orientation of educational experiences aimed at achieving specific educational objectives. For Taba & Spalding (1962) it is a structured programme of study or a roadmap for learning. The concept of curriculum as producing competences emphasises the role of teaching and learning processes in shaping the research agenda. Studies in this area focus on developing knowledge as competences and exploring ownership within this context; concepts such as learning outcomes and competence-based education are discussed (Annala, Lindén, & Mäkinen, 2016). This product-driven or outcomes-based model has faced criticism for its narrow and technical view. Freire (2000), in his seminal work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, famously critiqued this approach as the 'banking model' of education, where teachers 'deposit' knowledge into passive students, reinforcing existing power structures rather than encouraging critical inquiry. Furthermore, this model's neutrality is challenged by theorists like Apple (1993), who argues that curriculum is never a neutral assemblage of knowledge. Instead, it represents 'official knowledge'—a selective tradition that reflects ideologies and interests of dominant groups in society. By focusing solely on predefined objectives and competencies, the Tylerian model can obscure these political dimensions, failing to address the crucial questions of 'whose knowledge' is being legitimised and 'for what purpose.'

Stenhouse (1975), on the other hand, advocates for a dynamic and collaborative process-oriented approach, viewing it as a negotiated artefact that incorporates the experiences of both students and teachers (Pinar et al., 1995; Stenhouse, 1975). Pinar (2004, p. 185) refers to this as a "complicated conversation". This student-centred orientation emphasises the curriculum's role in facilitating personal change through encounters with knowledge, focusing on the development of epistemic dispositions and virtues. It posits that curriculum significantly impacts students' identities and

growth, with shared ownership among participants (Coate & Barnett, 2005; Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016).

The radical curriculum, grounded in critical theory, positions curriculum as praxis. This concept, central to the work of Freire (2000), moves beyond a simple 'process' orientation. Praxis is defined as a dynamic and dialectical relationship between reflection and action (theorising and doing) upon the world in order to transform it. A curriculum as praxis, therefore, has an explicitly emancipatory goal, to develop what Freire called a critical consciousness, in both students and teachers; to develop critical consciousness to promote social justice, value diversity, and encourage activism while emphasising community engagement and interdisciplinary learning (Null, 2011; Freire, 2000). It seeks to challenge and transform societal norms and power structures to address social injustices and inequalities in education. This aligns with Young's (2008) later arguments for providing access to powerful knowledge. While not a critical theorist, Young's work suggests that an empowering curriculum must provide students with access to specialised theoretical knowledge that allows them to generalise beyond their own experience and engage critically with the world. A praxis-oriented curriculum would therefore equip students not just with skills, but with conceptual tools necessary for meaningful social analysis and action.

The concept of curriculum as empowerment examines curriculum through the lenses of equality and cultural perspectives, including disciplinary, international, minority, and gender views (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016; Freire, 2000; Young, 2008). They argue that curriculum as praxis builds on the process-oriented approach with an emancipatory focus, necessitating ongoing evaluation and development through action-reflection interactions. Emancipatory power relations are a key feature of this approach, and the curriculum is conceptualised as a process where both knowledge and ownership are negotiated (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). The focus is on developing competencies that enhance the emergence of students' full potential, and curriculum is seen as a means of empowering students to take ownership of their learning and position them as co-creators of the curriculum in HE.

These four approaches, as proposed by Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen (2016), show that curriculum can only be fully understood inside the personal/biographical, institutional, programmatic, political and societal power relations that reflect a certain historical context. It is through this that the ways of understanding curriculum reflect what kind of knowledge, dispositions, learning conceptions and qualities are valued in HE (Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen, 2016). This study aims to understand how the curriculum at one UoT, a sub-set with the SAHE landscape, is transforming within a rapidly changing and complex globalised world. While the approaches that dominate curriculum work in the study relate to Tylerian model, it is clear that the GE imperative could be argued to align with curriculum as process and praxis orientations. These approaches are what Annala, Lindén & Mäkinen (2016, p. 177) call “curriculum as negotiating of potentials” and “curriculum as empowerment” (see also Freire, 2000).

The next section offers a brief description of curriculum traditions/paradigms that represent different curriculum approaches to designing and organising HE programmes.

3.4 Philosophical orientations of curriculum

Many curriculum scholars share a common belief that the curriculum must be guided by ethical and philosophical principles. Good curriculum making takes into account the theoretic visions for what curriculum ‘must do’ or ‘should do’ and the practical, decision-making world of classrooms (Null, 2011, p.6). While this author was alluding to the transitions between the official and enacted/experienced curriculum, the question of “what should be the nature of this transition between vision and decision-making” also applies to curriculum reconceptualisation and decision-making (Null, 2011, p.6). Five curriculum traditions/philosophical orientations have been recognised as powerful and influential in shaping curriculum and educational practices and outcomes. These are systematic/technological, existentialist, radical, pragmatic, and deliberative (Null, 2011). These orientations have been explored to some degree in the previous section. This section focuses on the deliberative curriculum theory that prioritises the development of students' decision-making abilities and their preparation as active citizens in democratic processes.

3.4.1 The deliberative curriculum

The development of students' decision-making abilities is emphasised in the deliberative curriculum theory. The theory includes students' preparation as active citizens in democratic processes. Key features include promoting discussion and debate, fostering civic engagement, enhancing critical thinking, encouraging collaboration, and linking classroom learning to real-world issues. The goal is to empower students to make informed decisions and apply their knowledge responsibly within their communities, aligning with essential 21st century skills. Null (2011) posited that curriculum problems are inherently moral, practical, and social, advocating for a practical approach to resolving these issues. Benhabib (as cited in Waghid, 2020) highlighted the importance of accommodating diverse cultural perspectives within deliberative frameworks. While the deliberative curriculum shares similarities with the radical curriculum in fostering critical engagement, it is distinct in its philosophical foundations and emphasis on democratic values, open dialogue, and practical relevance, contrasting with the radical curriculum's focus on challenging societal norms and promoting activism (Null, 2011). Critics of the deliberative approach have raised concerns about potential marginalisation of voices and assumptions regarding equal participation.

3.4.2 Liberating the curriculum

The concept of liberating the curriculum, as articulated by Null (2011) and others, aims to empower both students and teachers to engage critically with educational content and structures. This approach advocates for moving beyond traditional, rigid educational frameworks to foster critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility. Freire's foundational work (2000) on liberatory education emphasised the importance of enabling students to engage with their social realities, explore diverse perspectives, and develop the skills necessary for active citizenship. Null (2011) asserts that this critical engagement allows students to analyse and challenge existing knowledge and societal structures, promoting a deeper understanding of complex issues and encouraging independent thought. Liberating the curriculum also seeks to enhance relevance and inclusivity by incorporating diverse voices and experiences, thereby addressing social inequalities and representing marginalised groups (bell hooks, 1994; Pinar, 2004).

While Null's framework is useful, other philosophical orientations offer further vital dimensions for a holistic curriculum. Noddings (2013) champions an 'ethic of care' as the central aim of education. From this perspective, the curriculum's primary purpose is not just to develop cognitive skills or civic responsibility but to cultivate the capacity for caring relationships, with oneself, with others, and with the world. This challenges the often impersonal and individualistic nature of traditional curricula, urging teachers and curriculum workers to prioritise empathy, relationality, and ethical engagement in their curriculum design. Similarly, Greene (1995) brings an existentialist and aesthetic lens, emphasising the role of the imagination and the arts in 'liberating students. For Greene (1995), a transformative curriculum is one that achieves 'wide awakeness', prompting students to question their lived worlds, imagine alternate possibilities, and engage in the social and political 'quest for a better state of things.' This perspective suggests that liberating the curriculum is not only a political act, as Freire (2000) would argue, but also a deeply personal and aesthetic one, rooted in the power of art and narrative to transform consciousness.

Additionally, scholars identify three aspects of the curriculum: the explicit, hidden, and null curriculum (Le Grange, 2016, 2020). The explicit curriculum encompasses the professional knowledge provided to students, while the hidden curriculum reflects implicit institutional culture. The null curriculum refers to knowledge that is excluded in the curriculum. Agbaje (2023) asserts that these distinctions highlight the significance of curriculum decisions/choices about what knowledge is included or omitted. This suggests some exclusions imply unimportance, as universities cannot feasibly cover all topics, whereas other exclusions raise questions about the rationale behind the exclusion. As discussed, scholars advocate for removing colonial influences and centring indigenous knowledge, as well as fostering critical literacies in the digital age. The development of well-rounded individuals is prioritised in the holistic approach, moving beyond rote learning and standardised assessments.

These curriculum paradigms represent different educational philosophies and approaches, each with its unique principles, values, and objectives. It is important to note that educational practices often incorporate elements from multiple paradigms, leading to a more eclectic and inclusive approach to curriculum change as is seen in the study context. The next section uncovers what is professional or PoE.

3.5 The South African imperative: Transformation, decolonisation and Africanisation

While the preceding sections outlined global conceptions of curriculum, any analysis of curriculum change in SA must be grounded in the specific, powerful, and ongoing discourses of transformation, decolonisation and Africanisation. These are not merely academic trends; they are urgent political, social, and ethical imperatives that fundamentally shape the purpose and practice of higher education in a post-apartheid society.

Transformation, in the SAHE context, moves beyond simple ‘change’ to denote a deep, systematic process of redressing the structural and epistemic injustices of the past. It encompasses issues of institutional culture (see Section 2.6), equitable access and success for all students, and the diversification of academic staff (Soudien, 2011). Africanisation is a more specific dimension of this, calling for centring of African knowledge systems, philosophies, languages, and contexts within the university. It is a project of reclaiming and asserting an intellectual identity that is *of* Africa, not merely located in Africa (Mbembe, 2015). This involves, for example, engaging with philosophies like ubuntu not as a cultural curiosity, but as a valid framework for ethical and pedagogical engagement (see also Section 3.9.4). Decolonisation, however, represents the most profound challenge. It argues that transformation is incomplete without dismantling the enduring colonial matrix of power that underpins the modern university. This involves confronting what has been termed ‘epistemic violence’—the systemic erasure and marginalisation of indigenous and non-Western knowledges (Heleta, 2016; Hlatshwayo, 2022a). A decolonial approach to curriculum, therefore, resonates strongly with the work of Apple, questioning whose knowledge is legitimised, and with Freire, seeking to create a pedagogy that liberates rather than domesticates (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4).

These discourses have a particular resonance for UoTs. Historically, Technikons were positioned within a colonial and apartheid hierarchy that privileged ‘academic’ knowledge over vocational or ‘technical knowledge. A decolonial project at a UoT, therefore, involves not only diversifying content but also challenging this very hierarchy, asserting the value of applied knowledge and practice-based

epistemologies. Furthermore, as institutions that serve a diverse student body, often from marginalised communities, UoTs are at the forefront of the struggle to create curricula that are contextually relevant and socially just.

The rise of movements, particularly catalysed by the #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall student protests, has created a critical tension with the pervasive forces of neoliberalism. While decolonial agendas call for a curriculum rooted in social and epistemic justice, the neoliberal university (UoT) often prioritises market-readiness, efficiency, and global rankings—metrics that can inadvertently reproduce the very Western, colonial standards that decolonisation seeks to dismantle. While it must be noted that the planning for the curriculum renewal project preceded the 2015/2016 student protests, this study's theoretical framework is informed by the critical tension. The analysis of the GE imperative at the UoT will be viewed through this lens, examining to what extent it represented a genuine move towards a decolonised, Africanised curriculum, or whether it was ultimately co-opted by institutional inertia and neoliberal pressures. These discourses provide the essential context for understanding the forces at play in curriculum decision-making in contemporary SA.

3.6 Professional education: Is it enough in itself?

This section explores the evolving role of professional education in HE, particularly in the context of UoTs. It examines the historical divide between vocational and professional education, the differences and implications of transitioning between diplomas and degrees, and the tensions between theoretical knowledge and practical skills. The discussion highlights the need for curricula that prepare graduates for immediate work-readiness as well as for ethical, adaptable and transformative roles in 21st century workplaces, society and the world.

3.6.1 Vocational and/or professional education: The widening divide

Professionally oriented education (PoE), as defined by Winberg (2012), encompasses traditional fields such as medicine, engineering, accounting and law, as well as emerging professions such as mechatronics, software engineering, environmental health and radiography. Historically, vocational education emphasised technical skills

aligned with labour market needs, while professional education integrated theoretical and liberal dimensions. This distinction has shaped the South African UoTs, whose roots as Technikons often led to perceptions of offering inferior qualifications compared to traditional universities. For UoTs, the historical focus on vocational, or workplace-based diplomas for technicians contrasts with professional degrees from traditional universities, leading to different societal perceptions of graduates.

As indicated earlier in the thesis, PoE gained significance due to the rapid expansion of HE and a shift towards knowledge-based societies. The increasing student population, with diverse expectations for career preparation and the demand for post-secondary education, have contributed to the growing importance of this educational approach. Modern professional curricula face pressures to balance broad conceptual knowledge with specialised, practice-oriented training. Despite the increasing demand for professionally oriented higher education to meet new individual and societal needs, its development is not a straightforward process. Tensions arise between preparing graduates for immediate employment and enabling them to drive transformation within their industries.

The divide between vocational and professional education widened significantly in the early 20th century, driven by the growth of scientific research (Summer, 2006). Criticisms of vocationalism point to its narrow focus on practical skills, which may quickly become obsolete in rapidly evolving economies. In response, “new vocationalism” emerged, integrating academic and practical skills to foster critical thinking, adaptability, and lifelong learning (Bills, Graf & Protsch, 2017). Neuhouser, Latz and Mulvihill (2022) offer three considerations for higher education leaders and institutions involved in developing POC. These considerations include evaluating the extent to which curriculum prepare students to go beyond mere job readiness and drive transformation in their industries, considering equity and access for underserved students, and fully preparing students for lifelong learning and long-term professional success. It has been argued that despite the strengthening between vocational/professional and liberal/general education, that the ‘professional’ curriculum has also become too narrow and too technical, possibly due to the massification of higher education (Piasey & Paisey, 2004; Summer, 2006).

These distinctions have great bearing on UoTs (erstwhile Technikons) in SA because historically their primary offerings were ‘vocational’ in nature. This meant that all engineering and health sciences diplomas offered at the old Technikons served a particular purpose in preparing diplomates for the workforce, mostly as ‘technicians’. Meanwhile, traditional universities prepared graduates with professional degrees in the same or similar fields, but as ‘professional’ engineers, physiotherapists, pharmacists, etc. All diplomas in the old Technikon education system followed a three-year national curriculum, including a strong workplace-based component. It is within this context that the study explores how one UoT navigates its way towards rethinking and repositioning PoC beyond the technical skills agenda, beyond workplaces and offering its students a curriculum of difference.

The next section explores the curriculum implications for diplomas and degrees within the SAHE system.

3.6.2 From diplomas to degrees: Curriculum implications

A degree credential is seen as having greater symbolic value and enhancing one’s professional standing, providing graduates with broader disciplinary knowledge and preparing them for complex professional practice, as argued by Merriman (1998). Diplomas, according to Winberg (2012), have a narrower, practice-based focus that is directly aligned with labour market needs. Professional status and intra-professional parity, particularly in regulated professions, are cited as key differences between diplomas and degrees and one of the main reasons for the curriculum shifts. Transitions to degree status are seen to be driven by the need to improve professional status and maintain intra-professional parity with other para-professions that have graduate entry. This parity is crucial for competing for suitably qualified students. The major shifts from diploma to degree offerings at the study site, especially in the select faculties to attend to issues of professional parity, are discussed in Chapter Two.

The distinguishing features between diploma and degree programmes, in all professional education, are in their focus and approach to education. Winberg (2012) proposed using Dewey’s perspectives of the classification of programmes, not being contingent on their social standing but rather on their overarching purpose: preparing students/graduates to engage meaningfully with the world beyond the university. She

recommended ten categories for distinguishing diplomas and degrees, as shown in Table 3.1 below. These ten categories include the purpose, the complexity of practice for which the qualification prepares a graduate, disciplinary knowledge, focus and specialisation, research requirement, practice requirement, relationship with labour market, entry requirements, exit level, and preparation for higher levels of study.

Winberg (2012) highlights this difference in her diploma-degree continuum, with degrees prioritising research and complex knowledge, whereas diplomas prioritise procedural skills and experiential learning (see Figure 3.1). Degrees include a stronger research component, enabling students to engage with knowledge production and pursue further studies.

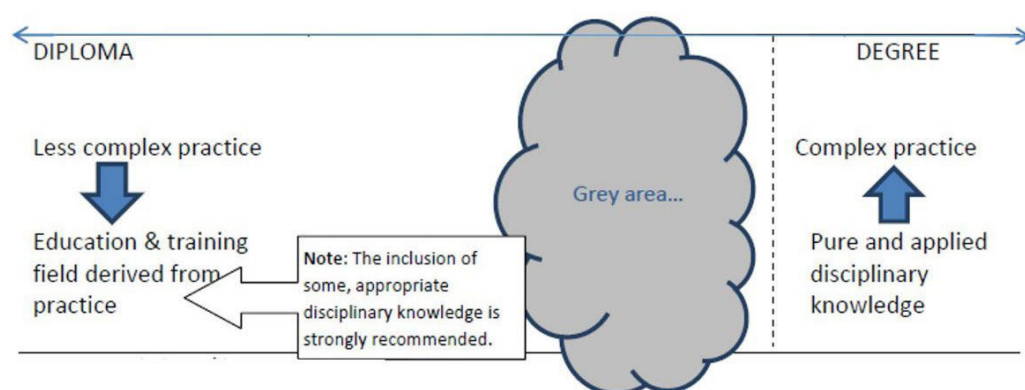


Figure 3.1: The diploma-degree continuum (adapted from Winberg, 2012).

When considering curriculum transformation/shifts from a diploma to a degree or even aligning the diploma offerings to the new HEQSF, it is not simply a ‘stretching’ of the curriculum structure or repackaging of the old National Diploma and BTech offerings. There are greater concerns of elevating the purpose of the programme/qualification, to include appropriate disciplinary knowledge to enable complex practice and create a sufficient base for further studies (Shay, 2013; Winberg et al., 2013). Several scholars (Clegg, 2016; Shay, 2013; Winberg et al., 2013; Wheelahan, 2012) argue that curriculum reform remains a site of contestation and struggle, when the recontextualising principles for earlier educational settings do not provide an adequate basis for conceptual knowledge building in POC. Differences between diploma and degrees are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Differences between diploma and degrees (adapted from Winberg, 2012)

Feature/Domain	DIPLOMA	DEGREE
Academic Focus & Knowledge	Emphasises practice-based knowledge derived from a specific field of practice. Designed for specialised roles and immediate application.	Focuses on pure and applied disciplinary knowledge (e.g., physics, mathematics). Prepares for a broader field, starting general and becoming specialised at higher levels.
Complexity of Practice	Prepares students for less complex forms of practice.	Prepares students for more complex forms of practice.
Research Requirement	Typically, no research requirement in a basic diploma. Research may be included in advanced or postgraduate diplomas.	Research is an essential component of the qualification (e.g., research methods course, final year project, dissertation).
Practice Requirement	Practice is often integrated within the qualification. Accounts for an average of 15% of qualification credits.	Supervised practice is usually required after graduation. Often a prerequisite for registration with a professional council.
Purpose & Career Goal	To prepare students for specific job requirements and defined forms of practice.	To prepare for broader professional practice and create a foundation for further study, research, and knowledge building.
Labour Market Relationship	Direct relationship to industry needs and specific job roles. Can be controlled by professional councils.	Indirect relationship to the general labour market but strong ties to and control by professional councils.
Progression & Pathways	Lower entry requirements. Progression to a degree may require starting from the beginning ("go back to the first year") due to its specialised nature.	Higher entry requirements. Provides a natural pathway to higher levels of specialised study (e.g., PG Dip, Master's, PhD).

Curriculum change contributes to ongoing debates around vocational versus professional education; UoTs must balance industry relevance with conceptual knowledge that fosters occupational and academic progression. Workplace-based learning remains central to POC, ensuring graduates are prepared for real world challenges while building a foundation for long term career growth.

3.6.3 Curriculum and professional knowledge

Professional education involves what Barnett (2006) referred to as double recontextualisation, where academic knowledge is adapted for professional contexts, and workplace practices inform university curricula. Bernstein's (2006) concept of regional knowledge underscores the dual-facing nature of professional curricula, which must balance disciplinary knowledge and practical application.

Ntshoe (2012) critiqued the overemphasis on applied knowledge at erstwhile Technikons, arguing for an integrated approach that combines theoretical, conceptual and procedural knowledge. This balance is essential for preparing graduates to navigate diverse and evolving professional environments. Additionally, he critiqued competence-based and outcomes-based models in higher education, suggesting they have not effectively enhanced teaching and learning. Shifting from diplomas to degrees allows UoTs to address these tensions, enhancing cognitive complexity and fostering innovation.

Theorists, like Kinsella and Pitman (2012), highlight the ethical dimensions of professional practice, emphasising Aristotle's concept of *phronesis* or practical wisdom. *Phronesis* integrates ethical judgement reflection and action-oriented decision-making, offering a deeper understanding of professionalism. This perspective addresses the theory-practice gap advocating for curricula that develop reflective, adaptable professionals capable of ethical and transformative practice. Kinsella and Pitman (2012) introduced six criteria to help practitioners cultivate wise judgment in their professional practice: pragmatic usefulness, persuasiveness, aesthetic appeal, ethical considerations, transformative potential, and dialogic intersubjectivity.

3.6.4 The professional and professionalism

The term 'profession' traditionally refers to occupations requiring specialised knowledge, ethical conduct, and social responsibility. Professionalism is often illustrated as a developmental process and analysed through the 'escalator model': starting with the establishment of a school, followed by the formation of an association, then the introduction of examinations, licensing, adoption of an ethics code, and ultimately reaching full professional status (Allen & van der Velden, 2011). Professionalism hinges on the notion that a professional can utilise systematic knowledge in their practice, a fundamental characteristic of a profession as outlined by Eraut (1994). He believed that personal attributes such as confidence, commitment, openness to feedback, and a profound professional dedication to the value of one's work are essential in professional practice. Gardner and Shulman (2005) outlined six tenets of professionalism: commitment to ethical service, a unique knowledge base, mastery of practice, capacity for complex judgment, reflective learning, and active professional communities.

HE must prepare students to embody professionalism by fostering critical thinking, ethical decision-making and lifelong learning. This preparation requires curricula that integrate disciplinary knowledge, practical skills and reflective practice, ensuring graduates are equipped to address complex real-world challenges. Modern professionals must navigate tensions between societal expectations, technological advances, and ethical challenges. Gardner and Shulman (2005) argued that professionalism involves balancing individual client interests with broader societal responsibilities. These authors argue that 'creeping professionalism'—marked by rising standards and credentialism—has sparked debates based on access, innovation and professional identity; and they see this as the "enemy of liberal learning" (Gardner & Shulman, 2005, p. 14).

3.6.5 Towards professional learning: Rethinking professional standards

Professionals are increasingly expected to engage in continuous professional development (CPD) to enhance their skills and practices throughout their careers (Daniels, 2017). The terms 'professional development' (PD) and 'professional learning' (PL) are often used interchangeably, but they have distinct meanings. PD traditionally refers to externally imposed activities, whereas PL is an ongoing, context-driven

process embedded in daily work that fosters continuous improvement and growth (Mayer & Lloyd, 2011). It involves transforming one's thinking, knowledge skills, and practices, with a focus on enhancing capacity for practice. This shift in terminology addresses criticisms of poorly designed disconnected PD activities, emphasising the need for both terms to contribute to improved professional practices and better graduate outcomes.

Professional learning encompasses transformations in a professional's thinking, knowledge, skills, and instructional approaches, shaping their professional repertoire. It involves enhancing one's capacity for practice by developing new thinking patterns, knowledge, skills, and habits of mind relevant to their profession. Additionally, PL may lead to changes in actual practices when professionals apply newly acquired knowledge and skills in their daily work routines. This shift in terminology reflects concerns about the negative associations linked to poorly designed, isolated, and disconnected professional development activities. The call for distinguishing between 'professional development' and 'professional learning' is essential to acknowledge the legitimacy of both terms in fostering improved professional practices that positively impact student learning outcomes (Mayer & Lloyd, 2011; Daniels, 2017).

The professional landscape is influenced by standardised policies that overlook individuality and contextual differences, creating tension between practitioners and institutional expectations (Daniels, 2017). In SA, professional bodies affiliated with SAQA play a key role in quality assurance, career development, and aligning qualifications with national and international standards. These bodies also support lifelong learning and promote social responsibility (Naidoo & Rajcoomar, 2020). The accreditation of SAHE programmes by professional bodies ensures quality control and aligns university curricula with industry needs (Dowelani & Dowelani, 2020). However, in post-apartheid SA, professional bodies have been critiqued for representing particular worldviews, influencing curriculum decisions and redefining the notion of the 'professional' (Ramrathan, 2016, p. 6).

In professional education the shift towards 'becoming' a professional integrates knowledge, action and being shaping professional identity and practice over time. This holistic approach fosters purpose, continuous growth, and ethical professionalism

(Barnett, 2009; Dall’Alba, 2024). Despite advances in fostering professional becoming, these authors argue that modular curricula emphasise specialised knowledge and have faced criticism for fragmenting learning and for neglecting essential soft skills such as communication, collaboration, empathy and ethical sensitivity. This fragmentation erodes holistic education and underscores the need to reintegrate these generic skills to better prepare graduates for the complexities of modern professional practice. Shifting the focus to the process of becoming a professional helps to support students in developing a holistic understanding of their professional identity and practice.

In summary, this section explored the evolving nature of professional education, highlighting its historical tensions, curriculum implications, and the need for integrated knowledge approaches. UoTs in SA are uniquely positioned to navigate these challenges, balancing workplace relevance with academic depth to prepare adaptable, ethical, and transformative professionals for the 21st century. The next section discusses liberal arts education or GE education and how it addresses the limitations of narrow and specialised curricula.

3.7 General education or liberal arts education: Creating the balance

This section examines the conceptual and practical distinctions between GE, liberal arts education (LAE) and liberal education (LE). Historical evolution global trends, and contemporary challenges, are explored. How these paradigms intersect and diverge are highlighted including addressing tensions between breadth and depth, specialisation and generalisation, and local versus global educational priorities. By understanding these dynamics, HEIs can design curricula that balance foundational knowledge intellectual development and career preparation.

To reiterate, the previous VC in my study mooted for a fifty per cent inclusion of the American tradition of a liberal arts education into the undergraduate curricula. However, the final consensus was to adopt general education at the UoT. This section explores these competing paradigms to foreground similarities and/or differences. This section includes a description of the characteristics and requirements for GE as well as a brief examination of the global trends and challenges related to adopting GE as a curriculum ideology.

3.7.1 General, liberal arts or liberal education: Competing paradigms or not?

General education (GE), like all curriculums, is a contested space in HE, mostly due to the fact there is no single definition for the term. Interestingly, in the literature, it is used interchangeably with the LAE and sometimes conflated with LE. As alluded to in Chapter One, it adopts different contextual meanings within varying global contexts with each context creating its own nuances in its conceptualisation, interpretation, and practice.

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) posit that LE is “an approach to learning that empowers individuals and prepares them to deal with complexity, diversity, and change, liberal education provides students with broad knowledge of the wider world (e.g., science, culture, and society) as well as the in-depth study in a specific area of interest. It helps students develop a sense of social responsibility, as well as strong and transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical and problems-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real world setting” (AAC&U, 2024). This approach encourages students to engage with diverse perspectives and to think critically and creatively about complex issues, transcending the boundaries of specific professional fields. GE is seen to be ‘part of a liberal education curriculum’ that is shared by all students, often referred to as the ‘core curriculum’ (AAC&U, 2024). It provides a “broad learning in multiple disciplines and ways of knowing, along with more in-depth study in a major” (AAC&U, 2024). It includes study in the liberal arts (humanities, arts, social sciences and sciences) and forms the basis for developing important intellectual and civic capacities, fostering critical thinking and broadening students' awareness (Stross, 2017). While GE provides essential baseline competencies, it may lack the same level of depth and interdisciplinary focus inherent in LE. LAE differs from GE because it encompasses a broader range of disciplines within the humanities, social sciences, natural sciences and creative arts. It is rooted in classical education philosophies and aims for personal growth and lifelong learning (Stross, 2017).

Historically, Newman’s *The Idea of a University* (as cited in Briel, 2008), emphasised that education cultivates clear judgment, critical thinking, and effective communication, preparing individuals for intellectual for any intellectual personal pursuit. These goals align with Kimball’s (2010) oratorical and philosophical traditions of LE that prioritise

communication, critical reasoning and cultural breadth. Nussbaum (2006) extended this by advocating for global citizenship, urging education to foster cross-cultural understanding and social responsibility. These principles are increasingly relevant in today's VUCA world.

Table 3.2: Comparison between general, liberal arts and liberal education
(adapted from Erickson, 1992).

Aspect	General Education	Liberal Arts Education	Liberal Education
Knowledge base and definition	Foundational knowledge across various subjects	Broad curriculum emphasising humanities and social sciences	Comprehensive education focusing on critical thinking and ethical reasoning.
Curricular structure	Predetermined courses/modules covering essential disciplines	Flexible, interdisciplinary approach with diverse subjects	Integrative curriculum that combines practical knowledge with theoretical understanding
Focus and goals	Develops essential skills for career readiness, specialisation	Cultivates creativity, critical thinking and cultural awareness	Aims to foster holistic personal growth & adaptability in complex societies
Critical Thinking skills	Emphasises problem-solving & practical applications	Strong emphasis on questioning assumptions and analysing ideas	Encourages deep engagement with complex issues & diverse perspectives
Interdisciplinary approach	Limited integration between disciplines; more independent exploration	Strong emphasis on interconnectedness of knowledge across fields	Promotes connectedness among various disciplines for comprehensive understanding
Career relevance	Prepares students for specific career paths with essential skills	Prepares adaptable graduates for diverse roles requiring critical thinking and creativity	Equips students for various careers while emphasising lifelong learning and civic engagement.

The rise of GE in the 20th century reflects the response to societal demands for broader, more integrated education. While LED emphasises intellectual development, GE focuses on practical knowledge and foundational skills for specialization. Ericsson (1992), and Stross (2017), highlight their axiomatic distinctions: LE prioritises holistic personal development and intellectual depth, while GE aligns more closely with career preparation and practical competencies, and LAE fosters deeper intellectual

engagement with diverse subjects, preparing students for a wide range of life experiences beyond vocational training (see Table 3.2).

The literature on LE, liberal arts and/or GE is expansive. Several authors explore various histories, trajectories and traditions of LE (Altbach, 2016; Dekker, 2021; Logan and Curry, 2015; Schneider, 2018; Shen, 2016; Wang & Xie, 2018; Miller, 2021; Zakaria, 2015) and GE (Zai III, 2015; Koritz, 2018). This thesis does not detail this history, and explore the important distinctions between LE, liberal arts and GE. It does, however, hone in into the benefits of a 'liberalised' education. While historically distinct, the differences between LE and GE have gradually decreased, showing a trend of integration and infiltration. This indicates that the distinctions between the two are becoming increasingly blurred, and are increasingly being used according to individual university understanding. Both are expected to provide relevant teaching content to help students have a sense of social responsibility, master transferable knowledge and skills, and practical ability (Jiang, 2019). The next section focuses on GE and looks at the historical trends globally.

3.7.2 General education: Evolution and global trends

This section explores the evolution of GE within the American LE traditions, which evolved from British influences, and developed its distinct characteristics over the 20th century (Shen, 2016). It provides a brief overview of its historical roots and more importantly, its global influences, particularly in East Asia and the MENA region.

The global adoption of GE/LE has expanded significantly, with the Global Liberal Education Inventory (GLEI) being evident in 58 countries outside the US, across all continents with post-secondary institutions (Godwin & Altbach, 2016). While many countries adopting GE have historical ties to the US/UK, often maintained through affiliations or partnerships, they are not passive recipients of these models. Instead, they actively adapt the GE frameworks to align with their local and regional contexts (Al-Hendawi, Ahmed & Albertine, 2019; Boyle, 2019, 2022; Godwin & Altbach, 2016; Huang, 2017). Since the 1990s, GE has been introduced in several African countries, including Kenya, Morocco, Ghana and Nigeria, although the number of institutions offering GE remains relatively small. This excludes the MENA region (Godwin & Altbach, 2016).

3.7.2.1 Historical development of GE

In the early 20th century, GE emerged as a distinct movement opposing traditional LE emphasis on western civilisation and intellectual refinement. According to Brint et al. (2009), John Dewey and other progressives have influenced general education to integrate knowledge to address societal challenges, promote scepticism, problem-solving, and education for social change. They assert that Dewey's pragmatic vision reshaped educational practices blending intellectual development with practical application and broadening the scope beyond specialised disciplines. Pragmatic liberal learning did not position itself in opposition to those seeking a more utilitarian education. Instead, it advocated for a broader understanding of what could enhance a student's capacity to positively impact the world, beyond the narrow specialised knowledge associated with a 'major'/discipline (Roth, 2013; Cusoe, 2016).

Tracing its roots, early western GE curricula evolved by distinguishing between general and specialised education. As vocational programmes expanded, institutions began introducing GE courses to address contemporary social issues. Notably, the University of Chicago's 'Great Books' curriculum exemplified this evolution, emphasising a multidisciplinary approach. The Harvard's 1945 report proposed dedicating one-third of the undergraduate programmes to GE to counteract over specialisation, emphasising the need to balance specialisation with GE values. Although not adopted, the report significantly influenced GE programmes in the US (Bourke, Bray, & Horton, 2009; Brint et al., 2009; Wehlburg, 2010). The late 20th - century saw many institutions reducing their GE requirements while increasing curricular fragmentation through the number of electives students could take. Reports like the 1977 Carnegie study criticised this decline; specialisation increased and the coherence and integration of GE programmes diminished (Boning, 2007; as cited in Wehlburg, 2010). Recent reforms led to hybrid models combining core curricula with elective systems, tailored to institutional needs and cultures. While GE experienced a modest global revival, critiques persist regarding overemphasis on employability within initiatives like the European Bologna Process, which is seen as a significant initiative in European HE that aimed at creating a more coherent and compatible system for participating countries. The utilitarian outcomes have been criticised for undermining the broader 21st century goals of HE. This was coupled with concerns over

standardisation that could lead to a loss of autonomy and stifling innovation and creativity in teaching, learning and research (Altbach, 2016; Shen, 2016).

3.7.2.2 General education: US and UK

When comparing LE traditions in the UK and the US, key distinctions were identified. Firstly, distinctions in the interpretation of the term 'liberal' in the US signify 'free' or 'liberating' contrasting with the UK interpretation as 'gentlemanly' or 'learned' (Dekker, 2021). The British LE rarely emphasised multidisciplinary, whereas the US approach integrates liberal arts and sciences to address societal demands. In PE, the US model defers medical, law and theology studies to postgraduate levels, allowing for broader undergraduate education (Shen, 2016). The UK undergraduate programmes are more specialised. Dekker (2021) critiqued the open curriculum in Europe, noting that its flexibility demands careful planning and support. The US maintains LE's prominence through liberal arts colleges and scholarly discourse; LE in the UK has diminished as a scholarly focus. However, Logan and Curry (2015) critiqued the adoption of GE globally where there is an emphasis on increasing curricular breadth, in contrast to institutions in the US. This risk of losing curricular breadth has been attributed to reduced institutional autonomy, rapid technological advancements, and shifting student interests. A report from a decade ago by the AAC&U (2014) on 'How Liberal Arts and Sciences Majors Fare in Employment' underscores this concern, revealing that over eighty per cent of employers value broad, liberal arts-based knowledge and critical skills over a student's specific undergraduate major (Humphreys and Kelly, 2014). This discussion also references Kimball's conceptualisation of the oratorical and philosophical traditions of LE. The oratorical tradition prescribes broad learning along broad and the pursuit of consensus within an academic community (breadth). On the other hand, the philosophical tradition values deep specialisation (depth) and discovery (Kimball, 2010). Balancing these two traditions—breadth and depth—is essential to fostering a well-rounded citizenry capable of thinking critically, creative problem-solving and effective communication. These insights are crucial for curriculum decision-making and design.

3.7.2.3 General education: East Asia

The adoption of US-style GE significantly influenced HE curricula in East Asia, particularly in Hong Kong, China and Japan. Each country has however adapted the

model to suit its unique context. Scholars note that the integration of GE in these regions addresses the balance between breadth and depth and curricula, a concept central to global discussions on undergraduate education. In Hong Kong, Logan and Curry (2015) highlight a government-mandated extension of the UG curriculum from three to four years, incorporating a General University Framework (GUR) at Hong Kong PolyU. The GUR includes six key components: first-year experience, language and communication, cluster areas, leadership and interpersonal skills, service learning, and a healthy lifestyle. Despite its similarities to US traditions, challenges such as transition issues, weak integration with disciplinary studies, and logistical difficulties in student registration were identified (Shek, Yu & Chan, 2016). The Hong Kong experience exemplifies diverse institutional approaches to GE and a gradual shift from UK to US-inspired GE models (Huang, 2017).

In China, GE's trajectory reflects a revival of since the early 2000s, following decades of Soviet-influenced specialisation. The initial phase, termed 'cultural quality education', or "*Wenhua suzhi*" (Ma, 2018, p. 2), or "*suzhi jiaoyu*", means educating the "whole student" (Huang, 2017, p. 85). This model emphasised holistic development, including ethics, cultural literacy, emotional intelligence and extracurricular activities, particularly for science and engineering students. The aim was to train students' minds, shape their character, equip them with the capacity for innovation and taking up new challenges, and foster their cultural literacy with knowledge of both Chinese and Western civilizations. Over the past decade, GE has evolved to encompass 'Tongshi' education, modelled after American traditions, while retaining influences from Confucian ideals of higher learning (Ma, 2018). However, challenges such as fragmented systems insufficient interdisciplinary integration and a lack of shared understanding of GE concepts persist (Wang & Xie, 2018; Meng & Huang, 2018). These scholars argue for the development of GE curricula that reflect China's unique educational philosophy, emphasising humanistic cultivation and institutional branding over direct replication of foreign models.

Japan has a longer history of GE, heavily influenced by US practices, but adapted over the last six decades to align with changing social and educational contexts. Unlike the integrated four-year US model, GE in Japan is typically confined to the first two

years of UG education and is delivered by a dedicated faculty often regarded as secondary to specialised disciplines (Huang, 2017).

While GE models in the US have significantly shaped undergraduate education in East Asia, their adaptation reflects distinct national traditions, cultural values, and higher education. Scholars emphasised the need for local innovation in GE design, advocating for curricula that aligned with institutional missions and national educational goals.

3.7.2.4 General education: Middle East and North Africa

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has a rich intellectual heritage rooted in a longstanding commitment to education and the preservation of knowledge. This tradition dates to the golden age of Islam from the 8th to 14th centuries, during which scholars significantly contributed across various disciplines. Libraries and institutions of higher learning flourished, playing a key role in maintaining and expanding classical knowledge through Islamic traditions of global contexts (Al-Hendawi, Ahmed & Albertine, 2019; Altbach, 2016).

In contemporary settings, HEIs in the MENA region often align with Western models of GE, influenced by international bodies like the AAC&U. This trend can be attributed to the absence of regional leadership and varying national investments (Al-Hendawi, Ahmed & Albertine, 2019). These authors' monograph, *'Tradition Shaping Change: General Education in Middle East and North Africa'*, highlight three main approaches to GE implementation in the region: emulation of US institutional practices in branch campuses, adherence to US processes by accredited institutions, and independent GE programmes without US affiliation by national institutions. GE is seen as a critical necessity in the MENA region, given the ongoing political, economic, and cultural challenges such as gender segregation and the influence of religious law (Godwin, 2017, as cited in Al-Hendawi, Ahmed & Albertine, 2019). HEIs must balance preparing students for the job market while cultivating informed, tolerant and independent citizens. Achieving a balance between cultural preservation and modernity is critical in a context marked by conflict and tension between tradition and change (Al-Hendawi, Ahmed & Albertine, 2019).

The challenges faced by GE implementation in the MENA region echo those seen in East Asia, including lack of focus and scepticism about the value of GE compared to specialisation, potential conflicts between Western models and local universities, economic disparities affecting resources, and sociocultural differences shaping approaches to GE. Addressing these challenges is vital, considering the complex interplay of cultural economic and institutional factors. Emerging innovative approaches—such as integrating Islamic epistemology, a focus on indigenous knowledge and balancing tradition with modernity—reflect a shift towards GE experiences that resonate with the region’s unique cultural and intellectual heritage.

The evolving GE frameworks in East Asia and MENA regions illustrate the importance of contextualised approaches to undergraduate education, highlighting the interplay between global influences and local imperatives. While acknowledging the influence of the US model on recent changes in undergraduate studies in these regions, many scholars caution against uncritically adopting it as a blueprint. According to Huang (2017), while a curriculum model may gain prominence, universal acceptance is unlikely due to the enduring significance of national identities and cultural values.

3.7.3 General education: Models, frameworks and tensions

The discussions in the previous section flag the perennial struggle between GE and specialisation planning for HE curricula. Newton (2000) cautioned that some of the challenges in GE reform related to a limited number of well-intentioned GE curriculum planners who may lack an understanding of the history of GE and/or the competing models as well as the underlying pedagogical issues. He averred that these contexts are likely to experience high levels of tension and frustration, as is shown in the data of my study. This section looks into the different GE models, together with the four tensions that GE ‘reformers’ generally confront (Adler-Kassner, 2014; Newton, 2000;).

3.7.3.1 Models of general education

GE models vary widely across institutions, reflecting differences in history, culture and mission (Zai III, 2015; Adler-Kassner, 2014; Wehlburg, 2010; Newton, 2000). Despite the diversity, three primary models of GE curricula emerged, namely, the Great Books model, the Scholarly Discipline model, and the Effective Citizen model.

The Great Books model, also known as the 'core' or traditional liberal arts curriculum, emphasises intellectual breadth and student development through the study of influential works shaping human history. Proponents argue that dividing knowledge into separate disciplines creates artificial barriers to understanding. It adopts an interdisciplinary approach, encouraging students to address complex problems historically and to engage with fundamental questions of human existence. This model prioritises broadened learning before specialisation, cultivating intellectual habits that preserve cultural heritage (Adler-Kassner, 2014; Newton, 2000).

In contrast, the Scholarly Disciplinary model (or the core distribution model) advocates for the general introduction to various disciplines, emphasising the latest thinking in the field. It posits that serious achievement in any scholarly area requires concentration and specialisation that can only be achieved through dedicated study within a single discipline. It suggests that GE should serve as an introduction to these disciplines, leveraging their strengths (Zai III, 2015; Adler-Kassner, 2014; Wehlburg, 2010; Newton, 2000). However, it often leads to minimal collaboration among the faculty from different disciplines because the GE modules are developed independently, which is similar to what occurred in this study for the distribution and decentralised GE modules. Critics argue that this approach prioritises departmental autonomy over interdisciplinary collaboration, limiting the coherence of the GE experience (Adler-Kassner, 2014; Bourke, Bray & Horton, 2009; Newton, 2000).

The central concern of the third model, the Effective Citizen/ship model, is determining the type of GE necessary for individuals to thrive and actively engage in the 21st century, rather than relying on nostalgic or fragmented disciplinary approaches (Adler-Kassner, 2014; Bourke, Bray & Horton, 2009; Newton, 2000). These authors posited that GE is positioned as a vital component of undergraduate education, providing a comprehensive framework that supports specialised study in the majors and further exploration in the electives. They are of the opinion that the curriculum is designed around real-world problems and societal challenges that graduates are likely to encounter. This approach aims to foster a broad understanding of fundamental concepts and methodologies across disciplines, highlighting their societal significance rather than focusing solely on discipline mastery. The focus is on creating modules for non-specialists, focusing on relevance and cultivation of informed citizens, while still

producing skilled experts. These modules may remain within specific disciplines or adopt interdisciplinary approaches.

Despite these differences, all GE models attempt to balance the tensions within postsecondary education. They all seek to provide students with a comprehensive and well-rounded education including the emphasis on liberal learning, professional skills and training, and academic disciplines. Globally, GE requirements differ widely among institutions to ensure the alignment and delicate balance of breadth versus depth of learning, to the wide range of institutional missions, goals and ethos/cultures.

3.7.3.2 Tensions in general education reform

GE reformers propose four main areas of tensions experienced in GE reform, namely, knowledge, student learning, faculty competence and curriculum content (Newton, 2000). The purpose and planning for GE, like all curriculum practices, are inextricably linked to the nature of a university/college and often reflect its mission, vision, ethos, values, culture and structure, giving rise to the first tension. Some institutions prioritise distinct, siloed disciplines and view themselves as collections of specialised departments. This allows students to explore diverse fields, but risks curriculum fragmentation. Conversely, some institutions pursue coherence through integrated disciplines that promote interdisciplinary understanding as well as a unified academic community. However, Newton (2000) cautioned that this quest for unity sometimes clashes with the growing specialisation of faculty and their preference for discipline-specific teaching.

The multiple GE movements between breadth and depth in undergraduate curricula give rise to a second chronic tension. Where, both students and academics frequently perceive GE as an obstacle rather than an opportunity for intellectual growth. Scepticism persists about the feasibility of a 'common body' of knowledge in contemporary times (Newton, 2000). He argues for allowing students more autonomy to design their educational pathways, aligned with their interests and talents. Reducing GE requirements often resolves this tension, enabling greater focus on specialisation (Wehlburg, 2010).

GE programmes also reflect a faculty's perceptions, interests/ambitions and departmental structures. The rise of specialisation and departmentalisation has led to the third tension of faculty prioritising their profession/discipline and department over the institution and its students. Senior faculty prefer teaching in their specialisations, while leaving the interdisciplinary and GE teaching to non-tenured counterparts, adjuncts or graduate students (Newton, 2000; Zai III, 2015). This leads to inconsistent oversight and a lack of cohesive GE philosophy. As promotion and tenure are tied to disciplinary expertise, teaching GE modules risks being undervalued, and further diminishing effective implementation.

The fourth tension surrounding GE centres on the content. Critics argue that it tends to prioritise the ideas and values of the cultural elite, often negating or neglecting contributions from diverse cultures and theoretical perspectives (Tierney, as cited in Newton, 2000). Advocates call for a re-expanding of GE to incorporate non-Western traditions and underrepresented voices and cultures, enhancing global understanding and fostering tolerance (Altbach, 2016; Meacham, 2015). Meacham (2015) further suggested integrating Islamic studies into Western GE, highlighting its potential to promote critical thinking and informed citizenship.

This section established a foundation for understanding GE's role in balancing specialisation and interdisciplinarity. It set the stage for a discussion of reconceptualising professional and general/liberal learning in the next section.

3.8 (Re)conceptualising professional AND liberal learning: The false choice upended

The purposes of university education have long sparked debates, often framed through a 'discourse of polarities' (Shay, 2016). Some view universities as primarily serving professional/vocational needs, focused on socio-economic utility, while others emphasise their role in fostering intellectual and personal development. Preparing graduates for a complex and uncertain future requires transcending the false dichotomy between liberal/general and professional/vocational education. Critics (Katz, 2015; Nevo, 2016; Rust, 2011; Shinn, 2014; Stiles, 1974) argue against devaluing liberal learning that remains crucial in a super-complex world.

In the early 1970s Stiles (1974) argued that LE (or liberal arts or GE) serves as the foundational element for all professional training, enabling individuals to think critically and independently. He contended that many contemporary professional challenges and dilemmas may stem from a lack of LE. More recently, Pasquerrella (2022) emphasised the need for equitable access to liberal and/or GE, advocating for high-impact practices that prepare students for success in work and civic life. She asserted that a well-structured curriculum fosters LE/critical skills such as resilience, adaptability, moral decision-making, and teamwork, which are all essential for contributing positively to the personal, professional and societal landscapes.

In this study, I am not arguing against PE, which is generally expansive and embodies a liberal agenda. Rather, I focus on the limitations of narrow vocational education that prioritise specific skills for routine and often technical tasks. The liberal perspectives are often stifled in such curricula, as demonstrated in this study (see Chapters 2 and 5). This section aims to conceptualise 'liberal' learning within PoE by exploring the perspectives embedded in the GE curriculum and addressing the dynamic tensions between the two; highlighting the need to balance the depth of specialisation with the breadth of GE.

3.8.1 'A 3rd way': Education as 'a means' AND 'an end'

The coming together of GE/LAE and PE brings opportunities for experimentation and possibilities (Freeland, [2016](#); Shinn, 2014). Historically, GE/LAE and PE were seen as opposed to each other, each with its distinctiveness. However, Freeland (2016) argues that a 'third way' has been emerging based on integration between the two. He sees experiential learning playing a critical role. He decidedly declares that experiential learning is "the single most powerful pedagogic device" that has the capacity to foster both 'essential non-intellectual capacities' and a deeper intellectual understanding of the concepts studied in the classroom (Freeland, 2016). This view aligns with Dewey's philosophy that deep learning cannot be separated from experience. Dewey (as cited in d'Agnese, 2020) recognised that learning is not a linear process with fixed outcomes: it is or should be dynamic and filled with potential for exploration/discovery and creativity, referring to the open-ended nature of learning and growth. This perspective prioritises the intrinsic value of the educational process rather than just its result. In other words, it balances the extrinsic and intrinsic values. UoTs, by their very

nature, are inextricably linked with experiential learning through internships, service-learning, community engagement, simulations, case studies, group projects focused on problem-solving and so on. These existing pedagogical practices can be enhanced through GE/LE integration, as opposed to the siloed curriculum with siloed pedagogical approaches.

GE/LE broadens students' perspectives by fostering two key dimensions: the social-spatial and chronological perspectives, as argued by Cuseo (2016). These perspectives are depicted in Figure 3.2 below.

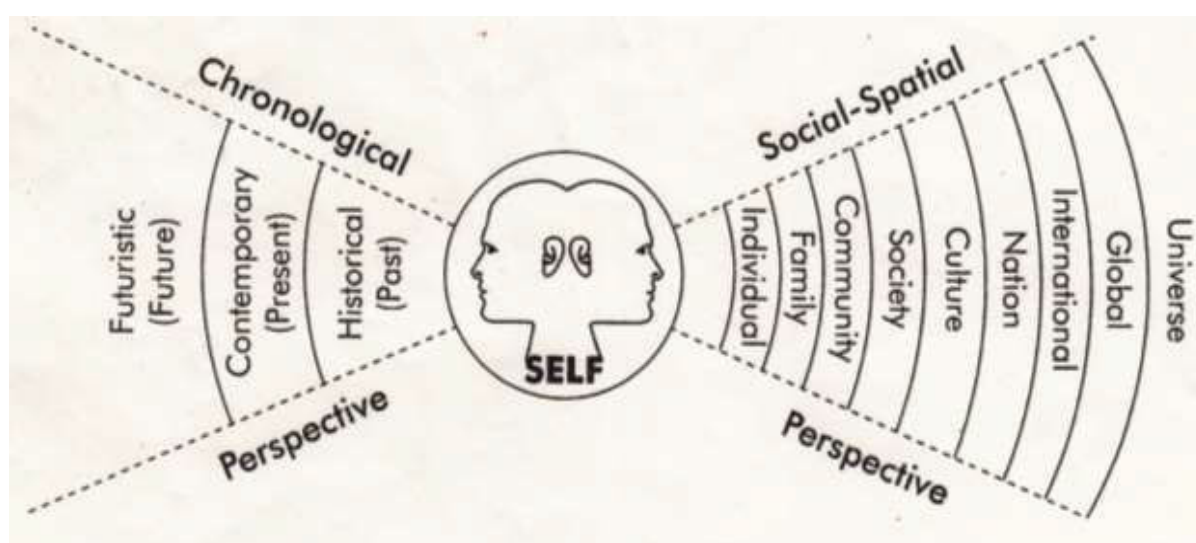


Figure 3.2: Broadening the perspectives developed by general education (Cuseo, 2016).

The social-spatial perspective expands students' worldview from an individual focus to a universal understanding, urging them to see their relationships with others—human and non-human—within increasingly larger social and spatial contexts. The chronological perspective deepens their understanding of time by integrating past (hindsight), present (insight), and future (foresight), enabling them to view the world across temporal dimensions (Cuseo, 2016). Together, these perspectives equip students with a comprehensive and holistic worldview, preparing them to be critical, engaged, and responsible global citizens.

3.8.2 (Re)fining interdisciplinarity: Bridging GE/LAE and PE

While both fields use interdisciplinarity, they do so with different emphasis and objectives, reflecting their unique educational philosophies and goals. Rather than viewing GE/LAE and PE as separate “islands”, they should be seen as interconnected fields where interdisciplinarity can serve as a bridge (Trinidad, 2021, p. 226). This perspective allows for a more integrated approach to education that values the contributions of both domains. GE/LAE and PE aim to answer questions and solve problems, and both contribute to the development of critical thinking, creating problem-solving and broad perspective-taking (Gunjal, 2020). By recognising these similarities, collaboration and integration between the two fields can be fostered (Stross, 2017). Recognising the rapidly changing nature of work and the skills and aptitudes most needed in the workplace, Vivek Wadhwa (as cited in Schejbal, 2017, p. 218) touts the workforce value of liberal arts knowledge when he writes:

An engineering degree is very valuable, but the sense of empathy that comes from music, arts, literature and psychology provides a big advantage in design. A history major who has studied the Enlightenment or the rise and fall of the Roman Empire gains an insight into the human elements of technology and the importance of its usability. A psychologist is more likely to know how to motivate people and to understand what users want than is an engineer who has worked only in the technology trenches. A musician or artist is king in a world in which you can 3D-print anything that you can imagine (as cited in Schejbal, 2017, p. 218)

What he is proposing is an educational environment that fosters a culture of inquiry, which transcends disciplinary boundaries to enhance students’ learning experiences, outside their specialisations. This approach encourages students to pose interdisciplinary questions and integrate knowledge from multiple fields, fostering a deeper understanding of complex issues Trinidad (2021). This can involve team teaching or individual academics exploring areas outside their primary expertise, thereby enriching the learning and promoting a holistic understanding of knowledge.

3.9 Theoretical orientations and conceptual frameworks

Various conceptions of curriculum and curriculum change, for both PR and GE, were discussed in the previous section. It highlighted that curriculum and curriculum change is not neutral and is a deeply political process with curriculum planning, decision-making, designing and implementation occurring within specific social, cultural and economic contexts (Apple, 1993). As a site of constant struggle, it can be liberating or oppressive, as well as exploring the ethical dimensions of education. All encourage a

critical examination of what is taught and how it is taught, with the goal of fostering a more inclusive and equitable education. This section uncovers the theoretical tools that assisted in exploring the process of curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making for a university in becoming. An understanding of the nature of the specific phenomenon of planning for the 'liberal' agenda for professionally oriented undergraduate curricula at the UoT, and the implementation thereof, are discussed.

For this purpose, Samuel's (2008) FFM, an extension of field theory, is useful to comprehensively analyse the multifaceted, and often conflicting forces that impact curriculum change in higher education (field), recognising the dynamic interplay of internal and external factors.

Pinar's curriculum theory or *currere* is both philosophical and a psychoanalytical technique and talks about curriculum as a verb, an action, a social practice, a private meaning, and a public hope (Pinar, 2010, p.78). Pinar proposed a series of "scholarly moves" that can support the verticality horizontality conversations in curriculum studies, which include a synopsis, analysing and critiquing concepts, extending the idea/revising the concept or replacing it with new ones. In this study I consider Wallin's (2010) extension of Pinar's work and bring it into dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome. Deleuze and Guattari (1987) emphasised that a concept is not merely a name; it is a way of approaching the world. Wallin's approach is not autobiographical. It focused on understanding what *currere* can achieve or enable, akin to a "thought experiment." He presented *currere* as a fresh lens through which to contemplate the trajectory of a pedagogical life, moving away from the conventional idea of a predetermined path. He underscored the dualistic nature of *currere*'s origins, highlighting its active and reactive aspects. Conceptualising curriculum as an active force, suggests that it should not be confined to predetermined images, but should instead embody the potential for diverse pathways in educational experiences (Wallin, 2010).

Ubuntu, as a Southern African philosophical concept, emphasises human interconnectedness and the importance of compassion, community, and shared humanity. It is often translated as 'humanity towards others' or 'I am because we are'.

Lastly, I borrow from Le Grange (2019) the idea of bringing Ubuntu into dialogue with the active force of currere and the FFM to generate what Wallin (2010) terms 'unlikely fidelities'.

3.9.1 Force Field model for curriculum change

The force field model (FFM) of teacher development, as proposed by Samuel (2008), is adopted in this study. The original theoretical model offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the challenges and opportunities that shape teacher identity in today's educational landscape. This model illustrates how various forces interact and influence teachers' roles and identities, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the complexities they face. The FFM recognises that teachers and their identities are influenced by a confluence of forces; including their personal biographical experiences, historical backgrounds, institutional contexts, and broad social and political settings (Samuel, 2008). This recognition helps to clarify the competing and sometimes contradictory expectations that teachers encounter, making it easier to understand the complexities of their identities and roles. The model emphasises that these forces interact dynamically, which means that the teachers' identities are constantly being shaped and reshaped as they navigate their professional environments (Samuel, 2008). For example, the expectations from policy changes or societal attitudes towards teachers may exert pressure on their practises and sense of self, while their personal agency and resilience can also influence how they respond to these challenges. By mapping out the different forces at play, the FFM highlights areas where teachers can find opportunities for professional growth and identity development, for instance. The model advocates for creative discursive spaces where forces can coexist and this approach promotes dialogue amongst teachers, policymakers and other stakeholders (Samuel, 2008). Lastly, understanding the impact of the contextual forces helps teachers recognise how broader social and political issues shape their practise, and this contextual awareness enables them to critically reflect on their roles and adapt their identities in ways that address the needs of their students and communities. This model has since been adopted and used to not only understand identities of student teachers and teachers (Samuel, 2008, 2009; Samuel & van Wyk, 2008), the dynamics of music education teacher training (De Villiers, 2021), but also the shifting identities of institutions, systems, and key constructs.

While the FFM is not a model of/for curriculum, I have chosen to adopt this FFM model as it provides a comprehensive framing for understanding the complex and often competing forces that shape curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making, in a changing HE landscape. Adopting this model in this study recognises that the institutional and its curricula are also influenced by a myriad of internal and external forces, including biographical, contextual factors, and institutional expectations (see Figure 3.3). Similarly, in this study, the four forces are dynamic and interact with each other, creating overlapping intersections. This various push and pull factors shape the perspectives and experiences of the curriculum planners/workers in the field. By acknowledging these diverse forces, the FFM helps curriculum workers and policymakers navigate the complexities of the curriculum conceptualising, planning and implementation.

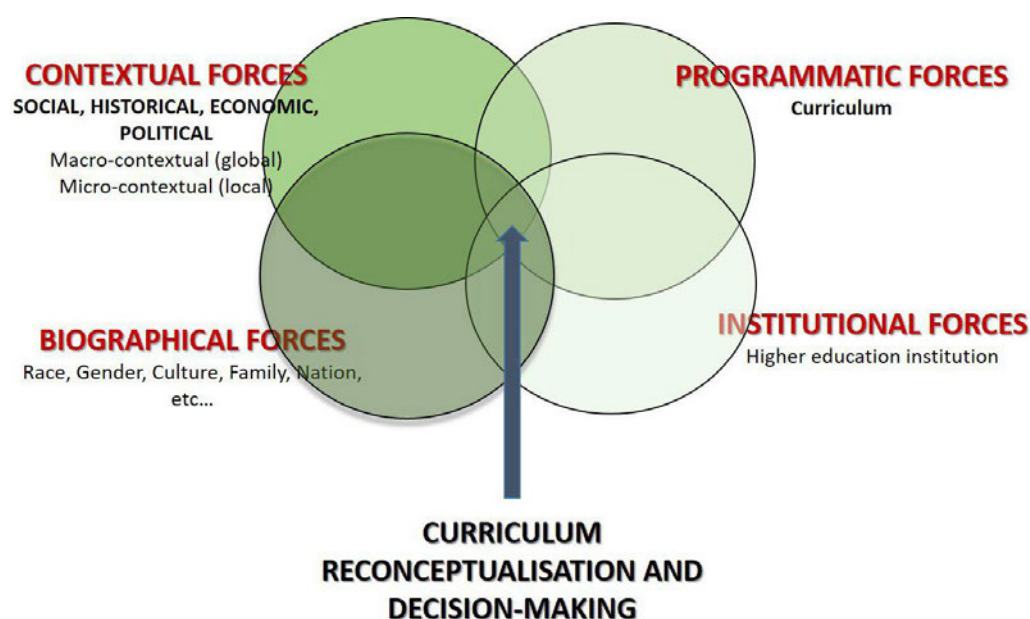


Figure 3.3: Forces in the field: a model for curriculum change (adapted from Samuel, 2008).

The model highlights the dynamic nature of curriculum change, emphasising that these forces are not stable or unitary as they can include complementary and contradictory elements. By considering the interplay of these forces, curriculum workers can better understand the forces shaping curriculum and how. This understanding is crucial for addressing the challenges faced by academics and curriculum workers, such as competing rationality demands for curriculum spaces.

Samuel (2008) contends that the FFM underscores the importance of creating creative discursive spaces where multiple forces can coexist and interact constructively. By fostering dialogue and collaboration among stakeholders, academics can leverage the diverse perspectives and influences within the force field to promote the desired curriculum change and enhance the quality of PoE. In essence, the FFM serves as a valuable tool for interpreting the complex landscape of curriculum change, offering insights into the various forces at play. Borrowing from Samuel (2008), I contend that there are many different forces which push and pull both the institution's role and identities in multiple directions. Each force "professes ideological and theoretical positions about the role and identities of the institution should be" (Samuel, 2008, p. 11). For the institution the following key forces impact its identity: namely, its biography, its institutional setting or its people (micro-contextual), its curricula, and its macro and supra contextual setting. Similarly, in this study, I invoke an identity/persona for the professionally oriented curriculum (PoC) and consider the following forces that shape it—its biography/differentiation, the institutional (micro-contextual), conceptions of curriculum/curriculum workers, and the meso/macro/supra contextual forces outside the institution.

3.9.1.1 Institutional forces

The force of the institution is rooted in the personal experiences and background of specific institutional environments, as Samuel (2008) posits. It is widely acknowledged that the culture of diverse institutions across various historical eras can significantly impact the quality within those contexts. This institutional culture is shaped by a multitude of factors, as shown in Chapters One and Two. The merging of Technikons to form UoTs, for example, was seen as a formidable force on its recipients and had huge repercussions for the sector at large, and specifically for the UoT in the study. Additionally, this institutional force encompasses the inspirations offered by its "charismatic leaders" who possess a clear vision, theoretical depth, and fervent commitment to achieving excellence in higher education (Samuel, 2008, p.13). Institutional culture encompasses the fundamental mission and theoretical foundations of an institution. Academics and/or curriculum specialists/workers within institutional settings absorb the essence of the institution and its culture in varied ways, influencing their perceptions of self, roles, and identities as integral members of that institutional community. These, in turn, influence their curriculum decision-making.

Chapter Two draws on the lived biography of the UoT, in its trajectory from an erstwhile Technikon to an emerging new generation university (towards a desired future state). How does the reputation and ethos of the university influence curriculum change? How does it influence the conception of self, role and identity of its members of the academic community – forced or inclusive? Chapter Five provides an analysis of the institution as a driving force for curriculum change and transformation.

3.9.1.2 Macro-contextual forces

According to Samuel (2008) the macro-contextual force represents a significant influence on curriculum development and change. This force is characterised by the unique macro-social, political and regulatory, cultural, economic, technological, and planetary environments within which academics and curriculum workers operate. It recognises individuals, institutions and curricula are shaped by the historical, cultural and socio-political contexts within which they operate. Samuel's (2008) example can be applied in post-apartheid SA, where the HE landscape is marked by a sense of optimism regarding policy changes and the potential transformation of the HE system. Other examples include the 2015/2016 #feesmustfall movement, rapidly changing workplaces, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the higher educator sector globally, and the more recent impact of AI in higher education. Changes in the external environments have an impact on the internal environment that either hinders or empowers academics/curriculum workers, depending on the prevailing conditions. In environments characterised by uncertainty and hostility, they may struggle to define their roles and identities (Samuel, 2008). However, in contexts that promote democratic participation and professional agency, academics/curriculum workers may feel more empowered to adapt, innovate, and assert their identities in more flexible and powerful ways. The contextual forces underscore the importance of understanding the broader societal and historical context in which academics and curriculum workers operate, as it significantly shapes their professional identities, roles, and opportunities for growth and development within the HE system. Chapter Six provides an analysis of how curriculum decisions are made based on the interplay between the multiple levers of external forces leveraged against the internal forces.

3.9.1.3 Programmatic forces

The programmatic forces, within the framework of Samuel's FFM, represent a crucial aspect of shaping what is valued in the academic project. The emphasis in this force is placed on the formal (official), non-formal and hidden curriculum, the espoused, enacted and experienced curriculum and how these contribute to shaping the identity of academics and students: consciously, unconsciously, or even subconsciously. This study has limited its analysis to the official or planned curriculum. These forces can be seen as the explicit guidelines or interventions that dictate the sequence, content, and direction of curriculum and teaching and learning practices within an HE setting (Samuel, 2008; Samuel & van Wyk, 2008; De Villiers, 2021). Twenty-first-century curricula face significant challenges in maintaining relevance amidst rapid, unpredictable, and disruptive contextual changes. A key challenge is for curricula not only to react to these changes but also to lead them. Curricula must function as lifelong learning systems, continuously renewing themselves to stay relevant. With the accelerating pace of change challenging traditional curricula reform processes, 21st century curricula need foresight, adaptability, and innovation for ongoing self-renewal, (Marope, 2017). In this study, the CRP and the GE imperative, in particular, could be seen as catalytic forces to bring about the desired transformation and serve as lifelong learning tools for curriculum change.

It is important to recognise that each force, including programmatic forces, can have varying degrees of impact, ranging from positive to negative influences. Some forces may constrain, while others can serve as catalysts for innovation and transformation.

Academics/curriculum workers who are influenced by these programmatic forces interpret their roles and identities in distinct ways, as they align their practices with the prescribed guidelines (Samuel, 2008). He exemplifies this by underscoring that academics may become disengaged and lose enthusiasm, in an environment characterised by monotony and lack of critical reflection. He asserted that in contrast, an academic with a diverse background and experiences may view such an environment as an opportunity to ignite passion and drive change. That this individual may choose to leverage the programmatic interventions in place or even seek to transform the institutional context to create a more dynamic and engaging learning

environment (Samuel, 2008). Chapters Five and Six underscore the push and pull factors of the curriculum change, as both driving and restraining forces.

3.9.1.4 Biographical forces

Biographical forces within the FFM, represent a significant influence on identity forming and professional development. These forces encompass the life events and experiences of an—individual, institution or systems, curriculum or constructs—making each unique with diverse choices (Samuel & van Wyk, 2008). It is important to note that these experiences are not limited to formal educational settings as they also encompass personal, family, and social contexts where teaching and learning have been part of the individual's life (Samuel, 2008). In the case of the curriculum workers and/or academics, these forces vary for each lecturer, influenced by factors such as demographics, varying levels of education and training, language proficiency, social background; all contributing to the teaching and learning environment (Amin, 2008, De Villiers, 2021; Samuel, 2008; Samuel & van Wyk, 2008). In the case of the institution and/ the curriculum, these forces vary as they relate to the underpinning history, culture and ethos.

Samuel (2008) posited that the biographical forces act as an "inertial force," serving as a residual influence that teachers often retreat to when external forces exert strong control over their identity. This "inertial force" (Samuel, 2008, p.12) can be seen as a conserving and stabilising factor, providing a sense of comfort and grounding in the personal history or social context. He posits that this may lead the player/actors to romanticise past experiences and hold onto cultural archetypes and practices, offering a point of return when other external forces become overwhelming. Despite its comforting nature, the biographical force can also be a restricting movement, as it may limit a willingness to embrace new ideas or approaches that challenge their established beliefs. These biographical entanglements are explored in Chapters Five and Six, from the perspective of the institution, its curriculum and its curriculum workers, all navigating the multiple force fields in their enactment as agents of curriculum change.

3.9.2 Currere as an active conceptual force

Pinar first invoked the etymological root of curriculum, *currere*, more than five decades ago, to refocus curriculum on the significance of individual (academic, student, institution) experience, irrespective of “the course content or alignment with society or the economy” (Pinar 2011, xii). *Currere*, which means “to run the course”, privileges the individual. Pinar (2011) argued the complexity of the concept of *currere* and cited the inherent diversity among individuals in terms of genetic makeup, upbringing, family background, as well as broader factors like race, gender, and class. This diversity leads to unique experiences of the world for each individual, resulting in distinct paths in their educational journey. Pinar (2011) highlighted that as individuals run their ‘courses’, they engage in ‘complicated conversations’ with themselves and others, interactions that are often excluded by the dominant Tylerian approach to curriculum, which tends to oversimplify educational experiences. A predetermined course /race to be run leaves little room for reflection and thinking, as it is focussed on standards and competencies and measurable outcomes.

3.9.2.1 Currere as autobiographical

Pinar’s concept of *currere* re-imagines curriculum as a dynamic reflective process comprising of four interconnected steps: regressive, progressive, analytical, and synthetical (Pinar, et al. 1995) as shown in Figure 3.4 below. Rooted in phenomenology and later influenced by post-structuralism, *currere* encourages an autobiographical exploration of the self in educational contexts. This approach emphasises the relational dynamics of personal narratives, including omissions, to offer a deeper understanding of the interplay between individual experiences, social relationships and knowledge construction (c/f Samuel’s biographical forces in see 3.8.2.4). *Currere* has significantly influenced the reconceptualist curriculum movement, reshaping how curriculum is understood and developed globally (Pinar, 2022). As alluded to earlier, this study is limited to the ‘official’ curriculum, noting what the participants consider to be their views of the shaping influences on curriculum reconceptualisation and decision-making. The emphasis is not on how this espoused plan is implemented (enacted curriculum), although practitioners/academics are likely to draw from the implemented (or experienced) curriculum to reflect on their original intentions and declared positionings about curriculum design.

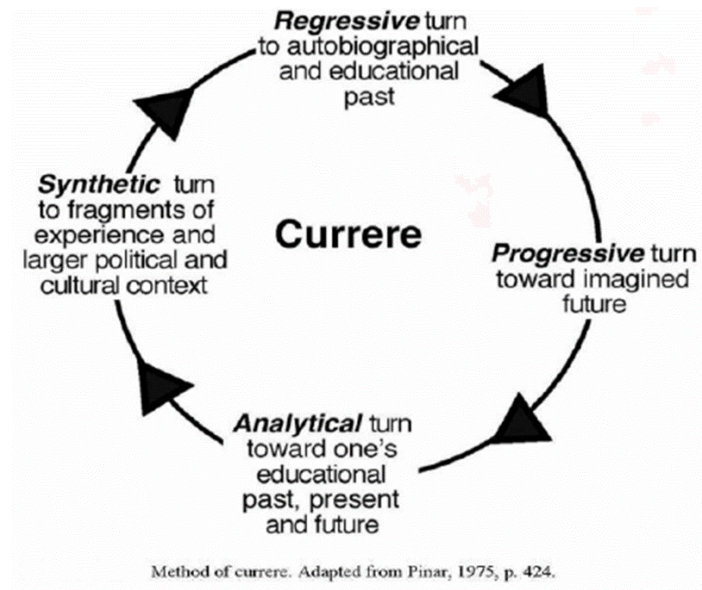


Figure 3.4: Method of currere (adapted from Pinar, 1994, 1975).

The first steps of currere is shown from a temporal and reflective framework, in Figure 3.4. The regressive turn involves revisiting past educational experiences to understand how they shape the present. This reflective process centres the individual in their past, fostering self-awareness. The progressive turn focuses on the future, connecting past experiences to future goals, enabling individuals to replicate successes and strategise improvements. The analytical phase emphasises the present moment, integrating reflections on the past and future to examine personal and professional development. Finally, the synthetical step integrates past, present, and future experiences into a cohesive understanding of self within broader political and cultural contexts. This process unifies fragmented elements, facilitating a holistic view of one's journey and contributions to the social world (Pinar, 2004).

This method of currere is both temporal and conceptual, offering a trans-temporal perspective that situates individual experiences within cultural and societal frameworks. Two decades earlier, Soare (2009) highlighted currere's strengths lie in shifting focus from institutional documents to personal narratives, acknowledging the formative role of individual experiences in shaping broader educational and cultural dynamics curriculum; this lens is not merely a transmitter of culture but is also a force capable of shaping and redefining it. At the UoT, the CRP aligns with Pinar's

reconceptualised vision, emphasising reflective, ‘complicated conversations’ that challenge dominant technical (Tylerian) approaches to curriculum design. This approach reveals hidden implications for traditional frameworks, fostering a more nuanced and culturally responsive understanding of curriculum as a dynamic transformative process.

3.9.2.2 The conceptual powers of *currere*

For this study, I draw on Wallin’s (2010) reinterpretation of *currere* that he brings into dialogue with Deleuze and Guattari’s idea of a concept. Deleuze and Guattari (1994) argued that concepts are not static labels for objects or ideas but dynamic tools for engaging with the world and shaping reality. Concepts, in their view, expand experiences, foster connections, and generate new possibilities through experimentation and exploration (Le Grange, 2014, 2019; Wallin, 2010). Rather than describing the world as it is perceived, Deleuze and Guattari (1994) influenced the generative and practical nature of concepts, fostering openness to new ideas and creativity rather than reliance on conventional knowledge. Wallin (2010, p.1) encapsulated this notion as “a way of creating a world through the active extension of thinking the possible”, suggesting that concepts extend experience by affirming difference and embracing what is not yet known or realised.

Wallin’s approach to *currere* diverges from other scholars, such as Aoki, Daignault, Pinar and Reynolds, who also engaged with Deleuze’s ideas but leaned towards reflective and autobiographical methods (Le Grange, 2019). Instead, Wallin situates *currere* as an exploration of its potential to act or transform, describing it as “an exegesis on what *currere* wills to power” (Wallin 2010, p. ix). This perspective frames *currere* as a ‘thought experiment’ that interrogates what curriculum can achieve, moving beyond reflection to embrace active (re)conceptualisation and innovation.

The etymology of *currere*, meaning “to run” in Latin, signifies not a static framework but an active and transformative force. For Wallin, this “running” symbolised the dynamic and productive nature of the curriculum, which creates “new flows, offshoots and multiplicitous movements” (Wallin, 2010, p.2). He likened this to the rhizomatic growth of roots, as described by Deleuze and Guattari, that extend outward to create new connections and interfaces (Wallin, 2010). This rhizomatic view underscores

curre as a “line of becoming” that expands difference, fosters experimentation and resists the imposition of fixed predetermined educational pathways. In this way, curre abolishes dictatorial images of the world, promoting continuous transformation and growth. It underscores the idea that educational pathways are dynamic and multifaceted, existing in a state of constant flux and transformation even before they are consciously articulated or conceptualised (Le Grange, 2019; Wallin, 2010).

This dynamic view of curriculum challenges the reactive, ‘terroritorialised’ form of curre that has dominated Western education. Historically, the notion of running the course was constrained to a predefined part, analogous to the Grecian chariot track, reflecting a reactive force that stifles experimentation and personal growth (Le Grange, 2019; Wallin, 2010). This reactive image is evident in the instrumentalist curriculum and pedagogical practices prevalent in the UoT’s prescribed outcomes and standardised assessments. This, in turn limits students’ potential for exploration and creativity, stagnating personal growth, and promoting a sense of conformity (Hlatshwayo, Shawa & Nxumalo, 2020; Le Grange, 2019). Such territorialisation, argues Le Grange (2019), reflects Western society’s reliance on transcendence; it separates humans from nature and reinforces dualistic thinking in education. In contrast, the active image of curre emphasises the exploration of life’s vital powers, its assemblages and its potential for becoming (Wallin, 2010). This approach resists reactive thinking and identitarian frameworks, rather advocating for curriculum as a generative open-ended process. Adopting this framework, this study examines attempts to shift POC from reactive, static images to active conceptual forces, exploring the associated contestations and challenges in this transformative process.

3.9.3 Ubuntu: An African philosophy

Ubuntu/Botho is a concept originating from proverbial expressions in languages from Africa south of the Sahara. It goes beyond linguistic significance to embody a normative connotation dictating how individuals should interact with others and their moral obligations towards them. The Xhosa expression “Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu”¹⁸ encapsulates Ubuntu’s essence, emphasising that one’s humanity is best

¹⁸ *Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu* – “I am, because we are, we are because I am.” The notion of ubuntu, meaning “a person is only person through other people” (Ramphela 2001, 3), and this embodies the concept of shared humanity

demonstrated through relationships with others, allowing individuality to flourish. Metz and Gaie (2010) highlighted the distinctiveness of sub-Saharan African morality, represented by Ubuntu, compared to Western ideologies. Firstly, ubuntu's inextricable linked with community and interconnectedness is in sharp contrast with utilitarianism and Kantianism. Utilitarianism focuses on the consequences of actions for the greater good of the majority, while Kantianism has a strong focus on individual rights and autonomy (Metz & Gaie, 2010). They stressed that within the framework of Ubuntu, moral responsibility entails engaging in actions that benefit others, acknowledging interconnectedness with fellow individuals, and valuing familial relationships for their inherent worth rather than for practical gains. They clarify that their reference to "the other" specifically pertains to human beings, underscoring the significance of nurturing deeper connections with others to enrich one's humanity. Despite criticisms suggesting that Ubuntu is speciesist and ill-equipped to address environmental concerns due to its human-centric focus, proponents argue that Ubuntu actually demonstrates strong ecocentric tendencies when evaluated through an environmental ethics perspective (Le Grange, 2012). By examining the broader concept of Ukama, which encompasses Ubuntu, it becomes apparent that Ubuntu surpasses the binary classification of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism, revealing its inherent ecocentric qualities (Le Grange, 2012, Waghid, Waghid & Waghid, 2018). It is relational.

In the Shona language, ukama represents interconnectedness with the cosmos. Murove (2020) suggested that ubuntu embodies ukama, illustrating how human relationships mirror universal dynamics. This perspective highlights ukama's ethical foundation for uniting human social, spiritual, and ecological spheres. Scholars such as Bujo and Tangwa (as cited in Le Grange, 2012) advocated for ecological harmony, emphasising the interconnectedness of all cosmic elements and the African belief in peaceful coexistence among humans, animals, plants, and the earth. Collaboration with nature, recognises humanity as part of nature and advocating for cooperation based on identity, kinship, and respect.

Ramose (2015) distinguishes humanness from humanism, portraying it as an ongoing state of development rather than a rigid ideology. Humanness is linked to relationships with others and the evolving biophysical world, suggesting that caring for others includes a responsibility to care for nature and the broader environment. Despite

criticisms of ubuntu as speciesist, advocates argue that it aligns with Guattari's three ecologies—self, social, and nature—emphasising its holistic and interconnected nature.

The essence of Ubuntu lies in the interconnectedness of self, society, and nature, suggesting that promoting Ubuntu involves healing on all these interconnected levels. Guattari's theory of transversality (Guattari, 1995, p.23) indicates that suffering in one ecological aspect has repercussions on other ecological realms. The social fractures and societal ills faced by Africa, such as genocide, patriarchy, corruption, and environmental degradation, are viewed as outcomes of the decline of ukama influenced by historical events like colonialism and apartheid-capitalism (Le Grange, 2012). Improving one ecological domain can have positive effects on others, underscoring the holistic essence of ubuntu.

Waghid (2020, p.299) underscores the notion of ubuntu, namely, human interdependence and humaneness, to engender an argument for an ubuntu philosophy as applied to an African higher education. From his analysis of the concept of ubuntu, he outlines key principles and practices of social responsibility, deliberative engagement, attentiveness to others and otherness, ethical beings, and dissonance in learning as “most salient in enacting a reconsidered view of African higher education.”

3.9.4 A dialogue between FFM, currere and ubuntu

While the FFM, the concept of currere and the philosophy of ubuntu each offer a powerful lens for understanding curriculum change, their true analytical power for this study is unlocked when they are brought into a dynamic and critical conversation. Presented in isolation, they remain separate tools; synthesised, they form a cohesive and multi-layered framework uniquely suited to exploring the complexities of curriculum transformation in a South African UoT. This section forges that synthesis by placing these concepts into proximity, allowing them to challenge, enrich, and invigorate one another.

3.9.4.1 Synergies and complementarities; Fleshing out the framework

The frameworks are profoundly complementary. Samuel's FFM provides an essential structural map of the research terrain. It allows for a systematic identification and categorisation of the various forces, namely, institutional, programmatic, biographical, and contextual, that create the field of curriculum contestation. However, the FFM on its own can appear static, a sociological snapshot of pressures and counter-pressures.

This is where the concept of *currere* becomes vital. If the FFM maps the field, *currere* provides the experiential and phenomenological pathway through it. It gives voice to the lived reality of navigating the forces identified in the FFM. *Currere* transforms the FFM's abstract 'biographical force' into a dynamic personal journey of becoming, full of tensions and 'complicated conversations' that characterise the lived experiences of curriculum work. It provides the methodological lens to understand how individual's 'run the course' that the FFM has mapped out.

The philosophy of *ubuntu* provides the overarching ethical and relational compass for this entire framework. It moves the analysis beyond a neutral description of forces (FFM) or a purely individualistic journey (*currere*). *Ubuntu*, with its principle of 'I am because we are, we are because I am', insists that any curriculum change evaluated against a criterion of communal well-being and social justice. It provides a normative lens through which to critique the forces at play. An example: Does a neoliberal policy promote human connection and collective good, or does it foster alienation and competition? *Ubuntu* thus infuses the framework with a decolonial, African-centred value system, providing a powerful counter-narrative to the instrumental logics often dominant in higher education.

3.4.9.2 Productive tensions and critical invigoration

Bringing these theories into proximity also creates productive tensions that invigorate the analysis. The deeply personal and individualistic focus of Pinar's original conception of *currere* is challenged and enriched by communal ethos of *ubuntu*. This creates the possibility of *ubuntu-currere* (Le Grange, 2019), where the personal journey of the curriculum worker is understood as being inextricably linked to their

responsibility to their students, their community, and the broader project of social transformation.

Similarly, the fluidity and the 'lines of flight' inherent in the concept of *carrere* (Le Grange, 2019; Wallin, 2010) challenge the FFM's more structured categories. It reminds us that the forces are not static boxes but are constantly being negotiated, resisted, and re-interpreted by active agents. This prevents the FFM from becoming a deterministic model and keeps the focus on human agency within structural constraints.

3.4.9.3 The synthesised theoretical framework for the study

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework where:

- i. Samuel's FFM provides the structural analysis of the multiple forces shaping curriculum change.
- ii. The concept of *carrere* serves as the experiential and dynamic lens to understand how individuals and the institution itself navigate and make meaning within the field.
- iii. The philosophy of *ubuntu* provides the overarching ethical and relational criterion against which these forces and experiences are critically evaluated, grounding the entire inquiry in a socially just, African context.

This synthesised framework allows the study to move beyond mere description, enabling a critical and multi-layered analysis of curriculum transformation that is simultaneously structural, experiential and ethical.

3.10 Chapter synthesis

In summary, the chapter underscores the inherently political and dynamic nature of curriculum change, revealing it as a site of contestation. By blending critical theory, philosophical traditions, and empirical insights, the chapter positions curriculum as a mechanism for addressing inequalities, fostering professional capabilities, and promoting holistic human development. The integration of GE into PoC is posited as a solution to overcome the binary framing of PoE versus GE/LE, offering a pathway for developing adaptable, ethical and transformative graduates.

To navigate this complexity, the chapter moved beyond a review of disparate theories to forge a unique, integrated theoretical framework designed specifically for this study. AS detailed in the preceding discussion, this framework synthesise three distinct by complementary conceptual lenses. By bringing these frameworks into critical dialogue, this chapter has established the analytical toolkit that will be employed in the rest of the thesis. It will used to explore the central proposition of the study: that the integration of GE into POC offers pathway for developing adaptable and transformative graduates. This framework provides the necessary depth to understand not just the *what* happens in curriculum change, but *how* it is experienced and *why* it matters in a complex, modern HE landscape.

The next chapter presents the methodology used in the study, justifying the choices made and describing the research approach and the methods that will be used to operationalise the theoretical framework and analyse the data.

CHAPTER FOUR: JUSTIFYING THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." (Marcel Proust)

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapters covered the background, context, rationale, and developing a theoretical lens for fieldwork. The literature review and theoretical framings provided me with insight into the potential research approaches that were suitable for the study. This chapter outlines the research journey and provides an account of the approach used to address the research questions. This chapter accounts for the appropriateness of the research design, sampling techniques, data productions, data analyses, and other methodological considerations (see Figure 4.1 below). It also outlines the techniques to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings. In this chapter, I argue for the use of a critical interpretivist paradigm and a case study approach and why it is best suited to address the critical questions in the study.

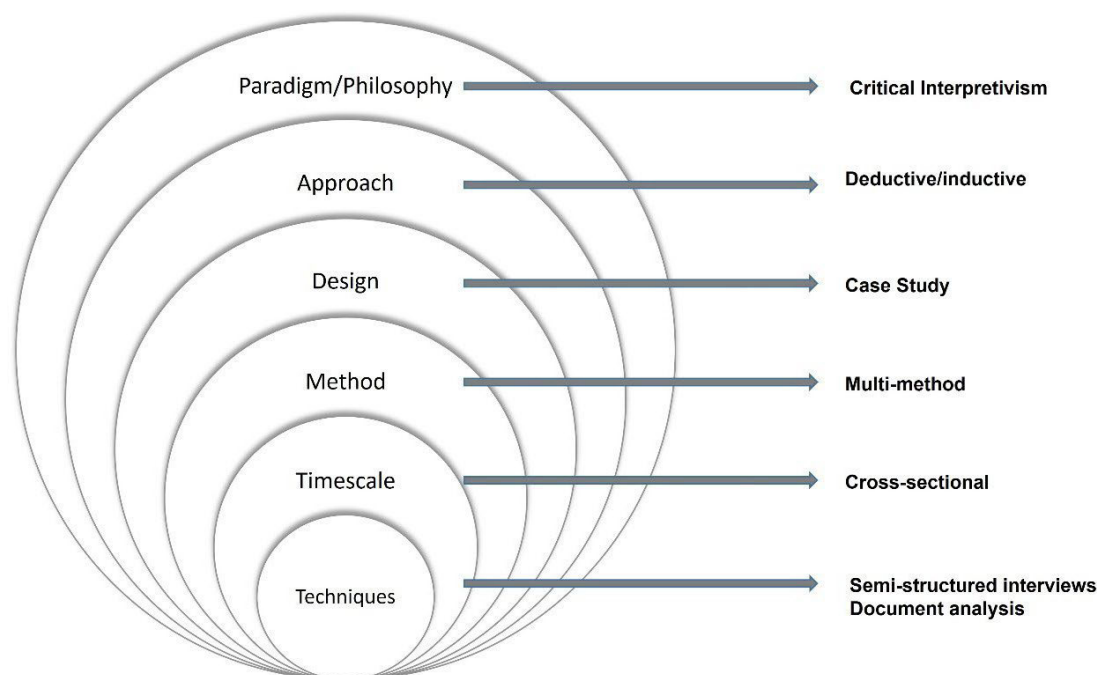


Figure 4.1: Outline of research orientation and approach (adapted from Naidoo & Rajcoomar, 2020).

The chapter also includes an account of some of the challenges experienced during the data production phase and the steps taken to mitigate them. As an insider researcher, my assumption was that I would not encounter any difficulties entering the field. However, this proved more challenging than anticipated. This disconnection between the planned approach and what actually happened, gave rise to high levels of uncertainty and messier processes in sampling, timeframes, data analysis selection of units of analysis, adherence to timeframes, and data analyses. Selecting the university of technology (UoT) as a single case study was simple and straightforward, with the liberal agenda being the main criterion. In the planning, I had limited sampling to three programmes in the engineering and health sciences faculties, and one programme in arts and design. This had to be modified, due to the poor and slow responses to the invitation for participation (see section 4.5). Furthermore, I had experienced challenges in securing interview dates, mainly due to the high workloads of many participants. The fieldwork exceeded the planned timeframes. Eventually, all the data were generated. However, the data analysis phase proved more difficult than the data production processes. And this is where I began to understand what others meant by 'do not get lost, swimming in the data' or 'romancing the data'. This phase took significantly longer than was planned for, due to countless iterations. I found this phase administratively onerous and often struggled with moving from a practitioner's stance to a scholarly one; affirming that research is not just a 'technical process' but a conceptual one.

4.2 Chapter overview

The chapter begins by locating the methodology within the ontological and epistemological landscape discussed in Chapter Three. The implications of the selected methodology for the design of the study are discussed. Section 4.3 presents the purpose of the research and the critical questions. Section 4.4 explains the paradigmatic considerations and epistemological orientations. Sections 4.5 and 4.6 describe the case study research approach adopted in the study, along with the strategies and methodologies for sample selection. Section 4.7 describes the processes involved in data production, including the limited and later abandoned use of the NVIVO software package to manage data management and familiarisation. Section 4.8 describes the data analysis approaches used in the study. The rationale

for these choices is also provided. Sections 4.9 and 4.10 identify the processes for ensuring trustworthiness and rigour in the study, including ethical considerations.

4.3 Research purpose and critical questions

As established in Chapter One, this study's central purpose is to examine the transformation of undergraduate professionally oriented curricula at a UoT, exploring both the nature of this change and the complex forces driving it. The preceding chapters have explored the conceptual and theoretical dimensions of this phenomenon, establishing historical context and the key theoretical lenses that inform the analysis.

This chapter now turns to the specific research design and methodology employed to investigate these issues empirically. The critical interpretivist paradigm and the case study approach were chosen precisely because they provide the necessary tools to delve into the nuanced, contextual, and lived experiences of curriculum change. To guide this methodological approach, the study remains focused on two central questions and four key objectives. To reiterate, these are:

Critical questions:

- i. How are undergraduate professionally oriented curricula at a UoT transforming?
- ii. Why does it happen in the way that it does?

Specific objectives:

- a. To critically interrogate the practices for reconceptualising professionally oriented curricula at a UoT. This involves questioning whose interests and ideologies are embedded in these practices.
- b. To examine the multiple forces at the micro, meso, macro and supra levels that influence these practices, with a specific focus on how these forces represent sites of power and resistance, and how they serve to either challenge or reproduce existing educational hierarchies.
- c. To understand the participants' experiences of these forces and their influences on their curriculum planning and decision-making.
- d. To understand the implications for curriculum, change within the UoT sector.

The following sections will detail the paradigmatic considerations, the case study design, and the methods of data generation and analysis that were specifically structured to address these guiding questions and objectives.

4.4 Paradigmatic considerations and epistemological orientations

A research paradigm is a foundational framework or a whole system of thinking that guides the approach and methodology of research, encompassing the researcher's beliefs and values about reality (ontology) and knowledge (epistemology) (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Neuman, 2011). The study, with its focus on the 'how' and 'why' of curriculum transformation, necessitates a qualitative approach. It seeks to understand the complex meanings, experiences, and social actions of individuals involved in curriculum change, which are deeply informed by social and historical context in which they occur (Neuman, 2011). The aim is not to test a pre-existing hypothesis, but to develop a rich, contextualised understanding of a specific phenomenon.

Lather (1991) distinguished three out of the four paradigms that fall within qualitative research: approaches that seek to understand (interpretivism), approaches that seek to emancipate (critical), and approaches that seek to deconstruct (post-structural). The fourth approach is one that seeks to predict (realism), a positive or realist approach that argues for a single truth and is usually quantitative in nature. According to Guba and Lincoln (2005), each paradigm is characterised by its ontology, epistemology and methodology. A researcher's ontology and epistemology create a holistic view of how knowledge is viewed and how one sees oneself in relation to this knowledge, as well as the methodological strategies that one uses to discover this knowledge. It is argued that a researcher's intentions, values and philosophical assumptions are inextricably linked with the research they engage in and that they need to understand the philosophical underpinnings that inform their choice of research questions, methodology, methods and aims (Mack, 2010).

To reiterate, curriculum and curriculum change is not neutral and is rooted within political, social and cultural contexts. Its construction will inevitably mirror content choices made by dominant discourses and is therefore embedded in tensions, contestations and contradictions. Therefore, the study is located within a critical interpretivist paradigm. This paradigm was deliberately chosen as it provides a robust

framework that synergises the strengths of both interpretivism and critical theory, which are essential for addressing the research questions of this study. It rejects the notion of a single, objective truth (realism) and instead embraces the complexity of socially constructed realities, while simultaneously questioning the power structures that shape them (Lather, 1991).

The interpretivist dimension of this paradigm acknowledges that reality is subjective and socially constructed. The primary goal is to understand the world from the perspectives of the participants themselves—to interpret their lived experiences, their decision-making processes, and the meanings they ascribe to the involved in curriculum renewal project (Denzil & Lincoln, 2000). This allowed for an in-depth unpacking of the layers of meaning within the UoT context, capturing the voices and perspectives of the institutional and faculty leaders and curriculum champions who navigated these changes.

However, in the context of SA's post-apartheid higher education landscape, a space marked by historical inequalities and ongoing transformation, a purely interpretative approach would be insufficient. The critical dimension of the paradigm is therefore essential. It moves beyond simply understanding multiple perspectives to actively challenge and critique the underlying power structures, ideologies, hegemonic discourses, and historical legacies that influence curriculum (Cohen et al., 2007). This study did not just seek to understand what decisions were made, but to question why they were made in a particular way, examining the patterns of power and positionality that might constrain or enable genuine transformation. This critical lens was vital for analysing the tensions between institutional imperatives, professional or regulatory body requirements, neoliberal pressures, and the lived realities of the academic community. Therefore, a critical interpretivist stance allowed me to engage in meaning-making from within, while simultaneously maintaining a critical perspective on the forces that shaped the curriculum, both internally and externally.

By adopting a critical interpretivist stance, this study sought to achieve a dual objective: first to capture an authentic understanding of the curriculum reconceptualisation process from the perspectives of those involved, and second, to

critically examine how this process was shaped by, and in turn shaped, the broader political, social and institutional forces at play.

This paradigmatic stance also reflects my own evolving journey as a researcher. My professional origins in radiography were rooted in a positivist framework of absolutes. However, my experiences as an academic, curriculum worker and scholar have necessitated a shift towards a more relativist and critical orientation. My insider status provided privileged interpretive access to the nuances of the institutional context, while my scholarly training provided the necessary critical distance to analyse the underlying power dynamics that influenced the phenomenon. This positionality is not seen as a source of bias to be eliminated, but rather as a lens through which both a deeper interpretation and a sharper critique were made possible.

4.5 Research design: A case study

There are five methods of inquiry or research design in qualitative research: ethnography, narrative, phenomenological, grounded theory, and case study. Ethnography has its roots in cultural anthropology, where researchers immerse themselves within a culture to experience the phenomenon firsthand and not rely on participant data. The narrative approach weaves together a sequence of events, usually from a small group of participants, to form a cohesive re-storying about the phenomenon. Phenomenological inquiry describes an event, activity or phenomenon using a combination of methods, such as documents, interviews, observations, etc., to understand the meanings assigned to the phenomenon relying on the participant's own perspectives. Grounded theory looks to provide an explanation or theory behind events and activities and uses the data to help build the theory. A case study, which is the approach used in this study, has value in explaining an event, an organisation or entity and involves a deep understanding of the phenomenon through multiple types of data sources.

The benefits of case studies are that they allow one to examine many features of a single case in reasonable depth; they allow for flexibility and uncertainty and are not limited by instruments. They also allow researchers to connect macro-level issues with micro-level actions. Stake (2005) argued that case study research is not a

methodology; it is a choice of what is to be studied. Others view it as a strategy of inquiry, a comprehensive research strategy, or a methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2018). I support Creswell & Creswell's (2017) argument that a case study is a type of *research design*, "or an object of study, as well as a product of inquiry" (p.73). I present an argument for choosing this mode of inquiry. Case studies in education research are usually undertaken on a small scale: they are clearly bounded and defined, characterised by in-depth and detailed analysis and allow for a variety of issues to be explored (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Yin (2018) argued that exploratory case study research addresses the 'what' questions whereas explanatory case study research is best suited to studies where the main research questions posed are 'how and why questions.' This study drew on a particular institutional context, namely a UoT. The focus was on those professional programmes, which had undergone curriculum change/renewal. This collective case study examined the administrators' and academics' experiences and beliefs about the processes of curriculum change and curriculum decision-making at one UoT in South Africa over the period 2011 to 2019. This was done by purposefully selecting several professionally-oriented programmes in two faculties at the UoT, which were involved in curriculum change since the launch of the curriculum renewal project (CRP) in 2011.

These particular insights and richness of detail and narrative, however, are a limitation to using case study research in education, is that the findings are difficult to apply beyond the site of the case (Thomas, 2011). This can be a drawback in case study research design because researchers often want or need to make claims that are bigger than just the case or cases they have used, or applicable beyond that one context. It was not the intention of this study to generalise the findings. The aim was to be generative of the kinds of issues that could influence the curriculum (re) conceptualising and decision-making processes for professionally oriented curricula (PoC) in the HE system, based on an in-depth exploration of a single institutional case study.

The primary sources of data for the study were generated from the interviews of the participants located within the selected HEI. Supplemental or non-primary data sources included all relevant curriculum documentation at the institution which will

provide the framing interpretation of the context/background within which the participants operate.

4.6 Defining the case

This study involved the selection of a single institution as a case study. It involved selecting specific faculties and programmes and key curriculum documents that could provide the required data and address the objectives of the study.

4.6.1 Opting for a single case

The focus of the research study was a single case at a University of Technology (UoT). Comparative studies involving multiple cases from different institutions require extensive resources and time, can sacrifice depth for breadth, and can leave a researcher with voluminous and crippling sets of data (Yin, 2018). A decision was taken to use a single case study approach, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the research questions.

When the study was being conceptualised, I realised that the UoT itself was large enough as a case study, comprising six faculties, fifty-eight departments with approximately seventy undergraduate programmes, excluding foundational offerings, service departments and centres. These numbers exclude all forms of postgraduate qualifications from the advanced diploma up to doctoral levels. This case alone needed to be limited owing to its vastness to make it feasible and manageable for in-depth analysis. Similarly, involving the entire university would have been too onerous and proved too extensive of the purposes of this study. Although a multiple case study could offer valuable insights into the connection between institutional culture and curriculum reform, it was deemed impractical. Even though a single case study limits the diverse perspectives when exploring multiple cases, it offers the benefit of conducting a thorough analysis of a single site from different perspectives and utilising diverse evidence sources.

4.6.2 Selecting the institution

The absence of established standards and protocols offering precise guidance on what should be done and how makes it difficult to establish the boundaries of a case study. This proves to be more complex when choosing specific aspects of a case for

a thorough examination, highlighting the conceptual nature of the process rather than its technical aspects.

As already stated, the UoT was chosen as the institutional case for this study. The selection of the institution was based on four important criteria in terms of qualitative studies. Firstly, the study drew on Ensor's (2006) institutional differentiation in SA to select a UoT for this study. She emphasised that differentiation plays a crucial role in shaping the curriculum restructuring efforts in South Africa's higher education institutions (HEIs), ensuring that the educational offerings were relevant, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of students, industry, community and society (Ensor, 2006). Further, a UoT has been traditionally associated with an academic mission of making knowledge useful and preparing graduates for the workplace. Therefore, this institution was selected to represent an interesting dynamic between the utilitarian agenda and what it means to be educated in the 21st century VUCA world (see Chapters One and Two). Secondly, UoT is the only institution that approached its curriculum renewal to include general education (GE) at the undergraduate level, marking it as distinct within South African higher education (SAHE) landscape. It is the only institution among the 26 public universities in the country that offers this undergraduate curriculum in the way that it does. Thirdly, as alluded, the case was drawn from the public sector, which characterises the largest pool of HEIs in South Africa. Lastly, the choice of the UoT was a pragmatic choice, informed by ease of access.

4.6.3 Navigating the institution: Defining the parameters

Given the substantial size of the selected UoT, further choices had to be made regarding which specific segments would undergo in-depth scrutiny. Using purposive maximal sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), potential participants from the epistemic community at this institution were invited to participate, ensuring a balance of breadth and depth of data production methods. Firstly, the nature of curriculum change was explored through the perspectives of the institutional administrators who were not part of the faculties. The invited participants of the study included the key executive managers or administrators in the vice chancellors' (VC) office, the Deputy Vice Chancellor: Teaching and Learning's (DVCTL) office, and the Centre for Quality Promotions and Assurance (CQPA). Participants from these levels within the institution

provided a comprehensive or breadth examination of curriculum reconceptualisation, and re-envisioning from an institution's overall perspective (see Figure 4.2 below). They offered insights into curriculum policy and management. Next, I focused on developing an understanding of curriculum change at the faculty level. Data from the two select faculties were included in the study: the Faculty Engineering and the Built Environment (FEBE) and the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS). These faculties were seen to have made the most significant changes to their Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) and their curricula, arising mainly from the shifts from diploma to degree programmes. Data production at the faculty level balanced the breadth and depth focus.

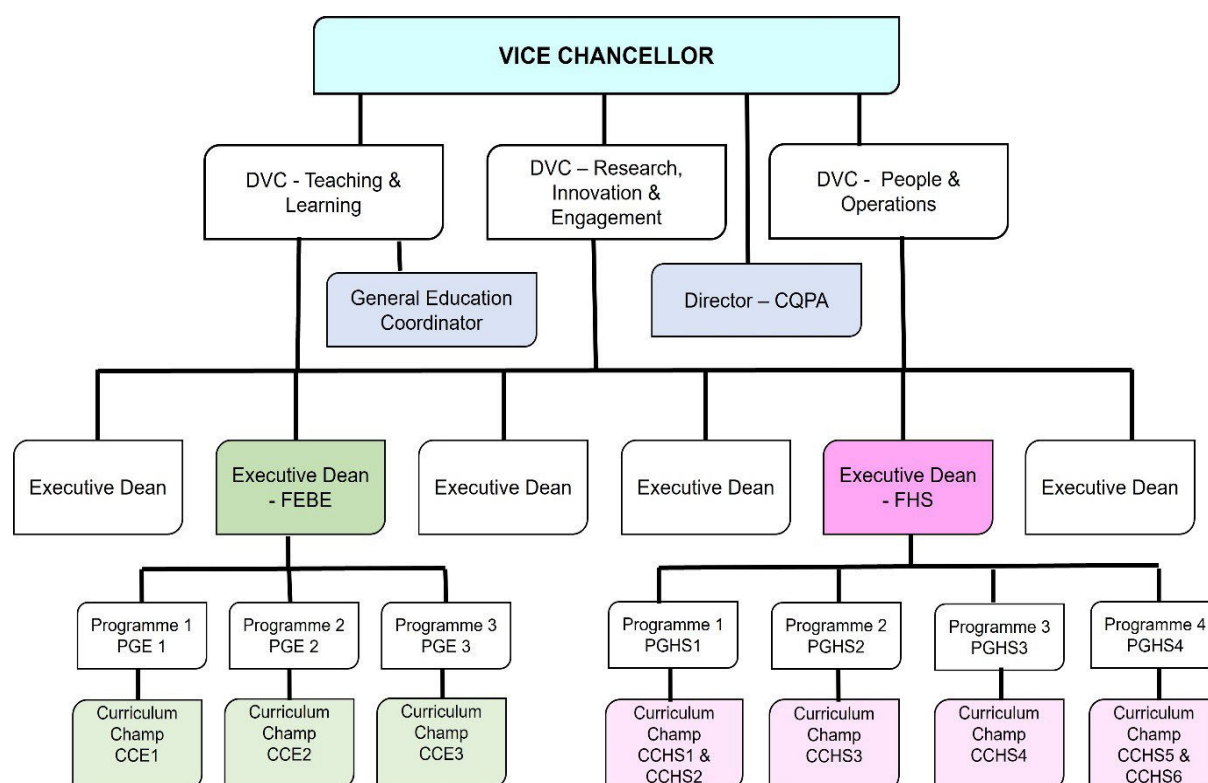


Figure 4.2: Breadth and depth of selected participants.

In the research proposal, at the programme level, the selection was limited to three programmes, one in each of the two faculties. Curriculum development and decision-making is traditionally an academic endeavour. However, once the first interview was completed, it became apparent that the responsibility of the CRP was relegated to one curriculum champion in each programme. I was concerned about the adequacy of the

data production. I realised that including multiple perspectives of the several ‘curriculum champions’ within faculties would enhance the rigour of the study and yield better results. My ‘insider’ status gave me an advantage, as I could identify some participants and access some programmes easily. However, I also had to rely on snowballing sampling¹⁹ to gain access to a total of three programmes in FEBE, and four selected programmes in FHS.

In this faculty, the selection was originally limited to one programme/specialisation per faculty. However, due to the lack of participation on the part of the academics, mostly due to the reliance on the one curriculum champion in each programme, the sampling had to be revisited. The FEBE has ten departments that includes six programmes in engineering, three in the built environment, and an Urban Futures Centre (UFC). For this study, three programmes/specialisations in engineering were purposefully selected out of the six engineering programmes. The FHS also has ten departments, with one being completely a servicing department for all the health programmes in the faculty. For the similar challenges experienced in engineering, participation was opened to all the health sciences programmes affiliated with the Health Professional Council of South Africa (HPCSA). Four programmes were selected for inclusion in the study.

The curriculum champions from each of these programmes were the primary data sources and provided the depth in the data. All eight programmes are professionally oriented or applied fields that are closely linked with industry and professional bodies that wield power in curriculum decision-making. These programmes were purposively selected to understand how the curriculum champions navigated the multiple levers of forces at the meso and macro levels when making curriculum decisions.

Details of all the participants are presented and coded in Figure 4.2 and in Table 4.1.

¹⁹ Snowballing sampling refers to a method of non-probability sampling in which the researcher asks a participant to identify others who might also participate in the study - [Methods Map: Snowball sampling: SAGE Research Methods \(sagepub.com\)](#)

Table 4.1: Participants selected for the study at institutional and faculty levels

	Institutional sectors	Number of participants	Study Code
Administrator level relevant to the study	Vice Chancellor's office	3	EM1
	DVC: Teaching & Learning Office		EM2
	- Centre for Quality Promotions and Assurance (CQPA) - Special Projects		EM3
Faculty management level	- FHS Dean's office	2	FM1
	- FEBE Dean's office		FM2
Programme level	- FEBE - Engineering programmes	3	CCE1, CCE2, CCE3
	- FHS - Health Sciences professional programmes	6	CCHS1, CCHS2, CCHS3, CCHS4, CCHS5, CCHS6,

Below is a brief overview of each of these eight programmes selected in the study (see Figure 4.2 for programme codes to preserve anonymity). Each of these new programmes was developed in response to the alignment with the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Further descriptions and discussions that relate to the phenomenon are detailed in Chapters Five and Six.

All engineering programmes in FEBE had taken a decision to shift from a national diploma to a three-year degree offering, with a total of 420 SAQA credits pitched at National Qualification Framework (NQF) level seven, and with a minimum of 120 credits at the exit level. Minimum entrance requirements were aligned with national and institutional policy requirements. These additional credits in these programmes seemed to align with international standards of engineering qualifications. Although there were modules that seemed to fall within the general education categories, it seemed like only the core module was included in the curriculum from the institutional GE basket. The GE imperative appeared to have been modified in all three engineering programmes. In FHS, a decision was taken to move the majority of its offerings from the national diploma to a four-year professional degree. All five programmes had a minimum of 480 SAQA credits at NQF level 8, with a minimum of 120 credits at the exit level. Again, the minimum entrance requirements were aligned

to the national and institutional policy requirements. The general education integration across each programme was not homogenous in health sciences, compared to engineering, and is further explored and covered in Chapter Five.

4.7 Data production and management

In this study, a conscious decision has been made to use the term 'data production' rather than the more traditional 'data collection' or the often interchangeable 'data generation'. This choice is deliberate and rooted in the study's critical interpretivist paradigm. The term 'data collection' is avoided as it implies a positivist assumption that data exists as a pre-formed reality to be passively gathered by the researcher. This is inconsistent with the paradigm that views knowledge as socially constructed.

While 'data generation' rightly emphasises the co-creative nature of qualitative research, where meaning is generated through the interaction between the researcher and participant, the term 'data production' is adopted here to more explicitly align with the critical dimensions of the study's framework. The term 'production' highlights that the data, whether from interviews or documents, is not created in a vacuum. It is an artefact produced within specific institutional, historical, and discursive contexts, shaped by the very power relations that the study seeks to understand (Lather, 1991). It acknowledges that participants' narratives and curriculum documents are constructed and presented in particular ways, reflecting the underlying ideologies and strategic personalities.

This section details the methods through which the data was produced, focusing on the espoused curriculum and the official (declared) curriculum. These methods were designed to produce rich, contextual data that could be interpreted for subjective meaning while also being critically analysed for the systemic forces they revealed.

When deciding on the most appropriate methods for gathering information about curriculum change at the study site, I had planned for three data production approaches: document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and focus group interviews. The use of multiple methods aims to validate data and enhance credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). However, in this study, this was limited to the semi-structured interviews and the respective key curriculum documents at the institutional and the

programme levels. Focus group interviews would have contributed to the rigour of the study, by providing another level of perspectives, particularly on the GE agenda. However, this did not materialise and was eventually abandoned, owing to the difficulties and delays encountered with securing interviews and the time lapses between interviews.

The production of data for this study was undertaken in a sequential and iterative manner, designed to build a rich and multi-layered understanding of the curriculum renewal process. The approach began with a foundation analysis of the key institutional and programme level documents, which then informed and contextualised the subsequent phase of the semi-structured interviews. This sequence was deliberate where the document analysis provided an essential grasp of the 'official' policies, strategies, espoused goals, and structural frameworks for curriculum change, creating a robust foundation from which to explore the 'lived realities', interpretations, and tensions experienced by the participants.

This section details the two core phases of data production. It begins with the initial document analysis (section 4.7.1) and then moves to the semi-structured interviews (section 4.7.2).

4.7.1 Document inclusion

The first phase of the data production involved a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating key documents. This process was guided conceptually to establish the official context and stated intentions of the curriculum renewal process. The institutional documents, including strategic plans and curriculum policies and guidelines, were analysed first to provide the essential meso-political and implementation context for the study (as detailed in Table 4.2). This foundational analysis provides crucial insight into the institution's espoused conceptions of curriculum renewal and the official value placed on the liberal/general education agenda. The subsequent analysis of programme-level documents was then undertaken to understand how these institutional mandates were formally translated into specific curricula.

The process of selecting documents should be guided conceptually to avoid the challenge of deciding what documents to include or not include. This often leads to

voluminous data, or gaps, respectively. For this study, institutional documents included the university strategic plans, as well as curriculum policy and guideline documents that were approved by the Senate. A further document that was included in the selection was the 2017 CHE QEP Phase 2 Institutional Report²⁰. This selection was guided by the meso-political context as well as implementation context, as shown in Table 4.2 below. These six institutional documents provided insight into the institution's conceptions of curriculum renewal in general. They were used to explore the value of the liberal/general education agenda specifically in its curriculum planning.

Table 4.2: Summary of documents in the document analysis process

Document Type	Document name	Study Code
Institutional documents on curriculum matters	Curriculum Renewal Principles 2011	DAI1
	General Education Guidelines 2012	DAI2
	Graduate Attributes Position Paper 2014	DAI3
	UoT Strategic Plan 2015-2019	DAI3a
	UoT Strategic Plan 2.0 2017-2019	DAI3b
	CHE Quality Enhancement Project Phase 2 Institutional Report 2017	DAI4
Programme documents for three programmes in FEBE	HEQC Online Application	DAPE1
	SAQA registration	DAPE2
		DAPE3
Programme documents for five programmes in FHS	HEQC Online Application	DAPH1
	SAQA registration	DAPH2
Institutional general education (GE) module descriptors	Cornerstone 101 – core modules	DAGE1
	List of institutional GE modules	DAGE2
	List of faculty GE modules for FEBE and FHS	DAGE3

Following programme selections, key curriculum documents for each programme, primarily the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Online-Offline applications and SAQA registration documents, were subjected to a systematic analysis. This process was guided by the detailed critical framework presented in Appendix 3.

²⁰ 2017 CHE QEP Phase 2 Institutional Report – this report was derived from the institutional response to the CHE's Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) Phase 2 that focused on the curriculum. All 26 public HEIs had to respond, showing the institution's path or trajectory in addressing critical curriculum matters – see [FINAL QEP phase 2 MARCH 2017.pdf](#) for full details.

The analysis moved beyond a superficial audit of curriculum components. Rather than simply cataloguing modules and credit values, the inquiry was designed to elicit a deeper understanding of the curriculum's conceptual and political foundations. For each programme document set, the analysis specifically interrogated:

- The stated rationale and purpose, to uncover the ideological and philosophical underpinnings informing the curriculum.
- The key change features that were emphasised, revealing the priorities of the renewal process.
- How the curriculum design responded to the intersecting forces of the national policy, professional body mandates, and institutional imperatives.
- And, in line with the study's critical orientation, an interrogation of what the documents did not say and whose interests were ultimately being served or marginalised by the final design.

This multifaceted approach ensured that the document analysis was not merely descriptive but served as a critical tool for cross-referencing with the interview data, aiding in the interpretation of curriculum choices, and understanding the rationale behind the development of the new programmes. The internal programme overview and curriculum map (POCM) could not be obtained for all the programmes during the fieldwork and were therefore excluded from the formal analysis.

4.7.2 Semi-structured interviews

Following the foundational document analysis, the second phase of data production utilised semi-structured interviews as primary strategy to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants. This sequence allowed for the interview questions to be deeply informed by the 'official' narrative revealed in the documents, enabling a more nuanced and critical exploration of the phenomenon under investigation. As Miller and Glassner (in Silverman, 2011, p 131) note, "in-depth interviews provide a meaningful opportunity to study and theorise about the social world" offering insights into the cultural frames people use to make sense of their experience.

A range of semi-structured interviews were therefore conducted to capture diverse perspectives and to tap into the curriculum expertise within the institution (see Figure 4.1). This method was particularly crucial for moving beyond the formal text of the

documents to comprehend internal debates, informal decision-making processes, and institutional memory related to the curriculum renewal. This was critical, due to the dispersed nature of knowledge about curriculum across different two programmes in the two faculties.

A significant challenge in qualitative research is determining the appropriate number of interviews to conduct. Bekele and Ago (2022) acknowledge the complexity of deciding on the required number of interviews for a qualitative study, and they emphasise that there is no straightforward answer to this question. They maintain that determining the sample size for qualitative research interviews involves considering several key factors, which include the research purpose and questions as well as their type, the methodology, nature of the research, quality of the data, resource availability, researcher experience, institutional requirements, and most importantly theoretical saturation (Bekele & Ago, 2022).

To address this challenge, a cyclical approach to data production was adopted: the initial information guided subsequent decisions on whom to interview. This iterative process continued until interview data started to repeat without yielding new insights. However, this iterative nature of data production can be challenging, especially when interview planning is typically done in advance. In qualitative research, researchers are advised to have a clear and confident understanding of the sampling method that has been used, the rationale behind its selection, and the reasons why the attained sample size is deemed appropriate. It is also advisable to follow a structured yet flexible approach that allows for adjustments.

In this study, fourteen interviews were concluded at different levels within the institution, using purposive and snowballing techniques (see Figure 4.2 above). Semi-structured interviews were undertaken, using a schedule (see Appendix 3) to provide some structure and commonality across the interviews, while still allowing flexibility and opportunities for probing each participant's responses. As alluded to earlier, the following interviews were conducted.

- a) Interviews with institutional executive managers or administrators (as they are referred to in this study) to understand their perspectives of curriculum (re)conceptualising and decision-making at an institutional level, why they

advocated and drove these changes in the way that they did, and what their views were on the disjuncture between policy and implementation. Three administrators participated, providing a comprehensive examination of curriculum reconceptualisation, and re-envisioning from an institution's overall perspective and offering insights into curriculum policy and management. It is important to note that all three participants had left the institution at the time of the data production.

- b) Interviews were held with faculty managers (at the dean level) to understand how the critical curriculum change processes were managed and influenced/facilitated the implementation processes across the faculty. The data show that faculty leadership strategically influenced the CRP processes in particular ways, within each faculty. Two deans' interviews were included in this thesis.
- c) The last set of interviews with academics or curriculum champions from the select faculties (as they will be called in this study) were conducted to understand the multiple levers of forces of curriculum change were manifested at the programme level.

It is important to recognise that the study was undertaken at the study site; the participants' perspectives regarding the phenomenon being the primary source of data. All interviews of the curriculum champions were conducted on campus, at the convenience of the participants. The interviews at the administrators' level were conducted off-campus, mainly due to these participants having exited the UoT during the data production phase. The interviews with the faculty managers were completed during the pandemic lockdown period and conducted as online, using Microsoft Teams. All participants were critical to the study, and each was fully aware of the institutional context and the curriculum imperatives during the study period.

One thing that was not anticipated was the level of difficulty in securing interviews during the data production phase with willing participants, given that for nearly two decades I have been employed at the UoT. It was particularly challenging to secure interviews at the executive levels; this resulted in major delays with the fieldwork. Further complications arose when trying to access institutional curriculum documents, especially at the programme levels. Only certain curriculum documents were stored centrally and made available for analysis. Other documents were not forthcoming, despite numerous attempts to source them. This resulted in difficulties trying to establish what the previous curricula looked like. This seemed to become even more

problematic when institutional memory lies with key people and even those who are no longer at the institution, as indicated earlier.

4.7.3 Preparing the data for analyses

Eleven of the fourteen interviews were recorded as audio files, using a dictaphone. The last three interviews, at the faculty management level, were completed using the Microsoft Office Teams (MST) platform, which meant there were both audio and video files. During, and at the end of each interview, notes were captured on the highlights of the interviews. The eleven audio files were later transcribed by a professional transcriber. The three interviews on MST were accompanied by a transcript. Thereafter, I went through the transcripts to correct any errors that were prevalent, while listening to the audio files. I completed this task for all the interview transcripts. While this task was onerous, going through this process allowed me to familiarise myself with the data, in accordance with step 1 in Braun and Clark's (2006) framework. This process was repeated a few times to immerse myself in the data and it helped me to develop an intimate understanding of it.

The institutional and programme documents were used to enhance and supplement the interview data, offering additional clarification of curriculum change processes at both the institutional, faculty and programme levels. These documents also served as a point of comparison with the participants' interview data. The interviews were however deemed to provide deeper insight into the participants' perspectives on the focal points of their decision-making.

Given the large quantities of qualitative data produced through interviews and document review, the NVIVO software package was initially adopted to manage the data and facilitate the preliminary stages of the analytic process. The initial intention was to use the software for systematic coding and theme development.

However, early in the process of data familiarisation, it became apparent that this tool driven approach was premature and potentially restrictive. As described in Section 4.8.2, there was a significant concern that a rigid, code-book style approach within NVIVO would limit the exploratory and inductive nature of the inquiry, forcing the data into pre-conceived categories rather than allowing themes to emerge organically. This

was particularly pertinent given the study's critical interpretivist goal to uncover latent meanings and complex interconnections, rather than simply categorising surface level content.

Consequently, a deliberate decision was taken to abandon the extensive use of NVIVO for deep analysis. While the software remained useful for initial data storage and organisation (for example, housing the transcripts and all other data), the core analytical work was conducted through a more immersive and manual process of RTA, as detailed in Section 4.8. This involved repeated readings of the transcripts, manual memoing, and conceptual mind-mapping to maintain a close, interpretive relationship with the data. This shift from tool-centric to a researcher-centric analysis was a crucial methodological step to ensure the integrity and depth of the study's findings.

4.8 Data analysis and interpretation

Data analysis is a crucial component of qualitative research. It allows researchers to make sense of the rich, detailed data collected through methods such as interviews, observations, focus groups, and other qualitative means. It enables researchers to derive meaning, generate insights, validate findings, inform decision-making, enhance research rigour, and communicate results effectively (Maquire & Delahunt, 2017). A systematic and rigorous process is essential for producing high-quality research outcomes. Similar to other stages of a research process, data analysis also requires evaluating the most suitable method to employ. In the literature there are several approaches to data analysis that including content analysis, narrative analysis, grounded theory, comparative analysis and thematic analysis, each one with its own purpose and technique. Several scholars recommend thematic analysis (TA) as the first qualitative method to learn because it provides core skills that are transferable to various other types of analysis. A key advantage, it is argued, is that it is a method rather than a methodology. This distinction means that TA is not constrained by specific epistemological or theoretical perspectives, making it a flexible approach, suitable for the diverse nature of work in educational contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017).

TA is a versatile and customisable approach suitable for various studies, offering a detailed understanding of data without requiring extensive theoretical or technical

knowledge. It is accessible, particularly for novice researchers like me. It is easy to grasp and learn due to its flexible nature with minimal strict guidelines. This method is effective in exploring diverse perspectives, highlighting similarities and differences among participants, and revealing unexpected insights. TA also helps to summarise key elements of large datasets by promoting a structured data management approach, resulting in a clear and organised final report (Nowell et al., 2017). Despite its benefits, it is important to acknowledge and mitigate the limitations associated with TA. The relative scarcity of literature on TA may leave inexperienced researchers uncertain about conducting a rigorous analysis. TA does not allow researchers to make claims about language use, which can be a drawback (Braun & Clark, 2006). While the flexibility of TA is an advantage, it can also lead to inconsistencies and a lack of coherence in developing themes from the research data. To address these issues, it is important to establish and articulate an epistemological position that can consistently support the empirical claims of the study (Nowell et al., 2017).

For my study, I adopted the TA framework, proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). It distinguishes between different levels of themes, offers flexibility, enhances credibility, and emphasises interpretation and explanation of the data. Aligning to the constructivist perspective, meanings and experiences were viewed as socially constructed and reproduced, rather than being inherent within individuals. Therefore, in my TA, the focus was on interpreting deeper meanings in discourse and acknowledging multiple realities rather than a single 'objective' reality. This approach stems from a hermeneutic traditions that have evolved to encompass the interpretation of non-religious texts to uncover underlying socio-political, structural and cultural meanings (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023). The focus was on theorising socio-politico-cultural contexts and structural conditions that shaped each participant's accounts. Moreover, within this paradigm, TA at the 'latent' (implicit) level moves beyond the 'semantic' (surface or explicit) content of the data and identifies and examines the "underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations, and ideologies" that are theorised to influence or shape the explicit content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84). This was the focus in this study with regard to curriculum change and transformation.

Braun and Clarke (2006) offer six phases of TA that are flexible, non-linear, and reiterative, and not exclusive to TA (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Phase description of the TA process (adapted from Braun & Clarke, 2006)

Phase	Description of the phase
1. Familiarisation with the data	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Coding the data:	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.
3. Generating themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes:	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.
6. Presenting the findings:	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature.

The process starts with data familiarisation and ends with presenting the findings, each step leading into the other and overlapping with each other. TA entails a dynamic process of iteratively moving between the complete dataset, coded data extracts under analysis, and ongoing data analysis. Unlike statistical analysis where writing typically occurs at the end, in thematic analysis, writing is an integral part of the analytical process. It is recommended to start writing early in phase one by jotting down ideas and potential coding schemes, and to continue writing throughout the coding and analysis stages. There are different stances pertaining to when one should engage with the literature relevant to the analysis. Some argue that early reading may limit the analytical scope, focusing on certain data aspects at the expense of others. Conversely, others suggest that literature review can enhance analysis by sensitising researchers to subtle data features. Therefore, there is no definitive approach to literature engagement in thematic analysis. An inductive approach may benefit from delaying literature engagement, while a theoretical approach may require reviewing literature before analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In the beginning of my data analysis, I found myself oscillating between positivist and post-positivist orientations, dedicating considerable effort and time to systematic analytic procedures, focusing on identifying structures within the data and utilising 'measurement and quantification techniques' in my analysis. Braun and Clarke (2023), call this "[swimming] unknowingly in the waters of positivism". Without a doubt, I was 'swimming in the data'. It was much later, with more reading and understanding and repeated iterations of these six steps, when I began to acknowledge the diversity within TA that these authors allude to. They critique the way many studies, like my study, portray TA as a singular/standardised method, arguing instead that it should be more accurately viewed as a 'family of methods' with diverse approaches. They maintain that it is essential to recognise this diversity and understand the specific type of TA being employed. Braun and Clarke (2023) have developed a typology of approaches that includes i) coding reliability, ii) codebook and reflexive TA, and iii) thematic coding (involves the use of grounded theory) to capture this diversity.

These typologies of approaches share common practices, for example, coding and theme development; the flexibility to capture semantic or latent meaning and orienting to data inductively and/or deductively; and the designation of TA as a theoretically flexible method (Braun & Clarke, 2023). At the same time, they differ in how coding and theme development are carried out. They also differ on underlying research values, and the conceptualisation of key concepts such as themes. They argue that these procedural differences are significant as they reflect a researcher's fundamental research values and should not be overlooked (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.1). They promote a 'knowing practice' of TA, where researchers are encouraged to take ownership of their perspectives, both personal and theoretical. They emphasise the importance of being thoughtful and reflective in decision-making and maintaining reflexivity throughout the TA process (Braun & Clarke, 2023, p.1)

Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), a contemporary approach exemplified by Braun and Clarke (2019), acknowledges the 'plurality' within TA methods and aims to differentiate itself from other approaches. This approach falls under the Big Q or non-positivist qualitative research paradigm. Their argument is not for strict adherence to analytic procedures like recipes as a marker of good research. Instead, a

knowledgeable TA researcher should recognise deviations from established procedures, even if they introduce conceptual inconsistencies, and justify their innovative approach. It is emphasised that there are boundaries in TA research since the procedures are rooted in broad paradigmatic and conceptual frameworks. It became clear that I had to embrace my new identity as an 'interpretivist artist', because, according to Joy et al. (2023, p.2) one cannot "coherently be both a descriptive scientist and an interpretative artist". These authors underscore the importance of thoughtful consideration in handling divergences and combinations of approaches in the procedures that are developed (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Joy et al., 2023).

RTA recognises researcher subjectivity as a valuable asset for research and rejects positivist ideas of researcher bias or positivism creep²¹; it considers TA as inherently subjective, and emphasises researcher reflexivity. It also challenges the notion that coding can be completely accurate due to its interpretative nature and the fluidity of meaning within data (Joy et al., 2023). This position resonated with my insider status and alleviated concerns about bias. In my capacity as a former curriculum champion, head of the department, member of the curriculum task team and currently a curriculum leader in my faculty, I have insider knowledge and experience and institutional memory of the curriculum change processes. In this vein, I see myself as a resource for [this] research [study], rather than a threat to be contained. I recognise, in this way, meaning and knowledge as context-dependent, partial, and subject to change. In qualitative research, data can be categorised in various ways, leading to a complex, uncertain, and subjective analysis process. The conceptual framework and existing literature are crucial in guiding the analysis. Initially, a basic thesis argument is formulated, which, evolves from a literal interpretation to a more conceptual and theoretical one. The argument's clarity typically emerges only after the completion of writing the thesis chapters.

²¹ Positivism creep is what Braun & Clark refer to "where positivism slips unknowingly into reflexive TA, through the use of concepts like researcher bias" (Joy et al., 2023, p.2)

4.8.1 Document analysis

Document analysis is a “systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents” and “requires the data to be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge” (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). It has immense value in critical interpretivist/constructivist research and is often used with other qualitative methods as a means of triangulation and, involves coding content into themes similar to how interview transcripts are analysed (Bowen, 2009 p. 28). For document analysis, an analytic procedure entails finding, selecting, sense-making, and synthesising data contained in documents (Bowen, 2009). It is an iterative process that combines elements of content analysis and thematic analysis. A researcher should demonstrate the capacity to identify pertinent information and to separate it from that which is not pertinent (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The document analysis (see Appendix 3) responded to the national and institutional statutory requirements in understanding how it drives curriculum change. It provided insight into the internal forces that shaped curriculum (re)conceptualising and planning, decision-making and implementation for undergraduate programmes at the UoT, through the nested case study.

Document analysis yields data, namely, excerpts, quotations, or entire passages that are then organised into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis (Labuschagne, 2003). The institutional documents were reviewed to gain insight into the institution's conception of the liberal agenda in its curriculum planning and the value placed on the imperative to include thirty percent GE in all undergraduate curricula. These documents also provided information on contextual factors that may have influenced curriculum decisions. The document sets for each of the seven select programmes were used to extract the implementation plans of the university directive to include GE into the undergraduate curricula and examine the curriculum decisions that were taken. They provided clarity on interpretations of the approaches suggested in the documents and facilitated discussions on the rationale behind specific choices that led to the development of the new programme, as evident in the programme documents.

4.8.2 Listening to the data: A theoretically informed inductive approach

Data analysis in this study followed an iterative and reflexive process, committed to the principle of 'listening to the data' ((Braun & Clarke, 2006). This presented a methodological tension between a purely inductive and deductive approach. In an inductive approach, the themes emerge directly from the data, whereas in a deductive approach, a pre-existing theory is applied. A purely inductive analysis risks overlooking broader structural forces, while a purely deductive approach risks the very 'imposition of key concepts' that can silence participant narratives.

To navigate this, the study adopted a theoretically informed inductive analysis, a common approach within the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA), as posited by several scholars (Byrne, 2022; Joy et al., 2023). The process began inductively: the initial phases of data familiarisation and coding were deliberately open, focusing on capturing the meanings and concerns articulated by the participants themselves. The initial codes and themes were generated from the data, from the language, stories and tensions present in the interview transcripts and documents.

Only after these initial data-driven patterns began to emerge was the theoretical framework, primarily the force field model (FFM), employed as an analytical lens to interpret and organise these findings. The FFM was not used as a set of pre-determined categories into which the data was forced. Rather, it served as a 'sensitising framework' to help explain and provide theoretical language to the complex interplay of forces that the participants were already describing. For example, themes of institutional history and resistance that emerged from the data could be powerfully illuminated and understood through the FFM's concept of 'biographical and inertia forces.

This two-stage process ensured that the analysis remained grounded in the participants lived realities first and foremost. The structure of the following data chapters (Chapters Five and Six) is designed to reflect this process. Each section began by presenting the findings as they emerged from the data: the stories, the tensions, and the commonalities. These dimensions grounded in the fieldwork data were then applied to the theoretical framework to provide a deeper analytical

interpretation. This iterative guided approach allowed the reader to 'hear' the narratives first, before moving to the conceptual analysis that enhances their meaning.

The initial phase of analysis was fundamentally inductive. It began with generating open codes that signalled interesting or significant features in the data, based on verbatim content of the interviews and documents. The first level of analysis was intentionally descriptive, concentrating on understanding the explicit perceptions and semantic content articulated by the participants, without immediately imposing theoretical interpretations. Following this initial coding, a search for broader patterns was undertaken by collating codes into potential themes. This involved a recursive process of checking the emergent themes against both the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire dataset, ensuring that the themes were strongly grounded in the data itself.

Once a preliminary thematic map was generated, the analysis moved from a semantic to a latent level. This represented a crucial shift from descriptive to interpretation, aligning with the study's critical interpretivist paradigm. The aim was no longer just to summarise what the participants said, but to drill deeper to reveal the hidden meanings, assumptions, and ideologies that shaped their accounts (Joy, et al., 2023). This required an active and interpretive role as a researcher, acknowledging that themes are not inherent in the data but are constructed through a process of analytical engagement. A key distinction in this phase, as highlighted by Joy et al. (2023, p.2), is between themes as simple "topic summaries", and themes as "meaning-united stories." While this study was at risk of producing topic summaries, a conscious effort was made to move towards the latter. The goal was to develop themes that captured a central unifying idea or core narrative about the phenomenon, rather than simply grouping together all data related to a single topic. This involved asking critical questions of the patterns; What is the underlying story here? What tensions or contradictions do this theme reveal?

The final phase involved refining the specifics of each theme and constructing a coherent analytical framework. It was at this stage that the themes were turned into a clear story that aligned the data with the research questions and the study's theoretical frameworks. Each theme and its corresponding sub-themes were defined and then

substantiated with vivid data extracts that represented the arguments within them. Crucially, each data extract was subjected to a detailed analysis that moved beyond description to interpret its relevance to the broader research context. This process, informed by the work of Bryne (2022) and Maguire & Delahunt (2017), ensured that the analysis did not simply use quotes as illustrations, but engaged with them as rich sites of meaning. While this approach sought to honour the principles of Braun & Clarke's RTA, it is acknowledged that the final write-up, in its structured attempt to integrate multiple data sources and theoretical lenses, may represent a specific application of RTA rather than a purist representation. The ultimate aim was to produce a trustworthy and insightful analysis that remained deeply connected to the voices of the participants while being critically informed by theory.

4.8.3 Producing the report

Researchers acknowledge that data are open to interpretation, reinterpretation, and reconstruction over time, underscoring the dynamic and subjective essence of qualitative data. This recognition emphasises that multiple perspectives and narratives can arise from the same dataset, illustrating the fluidity and complexity inherent in qualitative research data (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013). In order to fully engage with each specific research area and achieve the best integration of results and interpretations, the study findings have been structured into Chapters Five and Six aligned with the main research questions, the literature and theoretical frameworks. Both chapters are framed, using Samuel's FFM as an analytical framework. Chapters Five and Six explore the leveraging of the liberal agenda within the micro-, meso-, macro- and supra-curriculums/influences and its potential for re-imagining or re-envisioning professionally oriented curricula for a 21st century VUCA world (see Figure 4.3 below). These chapters explore the interplay between the internal and external forces as well as the interplay between the forces of influence and curriculum ideologies.

The objective is to narrate the intricate data story convincingly to demonstrate the credibility and validity of the analysis. The analyses write-up, inclusive of data extracts, should offer a concise, coherent, logical, engaging, and non-repetitive portrayal of the data story within and across themes. It is essential to present ample evidence of the identified themes in the data through a sufficient number of data extracts to showcase the prevalence of each theme, evidenced in the next two data chapters.

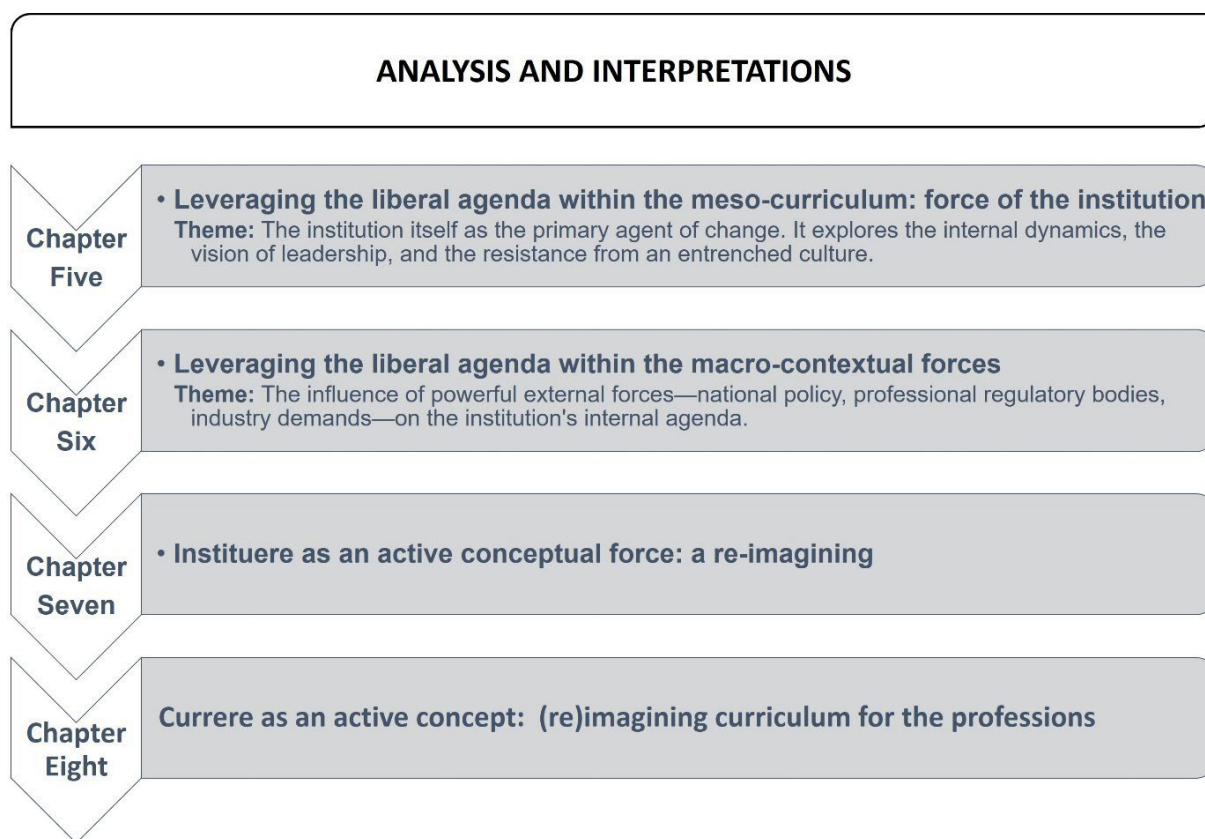


Figure 4.3: Structure of the post-fieldwork chapters

Chapters Seven and Eight covers further abstractions in the data and provide a final analysis, bringing these interpretations into dialogue with the literature and theoretical framings. The analyses aim to be concise, coherent, logical, and engaging, providing evidence of the identified constructs extracted from the data. These constructs are clear, relevant, and illustrative, embedded within an analytical narrative that goes beyond mere description to make a compelling argument related to the research question/s.

4.9 Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are essential for safeguarding the welfare of communities involved in research and are a mandatory aspect of studies at the School of Education at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Ethical clearance was obtained from the UKZN Humanities and Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee and gatekeeper permission to conduct the study at the UoT was secured from the institution (Appendix

1). A core principle of the ethical protocol was the safeguarding of participant anonymity and the confidentiality of the data provided.

Participants were assured of this protection in the information letter and consent form (see Appendix 2). The initial information sheet stated that “Confidentiality will be maintained at all times through the use of pseudonyms (that you may choose)”. However, during the process of data analysis and writing, a more robust system was implemented to ensure a higher level of anonymity and analytical clarity. Instead of using participant-chosen pseudonyms, which can sometimes be inadvertently revealing or difficult to track analytically, a systematic coding system was adopted. As detailed in Table 4.1, each participant was assigned a unique alphanumeric code.

This coding strategy offered several ethical and methodological advantages:

- i. Enhanced anonymity: the codes completely obscure the identity of the individuals and are not linked to any personal identifiers. This provided a strong layer of protection than self-chosen names might have. This may have not been so easily achievable at the administrator level, where participants in the various categories were single entities. For example, the identity of the outgoing VC during the study period, may present a challenge.
- ii. Analytical clarity: the codes allow the researcher to identify the role and level of the participant being quoted (for example, distinguishing an institutional-level view from a programme-level view).
- iii. Preventing conflation: in an institution where participants may know each other, this system prevents them from trying to guess the identity of a “Dr S” based on the content of a quote. The abstract code maintains a focus on the data rather than the person.

This approach, while a refinement of the initial proposal, fully upholds the spirit and commitment of the ethical guarantee made to all participants. All data has been stored securely, and identifying information has been removed from all transcripts and reports to protect the participants. Additionally, the participants' privacy and sensitivity were safeguarded, and they were informed about the handling of their information post-recording. Before each interview, participants were briefed on the study's objectives, and their consent was obtained for recording the interviews and understanding the

analysis process (see Appendix 2). The participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage during their interviews. Interviews were conducted in private spaces agreed to by both parties.

Table 4.4: Practical ways to ensure trustworthiness

QUALITY & RIGOUR	PRACTICAL WAYS TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS
Credibility and transferability	Rich, thick descriptions captured the fullness and essence of the interviews and were an integral part of the study. Crystallisation was adopted using multiple methods and perspectives to enhance the depth and richness of the analyses. This is a metaphorical framework introduced by Richardson (2000) offering a more flexible and multifaceted approach to understanding complex social phenomena, like curriculum change. It also emphasises the importance of reflexivity, where I had to repeatedly and critically examine my own role and 'insiderness.' Crystallisation further symbolises the diverse interpretations and representations of data, capturing the complexity of the participants' experiences rather than reducing them to a single perspective. Member checking was not possible in the study data production owing to the delays experienced with the data production and data analyses. However, several iterations of listening and re-listening to the interviews and engaging with the interview transcripts were completed to ensure accuracy and reliability in the interpretations of the data (see section 4.8.2). To mitigate the influence of personal subjectivity on the study's credibility, each stage of the research process was discussed with my supervisor and a critical friend. Their feedback helped refine and/or revise my approaches, ensuring methodological rigour and enhancing the overall trustworthiness of the study.
Dependability and confirmability	A full disclosure of the research process, position and ethics, including any limitations of the study was actioned. Throughout the study, detailed justifications are provided regarding the methodological choices made, including what was done/not done, and the rationale behind the choices and/or decisions made. These explanations explicitly connect the chosen approaches to the study's objectives and critical research questions. A digital audit trail was also created, labelling and organising data, initially using the NVIVO software but also using OneDrive.

In qualitative research, the four measurements of trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Rigour in qualitative research is about being open to the data, adhering to a specific philosophical perspective and being thorough in collecting data. van Manen (1990) asserted that the research story text in narrative studies must be oriented, rich, deep and strong to ensure quality. My positionality in the study is included in the prelude to the thesis, showing both my insider and outsider status. Within this case study, this positionality may be viewed as posing a potential risk, but how this was addressed in the study has been outlined.

Rather than being a singular act, trustworthiness must be embedded in all stages of the research journey and processes. Trustworthiness, as defined by Rose and Johnson (2020, p. 3) has four important components—methodological rigour in research design, relevance of the research methods, plausibility of the findings and researcher credibility. Table 4.4 presents four practical ways to ensure trustworthiness in qualitative research, and how this was applied in this study.

4.10 Chapter synthesis

This chapter has laid the methodological and ethical groundwork for the entire empirical study. Guided by the Proustian notion that discovery lies in 'having new eyes', it has argued that understanding curriculum transformation requires not just observing a new 'landscape' but applying the specific critical lens of a carefully constructed research design. The chapter has detailed the journey from the theoretical foundations established in the previous chapter to the practical choices made for producing and analysing data.

Central to this was the establishment of a firm paradigmatic stance in critical interpretivism. This was justified as the most appropriate framework for achieving the study's dual objective: first, to interpret the subjective, socially constructed experiences of those involved in curriculum change, and second, to critically interrogate the underlying power structures, ideologies, and historical legacies that shaped those experiences. The researcher's own positionality as an insider was

framed not as a source of bias to be eliminated, but as a unique lens that enabled both a deeper interpretation and a sharper critique.

The research design was operationalised through a single, bounded case study of a UoT, a site chosen for its unique and distinct response to the changing HE landscape. The chapter detailed the deliberate, sequential process of data production, which commenced with a foundational document analysis to establish the 'official' context, when then informed subsequent exploratory semi-structured interviews. Further, the chapter transparently addressed the ethical protocols, justifying the use of a systematic coding system for participant anonymity over initially proposed pseudonyms to enhance both confidentiality and analytical clarity.

Finally, the chapter detailed the process of data analysis, defined as a theoretically informed inductive approach. The process included a reflective account of the decision to move away from the extensive use of NVIVO for deep analysis, a choice made to preserve the conceptual and exploratory richness of the data and to ensure that the participant voices were heard first before a theoretical lens was applied. The strategies employed to ensure the trustworthiness and rigour of the study were outlined, concluding the comprehensive justification for the methods that follow.

With this robust methodological framework established, the thesis now proceeds to the presentation and analysis of the empirical findings in the subsequent chapters, beginning with the internal, meso-level forces at play within the institution

CHAPTER FIVE: LEVERAGING THE LIBERAL AGENDA WITHIN THE MESO-CURRICULUM: FORCE OF THE INSTITUTION

"The greatest danger in times of turbulence is not the turbulence; it is to act with yesterday's logic." (Peter Drucker)

5.1 Introduction

The discourse surrounding curriculum is inherently complex and deeply intertwined with the politics of culture, reflecting the selective priorities and values of various stakeholders within an educational landscape. As articulated by Apple (1993), curricula are not neutral entities. They emerge from multifaceted cultural, political and economic negotiations, serving as representations of what is deemed legitimate knowledge within a given context. In light of these considerations, this chapter explores the integration of general education (GE) within professionally oriented curricula (PoC) at the university of technology (UoT). Drawing on the theoretical lens of Samuel's (2008) force field model (FFM), it examines the meso-level institutional forces driving curriculum change, while at the same time examining the biographical forces of the institution. The previous chapters established the contested and politically charged nature of curriculum and curriculum change. This chapter highlights the specific challenges and opportunities in embedding GE into historically rigid, vocationally driven academic programmes.

The analysis engages deeply with the institutional strategies and philosophical motivations underpinning GE integration, juxtaposing the espoused ideals and planning with their practical enactments. It interrogates the interplay between institutional setting, namely its players/actors, programmatic and biographical forces that shape curriculum reform. Moreover, the chapter captures the lived experiences and narratives of players/actors navigating this change, as they and thereby providing critical insights into how GE's transformative goals intersect with professional and institutional imperatives.

Through a new advanced exploration of field work data, policy and curriculum documents, and participants reflections, this chapter illuminates the complexities of

curriculum making as an iterative, dynamic process influenced by diverse internal and external forces. By situating this inquiry within the broader national and local context of higher education it offers a critical appraisal of the potential for GE to serve as a catalyst for fostering citizenship, interdisciplinary learning and institutional identity and the lived experiences of those that were engaged in these processes. It aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the ongoing evolution of curriculum practices in response to contemporary societal needs and expectations (see Chapter 3, section 3.8.1).

5.2 Chapter overview

This chapter is structured into three key sections, addressing critical aspects of curriculum change within the UoT, as it transitions from a Technikon to a university. Building on the historical and policy context established in Chapter Two, this chapter delves into the internal dynamics of the institution, positioning it as a primary, meso-level force in the curriculum renewal process.

Firstly, it expands on the curriculum renewal processes introduced in Chapter Two. Reinterpreting the principles and goals of the CRP through the lived perspectives of the participants. Section 5.3 will analyse the motivations behind the institutional mandate for curriculum reform, exploring how the institution leverages the external policy shifts as a catalyst for internal change. Secondly, the chapter will examine the philosophical and pragmatic motivations behind the push for GE integration, a key theme introduced in Chapter One.

Finally, the chapter provides a detailed analysis of the implementation of the GE imperative in two key faculties. In doing so, it lays the empirical groundwork for Chapter Six, which will explore how these institutional forces were challenged, shaped, and often constrained by the powerful macro-contextual force of policy, professional bodies, and industry. This analysis sets the stage for the theoretical discussion in Chapter Seven, where the institution itself will be theorised as an active conceptual force of *instituire*.

5.3 The institution as a force on curriculum change

Institutional forces within the FFM refer to the influences stemming from specific institutional settings or forces that are shaped by the historical context and ethos of an institution that can significantly impact the quality of curriculum and pedagogy within that environment (Samuel, 2008). The findings revealed that an institution's ethos is shaped by multiple factors, including leadership style, the explicit mission and vision, and the theoretical foundations underpinning the institution (abstracted further in Chapter Seven). These elements collectively influence the perceptions, roles, and identities of its members. This impact can be profound, as members of the academic community internalise the institutional ethos, integrating it into their educational experiences and professional practices (Samuel, 2008). This dynamic is particularly significant for institutions in constant state of flux, as they seek to forge a new identity and ethos.

5.3.1 Prioritising curriculum renewal beyond PQM alignment

Chapter Two outlined the Curriculum Renewal Project (CRP), emphasising its purpose and significance as a transformative initiative/force within the UoT. One of the pivotal shifts following the establishment of the revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) was the dismantling of the convenor system (as discussed in Chapters One and Two). This policy change in post-apartheid South Africa (SA) granted UoTs the autonomy to conceptualise, design and deliver their own curricula. While the CRP marked an essential step towards institutional independence, its implementation elicited mixed reactions, with resistance evident among some segments of the academic community.

This section expands on the institution as a force driving curriculum renewal. The UoT executives leveraged the institution's responsiveness to external environmental changes, such as the Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) alignment to the revised, to instigate internal reforms HEQSF (see also Chapters Two and Seven). There was a recognition that in order to bring about the desired change in the emerging university, that there was a need for institution-wide deliberations and actions, as affirmed by the participant below.

If we were to move from a Technikon type institution to a university type institution, what are the different things we have to do? one of them was the CRP”....so the nature of the Curriculum Renewal Project was really aimed at this institutional transformation. [EM1]

The primary rationale for an institution-wide curriculum transformation approach stemmed from concerns among executive members about the persistent legacy Technikon practices and an internal resistance to change. The resistance to change was particularly pronounced in matters of curriculum ownership and accountability, as reflected by one participant.

[Curricula] were still steep in the past where they were driven by what the convenor systems, [or] by whoever was the loudest voice at the time in the convenorship. And to a very large extent many staff were very comfortable with this approach...So it was a case of standing back from really taking responsibility for the curriculum. [EM2]

Historical practices rooted in the convenor system fostered disengagement among many academics regarding curriculum design and decision-making processes. The above comments of the participants affirmed that the CRP was strategically designed to support and scaffold the curriculum change processes within the institution. This was important to help the curriculum workers to ‘find their voice’ and take on an autonomous role, rather than continue in the ‘technician’ role to the convenor system. A further goal was to ultimately advance the institution’s trajectory toward a new identity.

There were other concerns about the disconnectedness between the curriculum, and teaching learning and assessment strategies, as expressed below by three participants.

...the nature of teaching and learning at the university had to change. And it had to change, not only... because it was the right thing to do. [EM1]

[There] was a disjuncture in relation to teaching and learning and assessments...LTA strategies and approaches and the curriculum. And the curriculum actually just promoted a particular way of doing in terms of the approach is to LTA at [UoT]. And again, it was about, this is what we have so this is all we can do. [EM2]

So you're not training robots, you know the old expression ‘monkey see, monkey do’, right? I don't like the term, but it does explain what the old Technikons were about. [FM2]

[The UoT] is a university first, and therefore a narrowly focussed curriculum that produces graduates with only industry specific skills is in itself a colonial legacy and needs to be addressed by adding a wider focus via GE modules. [DAI5]

These responses highlighted concerns about the disconnectedness between curriculum and pedagogy. They emphasised its adverse effects on holistic student development. The rigidity of prior curricula was identified as a barrier requiring significant reform. The university academic management team had reached consensus on the need for curriculum and pedagogical practices to evolve beyond industry-specific training to address societal demands. Aligning with contemporary educational theories, the reformed curriculum would prioritise critical thinking, adaptability, and comprehensive skill development. One faculty manager argued that a narrow focus on industry skills perpetuates colonial legacies, and advocated instead for an inclusive, transformative curriculum that reflects societal diversity and broader educational objectives. There was a strongly held view by both executives and curriculum champions that deep fundamental institutional changes were necessary to prevent superficial curriculum changes that showed compliance only with the political demands.

The resistance to change extended beyond the institution. External stakeholders in the UoT sector expressed a preference for retaining 'commonality' in curricula through retaining the diploma offerings, as explained by the participants at executive and operational levels.

It was not easy at a national level either because there were many voices that said we should not shift the curriculum. We should still ensure that we work with some commonality. And whilst I agree with that, within the context, discipline and so on. At the same time, I think you have to allow people that flexibility. You have to have the institution's culture and approach also to be deeply embedded, within the DNA of the curricula and the institution. And not something that comes from somewhere else. [EM2]

It was a fair amount of resistance as to why [there was], well not a fair amount, but there were some institutions that were insisting that the diploma was what gave them the competitive edge to other institutions. [CCE1]

It seems that the above comments referred to this UoT's challenge, as well as a common challenge across the UoT sector, more generically. The UoT sector had to redefine itself in the changed differentiated system of the post-apartheid South African higher education (SAHE) landscape. These participants viewed the resistance to change, as a manifestation of power dynamics embedded within the legacy convenor system, which perpetuated polarisation among these institutions. These views suggest that the view in the UoT sector at that time was to maintain the status quo in

regard to the convenor system. However, for the UoT in the study, the transitioning PQM marked a significant departure from past practices of convenorship and curriculum standardisation that characterised the Technikon era, according to a below comment from a participant.

[The] 'notion of curriculum 'renewal' signalled an important departure from old Technikon practices of re-curriculation and convenorship.' [DAI5]

In contrast to the dominant voices at the time, the findings showed that the UoT embraced the shredding of the old and ventured towards creating spaces for something new for itself. The UoT leaders saw the curriculum as a reflection of a new institutional ethos. The way to achieve this was through an institution-wide curriculum renewal approach, advocating for a distinctive culture to shape and drive the desired curriculum transformation. The CRP was envisioned as a unifying mechanism, fostering collaboration across the academic community and addressing entrenched legacies from the Technikon era. Participants emphasised the CRP's role in reshaping the institutional identity, moving beyond superficial compliance with political demands to achieve genuine transformation.

Despite the aspirational momentum for change, internally, there were concerns about the direction that the university was taking and the potential 'mission drift', as expressed by one participant.

So, the mandate of UoTs was changing, and people talk about mission drift, and it was a mission drift because the mandate was changing in practice, but in paper it is still there. But the mandate was changing. [CCHS2]

This participant perceived the changes and the practices happening internally as a deviation from the differentiation policy. At the executive level too, there were similar sentiments about the so-called 'academic drift', especially as it related to the high levels of diploma to degree shifts (see Chapter Two) as expressed by the VC.

we had this huge change in a kind of shift away from diploma programmes to degree programmes...all came with this idea, that the nature of teaching and learning at the university had to change. And it had to change, not only because, it was the right thing to do but also because if you were going to offer kind of masters and doctorate programmes, that you have to ensure that what you were doing was articulating with that...to higher levels. [EM1]

These shifts in primary offerings were particularly evident in the two faculties in the study. While the institutional leader expressed concern about these shifts, he acknowledged that there was need to introduce more disciplinary knowledge and elevate the cognitive demands in the curriculum. There was recognition that the shift

was driven by the need to transform the nature of teaching and learning and, more importantly, to address the social injustices of the past as they pertain to powerful regional knowledge. The above participant suggested that the agenda of becoming postgraduate providers included a more important goal of contributing to not just certifying technical, operational levels and competences of students, but preparing them as critical citizens of/for a wider society. The primary offerings had to prepare students for higher studies.

On the one hand, it does appear that in the HEQSF alignment process, the UoT could be seen to be emulating the offerings at traditional universities with the high levels of reduction in programme differentiation. It is important to note, however, that in the unified and single National Qualification Framework (NQF), there were no distinctions between the qualification types for the differentiated SAHE system. So, one had to choose between a diploma or a degree, as it was stipulated in the HEQSF guidelines (DHET, 2013). A side benefit was that moving to the degree route improved the articulation pathways into postgraduate studies for students.

Taking cognisance of the dual-facing nature of professional curricula was another concern that surfaced in the data, as expressed by the university leader.

[T]here is always the danger that you go too far... you create a split between cognitive learning and skills training... I think that there is a need for people who are working in curriculum to understand that cognitive learning, in professional training, is only half the story. I mean it is by no means the full story. I mean every profession requires high level skills and that there is a need for us to try and ensure that our students are exposed to both branches of learning [EM1].

The participant accented the importance of balancing cognitive learning and skills training in professional education. The participant cautioned against overemphasising one at the expense of the other, highlighting that both conceptual understanding and high-level practical skills are essential for comprehensive professional development. Ensuring that students are exposed to both branches of learning, adequately prepares them for the multifaceted demands of their professions. This exploration was outside the scope of this study and warrants further examination.

The CRP served as a unifying force to address critical internal legacy issues from the old national diplomas, foster collaboration and drive a shared institutional vision. A participant offered the below explanation.

And we thought that having a project like this [the CRP] actually brings people together because now you have to work together to establish something different and that was for us. Do something different, something new that also begins to shift that culture that everybody has come into, that everyone was holding onto and that baggage from the past. And let us create that for [UoT]. [EM2]

Conceived as a mechanism for rethinking and reimagining a future-oriented curriculum, the CRP emphasised inclusive stakeholder participation to address historical legacies and shape the institution's emerging identity. Executives highlighted the urgency of this transformation, underscoring the need for collective efforts to develop curricula aligned with the university's evolving mission and philosophy.

The next section is an exploration of another change force at the UoT: the call for the infusion of GE into all its undergraduate programmes.

5.3.2 The call for general education (a liberal) in the undergraduate curriculum

The UoT recognised the need for a paradigm shift in curriculum planning, in its efforts to define a distinct institutional identity. The curriculum can be appropriately characterised as a system that reflects and operationalises an institution's ideological purposes (Hay & Marais, 2011), as shown in this study. In 2011, the incoming VC introduced a vision of curriculum transformation that proposed the inclusion of fifty percent liberal arts or GE into all undergraduate programmes. This, together with the new strategic plans (see Chapter Two), marked a departure from the UoT's dominant social efficiency model towards more student and society-centred approaches. Inspired by his experience in the United States of America (USA), the university leader had several reasons for pushing the liberal arts/liberal/GE initiative.

The desired strategy for a fifty percent infusion of liberal/GE in all undergraduate curricula was proposed for two distinct reasons: activating identity building, nation building leading to global citizenship education and enhancing the literacies of students. This strategy was activated by the then VC's concerns about the calibre of the graduates that the UoT was producing, based on his observations and experiences with the different stakeholders, since joining the UoT. The VC arrived at the UoT after the commencement of the CRP. He saw what was happening at the institution as an opportune time to reconceptualise and re-imagine what a UoT curriculum could be.

At a philosophical level, the university leader raised critical existential and educational questions about living, learning, doing, being and becoming: for the university and its people. In current times of complexity and uncertainty, he was posturing ideas/debates about ‘what knowledge is of most worth?’, and ‘what should/could students at erstwhile Technikons be learning and how, in preparation for life, citizenship and lifelong learning?’ At a pragmatic level, his position was motivated by his interactions with students and the needs of industry, where employers were reporting general dissatisfaction with the critical lack of soft skills displayed by the graduates. In addressing employer concerns about graduates’ soft skills deficiencies, he asserted the following view below.

You know never once did I get comment that the technical education was not good or that students are not being trained technically. What I got all the time, was that students could not write, they could not kind of express themselves, they had bad work ethics and so on. So, my kind of major concern of course, is that we have to integrate those things into the curriculum. It is a fundamental issue: [it] is where this whole idea about the general education thing came about. [It] is to say that you cannot leave those aspects of learning to chance. [EM1]

He alluded to his many encounters with students at the UoT, where these deficiencies became visible (see Section 5.5.2).

The curriculum shifts were further necessitated by the evolving demands of Industry 4.0 and the 21st century knowledge economy that values adaptability, critical thinking, creativity, innovation, collaboration and interdisciplinary skills, among others. Furthermore, the contemporary knowledge economy no longer guarantees fixed career paths (Altbach, 2016). It became clear that it ‘could not be business as usual’: curriculum ‘disruptions’ were necessary to bring these elements of learning to the centre. This required moving beyond the narrowly vocational curricula to incorporate building other aspects of intellectual growth of students, that are not traditionally contained in the vocational and professional curricula. At the executive level, there was consensus on the necessity of transformation, ensuring graduates possess ‘skills, knowledge, attributes, and values’ for both professional and societal engagement.

While the executives showed consensus about ‘liberalising’ the curriculum, the responses were not homogenous among the different executive managers. How the GE agenda was planned for and implemented in the two faculties at the UoT is expanded in Sections 5.4 and 5.5.

5.4 Espoused approaches for GE integration

This section highlights the critical role of institutional ethos, leadership, and historical context in influencing curriculum decision-making and implementation. By analysing the interplay between the external mandates and the internal dynamics, the narratives aimed to elucidate the complexities of curriculum change, particularly in relation to the integration of GE within the undergraduate curricula. The section seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of how institutional characteristics and collective aspirations can facilitate or hinder meaningful curriculum change in an institution.

5.4.1 Evolution of the GE framework

As mentioned in the previous section, a decision was taken at the executive level to conceptualise the ‘liberal’ framework as “general education”²². The response to why this decision was taken was not crystal. The decision, however, seemed to be aligned to the benchmarking undertaken in the USA and how this aligned with the institutional realities; particularly its utilitarian character. It seems that this had to do with the differing underlying assumptions or orientations, foci, curricular structures, intended outcomes and pedagogical methods. The possible explanation for this decision can be seen in Table 3.2 outlines the distinctions between liberal education (LE), liberal arts education (LAE), and GE (see also Chapter Three). GE is often viewed as acquiring essential skills needed for specific careers. The pragmatic re-orientation acknowledged the socio-economic realities of the predominantly working-class student body, while balancing vocational aspirations with the need for a holistic, transformative education. This perspective aligns with broader scholarship emphasising the integration of LAE/GE into vocational and professional curricula (Altbach, 2016; Sullivan, 2004). The UoT’s initiative reflects the global shift toward balancing specialisation with broader educational objectives, recognising the value of GE in addressing societal and professional demands.

²² The resistance to ‘liberal education’ at the study may have had to do with its association with the western conception of normativising middle class values and culture. This was usually linked with a particular race/class group within the apartheid mentality. Avoidance of the term ‘liberal education’ could have been perhaps to avoid the curriculum renewal being associated with apartheid racist philosophies.

5.4.1.1 From 50% to 30% to 10: 10:10

The decision taken at the executive level was the negotiation of a thirty percent adoption, as opposed to the desired fifty percent.

[The VC] at the time wanted 50% of the curriculum. 50% of the credits to be for general education. We said, “no we cannot do that”. [EM2]

[The DVCTL] negotiated with him and say no, we cannot have a 50% because of the high number of vocational courses that we have. We could see that you could not have a 50% component. So we converted it to a 30% component of curricula. [EM3]

Although there was consensus on the GE agenda as a catalyst for institutional change, at the executive level concerns were raised about the potential disruption it could cause. Internally, the institution was navigating post-merger challenges and undertaking PQM alignment to the HEQSF, creating a state of flux. Participants reported that the academic executive management team expressed apprehension about a backlash from various stakeholders, including the academic community, industry, and professional councils, regarding the scale of proposed changes. Ultimately, executives negotiated a compromise: thirty percent GE integration across undergraduate programmes, divided into ten percent each at the institutional, faculty and programme levels. See Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: GE credit allocation and 30% split

30 % of actual total credits of undergraduate programmes to cover general education		
10% IGE modules comprising of core (compulsory for all students) and distributive (elective) modules.	10% FGE modules comprising of decentralised (elective) modules	10% of GE integrated into the programme modules (analysis of this was outside the scope of this study).
Institution-wide: IGE a. Cornerstone 101 – compulsory core, 12-credits at NQF level 5, for all first year students b. IGE electives x 3 (3-year programme) or x 4 (4-year programme) at NQF levels 5/6/7/8 from outside the faculty	Faculty-wide: FGE a. One elective, minimum 8 credits at NQF level 5 b. Other FGE options covering themes and outcomes at NQF levels 5/6/7/8	Programme-wide: GE is embedded and could include capstone learning experiences.

A key reason for the three-way thirty percent split, was to integrate the student body in the GE curriculum at both the institutional and faculty levels. This was intended to provide students exposure to fields outside their specialisation, integrate the student body and enhance interdisciplinarity in the curriculum, as posited by one participant.

he [the VC] didn't want any student to only have encountered other students in their particular program or even worse or furthermore, only students in their faculty. So it was important that although I came into the Faculty of Health Sciences, I had some engagement with a student in engineering around something or other, and if we could take this as far as it goes, we would ultimately not just be sitting in the same class talking about something which doesn't necessarily relate directly to my profession or his profession. But we could actually be talking about something that relates to both our professions. And we could ultimately come together and talk about it. And I think it's outset, it was just about bringing people together. [FM1]

While the final decisions on the GE framework appeared to be consensual, the findings revealed underlying tensions about its planning. One participant criticised the preoccupation with numerical targets and stated the following.

And then, unfortunately, even that became a number...30% of the credits...So the focus was more about 30% of my curriculum is going to be this and in [...] we kept saying look it does not have to be all these modules. If it is integrated and there are some aspects that are integrated, show us where it is integrated and how it is assessed, and you know that you are addressing general education in the curriculum. [EM2]

The participant highlighted the need to prioritise the transformative goals of the GE vision over bureaucratic metrics and suggested alternative approaches beyond the modular framework. The chosen approach likely reflected the institution's prevailing culture that tended to focus on compliance rather than innovation, according to the same participant.

but I think because that had been said at the outset, because the guideline document had been written in a particular way people and I think again it comes back to the culture, because the culture has been established if this is what is said then that is what you have to do. The issue of questioning and challenging and so on. [EM2]

This participant highlighted the influence of institutional history and culture in shaping curriculum reform, where adherence to prescribed guidelines often discouraged questioning or challenging prescribed norms. This rigidity contributed to a lack of substantive challenges to the GE framework, particularly in the health sciences faculty. Despite the 'kicking and screaming', there seemed to be a greater level of compliance in the health sciences faculty (see Section 5.5). Contrastingly, the engineering faculty deviated from this pattern, opting to adopt 'their own way' in implementing the framework, as stated below.

I mean engineering challenged and they said, “Well this is how it is integrated in our curriculum”. I do not think any of those programmes there, are 100% compliant with all those modules in general education, except for the compulsory ones. [EM2]

A review of the curriculum documents confirms the ‘non-compliance’ to GE framework in this faculty and is expanded further in Section 5.5.

And then you have... think about staff, where have staff come from. Have staff come out from the same system they are in and teaching or have they broadened their horizons and realised these are the things that we need to do as well from a student’s perspective. [EM2]

The participant raised critical issues about the history and the culture of the UoT sector, including the social conditioning that arose within the convenor system. The participant academics’ backgrounds and their ontological positions, often rooted in the same systems they now teach in, which seemed to have limited their capacity to embrace broader, transformative perspectives. Moreover, many of the academics teaching in UoTs were/are drawn directly from industry. The participant asserted that this recognition was critical in the planning and (re)defining of roles at all levels of the CRP.

Notwithstanding some of the tensions and challenges that surfaced, the participants saw the merit of the GE imperative and fully supported it. They viewed GE as a strategic vehicle for deeper curriculum change, if implemented as envisioned, and capable of meaningfully impacting teaching, learning, and assessment. In addition to the VC’s main motivations, these participants saw other benefits to students. For example, students would now have some choice over the electives; the student body would be integrated through the GE modules, within and across faculties; portability and articulation would be promoted should students want to change their programmes without losing too many credits; and contributing to a distinctive education.

The next section explores the guiding principles for the GE implementation and the form or model/s adopted.

5.4.1.2 GE guiding principles and structure

The overarching aims, objectives and guiding principles of GE are outlined in Appendix 4, showing clearly that the GE plan seemed to be ‘aligned’ with the institutional leader’s vision of broadening the students’ perspectives and educational experiences beyond

disciplinary boundaries; to foster self-awareness in glocal contexts and cultivate critical citizenry.

At the study site, the GE framework included the three models (see Chapter Three). The core model comprised a single, compulsory, twelve-credit module, Cornerstone 101, designed to induct first-year students into higher education (HE) with a focus on self-awareness, social justice, and sustainability. Its purpose was to induct students into HE by fostering self-awareness, social justice, and environmental sustainability (DUT, 2012). The module aimed to provide a common foundation of knowledge while developing student voice, communication skills, and critical thinking as they engaged with contemporary issues.

The distribution model comprised elective modules within seven thematic clusters, allowing students to choose a minimum of three for a three-year qualification or four for a four-year qualification. At the outset, thirty-six institutional GE (IGE) modules were developed across seven thematic clusters, each carrying eight credits. These modules incorporated elements such as quantitative reasoning, writing, and local KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) content. Students were required to complete at least one module from each cluster, with three modules for three-year qualifications and four for four-year qualifications (refer to Appendix 4 - list of IGE modules).

The decentralised model allowed for faculty-specific modules that tailored towards their fields of study, while still offering a broader focus. These faculty GE (FGE) modules would preferably be electives and account for ten percent integration at the faculty level. During the study period, nine FGE modules were developed by the engineering faculty, and nineteen by the health sciences faculty (see Tables 5.4 and 5.5).

The next sections cover the motivations for the imperative to infuse GE into all undergraduate curricula within the UoT and how this aligned to the main models of GE that all engaged with the four main tensions in GE reform.

5.4.2 Activating citizenship education through GE

As alluded to earlier, one of the primary motivations for advancing the GE initiative at the UoT was to foster both national and global citizenship education, while nurturing identity and culture. Identity-forming is multi-layered and begins through engagement with the self, followed by engagement with others, through relevant readings and literature and finally through engagement with the wider world (see Cuseo, 2016 in Chapter Three). The UoT leader emphasised the role of universities worldwide in identity and nation-building leading to developing critical citizenship, particularly in the context of SA's emergent democracy as indicated by himself:

So that is the one thing, it is saying how do we build a nation ...what are the steps? By the way building the nation also means probing the question, how do you build the global citizen? We are all South Africans but we are also human beings. How do you build a [nation?] So that is the one angle. So it is creating this idea of citizenship, both national and global citizenship. By the way, American universities now see themselves as being post-that era; they are already a nation. Then in our case that is not the case, I mean we are still building a nation. [EM1]

Recent debates and discourses surrounding nation-building in post-colonial SA reflect a complex interplay of historical context, current political dynamics and social challenges. As the country approached a significant milestone in the 2024 elections, discussions increasingly focused on unity, reconciliation and the ongoing struggle against inequality. Despite the progress over the last three decades, significant challenges remain: corruption, service delivery failures and public dissatisfaction with governance continue to hinder nation-building efforts. The focus remains on creating a cohesive society that honours its diverse heritage while striving for equitable opportunities for all ([South Africa, 2024](#)). The participant contrasted SA's efforts with American universities that have moved beyond the foundational era of nation-building and fostering a national identity (Xi, 2010).

Now we can say, that is a part of our curriculum... I do not buy that. I mean, we think that nation building is going to happen by osmosis, that somehow, you have got a diverse teaching body. And that somehow everybody learns from that... [EM1]

The above participant advocated for intentional curriculum and pedagogical practices to activate citizenship education and stressed that such a transformation cannot happen by chance or by mere exposure to/in a diverse classroom. By including topics like tolerance, addressing issues such as cultural diversity and gender-based violence in the curriculum, applied ethics, and so on, means that students become equipped

with the knowledge, skills, and values needed to contribute positively to the world and engage critically with the complexities of global issues.

The whole issue around tolerance, the whole issue around gender-based violence and so on, all of those somehow have to find the representation in what students are engaging with. [EM1]

This deliberate effort to use the curriculum as a catalyst for identity and nation-building was echoed across the institution (DAI1, DAI2, DAI3, DAI4a&b, DAI5). Another participant, a faculty manager, highlighted GE's potential to disrupt linear educational paths, broadening students' perspectives and fostering identity development.

[A] student could,, in fact,, come into the system, enter a department, and come out three or four years later as the professional or the person skilled for the intended job but never have looked left or right. And never having their perspective, let alone broadened, thrown into disarray. And the notion of the university, I think, is that you taking a person at the age of 18 or 19, where from a psychological perspective, they're starting to form their sense of self and there is a measure of disarray that needs to be created. Things need to be thrown into the air a little bit so that we can see how the pieces drop in a different way and that, in many ways, moulds our adult identity. Very critical time, from a psychological perspective, and I think the Gen Ed was a means of actively creating conflict, in the mildest sense of the word. [FM1]

This participant was asserting the potential of GE to serve as a tool that allows students to engage with diverse ideas and experiences, ultimately contributing to the moulding of their identities. The participant critiqued the siloed nature of Technikon curricula, which focused narrowly on professional training and lacked opportunities for broader perspectives or diverse thinking. He identified the purpose of GE as fostering intellectual growth by introducing constructive conflict, exposing students to diverse subjects, and encouraging interactions with peers from different professional backgrounds.

[A]lthough I came into the faculty [...], I had some engagement with a student in [another faculty] ... we could actually be talking about something that relates to both our professions...I have to play with difference. And in playing with difference, it makes me stronger in my own identity, when I finally come to it." And so, I think that this was what GenEd was. [FM1]

This concern was also expressed by one of the executives.

In the past, students had little or no idea of what happened in other faculties, students each just went their different ways, each with their own disciplines. [EM3]

From the outset, it was about wanting students to engage with other students in their faculties or other faculties. It was argued that this approach would contribute to helping students grapple with difference, ultimately fostering a stronger sense of identity through varied experiences.

The UoT leader advocated for exposing students to African literature to shape identity. Drawing from his experience in the USA, he stressed literature could simultaneously promote a sense of SA identity and global awareness. He stressed the importance of building this aspect of intellectual growth and student development that was not contained traditionally contained in PoC. The VC was advocating that the GE curriculum could create spaces for young individuals to engage in SA literature and literary works that help shape identities.

...it is such a frightening thing that well in 2011 when I spoke to 7000 young first years, what I got from that was interaction, not a single student of that 7000 have learnt Zakes Mda²³, not a single student! And I said to myself, how can you have so many South Africans who do not know our own literature. [EM1]

These concerns underscored the importance of exposing students to local literary works to foster critical thinking, empathy, and a deeper connection to their cultural roots. As the VC explained, such engagement promotes agency and activism, empowering students as both local and global citizens. At the same time, the institutional leader was advocating that this would produce double outcomes of developing the students' literacy skills (see next section). It seems that the charismatic leader was advocating for a GE model that holds elements of the traditional/classical liberal arts curriculum.

Now, by the way, you can bring those things together, so you can, you know, you can use literature as a way of introducing students to the idea of a South African identity and a global identity, bringing those things together and kind of getting them to work together. [EM1]

When examining the IGE modules basket, it seems there was little attempt to include the traditional liberal arts and it seems like only one module, called *Literacies through Literature*, was developed for the IGE module basket. Perhaps, this had to do with the limited capacity or professional kudos at the UoT, to develop modules in the social sciences and humanities. Perhaps it had more to do with what liberal arts means in the Global South, where it is usually more aligned to democracy, social justice, identity formation and citizenship. Notwithstanding, it seems that concerted efforts were made in the GE modules that were developed, to include local content and bring in these discourses. However, this was especially visible in the core module, Cornerstone 101 and few other modules (see Appendix 4); as confirmed by one of the participants.

²³ Zakes Mda is a SA novelist, poet and playwright, who has won major SA and British literary awards for his novels and plays. His most popular book is his first novel "*Ways of Dying*" (1995) - [Zakes Mda - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zakes_Mda)

What he [the VC] was saying was, do we know our South African literature? And are our students even engaging in SA authors and literatures? And that is what we have tried to do in the Cornerstone [101] module and then quite a few of our modules, looking at what it is that we should be [doing] and who we should be reading and engaging with. [EM3]

One faculty manager adopted a more pragmatic stance, extending the argument towards balancing the curriculum towards the public good.

*You need to become aware of your province, your history [...] of society [...] of the environment. In other words, there are that are a range of issues that impact directly on the quality of life and the quality of society. **And one's profession does not necessarily train you for that** [my emphasis added]. *It's all with self-interest, pretty much self-interest and so the GE was to break that.* [FM2] [my emphasis added]*

The participants argued the need for GE to broaden professional education beyond the utility discourse to incorporate learning about one's local history/location/content to not only support identity building but to connect the educational experience to global societal and global concerns. Notably, decolonisation and decoloniality gained prominence from the 2015/2016 student protests in SA. These decolonisation discourses were included in the revised institution Strategic Plan 2.0 (DUT, 2017) and included in the revised institution Strategic Plan 2.0 (DUT, 2017) under the auspices of the new VC in 2016/7. These strategic and transformative initiatives may have been integrated into the enacted curriculum, but are not visible in the official curriculum. It is important to note that the notion of a liberal arts or GE agenda is understood differently in the Global South, where the focus is more aligned to equity issues of identity formation and citizenship, democracy and social justice.

An interrogation of institutional and GE planning documents revealed that the compulsory core module, Cornerstone 101, aligned with themes of identity and nation-building as outlined in the seven clusters (see Annexure 8). Modules such as Cultural Diversity, Equality & Diversity, and Violence & Non-Violence reflect the UoT's commitment to fostering critical thinking, civic engagement, and identity building. By incorporating local (KZN) content, these modules aim to educate students as informed decision-makers who contribute to their communities, society, and the world, promoting values like democracy, justice, equality, and social cohesion. This approach balances education's practical utility with intellectual and personal growth, emphasising the interplay between private and public good. The second agenda of GE building the literacies of students is discussed in the next section.

5.4.3 Activating the new literacies through GE

A second important motivation for the GE initiative was to enhance the undergraduate students' academic literacies, including communication, quantitative reasoning and writing skills. The GE guidelines emphasised the development of "*written and oral communicative competence in English, mathematical and/or quantitative reasoning, analytical and critical inquiry and technology applications*," [DA12] (see also Annexure 7). These goals were reinforced by the UoT leader, who highlighted deficiencies in the students' numeracy skills through examples.

... you cannot have young people graduating who have not got the faintest idea of how to do simple numeracy things. I can remember the SRC president one day making a statement in a big crowd that the fees have gone up by 18%, 17.5%!... So the tuition fees went up by 7.5 % and the residences went up by 10% and he added those together...By the way he was an accounting student, right! And I just thought to myself, 'you know there is something fundamentally wrong here!' [EM1]

This recognition of the critical role of numeracy in HE stems from the concerns and considerations of the literacies of students within the context of the largely under-developed basic school education system in SA.

Writing was another area of focus, with concerns raised about the lack of emphasis in prior curricula. Internally, there was a push for curriculum design to foreground writing in the discipline, as these concerns were emanating from programme reviews, as posited by one executive.

But it was also about things like writing in the curriculum. within your respective disciplines and modules whatever you are doing there...So do we focus on writing and that comes back again to curriculum design. [EM2]

These concerns were magnified by the feedback from industry about the students'/graduates' lack of literacy skills, and in particular, their ability to write reports.

[F]or God's sake, teach your students how to write! You know, that was a very damning thing. So, they were saying... of them said to me, it really does not make [sense], I really cannot ask a student to write a report now because that report will have to be rewritten. [EM1]

These latter competences are repeatedly reported as under-developed amongst school-leavers. If these skills are not developed in undergraduate education, then they linger into the world of work or the world of postgraduate studies. The UoT leader stressed the need for a deliberate, structured approach to improving writing skills, linked to reading South African and African literature. He saw the value in reading literature as a relatively high-ended skill compared to the basic literacy of reading for comprehension (see previous section).

The under-preparedness of students entering the SAHE system is evidenced in the results of the international assessments that evaluate education outcomes in mathematics and science, namely, TIMMS²⁴, SACMEQ²⁵ and PIRLS²⁶. These studies generally argue that basic education does not produce adequate comparative literacies to read and interpret written text (usually in English), numeracy, and so on. These studies flag the educational inequalities that are still persistent in post-apartheid SA, showing wide variations among scholars. On the other hand, one must consider the challenges of literacies to cope with post-school pedagogies compared to the basic pedagogies in basic education (primary and secondary schooling). This has serious implications for the UoT that draws the bulk of its student population from quintile 1 to 3 schools²⁷.

Beyond the academic and information literacies, literacies discourse is magnified in the context of developing 21st century literacies skills that include digital and technological literacies, media and visual literacies, critical literacies, and collaborative literacies. The GE agenda was recognised as key to addressing the prior deficiencies and enhancing the literacies of students. These concerns spurred the development of at least two IGE modules to address the quantitative reasoning across the undergraduate programme. All GE modules, at the institutional, faculty and programme levels, had to embed these critical skills into the curriculum. Programmes were required to integrate and assess these skills to prepare graduates for the demands of evolving economies, particularly in the context of 4IR and 5IR.

²⁴ TIMMS – Trends in International Mathematics and Sciences Study – assesses mathematics and sciences knowledge of learners at the 4th and 8th grades globally, with SA participating since 1995. In 2019, learners in grade 5 and 9 participated. The results from TIMMS are instrumental for policymakers, educators and researchers in understanding educational quality and making informed decisions about curriculum and teaching methods in schools.

²⁵ SACMEQ – Southern and Eastern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality focuses on assessing the quality of education in Southern and Eastern Africa, primarily examining the reading and mathematics skills among Grade 6 learners.

²⁶ PIRLS – Similarly, the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study – is a significant international assessment that evaluates reading comprehension among 9-to-10-year olds in different countries.

²⁷ Quintile 1 to 3 schools – In SA, the quintile system categorises public schools based on the socio-economic status of the surrounding communities. This classification is crucial for determining funding and resource allocations to these schools, aiming to address the historical inequalities in the SA basic education system. Quintile 1 to 3 are poorest of schools comprising approximately 60% of the public schools in SA.

An analysis of institutional and GE planning documents reveals that while the university was calling this imperative GE, there seems to be a conflation with liberal education, and to a lesser degree with LAE. This is visible in the overall focus on the holistic development of students, curriculum focus, structure, and flexibility.

Having detailed the planning and rationale behind the GE initiative at the UoT, the focus now shifts to the participants' understandings, experiences and enactment of the GE plan. How this 'institutional guiding force' influenced their curriculum decisions is explored.

5.5 Actual approaches of the GE integration

The previous section discussed the UoT planning of the GE initiative as a catalyst for institutional transformation. While planning at the administrative level was outlined clearly in the GE guidelines, the data reveal nuanced perspectives among the executives and faculty managers regarding the GE imperative's value. This section provides an integrated analysis of the faculty of responses to the institutional directive, focusing on the differences in implementation, leadership's role in managing change, and the alignment between institutional and operational priorities.

The analysis began with an exploration of the participants' perspectives on how the GE imperative was understood and enacted at the operational level, highlighting the influence of the institutional, programmatic and biographical forces on curriculum decisions. This was followed by a review of the curriculum documents to assess the extent of GE implementation as planned. Findings revealed a significant mismatch between curriculum planning at the executive level and implementation at the operational level, with faculty responses varying widely. Both faculties did not comply with the institutional GE guidelines for implementation with respect to the ten percent IGE module insertions at institutional level, for three-year and four-year qualifications (see Tables 5.2 and 5.3 below). How each faculty interpreted and understood the mandate is further unfolded in next section. Leadership emerged as a critical factor in the success of GE implementation, a theme explored further in section 5.5.3. Here, the focus is on the responses in the two faculties, from the perspectives of the curriculum champions, including insights drawn from the curriculum documents at the programme levels.

Table 5.2: Institutional GE (IGE) modules in engineering curricula

	Bachelor of Engineering Technology in:		
	PGE1	PGE2	PGE3
<i>3 year degrees at NQF Level 7, with a total minimum of 420 credits</i>			
CORE IGE MODULE:			
Cornerstone 101 – 12 credits	✓	✓	✓
DISTRIBUTIVE/ELECTIVE IGE MODULES			
Cluster 1 – 8 credits	x	x	x
Cluster 2 – 8 credits	x	x	x
Cluster 3 – 8 credits	x	x	x
IGE TOTAL CREDITS	12	12	12

See Appendix 4 for full details of the IGE module options as they pertain to the themes and clusters.

Table 5.3: Institutional GE (IGE) modules in health sciences curricula

	Bachelor of Health Sciences in:			
	PGHS1	PGHS2	PGHS3	PGHS4
<i>4-year professional degrees at NQF Level 8, with a total minimum of 480 credits</i>				
CORE IGE MODULE:				
Cornerstone 101 – 12 credits	✓	✓	✓	✓
DISTRIBUTIVE IGE MODULES				
Cluster 1 – 8 credits	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster 2 – 8 credits	✓	✓	✓	✓
Cluster 3 – 8 credits	✓	✓	✓	✓
IGE TOTAL CREDITS	36	36	36	36

See Appendix 4 for full details of the IGE module options as they pertain to the themes and clusters.

5.5.1 Engineering: Implementation of the GE imperative

This section is an exploration of the nuanced responses of the engineering faculty to the GE imperative, highlighting the tensions and contestations that arose during the implementation and its implications for curriculum change.

5.5.1.1 Minor resistance to 'encroachment' but non-compliant

Curriculum champions in the engineering faculty acknowledged that the BEngTech programmes were primarily driven by the professional body requirements. This included the integration of complementary studies (CS), internationally and nationally recognised criteria, to broaden engineering education. This is discussed further in Chapter Six. While the inclusion of both CS and GE core was seen to be accepted at faculty level, resistance emerged at the department/programme level, where some academics perceived GE as encroaching on core disciplinary content. Rather than seeing the value of GE in enhancing the student experience and producing 'well-rounded' graduates.

it became easier to implement because it was a requirement but there was a fair amount of resistance...towards taking away what people considered core. [CCE1]
And we welcomed the transition, well I would not say everyone welcomed it, it would be a lie... There was a lot of contestation... The bigger tension...there was a lot of resistance. [CCE2]

Some academics saw this as an intrusion and a top-down-approach that they were forced to comply as expressed by a participant.

So, the university decided on it, and the faculty agreed to it. And then, the departments have to go along and say okay, we agree with it. [CCE3]

The final accredited engineering curricula revealed only the compulsory core module, showing non-compliance with the university directive of ten percent inclusion at the institutional level. The remaining GE modules included in the curriculum were the FGE modules that seemed to comply with professional body requirements more than it did with the GE requirements (see Table 5.4). In each of the engineering curricula, FGE modules were compulsory, which showed a rigid, prescribed curricula. The analysis of GE inclusion at the programme level was outside the scope of the study.

5.5.1.2 Complementary studies and/vs general education

A review of the curriculum documents revealed that none of the three engineering programmes full adhered to the GE directive. As indicated previously, the sole IGE compulsory core module, Cornerstone 101, was included. This module incorporated critical elements critical elements, namely, personal, social, and cultural values, environmental conservation, and ethics. However, the engineering curricula fell short of the ten percent IGE requirement at the institutional level (refer to Table 5.1). The remaining eight credit modules, developed as FGEs, aligned with the CS requirements of the professional body (refer to Table 5.4). Many of these FGE were common across

the BEngTech and other programmes in the faculty. This implied that at least student integration across the faculty was possible. However, the absence of other IGE electives in these programmes limited inter-faculty student engagement, one of the key desired outcomes of the GE agenda.

Table 5.4: Decentralised faculty GE (FGE) modules in engineering curricula

DECENTRALISED FGE MODULES	Bachelor of Engineering Technology in:		
	PGE1	PGE2	PGE3
3 year degrees at NQF Level 7, with a total minimum of 420 credits			
Technical Literacy	✓	✓	✓
Computing and IT	✓	✓	✓
Principles of Management	✓	✓	X
Project Management	✓	✓	X
Sociology of Work	x	x	x
Management Accounting for Engineers	x	x	x
Financial Accounting for Engineers	x	x	x
French for Sciences & Technology*	✓*	x	x
Mandarin for Sciences & Technology*	✓*	x	x
Environmental Engineering	x	x	x
Academic Literacy	x	x	x
Innovation Management & Entrepreneurship 3A	x	x	✓
Engineering Ethics & Professional Skills 3B	x	x	✓
FGE TOTAL CREDITS	32	32	32

* No credit allocation to these FGE electives.

Despite these limitations, the FGE modules seemed to incorporate institutional GE themes to promote professional development and civic responsibility. This aligned with the institutional mission to equip students for personal growth, professional success, and societal participation. This is noted in the faculty's reflective reports on curriculum change.

[E]xpected to maximise students' capacity to explore and exploit educational, entrepreneurial, and career opportunities, to develop themselves professionally, and to participate in society as responsible citizens. [DAPE1, DAPE2, DAPE3]

The CRP in the engineering faculty pre-dated institutional processes, driven by compliance with the HEQSF²⁸ (see section 5.3, see also Chapter Two) but more importantly, the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA) professional body's standards. The additional transition from diplomas to degrees (spearheaded by the shifts in identity towards a UoT and the GE initiative) were seen as opportunities to incorporate the soft skills and professional attributes crucial for modern engineers. Two curriculum champions highlighted that GE principles were indirectly integrated through CS.

I think it was, I think [the CRP] was not a driver in engineering because engineering had to comply with the new [professional body] standards. [CCE1]

[B]ecause we were ahead and the curriculum was somewhat sorted out and having identified our complementary studies modules, we were able to say "well this is how we will incorporate GE into the programme. [CCE2]

This decision could be seen as both strategic and/or expedient, potentially elucidating the faculty's stance on the integration of GE relative to approaches adopted in other faculties.

[W]hen the [UoT] graduate attributes were developed, we could show there was an overlap with the engineering council graduate attributes. Because...like I said they adapted those graduate attributes...we did a matrix where we showed we just follow the ECSA graduate attributes and implicitly we are fulfilling the [UoT] graduate attributes. [CCE1]

The alignment between the GE imperative, UoT graduate attributes, and the ECSA standards seemed to be a key justification for the faculty approach. At the executive level too, this faculty's approaches seemed to be received favourably in some ambits, as one participant declared.

And engineering had their approach. They were very clear because they are governed by professional bodies and international accord. So, the international standards are there even in so far as GE is concerned... and they were very clear that they can do curriculum development on their own and because it is a profession that is strong, not only within the institution but nationally. They have their national networks which does not prescribe to any institution. But they have the ECSA standards which they work according to that. But within the faculty they have a group of people who actually can drive this within the faculty. [EM2]

Participants attributed the 'kudos' for curriculum decision-making in this faculty to the ECSA standards, their professional standing as professional board members and scholars, and their networks both nationally and internationally. It was clear that in this faculty, the pre-occupation with credits was 'absent'. Instead, there was a focus

²⁸ HEQF was established in 2007, although revised HEQSF was promulgated in 2013. Curriculum work in the engineering faculty pre-dated the curriculum renewal project at the study site, which began in 2010.

on what standards and graduate attributes that were being promoted/nurtured in the programme

While the FGE modules addressed CS and some GE goals, their compulsory inclusion restricted student choice. One participant critiqued this approach.

Creating the GE module should give the student an opportunity to select a relevant module... But here the departments decided... it has not given the student the choice to do something he would like to do. [CCE1]

This prescriptive curriculum design limited opportunities for innovation and interdisciplinarity: confining electives to discipline-specific specialisations, professional studies and detracting from the GE objectives.

The engineering faculty developed FGE modules that enhance the literacy and communication skills of students, aligning with industry demands for technically proficient graduates who are adept in writing and teamwork. The inclusion of foreign language modules demonstrates efforts to internationalise the curriculum and improve global employability across the continent and beyond. However, this inclusion was limited to only one programme in the study. Other FGE modules seemed to focus more on professional studies requirements, namely, management, economics, computing and information technology (IT) instead of GE. This lack of GE or liberal arts components, at both the institutional and faculty levels, restricted interdisciplinary exploration and student integration, detracting from GE objectives. The inclusion of the compulsory core module meant that only first-year students would experience student-body integration.

The engineering curricula exemplify the tension between disciplinary depth and interdisciplinary aims. While specialist knowledge fosters technical expertise, interdisciplinary approaches cultivate holistic problem-solving and societal understanding, both essential for 21st century engineers. This complexity underscores the challenges of balancing institutional transformation goals with professional standards. The engineering faculty's efforts, although incomplete, reflect an evolving commitment to producing well-rounded graduates capable of addressing diverse societal and professional challenges.

One of the curriculum champions in the engineering faculty expressed a desire for expanded opportunities for a deeper engagement with the GE agenda. Earlier the same participant defended the faculty's position on meeting GE imperative through the inclusion of CS.

I do wish there will be more opportunities here, I think we haven't gone far enough with GE...Whereas here, I think maybe we have done it almost in a Technikon style... I have looked at some of the GE [modules] and I think we should be offering straight up philosophy, straight up psychology"...I would have liked... some proper liberal arts... but it would have been a major mind shift, which I don't think we were ready for [CCE2]

It is clear that he indicated a preference for a different engineering curriculum. He advocated for the inclusion of traditional liberal arts disciplines like philosophy and psychology as examples, implying a desire for more rigorous, stand-alone GE modules, rather than integrated or diluted ones. He also critiqued the 'Technikon-style' approach, suggesting that perhaps their decisions may have limited the desired breadth in the engineering curriculum. Lastly, this participant commented that the institution was not ready for this level of disruption, as significant shifts of mind-set and institutional culture was necessary, but not feasible in this wave of curriculum change.

Although GE aimed to provide transformative educational experiences, as exemplified by innovative core module, Cornerstone 101, concerns were raised regarding the implementation of the distributive IGE modules. A curriculum champion, who subsequently served as the GE coordinator, argued that many IGE modules closely resembled disciplinary specific modules in terms of content and learning outcomes that could have been offered by other academic departments. This critique highlighted the view that such modules diluted the original intent of integrating GE or the liberal arts into the curriculum. He suggested that these modules would have been more appropriately positioned as department electives rather than part of the GE framework.

5.5.2 Health sciences: Implementation of the GE imperative

This section is an exploration of the nuanced responses from the health sciences faculty to the GE imperative, highlighting the tensions and contestations that arose during the implementation and its implications for curriculum change.

5.5.2.1 Stronger resistance to perceived 'erosion' but more 'compliant'

In the health sciences faculty, voices of discontent were particularly pronounced, with many faculty members emphasising the sense of imposition associated with the GE directive. Various curriculum champions' responses reflect their strong negative perception about.

It [GE] was imposed on us...and it was horrible...the whole GenEd stories was a bit of a contention, big spot, because it was eating up into the credits of our core modules... and it still hurts us today. [CCHS1]

For me GenEd just messed up everything...It is imposed on us. The students do not want it; the staff do not want it! [CCHS2]

GenEd, nobody likes GE! [CCHS3]

...a lot of people was opposed to it... so we did not have a choice. [CCHS4]

I think I am still sceptical about the internal forces, in terms of , how we came up with... you know it is my pain, general education. [CCHS6]

Similar to the responses in engineering, these responses underscored a shared perception of GE as an 'unexpected and imposed force,' that undermined autonomy and created operational challenges. Academics expressed frustration over the reduction of core disciplinary content to accommodate GE, which they saw as misaligned with their professional priorities. Concerns also emerged regarding the disproportionate allocation of credits to GE, with the mandated "thirty percent" directive described as excessive and diluting the focus of academic programmes, as expressed by the participants.

It was a ridiculous amount of credits...a huge chunk! [CCHS4]

It has now diluted the whole focus...GenEd is like the tail wagging the dog. [CCHS2]

I think every Department battled with credits. Um? So. I think it was a wrestle. [FM1]

Despite some recognition of the noble intent behind GE, particularly the vision of the VC, its implementation was widely criticised, as evident in the remarks of participants.

If it was run in the way envisaged by the previous VC...it was going to elevate everyone's consciousness...But now, it is more of an impediment than anything else. [CCHS1]

I do I think I think GenEd is as an aspect of the [UoT's] curricula is really important. I think the way it's being implemented currently is no way near its potential. [FM1]

At the operational level, the GE mandate was increasingly viewed as a constraint rather than a catalyst for academic growth. This critique reflects a broader disillusionment with the GE agenda, which many faculty members believed was misunderstood and poorly implemented. This sentiment was particularly evident within the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS), where leadership challenges may have played a role (see section 5.5.3).

The resistance to GE in the FHS appeared to be tied to the tensions and discomfort with institutional/curriculum change intertwined with the challenge of independent decision-making. This is seen in contrast to the external guidance and ‘clout’ that the engineering faculty relied upon. The below indicates this resistance.

Well, it's really about people's perceptions and behaviour and baggages that they've come from the past. It's the resistance to transformation or resistance to change. It's a discomfort... it's really the feeling of disempowerment. You're not feeling empowered because you have to read, think, and if you have to rethink, you have to re-educate yourselves [FM1]

So, I think there was some anger about being forced to having to think about things that you never had to think about before. And again, this is not generalising. It happened in pockets. In some faculties, it was more overt than in others [EM2]

These perspectives reflect broader challenges associated with adapting to transformative educational initiatives. These professional fields in health sciences are what are considered the newer regions and not established fields like medicine, law and engineering. Despite the ‘kicking and screaming’ about having to rethink PoC, the FHS seemed to be more compliant to the GE directive, compared to FEBE. This is explored further in the next section.

5.5.2.2 Balancing the traditional imperatives with the GE imperatives

This section is an exploration of the health sciences faculty’s responses to the GE imperative, emphasising significant cognitive and structural shifts in curriculum offerings. Most of the health sciences programmes transitioned from a 360-credit, NQF level six national diploma to a 480-credit, NQF level eight professional degree. However, this shift was perceived as superficial rather than substantial reconceptualisation driven by an internal, purposeful vision, as suggested by one of the participants.

For many Departments, it was not a reconceptualisation. It was a rebranding of a package that we've been implementing for very long time and even in the [faculty], there are programmes that are pretty much the same as they were. [FM1]

This view was supported by claims made by one curriculum champion who underscored the lack of intentionality and planning in the curriculum change processes, describing it as arbitrary.

I think from my own point of view, I think we were more of 'thumb sucking'.... if you look at the programme now. We just put it here, because we were asked to do something; there was no thinking behind it, which is for me a big issue. [CCHS2]

Executives echoed these concerns too, emphasising that the implementation process often prioritised outputs/products over the process/journeying of curriculum-making.

*I think there was technical buy in. To many staff, it was compliance. [EM2]
I think people should realise that curriculum change is equally about the process and the product...a lot of the focus was on the product... Really understanding that word 'currere' is about journeying and understanding that it is a road map and that it is a road that you have got to travel.... I do not know I could be wrong but there was much more focus on compliance. [EM3]*

These perspectives highlighted the concerns that the curriculum change process was focused more on compliance with 'external' directives, rather than on meaningful curricular innovation. Notably, the GE imperative and other institutional initiatives were also seen as 'external'. Such sentiments suggest that for some programmes the process simply adapted existing structures to fit new mandates rather than rethinking or re-imagining the curriculum in transformative ways.

Integration of GE into the health sciences curricula faced significant challenges, primarily balancing the broader educational goals of GE with the specialised requirement for professional training. Contestations emerged over the thirty percent GE allocation, with many curriculum champions and many academics perceiving it as encroaching on core disciplinary content. In real terms, this shift from a three-year to a four-year qualification meant that the additional year was going to be usurped by GE, as evident in the below comments of three participants.

The whole GenEd stories was a bit of a contention, big spot, because it was eating up into the credits of our core modules... the biggest issue was GenEd credits which we could not do anything about,... We had to now cut credits from our core modules, and it still hurts us today. [CCHS1]

...to actually include GenEd modules in the curriculum. So, because most of us felt it is taking lots of our credits which are discipline credits. [CCHS3]

30% ...was huge because it is like one third... there was a lot of tension but how do we produce all of these content into this number of credits now. [CCHS5]

Internally, this resulted in what participants described as a fight for credits: individual departments prioritised their modules at the expense of the holistic curriculum vision, as recounted by a participant.

I mean it was a very collegial process within the department. Except that there was only one thing that was an issue. The fight for credits. Like everyone thinks their [module] is important and it was always down to me to bring it to everyone's attention that it is not about credits, it is not about your subject, it is about the programme. We have to look at it in entirety [...] it was like a bun fight for credits. [CCHS4]

However, this tension was not limited to internal debates. It extended to external engagements with professional bodies and industry stakeholders, who often resisted changes that deviated from traditional educational models. This was expressed by the faculty manager, who has had to deal with challenges with different professional bodies in health sciences.

In how we sell this to our statutory and regulatory bodies? ...many of these people are not necessarily in education and they are probably more likely to stick with that idea that if it didn't happen the way, we're not educating the way I was educated, something's missing...And then you have to sell to them that, in fact, at least conceptually, there's 30% of what we would traditionally have been teaching. We are now not teaching, we're giving them a whole 'lot of fluff' which is not professionally aligned. [FM1]

While this may sound like an exaggeration, what this participant highlighted was the power exerted by both the professional bodies and members of the professional and academic communities themselves, who were dogmatic about the traditional approaches used in medical or health sciences education. On the other hand, other participants also recognised a lack of curriculum expertise among other professional board members. Some Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) professional board members on the education team, who accredit the newly proposed qualifications, frequently lack expertise in curriculum development. Instead, they often rely on outdated paradigms and/or so-called 'experts' from other UoTs, as evident in the comment of a curriculum champion.

[V]ery few people on the board at that time, the education board [of the HPCSA], actually understood anything about curriculum. They relied on people from [another UoT] and they called it their...what did they call it...I forget the name now. But anyway, they like to lead them. The quality people from [another UoT] to lead them. So [another UoT] was also looking after their own interests at that time and it did not make for a... all collegial process, but ja... we got it done. So, they basically listened to whatever [the other UoT] had to say. [CCHS4]

This reliance on so-called 'experts' from former convenor Technikons who were perceived as the authoritative custodians of curricular expertise, raised concerns

about the impartiality of the accreditation/endorsement process. This dependence was seen to be potentially undermining a fully collaborative and collegial approach.

In this faculty, the integration of GE into the curriculum emerged as a contested and complex issue, reflecting the varying levels of commitment and understandings among stakeholders. The faculty manager described the curriculum structure as a “*site of struggle*” (see below comment by (FM1), suggesting that curriculum designers were reluctant to fully incorporate GE requirements. Instead, they often “*found ways of hiding or appropriating*” (or ‘*fihla*’²⁹) GE credits to meet the mandated thirty percent, without genuinely engaging with its principles.

And I think that was a struggle [...] So I think if you went into the curriculum... and did the sums, you would find that there was probably more than 10% of embedded curriculum, and there is probably significantly less than 10% of institutional GenEd. And even the so called GenEd modules that are selected are modules that you would have said, well, we could have had this as a module in any case, but we let them do it with other people. So, there was a fiddling of GenEd. [FM1]

This could be true of the ten percent requirements at the faculty and programme levels. As indicated, the GE integration at the programme level was not examined in depth in this study.

Despite the strong resistance and the high levels of contestations about the GE imperative, the findings revealed that there was a semblance of change, albeit a veneer or surface change. Table 5.3 above shows the compulsory core IGE module and at least three distributive IGE modules from the distinctive clusters in each of the select programmes. However, issues such as learning outcomes overlaps and ownership led to revisions and the introduction of discipline-specific or professional studies options (see Table 5.5). Similar to engineering, some modules were centrally developed by the health science faculty. They are generic in nature and ‘complementary’ to all health sciences disciplines. In the FHS, three out of the four select programmes showed full compliance with the FGE integration (refer to Table 5.5 below). In one of the BHSc programmes, there was an undersubscription of the FGE curricula, possibly due to the strong force of the professional body requesting that the GE modules be removed from the final study level.

²⁹ Fihla – an isiZulu term meaning ‘to hide or conceal’ - [fihla - Wiktionary, the free dictionary](#)

5.5.3 Leadership matters

University culture becomes particularly visible during periods of change, often resisting initiatives perceived as imposed or inadequately consulted (Jansen, 2005). Resistance to change is typical among those comfortable with the status quo, a pattern evident at the UoT. Curriculum champions expressed dissatisfaction with the perceived bureaucratic nature of the GE initiative, especially the mandatory thirty percent inclusion of GE content in all undergraduate programmes. Many experienced conflicts in curriculum practices, being pulled in multiple directions. This theme is further explored in subsequent chapters.

5.5.3.1 Institutional support and task team formation

Recognising the need for structural support, a GE task team (GETT) was formed. GETT comprised curriculum champions from each faculty and representatives from student and academic support services, including a student representative, which was a challenge. GETT's mandate included steering of the GE initiative, developing guidelines, and liaising between faculties and institutional leadership.

There are three aims of the Senate-approved GE guidelines.

- i. To cultivate an engaged and critical citizenry in the context of an emerging and fragile democracy to promote the development of graduate attributes – to make connections across disciplines and their experiences in formal and informal spaces.
- ii. To prepare students for an increasingly diverse and complex globalised work environment, and to foster the students' ability to think beyond their disciplines/professions
- iii. To build a student-centred educational experience embedded in the local context - by promoting students' awareness of themselves and the world around them

Table 5.5: Decentralised faculty GE (FGE) modules in health sciences curricula

DECENTRALISED FACULTY GENERAL EDUCATION (FGE) MODULES	Bachelor of Health Sciences in:			
	PGHS1	PGHS2	PGHS3	PGHS4
	<i>4 year professional degrees at NQF Level 8, with a total minimum of 480</i>			
	<i>credits</i>			
FGE TOTAL CREDITS	24	48	48	48
Issues of Gender & Society in Health Care	x	✓	✓	✓
Environmental Awareness for Health Professionals	x	✓	x	✓
Personal and Professional Development Levels 1 to IV	✓	✓	✓	x
Health Sciences Research Levels I & II	x	x	x	n/a
isiZulu for Health Professionals Levels I to III	x	x	x	✓
Professional Practice & Management I	x	✓	x	n/a
Educational Techniques	✓	✓	✓	✓
Ethics and Medical Law	✓	✓	x	n/a
Management Practice/Small Business Management	x	x	x	x
Contemporary Social Issues in SA Child & Youth Care	x	x	✓	x
Foundations of Professional Practice	x	x	x	x
Fundamental Environmental Health	x	x	x	n/a

Note: *FGE modules were electives, so more than one option at each study level.*

As indicated in the previous section/s, the UoT adopted a hybrid GE model comprising core, elective/distributive and decentralised components supported by seven thematic clusters (refer to Appendix 4). The core model was limited to one 12-credit IGE module, namely, Cornerstone 101. The distribution/elective model, on the other hand, allowed choices from the approved clusters. The third is what the UoT calls the decentralised model, as it pertains to the faculty or department decisions on the GE requirements for their programmes.

Faculty buy-in was encouraged through remuneration for GE module development at institutional and faculty levels. However, as shown in the previous section, this approach was not ideal for two reasons. Firstly, some of the modules that were developed within faculties were seen to not necessarily align with the vision for a liberal arts or GE curriculum. Secondly, ownership became a challenge as faculties/departments from within which these modules originated showed a reluctance to teach, citing high enrolments and workload concerns. These module developers prioritised their departmental over institutional needs. Despite the initial planning, implementation revealed an 'iceberg phenomenon', where surface-level compliance masked underlying tensions and challenges.

A further consideration in the planning was the critical content/knowledge areas to fulfil the aims of the GE. Following consultation with faculties, seven themes were identified that were further categorised into three clusters, as listed in Table 5.1 above. These GE themes aligned with the VC's ultimate vision to broaden and lengthen students' perspectives of the world, fostering a panoramic understanding beyond the discipline/specialisation (Cuseo, 2016; refer to Chapter Three, section 3.7.1). This approach aimed to cultivate critical and comprehensive thinking, guiding students from individual, micro-level perspectives to broader, macro-level understandings of global/universal contexts (Cuseo, 2016). So, a call was made to the UoT academic community to design and develop modules following the seven themes and within the three clusters. Faculty buy-in was encouraged through remuneration for module development, as noted by a participant.

[W]e got academic staff to actually design and develop them with their expertise and we thought that would give them more buy in and ownership. One of the biggest mistakes there was we paid them. We gave staff an incentive... our thinking was if you developed

a module, you will have an interest in the module and the rollout of the module would be easy. [EM3]

However, as shown in the previous section, this approach was not ideal for two reasons. Firstly, some of the modules that were developed within faculties did not necessarily align to the vision for a liberal arts or GE curriculum. Secondly, ownership became a challenge, and workload became an area of contention. The module developers showed a reluctance to teach, citing high enrolments and workload concerns.

But what happened when we started implementing the modules, [...]the first question they asked is, “how many students am I going to teach?” And when we said there is two, three, four hundred students that are taking the module, suddenly it was “I cannot teach the module”, because they were like, “we have got [no] time. [EM3]

These curriculum/module developers prioritised their departmental needs over the institutional needs and teaching in their specialisation over teaching a GE module. Moreover, the departments themselves did not want to lose their ‘specialised’ status or be seen as ‘servicing’ departments. Despite the effort that went into planning, the implementation revealed an ‘iceberg phenomenon’. In other words, surface-level compliance masked underlying tensions and challenges.

Despite all attempts to change the thinking, through negotiating funding for relief or re-allocating the FTEs to the relevant departments, there was very limited uptake. The administrator viewed this generally as fatigue due to the changes that seemed to interpreted as drastically different to what was the ‘known’. In the end, teaching of the GE modules was left largely to postgraduate students and part-time (non-tenured) staff. This is an area of concern that, unfortunately, lies outside the scope of this study.

5.5.3.2 Leadership and faculty dynamics

This study highlighted the intricate dynamics of leadership and faculty roles in curriculum development and transformation within the context of a UoT. It underscored the importance of academics as the primary custodians of the curriculum, requiring their expertise, leadership, and engagement. However, their role is not autonomous; it necessitates institutional support, capacity-building, and facilitation to foster effective curriculum renewal.

[L]eadership at the senior levels is absolutely critical.... this idea that you really have to build kind of a leadership, kind of capacity which builds kind of allegiance and collaboration and collegiality and all that...I mean ultimately, it has got to do with trying to understand how to kind of galvanise the capacity of people, academic staff basically. And really, about saying, you know, what do we have to do to improve the capacity, build their capacity, unleash their capacity, all those kind of things [EM1]

The institutional leader went on further to substantiate the importance of leadership in spurring the transformational change that is desired in an institution. Senior leadership, particularly the executive deans, played a pivotal role in galvanising academic staff and driving institutional transformation. This was emphasised by the university leader.

[S]o totally [a] non-trivial thing! Because, the vice chancellor cannot just flick a switch. It has to happen at the dean level and the deputy dean level and then the heads of school, the heads of department level and so forth...So, it is like saying, "Can we start thinking about how to have a kind of an institutional approach to galvanising this kind of interest to do interesting things?". And that is something which depends absolutely, fundamentally on the deans involved. I mean I have to tell you, that is where the vice chancellor realises that your ability to achieve something really depends on what is sitting underneath [EM1]

This leader emphasised the importance of collaborative leadership approaches, and balancing visionary guidance with decentralised decision-making to empower academic autonomy. However, variability in leadership styles significantly influenced faculty engagement, as expressed by one participant.

[T]he approaches of different deans were different as well, which also influenced what happened in the faculty. The approach of the Dean in [one faculty] did not garner that kind of overwhelming cohesion and support. I know there is a conflict if I am speaking from the outside ...But from a curriculum renewal process, the dean drove the project in the faculty [EM2]

Participant EM2 alerted to a possible explanation for the level of angst and tensions that was experienced in the health sciences faculty. A recurring theme was the struggle to balance academic autonomy with institutional demands. Managerial governance, often imposed rigid structures and accountability mechanisms, was perceived as stifling creativity and responsiveness in this faculty. These forces at the faculty level are likely what gave rise to academics often reverting to familiar methodologies and past personal experiences. Described as "inertial forces," (Samuel, 2008, p, 12) argued that the reverting to the past may have provided comfort amidst external pressures but may have also hindered the desired innovation and change.

While visionary strategies aimed to empower curriculum champions and promote innovation, at the operational level, curriculum champions faced significant obstacles, lack of structured capacity development and competing demands. Many described

their roles as daunting and isolating, highlighting a lack of clarity and preparedness for driving curriculum renewal. For instance, a champion from health sciences noted the absence of robust developmental support, which resulted in feelings of inadequacy and frustration. These sentiments underscore the critical need for leadership to build capacity and foster collaboration at all institutional levels. This highlights a gap in 'change knowledge' or systemic literacies that are critical for navigating institutional transitions effectively.

5.6 Chapter synthesis

This chapter provided a comprehensive exploration of the transformative processes underpinning curriculum change at the UOT as it navigated the transition from a Technikon to a university identity. Central to this discourse is the CRP, which served as a pivotal initiative aimed at redefining the educational ethos and curricular frameworks within the institution. The analysis underscored the necessity of moving beyond traditional technical practices, which have historically prioritised vocational training and skill acquisition, and to embrace a more holistic educational approach that incorporates GE. This shift was not merely a response to the external pressures. It reflects a deeper commitment to fostering critical thinking, interdisciplinary engagement, and societal relevance within the curriculum. The integration of GE into undergraduate PoC at the UOT aimed to cultivate graduates who were proficient in their respective fields as well as equipped to contribute meaningfully to broader societal challenges.

Furthermore, this chapter illuminated the complexities and tensions inherent in curriculum transformation. Through the lens of Samuel's FFM (2008) it highlighted the multifaceted influences. The latter ranged from institutional ethos to individual faculty perspectives and experiences that shape curriculum processes. The findings revealed that while there was a collective aspiration for genuine transformation, there were also significant challenges that included resistance to change and the legacy of entrenched practices from the Technikon era. This chapter emphasised the critical role of leadership, collaboration and capacity building in facilitating effective curriculum renewal and transformation. It advocated for a concerted effort to empower curriculum workers and to foster an environment conducive to innovation and responsiveness. This chapter contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the evolution of HE, reinforcing

the importance of aligning curricular practices with the dynamic needs of society and the aspirations of the institution, as it seeks to define its identity in a rapidly changing SAHE landscape. The next chapter explores the interplay of the multiple macro-contextual forces on curriculum planning and decision-making.

CHAPTER SIX: LEVERAGING THE LIBERAL AGENDA WITHIN THE MACRO-CONTEXTUAL FORCES

"We are all captives of the picture in our head – our belief that the world we have experienced is the world that is." (Walter Lippmann)

6.1 Introduction

The preceding chapter explored the internal forces on curriculum reconceptualisation and decision-making for undergraduate professionally oriented programmes. The diverse underlying principles that inform these dynamics were highlighted. This chapter focuses on the multifaceted external forces that act upon and influence curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making processes at the university of technology (UoT) in the study.

These external forces align with Samuel's (2008) force field model (FFM) that characterised these forces as macro-contextual forces. This chapter expands on this model to encompass the supra or mega forces, including the cosmo-contextual forces (IBE, 2017). Such forces are characterised by the unique socio-political, cultural, and environmental context within which curriculum workers operate, acknowledging that these individuals' decisions are invariably shaped by the broader societal and historical contexts in which they exist and function. I also draw on the concept of layered rationality of curriculum construction to explore the processes involving various levels of engagement in curriculum decision-making, and how these processes interact with the general education (GE) imperative, each guided by distinct rationalities (Ramrathan, 2016). The layers of influence include the overarching national political forces, which were discussed in Chapters One and Two, followed by the institutional forces referred to as the 'management rationality' that was discussed in Chapter Five. Ramrathan (2016) posited that the foundational layer encompasses individuals or groups, statutory or regulatory forces, the world of work and societal influences, each vying for dominance. While this layer reflects the highest demands, it is acknowledged that not all aspirations/desires can be accommodated within the constraints of limited curriculum spaces. Consequently, trade-offs are common, with the more powerful entities exerting greater influence over what is included or excluded from the curriculum.

In an era characterised by rapid societal and technological changes understanding these external influences is crucial for renewing curricula that are both relevant and responsive to the needs of the professional world. This chapter begins by contextualising the UoT within the broader fieldwork of South African higher education (SAHE), particularly in light of the historical shifts which resulted from the abolition of the binary apartheid system. It examines how these institutional transformations have necessitated a re-evaluation of curricular objectives and pedagogical approaches.

A significant aspect of the narratives centres on the role of professional bodies, which serve as both enablers and constraints in curriculum change processes. These organisations are tasked with ensuring the quality and relevance of educational programmes, particularly in fields such as engineering and health sciences. They emphasise the importance of competencies and graduate attributes, ensuring that graduates are technically proficient as well as being equipped with critical thinking, ethical decision-making skills and adaptability to real-world challenges. However, the influence of professional bodies can also impose limitations that stifle curricular innovation, creating a tension between maintaining professional standards and fostering creativity within educational institutions; and sometimes subjugating institutional forces.

Furthermore, the chapter extends to the implications of these changes for student preparedness and the alignment of educational outcomes with industry expectations. By fostering collaboration between educational institutions and industry stakeholders this chapter posits that a more integrated approach to curriculum design can enhance the relevance and responsiveness of higher education in equipping graduates with the requisite skills and knowledge to thrive in an increasingly complex and dynamic job market. The discussion of the role of technology and environmental considerations emphasises the necessity for higher education institutions (HEIs) to adapt to the rapid changes occurring in the global landscape. The integration of technological advancements into educational practices and the incorporation of sustainability principles into curricular frameworks are not merely optional enhancements; they assist in preparing graduates to thrive in a world characterised by constant change and uncertainty.

Curriculum and curriculum change are not neutral assemblages of knowledge, but rather a product of hierarchies and power dynamics (Apple, 1993). The power base commanded by each layer/hierarchy ultimately determines its influence in curriculum decision-making. Thus, this chapter explores how these hierarchies and power dynamics in each force/layer of influence operate within each layer of influence, affecting curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making. This topic is presented as articulated by the participants at both executive and operational levels, and includes insights gained from a review of the curriculum documents, notably the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Online applications, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) registrations, and curriculum maps.

6.2 Chapter overview

Having established the institution's internal meso-level agenda in Chapter Five, this chapter now broadens the analytical lens to examine the powerful macro-contextual forces that acted upon and shaped the curriculum renewal process. This chapter will analyse how the UoT responded to the national policy directives and regulatory pressures that were introduced in Chapter Two.

The analysis will proceed in three parts. First, Section 6.3 will explore, from the participants' perspectives, the profound impact of the HEQSF and the national push from diplomas to degrees. This will build directly on the findings from Chapter Two, which highlighted the internal tensions and 'mission drift' concerns that arose from those very pressures. Second, the chapter will delve into the significant influence of the professional regulatory bodies, such as ECSA and the HPCSA, exploring their roles as what Samuel's (2008) FFM terms a critical 'contextual force'.

Finally, the chapter will examine the influence of industry and the changing world of work. In doing so, this chapter provides the crucial external context needed to understand the complexities of curriculum decision-making, setting the stage for the meta-analysis in Chapters Seven and Eight, which will theorise the interplay between these internal and external forces.

6.3 National policy and regulatory forces: Implications for curriculum reconceptualising at a UoT

Chapters One and Two covered broadly how the UoT in the study became one of the three distinctive SAHE institutional types that emerged from the abolition of the binary apartheid policy. The simultaneous decoupling of qualification pathways into a single co-ordinated system, the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the subsequent revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) in 2007, was a second major policy reform and transformation. For the UoT sector, this single framework made it possible to consider programmes in any of the three distinctive qualification pathways: a general formative, professional, and vocational programme. These multiple possibilities extended the previously historical, separate and parallel, vocationally oriented national diplomas as a primary offering of UoTs. The post-1994 higher education (HE) landscape aimed at broadening access and participation while democratising knowledge and breaking down educational boundaries, which was covered in Chapter Two. In the new dispensation, all universities were tasked with aligning the institution's programme qualification mix (PQM) to the revised HEQSF. The additional removal of the BTech degree on the revised HEQSF negatively impacted the UoT sector and necessitated the development of new articulation pathways for post-graduate studies.

6.3.1 The revised HEQSF: Impact of national policy

The post-apartheid transformation of the SAHE system, which was driven by the introduction of the NQF and the revised HEQSF in 2007, marked a critical juncture for universities of technology (UoTs). Historically focused on vocational education through national diplomas, UoTs now had the opportunity to broaden their qualifications and align their programmes with the HEQSF, opening pathways for professional, vocational, and general formative programmes. This shift allowed the UoTs to diversify their offerings, providing a mix of diplomas and degrees to meet both national and global demands for skilled graduates.

Participants at both the executive and operational levels recognised the influence of these national policy changes as powerful external forces shaping curriculum decisions. These forces were exercised through governance bodies. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the

HEQC, and SAQA, imposed significant expectations on UoTs. Institutions were required to align their PQM to meet new quality assurance and accreditation standards. Some perceived the PQM-HEQSF alignment as mission drift, with UoTs attempting to emulate traditional universities. Participants at the UoT in this study described it as a re-imagining of the institution's identity. The Curriculum Renewal Process (CRP) became the lever for transformation, enabling the UoT to evolve from a Technikon into a fully-fledged university as explained by an executive participant.

We have transformed from a Technikon to a university, and the lever for that was the curriculum renewal process. [FM2]

This transformation, seen as a significant achievement, led to a rethinking of the PQM, allowing the institution to offer a suite of undergraduate qualifications that included diplomas, advanced diplomas, bachelor's degrees, and honours degrees. The revised HEQSF outlined distinct roles for diplomas and degrees, emphasising that diplomas are vocationally oriented and prepare students for specific job functions, whereas degrees provide a broader education that fosters initiative and responsibility in both academic and professional contexts. The shift towards degree offerings, coupled with the flexibility to retain or revise diplomas, was seen as crucial for UoTs to remain competitive in a rapidly changing higher education sector.

Despite some initial resistance from staff, who preferred to maintain the diploma offerings, the view within the institution was it had made considerable progress in aligning its PQM with the revised HEQSF framework. One participant noted the following.

[W]ith all the angst...we have moved...and [UoT] has made a lot more progress than many other UoTs. [EM2]

This allowed for a more flexible, comprehensive approach, to curriculum design, positioning the institution to offer qualifications that responded to both regulatory requirements and industry demands.

6.3.2 From diploma to degree: Push for competitiveness

Both the engineering faculty and the health sciences faculty in this study made the decision to transition from diploma offerings to degree programmes, driven by multiple factors. The overarching rationale was to increase competitiveness, both within the local higher education sector and globally. In the engineering faculty, the shift was

towards a three-year Bachelor of Engineering Technology (BEngTech) degree, which carried 420 credits and was aligned with HEQSF level seven. This degree was followed by a 120-credit honours degree, allowing students to pursue a master's degree in four years instead of five, had they remained in the diploma stream. In the health sciences faculty, a similar transition occurred with the introduction of the Bachelor of Health Sciences (BHSc) degree, which exited at NQF level eight and required a minimum of 480 credits.

Participants from both faculties highlighted that diplomas primarily focus on vocational training and practical skills, preparing students for immediate entry into specific roles in health or engineering. Diplomas emphasise foundational, craft-oriented knowledge suited for entry-level positions. However, all participants, at both executive and operational levels, agreed that advancing the qualifications from diplomas to degrees was crucial. This elevation was seen as necessary due to the increasing complexity of workplaces and the integration of advanced technologies in professional fields. Degrees, by design, emphasise both pure and applied disciplinary knowledge, thus better preparing graduates for the demands of modern professional practice.

Despite the general agreement on the benefits of transitioning to degree offerings, there were pockets of resistance among faculty members. Some academics preferred to maintain the diploma programmes, suggesting that not all staff agreed with the shift. One executive manager reflected on this resistance.

Staff was also pushing against this because there were staff who did not agree that there should have been a degree. The department should have continued with diplomas. [EM2]

The reasons behind this resistance were varied. Some staff likely wished to preserve the status quo, or there may have been insufficient deliberation and understanding about the distinctions between diplomas and degrees. According to executive EM2, these decisions were perhaps made without fully considering the purpose and appropriateness of each qualification type.

Some of these arguments were valid when one looks at the issue of fit for purpose. The thrust of particular diplomas, the notion of conceptual and contextual knowledge, I think those are not the issues that drove curriculum in that direction. [EM2]

However, one of the administrators suggested the decision to move to a degree offering seemed to be clouded by other concerns (see section 6.3.3). Perhaps not enough attention was given to the purpose or thrust of each qualification.

And some of these arguments were valid when one looks at the issue of fit for purpose. The thrust of particular diplomas, the notion of conceptual and contextual knowledge. I think that those are not the issues that drove curriculum in that direction of whether there should be degree or whether [to retain the diploma]...those things got lost. [EM2]

This sentiment echoes concerns raised by scholars like Kraak (2006), who argued that some changes in the UoT sector appeared to be driven by ‘hasty rebranding’ rather than a substantive shift in educational philosophy. Indeed, as the university debated whether to retain diplomas or shift towards degree offerings, it simultaneously discussed the inclusion of GE in its curriculum (see Chapter Five). Interestingly, some faculty members who resisted the inclusion of GE failed to recognise its alignment with the broader purpose of a degree, which aims to provide a comprehensive education that balances theoretical knowledge with practical skills. A well-rounded degree programme also promotes critical thinking, problem-solving, ethics, and civic responsibility.

Participants at the executive level noted that the absence of a clear philosophical framework hindered the curriculum renewal process. The institutional leader expressed his concern upon arrival at the UoT, emphasising that the CRP was not embedded in a new institutional paradigm.

I was deeply concerned that the Curriculum Renewal Project was not really located within a kind of new paradigm for the institution. Half the institution was still thinking of itself as a Technikon, the other half... there was not like an overarching kind of framework within which [CRP] and others fitted in so I think what I am suggesting is that the new [2015-2019] strategic plan in the sense provided a philosophical framework for the curriculum renewal project. [EM1]

He was concerned that half the institution was still locked in the old Technikon mindset and needed a strong philosophical and strategic driver to pull the institution collectively into the new trajectory and bring about the desired change. An executive level participant expressed regret over missed opportunities for reimagining the curriculum to align with the university’s strategic vision.

There’s one thing I wish we had done differently, which is to have reimagined curriculum in closer alignment with how we were reimagining the university. There is a measure of regret that we missed an opportunity. [FM1]

Ultimately, the transition from diplomas to degrees represented a significant transformation in the institution's identity. However, as reflected in the voices of

participants, there was recognition that this shift, while beneficial, could have been more thoughtfully aligned with a broader, philosophically grounded vision for the university's future. The introduction of new curricula, guided by a comprehensive institutional framework, could have more effectively addressed the evolving needs of both students and the professional world.

6.3.3 Balancing cognitive demand with skills-based learning

Although national policy and regulatory forces pushed UoTs towards degree offerings and a more academic focus, there was still a strong emphasis on maintaining the practical, skills-based learning that traditionally defined these institutions. One administrator cautioned against going 'too far' in the quest for academic rigour, stressing the need to balance cognitive learning with skills development. This reflects a broader debate within the UoT sector about how best to prepare graduates for an unknown future, ensuring they are equipped with both theoretical knowledge and the practical skills needed to thrive in the workforce.

6.3.4 Professional eminence in/for a differentiated institution

Historically, qualifications from former Technikons, including those in engineering and health sciences, led to national diplomas that emphasised practical, technical knowledge. In contrast, traditional universities awarded four-year professional bachelor's degrees that were built on a broader theoretical foundation. This differentiation in qualification types had significant implications for graduates' professional registration and status within their fields. Graduates from Technikons, often viewed as more practice-oriented, faced barriers to higher professional recognition compared to their peers from traditional universities. These disparities in status and professional registration were key drivers behind the decision to transition from diploma to degree offerings at the UoT.

6.3.3.1 Addressing the disparity in professional registration for engineering

In the engineering faculty, the disparity in professional registration for diploma holders became a significant point of contention. As one participant noted.

Previously, students with a diploma could register as a [candidate engineering] professional technician, and students with a B-Tech as a [candidate engineering] professional technologist. There [was] no route for people from a UoT to be a [candidate or] professional engineer. [CCE2]

This participant expressed concern about this limitation that hindered the professional advancement of UoT graduates, some of whom held advanced qualifications, such as PhDs, yet were unable to register as professional engineers.

One of the primary reasons for this disparity was the narrower scope of the national diploma, which lacked the broad base of mathematics and science that is required for registration as a professional engineer. The solution, as identified by the engineering faculty, was to introduce the Bachelor of Engineering Technology (BEngTech) degree, a three-year programme that exited at NQF level seven, followed by a bachelor's honours degree at NQF level eight. This new qualification structure addressed the gaps in the previous national diploma, particularly in terms of mathematics, science, and complementary studies, aligning UoT curricula more closely with those from traditional universities. This shift seemed to be motivated by the desire for the UoT graduates to gain parity in registration for practice, as mentioned by curriculum champion CCE2.

Our three-year degree plus an honours meets the minimum of their combined four-year degree, so we should be able to register our own [graduates]... as [candidate] engineers. [CCE2]

By offering a degree pathway, UoT graduates could achieve professional registration without the additional year of study and training required for diploma holders. This change enhanced the professional standing of UoT graduates and also streamlined their path to becoming registered engineers.

6.3.3.2 Elevating professional status in the health sciences

A similar logic drove the transition to professional bachelor's degrees in the health sciences faculty. Historically, health sciences programmes at former Technikons did not hold the same professional status as those offered at traditional universities. One participant remarked, these fields were often viewed as the 'poorer cousins' in the health sciences fraternity, constantly striving to find their place in the professional landscape. Therefore, the motivation for the shift from diploma to degree in select health sciences programmes was intended to elevate the professionalisation of these disciplines. Participants believed that the comprehensive curriculum and specialised modules of a degree programme offered more prestige and weight in the professional realm than a diploma as evident in the following comment of a curriculum champion.

They wanted more professionalisation... that 480-credit degree gave them that sense of professionalisation. [CCHS4]

Another participant echoed this sentiment, noting that the curriculum renewal strategy was aimed at ensuring that UoT graduates could ‘*compete with other professional people out there*’ [CCHS1]. This transition was not just about increasing professional status; it was also seen as a way to compete with other health professional programmes offered at higher education institutions. By offering degrees in fields such as pharmacy, physiotherapy, and radiography, the faculty aimed to put its graduates on par with those in similar professions across the country.

6.3.3.3 Concerns and challenges in the transition from diploma to degree

While the decision to move to professional degrees was generally seen as positive, some concerns arose about the nature of the qualifications. A few participants warned against simply ‘stretching’ or ‘repackaging’ the old diploma curriculum into a degree structure without carefully considering the programme’s purpose. The institutional leader cautioned “[t]here is always the danger that you go too far” [EM1]. Curriculum champion CCHS6 echoed these sentiments about including aspects of learning that demanded greater cognitive demand:

[I]t became more brain-focused, they [students] need to be researchers, managers... but they [students] still have to learn how to scan a patient. [CCHS6]

The delicate balance between academic rigour and practical, hands-on training that is essential in fields like health sciences, was highlighted in this comment.

In some cases, external regulatory bodies, rather than the UoT itself, mandated the shift to degree programmes. In the environmental health programme for example, the professional board required all HEIs in SA to transition to a bachelor’s degree, or graduates would be unable to register for professional practice. This was explained by participant CCHS4 in the below comment.

They gave us a mandate... all seven higher education institutions in South Africa would change to the [professional] bachelor’s [degree] or their students will not be registered. [CCHS4]

This external pressure underscored the importance of aligning UoT qualifications with national and professional standards.

A secondary benefit of transitioning to degree offerings was the potential to streamline academic pathways and to encourage postgraduate enrolment. The degree route

allowed students to articulate to a master's degree in four years, compared to the five years required for diploma holders. According to the participants, this streamlined pathway was seen as crucial for attracting students who were more likely to engage in postgraduate education, thereby remaining competitive. The participants perceived the articulation path from a diploma to a master's that equated to five years of study to be a deterrent for students wanting to pursue further studies. Refer to Figure 6.1 to see articulation pathways for diploma, degree and professional degree.

6.3.5 Section summary

How national policy and regulatory forces shaped curriculum decisions and influenced the overall trajectory of the UoT was highlighted in this section. While these curriculum changes at the UoT seem to emulate the curricula of traditional universities, they raise critical questions about the balance between academic knowledge and practical skills. As UoTs continue to evolve, they must navigate these competing demands, ensuring that their curricula remain relevant, competitive and aligned to both national imperatives and the needs of industry, the professional world and society at large.

6.4 The force of the professional regulators: protectors of the public or oligarchs?

Professional bodies play a crucial role in shaping curriculum design resolution making within the higher education context, particularly in professionally-oriented fields. Their influence varies by discipline, but they share a common purpose. For example, since the primary role of professional bodies is in the protection of the public, it is important that the curricula meet industry standards, foster professional competencies and maintain quality and accreditation requirements. This section explores how professional bodies, specifically in the fields of engineering and health sciences, were seen as significant agents of institutional change in terms of exerting a considerable influence on curriculum decisions and how this influence was perceived by curriculum planners and designers. This section highlights how the powerful institutional force is subdued by other forces or agents. The Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) exert their influence through their regulatory authority. Registration for practice is exerted as a powerful force and used as a “bargaining tool for domination” (Ramrathan, 2016, p. 6). The professional bodies' aim is to protect the public. Oligarchy discourse highlights the

risks of power concentration among a small group within these organisations. Such a concentration could lead to a disconnect from the broader membership, the public who demand accountability and the effectiveness of professional bodies in fulfilling their missions to serve public interests. In other words, rather than protecting the conservative habituated practices of old. This was evident in the participants' responses who wanted to claim accountability to certain professional bodies; therefore, they tended to be indirectly complicit with that agenda of habituating past practices.

6.4.1 Professional bodies in engineering

In the field of engineering, the ECSA serves as a dominant force in curriculum design. It is responsible for setting the standards that universities must adhere to in order to have their programmes accredited and their graduates recognised as professionals in their field. Participants in the study highlighted that although curriculum change was influenced by various external forces the professional body is the most powerful. These opinions were expressed by the faculty manager and a curriculum champion.

The most dominant [force]...is trying to comply as much as possible to the structure put out by the professional body. Simply because if you don't do that, your programmes are not accredited...So you have the CHE or the HEQC that accredits the programme... and they would not start the accreditation process, if you have not got endorsement from the professional body. [EM4]

Engineering is dictated by the professional body, and so, because, we have these explicit guidelines that we are told to adhere to...By the professional body. A lot of it is driven by that. [CCE3]

One participant explained that aligning with ECSA standards was essential to ensure that the undergraduate curricula met both national and international accreditation such as those under the Sydney³⁰ Accord. This led to a curriculum design that was heavily dictated by the standards set by ECSA, often prioritising their requirements over the institution's own initiatives, as shown by the insertion of complementary studies in all the BEngTech degrees, instead of the UoT's general education (GE) (refer to Chapter Five). Another participant emphasised the importance of complying with the structure of the professional body. This was viewed collectively as the most dominant force: failure to meet the ECSA standards would result in non-accreditation, rendering the

³⁰ Sydney Accord is "an agreement for the mutual recognition of engineering programmes that provide the educational foundation for professional engineering technologists" – as defined in the [Qualification Standard for the BEng Tech, NQF Level 7 document by ECSA, 2023](#).

qualification irrelevant to professional registration. It is important to note that while ECSA does not prescribe specific content, it provides guidelines on exit-level outcomes or what is known as graduate attributes. The curriculum designers had to ensure that these attributes would be developed and assessed throughout the qualification. This has led to a shift from a content-driven curriculum to what is called outcomes-based curriculum with a focus on competences such as problem-solving and ethical decision-making.

6.4.2 Professional bodies in health sciences

In the health sciences, the influence of professional bodies is similarly strong, although it manifests differently in the HPCSA, which governs most health-related programmes and regulates the education training and scope of practice for health professionals. The HPCSA oversees multiple health professions through its twelve professional boards, each responsible for different fields such as medical laboratory science, clinical technology, environmental health, radiography and others. The standards and scope of practice vary per profession. This might explain why the views about the role of the professional bodies on curriculum and curriculum change in the faculty were minimal. This is a sharp contrast to that of the engineering faculty, which is regulated by a single professional body.

The impact of these professional bodies on curriculum decision was highlighted by curriculum champions who expressed concerns over the tension between institutional autonomy and professional requirements. One faculty manager described the professional bodies as a considerable force emphasising how their stringent requirements sometimes came into conflict with a university's own curriculum goals. Additionally, the faculty manager referred to the complex 'inter-relationship between the dictates of professional body legislature and the institutional imperatives.' He argued that professional bodies are a force of considerable influence that simply cannot be disregarded. The issue of institutional autonomy came under the spotlight as he described the tensions that the faculty encountered with two professional bodies at the time of the interview.

Yeah, I think in Health Sciences the professional bodies is a considerable force. I'm because although I mean this issue of institutional autonomy is a little bit of a 'hot potato' [...] We are currently battling with approval of the undergraduate [programme outside the study] programme and the diploma as well as BHSc. Actually, the previous

National Diploma for [another programme outside the study] and maybe some things will come out in just discussing those two as current heartaches, in terms of, how do we balance a curriculum in terms of what the University needs as opposed to what professions might require us to do?_[FM1]

In this context professional bodies were seen as both enabling and constraining. While their role is to ensure the quality and relevance of the curriculum, they also have the potential to impose limitations that can stifle curriculum innovations (as was shown in Chapter Five).

6.4.3 The push for professionalism and standards

Across both disciplines, there is a growing recognition of the need for curricula to balance academic knowledge with practical skills. In engineering, this is achieved through ECSA's emphasis on competencies and general attributes (GAs), which ensure that graduates are technically proficient as well as being capable of critical thinking, ethical decision-making, and adapting to real-world challenges. Similarly, in health sciences, the inclusion of work-integrated learning (WIL), and clinical practice, ensures that students develop hands-on skills necessary for their professions while also engaging with broader professional and ethical issues. Both sets of interviews reflected a concern with what it means to be 'professional'. This concept goes beyond meeting technical requirements and includes being adaptable, socially aware, and capable of critical reflection. One participant in the health sciences noted that professionalism involves meeting the demands of the profession as well as thinking critically about societal and ethical responsibilities

6.4.4 Tensions between institutional autonomy and professional body influence

One of the central tensions identified by participants in both fields was the conflict between institutional autonomy and the requirements of professional bodies. In engineering, the professional body's guidelines, while flexible in some areas, still dominate decision-making. The notion of institutional autonomy is questioned when the university must prioritise accreditation requirements over its own curricular vision. The faculty manager in engineering reported that he believed that previously, ECSA was akin to an 'English Old Boy's Club', an apartheid legacy rooted in colonialism. In the apartheid days, the system was designed to 'exclude' or limit the registration of people of colour.

It's kind of an apartheid legacy which is rooted in British history. It's very much the English Old Boys Club..... So that is why in South Africa, you had all kinds of problems under apartheid, with getting people of colour to register. [FM2]

Another concern that this faculty manager raised was that the professional council served both as the accreditors of programmes and the regulators, raising concerns over its ability to drive change in a way that benefits both the profession and the broader educational goals. This was seen as a serious conflict of interest, as decisions could be taken based on vested interests at any given time, as was seen in the apartheid days.

The problem with that, is they are the regulators and accreditors, and that's a serious conflict of interest. You can't be the person that comes in to accredit and also regulate because then you have a vested interest. If you are an engineer, you don't want too many engineers graduating because they're going to take the job away. That's a big problem in South Africa. The US has mitigated that, and the licensing body is totally separate from the accrediting body. And similarly in other parts of the world as well.... Yes, but it's changed now. It's fully transformed now, I have to put that on record. [FM2]

However, the same participant contended that the ECSA post-1994 has become a fully transformed institution. Participant CCE1, who had served on the ECSA professional board, reported that a suite of qualifications for professional registration was developed to allow an individual to move from a sweeper to an engineer, using different routes.

So, we created the whole framework where you could articulate, immaterial of where you have started. But if you want to become a professional engineer, there is a route for you. So, we developed alternate routes, even though the UoTs, through the traditional universities and so forth. So, there is a whole suite. Whether you started with a diploma or whether you started with a three-year degree or a four-year degree, it did not matter. There was a way for you to get into professional engineering if you so desired. [CCE1]

Despite the affirmations by the participants about a fully transformed professional council for engineering, the vestiges of old seem to still prevail in the registrations of graduates from historically disadvantaged HEIs with those from the previously advantaged HEIs, namely the traditional universities (see Figure 6.1).

In the health sciences programmes, this tension manifests in the need to balance institutional goals, such as expanding research and postgraduate studies, with the professional body's focus on maintaining strict standards of practice. Faculty managers expressed frustration with the professional body's control over curriculum decisions, noting that it sometimes hindered the university's ability to innovate or address broader educational objectives.

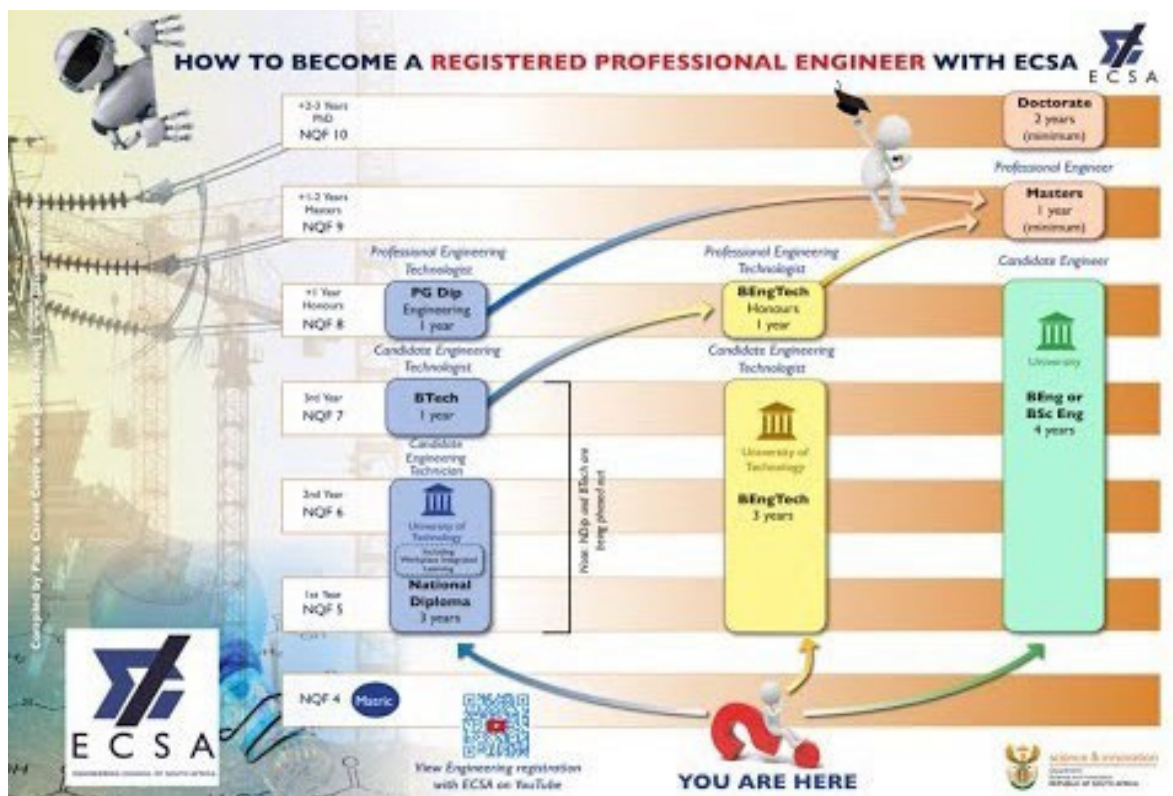


Figure 6.1: Pathways for registering as professional engineer with ECSA
<https://i.ytimg.com/vi/3rNuecK3-Qs/hqdefault.jpg>

6.4.5 Section summary

The role of professional bodies in curriculum decision-making is complex and multifaceted. While they ensure the relevance and quality of professional programmes, their influence can sometimes constrain institutional autonomy and innovation. The challenge for universities is to navigate this relationship in a way that allows for both compliance with professional standards and the pursuit of broader educational goals. This relationship between the university, regulatory bodies and/or other stakeholders is crucial for the effective development and implementation of professional curricula and is likened to how a successful marriage relies on the commitment and cooperation of both partners (Laher, 2009). As the data revealed, professional bodies such as ECSA and HPCSA play an indispensable role in shaping curricula, but their dominance raises important questions about the future of professional education and the balance between external regulation and internal creativity.

6.5 Industry as a force: rapidly changing workplaces and work types -

This section focuses on the influence of industry as a significant force in shaping curriculum decisions at HEIs, particularly in the context of rapidly changing workplaces and work types. It highlights how globalisation and technological advancements have created borderless work environment, necessitating that students develop the skills to navigate these new landscapes effectively.

The section emphasises the importance of technical and technological specialisation and the need for competences in essential ‘soft’ skills such as creativity, communication, collaboration, and problem-solving. These competences are increasingly sought after by employers in the 21st century job market, indicating a shift in skills required for success in various industries. As a result, a curriculum must adapt to integrate these elements of learning, ensuring that students are equipped with both the technical knowledge and essential skills needed to thrive in modern workplaces. These insights illustrate the critical role of industry in driving curriculum change, and the need for educational institutions, or UoTs in particular, to respond proactively to these shifts.

With globalisation and connectivity, workplaces are becoming borderless as people collaborate across national and virtual boundaries. These technological, societal and political innovations are reshaping and repositioning workplaces, making it critical for students to learn how to navigate these new workspaces and become lifelong learners. While technical/technological specialisation is critical in 21st century workplaces, it is inadequate by itself. Employers are looking for competencies in the 21st century ‘soft’ skills or what Participant EM3 calls “essential skills” that include creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, etc. The curriculum must bring these elements of learning to the centre. This came through very strongly in the interview with the institutional leader EM1 (refer to section 5.3.2).

6.5.1 UoT and industry partnership: Mission drift or shift?

The evolution of the UoTs (equivalent to polytechnic globally) has significantly impacted their relationship with industry, particularly in the context of vocational training and student readiness for the workforce. Historically, these institutions were designed to closely align educational outcomes with industry needs, focusing on

practical skills and vocational training (see Chapter Two). However, a noticeable shift occurred over recent decades. Many UoTs have begun to adopt a more research-oriented mission, akin to traditional universities. This transition has led to concerns regarding the preparedness of graduates for employment. UoTs were established with a clear mandate to provide vocational training that meets the specific needs of industries. Their curricula were closely aligned with practical skills required in the workforce, ensuring that graduates could seamlessly transition into their careers. This model fostered strong partnerships with local industries, enabling students to gain relevant experience through internships, service learning and hands-on projects.

In recent years, many UoTs have shifted towards a university-style educational framework that emphasises research and academic rigour over vocational training. These transitions are often referred to as 'mission drift', where institutions prioritise academic credentials and research output at the expense of their original vocational focus. The resultant dilution of programmes specifically designed to prepare students for immediate entry into the workforce is visible in the new curricula, especially in the engineering faculty (see Section 6.3).

6.5.2 What does industry readiness mean in the 21st century/VUCA world?

How industry and employers in both the private and public sectors perceive the UoT graduates was important to the previous VC. His gaze was on the quality of the UoT graduates. In the spirit of relevance and responsiveness, he always engaged with industry partners (see below comment). He was particularly perturbed by one encounter where he received what he called 'damning' feedback, raising concerns about the lack of these essential skills and attributes in the students/graduands.

So, there is the one thing I did while I was UT, was to speak to the employers about our graduates on a regular basis. It was just to say, "well what do you think, what can we improve, what is not working?" I was getting this feedback from industry which was saying, "for God's sake you know, teach your students how to write", that was a very damning thing by the way. [...] One of them said to me, "it really does not make [sense], I really cannot ask a student to write a report now because that report will have to be rewritten...You know, never once did I get a comment that the technical education was not good or that students are not being trained technically. What I got all the time, was that students could not write, they could not kind of express themselves, they had bad work ethics and so on. [EM1]

[...] they know how to do that work but they are lacking the skills of interacting with others, of working with diverse people. So, they know the content but their people relations are very poor. [EM3]

While industry/employers seemed satisfied with the level of technical expertise, they raised the alarm about the ‘missing’ soft /essential skills in both the students (during work placements) and graduates, namely, communication skills, cultural and diversity, writing skills, teamwork, ethics, and so on.

Internally, there were also concerns about the extent to which the curricula were building/nurturing the academic literacies of students. Participant EM2 alluded to ensuring that students were exposed to academic writing skills.

But it was also about things like writing in the curriculum. And that did not just mean the writing centre being established but that within your respective disciplines and modules, whatever you are doing, there is a focus on writing rather than students that are regurgitating ... So do we focus on writing, and that comes back again to curriculum design. How many programmes actually require students to write essays? Because when you get students to write essays there are a whole lot of attributes [that] you are actually promoting. But we do not see that, essay writing. [EM2]

The institutional leader also reported that he experienced similar challenges in his encounters with students. He recounted how, on one occasion, he had to address a group of disgruntled students when the president of the Student Representative Council (SRC) erroneously announced to students that the fees had gone up significantly. This incident exposed the serious lack of numeracy and literacy skills among the students.

I mean, I can remember the SRC president one day making a statement in a big crowd, that the fees have gone up by 18%, 17.5%. I remember thinking – ‘what the hell is this guy talking about?’ So, the tuition fees went up by 7.5 [%] and the residences went up by 10% and he just added those together. I had to explain to a 1000 young people out there, [that] this calculation is wrong. By the way he was an accounting student, right. And I just thought to myself, there is something fundamentally wrong here. [EM1]

The comments below highlight further concerns about the lack of communication and people skills, teamwork, work ethics and so on.

Then people started saying your students are good they know how to use [the equipment], they know how to operate the [...] machines and they know how to do that work but they are lacking the skills of interacting with others, of working with diverse people. So they know the content but their people relations are very poor. Some people call it the soft skills. I think I call it the essential skills ... was missing. [EM3]

And not discounting aspects of applied ethics, especially in the South African context, which is fundamental to that. [EM1]

This shows that while technical/technological specialisation is critical in 21st century workplaces, it is inadequate by itself. Employers are looking for competencies in the 21st century ‘soft’ skills or what one of the participants called “essential skills” that

include creativity, critical thinking, communication, collaboration, problem-solving, etc. There was a strong argument for why the curriculum had/has to bring these elements of learning to the centre.

Typically, the industry expects UoT graduates to produce 'work-ready' graduates. One faculty manager critiqued this expectation. His below comments highlighted that while industries have specific demands and vested interests in defining graduate attributes, there is a historical inconsistency in expecting new graduates to be fully competent immediately.

And of course, you have the profession, this industry itself also dictates what the graduate attributes should be. We pay less attention to that. For the simple reason that each industry will have its own vested interest. And they would want graduate coming out the day after graduating to be readily competent to do work. I'm not too sure when did we ever do that in the history of the world. OK, it takes about three years or so to really become competent professional practice. [FM2]

He argued that true professional competence develops over a period, typically around three years of practical/professional experience. He suggested that pressure on UoTs to produce instantly employable graduates may be unrealistic and overlooks the complexities of professional learning. This response calls for a more nuanced understanding of the transition from education to professional practice.

In preparing students for the work environment, and one that is also global in nature, it was important for the university to promote the attributes, values and skills that are necessary for all types of workplaces. It is important to also promote entrepreneurial thinking, to encourage students to think of themselves as entrepreneurs and future employers, not just employees. A few modules covering the world of work, values in the workplace, entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking were therefore included in the institutional GE (IGE) module basket.

6.5.3 Beyond the modern workplace: Activating entrepreneurial thinking

A review of institutional documents like the strategic plans and GE documents, showed there is a clear intent that the curriculum had to promote the attributes, values and skills that are necessary for all types of workplaces. The below comment illustrates that one aim of GE was to encourage students to think of themselves as entrepreneurs and future employers, and not just employees.

So aligned to the strategic objectives and the strategic plan one of the key things that we looked at as well was entrepreneurship. And you will see that we have got quite a few modules on entrepreneurial thinking, entrepreneurship that we have also included in that. Because we saying the world of work is not only one in which you will be employed, but one in which you will be self-employed. [EM3]

Innovation and entrepreneurship through collaboration and partnerships were integral to the mission, strategy and character of the university as an institution. According to a university leader, an important consideration for curricula was that it had to be future-oriented.

It is very likely that what you'll see in the future is that professionals will not be sitting in eight to five jobs like that; people will be a part of what they call this Gig economy. That people will be selling their labour or selling their profession, their professional skills in very different ways [...] It is something quite different when a young person says, look what I actually want to – I do not want to be tied to kind of one enterprise, I want to work for lots of things at the same time...[EM1]

The main message here is that the future of work is shifting away from the traditional, fixed employment structures, such as a standard eight to five jobs towards a more flexible and dynamic 'Gig economy'. In this new landscape, professionals will be increasingly seeking to sell their skills and labour in diverse ways. They will often engage in multiple projects or roles simultaneously, rather than being limited to a single employer. This reflects a growing desire among young professionals for autonomy and variety in their work, indicating also a significant transformation in career expectations and employment models. This has implications for the way in which they are trained to ensure that they have the requisite business acumen and related skills. There were a few IGE modules that covered this area of learning.

One of the faculty managers had a slightly different perspective to this agenda and felt that the university was 'going about this the wrong way'. He was not only referring to the planning or the official curriculum, but also how the curriculum was being enacted in the institution. He thought that the notion of entrepreneurship was too restrictive. He believed that it was more than just about 'creating business and making money. He argued that there are many disciplines within the university where that was not going to happen and questioned whether those affected students 'cannot engage in entrepreneurship or cannot be developed to think entrepreneurially'.

I think I my own sense is that we're going about entrepreneurship in the wrong way, although I'm not necessarily sure what is the right way. So, I mean, you can sense that something is wrong without necessarily knowing how to put it right. And I think our

notion of entrepreneurship is too restrictive. And this is what makes me think that we're going about it in the wrong way. Because entrepreneurship is not necessarily about creating business, making money. And yet we're seeing it. It's almost like our entrepreneurial student is someone who has created something and managed to make money out of it. I'm not sure that that's the objective. [FM1]

This participant also critiqued the university's new drafted entrepreneurship policy and expressed concerns about some missing concepts that he thought were critical, namely, 'social entrepreneurship' and 'entrepreneurial thinking that does not generate money'. He felt that the policy was mechanistic/transactional/contractual and lacked conceptually what he considered to be 'entrepreneurial thinking'.

When you read that policy, it talks about this portion of the money will go here. That portion of the money, intellectual property will reside here. That's pretty transactional. It's very business wise and it's it really is contractual and it's saying, there are spoils of the entrepreneurial activity and let's make sure that it's clear what happens to the spoils. For the entrepreneurial thinking, does not necessarily need to produce spoils. [FM1]

He further critiqued the implementation of the policy. He said it was limited to econometrics, as the university was setting targets for the number of students that should receive entrepreneurial training.

I mean, even when we're talking about operational planning at faculty level, and there is a goal in the EAPP that X number of people must receive entrepreneurial training. What does that mean? Does that mean training in the hubs that have been created? Or does that mean that within my particular program, there may be a module that develops entrepreneurship?...We need to think more openly about entrepreneurship, and we have to recognize that entrepreneurship may be incorporated into the curriculum, outside of the sort of goal at the moment, which seems to be an institution-wide entrepreneurship module. Well, you could register every student in that entrepreneurship module, and we all know what percentage of those students will ultimately develop something that can go to scale and make them. So is the aim to take them through a course? Or are we looking at a way of thinking? Is it an offshoot of the pursuit of creativity? Should we be focusing on creativity? Should we be making them do art classes rather than having some boring businesspersons explain to them how you upscale an idea? Should we rather be asking them to paint something? Just because it develops their creativity and shifts their perspective? [FM1]

When looking at this faculty manager's comments above, it is clear that he was arguing for an alternative way of developing entrepreneurial thinking. While he believed that the outcomes of the institution-wide entrepreneurship module encouraged thinking in a particular way, strategically and competitively, he asked if it was enough to 'solve societal problems'. This participant challenged the institution to move beyond the instrumental and market agenda and to re-imagine a curriculum that will promote/enhance creativity, innovation, entrepreneurial thinking and adaptivity to changes in society and the world.

6.5.5 Section summary

This section focused on the significant influence of industry as a driving force in shaping curriculum decisions at the UoT, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving workplaces. While UoTs have historically played a crucial role in preparing students for industry careers through vocational training, recent shifts towards a more academic focus have raised concerns about graduate readiness. The importance of curricula adapting to integrate the increasingly century sought-after essential 21st century skills were emphasised. Addressing these issues requires a concerted effort from both educational institutions and industry stakeholders to realign objectives and ensure that graduates are adequately prepared and adept to thrive in modern and ever-evolving workplaces.

6.6 Chapter synthesis

This chapter provided an exploration of the multifaceted factors influencing curriculum reconceptualising at the UoT. The narratives underscore the significant impact of macro systemic forces, including national policy changes and the role of professional regulatory bodies on curriculum change. These forces necessitated a responsive approach, particularly following the abolition of the apartheid-era binary system. Professional bodies play a crucial role in this context, as they set the standards and competencies required for various professions. Although their involvement ensures that the curricula remain relevant and aligned with industry needs it can also create tensions regarding institutional autonomy. The chapter emphasised the need for UoTs to navigate this relationship carefully, balancing compliance with professional standards, while fostering creativity and innovation within their educational offerings.

The influence of industry, as a driving force in shaping curriculum decisions, was also a theme in the chapter. In an era characterised by globalisation and rapid technological advancements, the need for curriculum to integrate both technical competences and essential soft skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and problem solving, has become paramount. Concerns surrounding the perceived 'mission drift', where universities have shifted towards a more research-oriented focus, potentially diluting their original vocational training mandate, were addressed. This shift raises important questions about the alignment of educational outcomes with industry expectations and the work readiness of graduates.

To address these challenges fostering collaboration between educational institutions, national government, professional regulatory bodies and industry stakeholders (or quad helix partners) was advocated in the chapter. An integrated approach to curriculum design or curriculum decision-making is essential: balancing the demands for demands of professional bodies, industry and other stakeholders with the need for creativity and innovation in educational practices. Finally, the incorporation of technological advances and sustainability principles into curricula was emphasised as vital for equipping graduates to navigate the complexities of modern workplaces and the modern world. By evaluating curriculum objectives and enhancing the relevance of higher education we can ensure that graduates are employable and capable of making meaningful contributions to society in an increasingly dynamic and complex world. The chapter encapsulated the call for adaptability and collaboration in preparing students for the challenges of the 21st century.

The findings and the analyses of the findings of an institution-wide curriculum change initiative have been presented in Chapters Five and Six, addressing the critical research questions and objective. The force field theoretical model adopted in this study offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of the multiple levers of forces that influence and shape the identity of an institution and its curriculum; highlighting the interconnected nature of these two forces.

Chapters Seven and Eight integrates these analyses and provide further abstractions of the findings, using the conceptual forces of *instituire* and *currere*. These chapters provide a comprehensive discussion of the generative principles underpinning the curriculum planning and curriculum decision-making for the integration of GE into the undergraduate PoC. Using the active forces of *instituire* and *currere*, the focus of the discussion is not only on what it is, but also what it has the potential to be in the re-imagining of both the institution and its curriculum.

CHAPTER SEVEN: INSTITUTE AS AN ACTIVE CONCEPTUAL FORCE: A RE-IMAGINING

"The snake which cannot cast its skin has to die. As well the minds which are prevented from changing their opinions; they cease to be mind." (Friedrich Nietzsche)

7.1 Introduction

The preceding three chapters presented the empirical findings of the study, detailing the process of curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making at a university of technology (UoT), through a 'liberal' agenda. Using Samuel's force field model (FFM) as an analytical lens, these empirical chapters were distinctly structured to explore the different levels of influence. Chapter Five focused specifically on the internal, meso-level forces, examining the institution itself as a proactive and reactive force. This analysis drew upon the micro-level experiences and perspectives of the curriculum champions as key evidence of these institutional dynamics. Chapter Six then broadened the scope to analyse the powerful external forces at play. This chapter concentrated on the macro-level influences of national policy and professional regulatory bodies, while also considering the supra-level context of global trends and industry partners. Together, these chapters provide a detailed account of the complex interplay between the institution's internal; agenda and the powerful external forces shaping its curriculum. This reflective meta-analysis will now build upon those findings at a further level of abstraction.

The findings reveal that the liberal agenda, characterised by its aspirational vision, advocated for a holistic, democratic and experiential approach to learning and being. This vision stood in stark opposition to the institution's historically narrow neoliberal orientation. At the institutional or meso level, there was a distinct call to reimagine curriculum practices that foreground human development, social/civic engagement, environmental consciousness and exploratory pedagogical possibilities. However, at the operational level (micro level), curriculum champions experienced high levels of angst and turbulence, as they navigated the interplay of internal and external forces. These curriculum champions appeared constrained by the over-arching macro-contextual forces—namely, political mandates, regulatory requirements and industry—all demanding space in the curriculum. Simultaneously, they had to contend

with new institutional priorities that created a complex and often conflicting institutional landscape. The findings underscored the inherent tensions in curriculum reconceptualising, where various stakeholders and forces compete to assert their ideals. As evidenced in the above-mentioned preceding chapters, the process necessitated negotiations and compromise, as not all aspirations can be simultaneously realised.

In this chapter, the reflective meta-analysis is an attempt to re-see the field data and initial analyses at a further abstract level drawing from inspirational theorists who examined curriculum and institutional higher education change. The focus here is a critically examination of the dualistic, yet paradoxical nature of *instituire*, delineating its active (proactive) and reactive dimensions. Through a Deleuzian lens, this chapter argues that there is no fixed ‘reality’ beyond the continual ‘flux of appearances’ (Spinks, 2010, p. 16). Reality is constructed through interactions among various forces, with active forces asserting dominance and shaping dynamics, while reactive forces respond passively, often constrained by the actions of the active forces. This relational view highlights that the characteristics and behaviours of systems, namely—instituire in this chapter or *curre* in the next chapter—are shaped not by their intrinsic properties but by the interplay of forces within them. Borrowing from Wallin (2010, p. ix), this approach is likened to a “thought experiment” that examines the generative and transformative possibilities inherent in the concept of *instituire* and what it might will to power—what it can do or might to. This framework foregrounds the importance of creativity and openness to new ideas, emphasizing the active potential of *instituire* in contemplating the trajectory of a university in becoming. The chapter situates this re-imagining within the broader challenges of professional education in volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) times and explores the transformative potential of GE in the Global South (see Chapter 8). Through this exploration, the chapter aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the university as an evolving entity, that is shaped by complex forces and is capable of catalysing and shaping transformation.

Similarly, the next chapter explores the conceptual power of *curre* in disrupting and re-imagining professionally oriented curricula (POC) through the liberal agenda, analysing their roles as both disrupted and disrupting forces. Chapter Eight captures

currere, namely, general education (GE) integrated professionally oriented education curricula as active conceptual forces that possess the ‘action potential’ to transcend instrumentalist paradigms and co-evolve to achieve the desired socially responsive and transformative higher education in/for the global south.

7.2 Chapter overview

This chapter moves from empirical analysis to a reflective meta-analysis, aiming to re-see the findings presented in Chapters Five and Six through a more abstract and theoretical lens. It explores the dualistic nature of the concept of *instituere*, positioning the UoT itself as a dynamic force that is both reactive to its environment and actively creating its own identity.

Drawing on the detailed empirical accounts from Chapter Five, which showcased the university’s proactive leadership and internal vision, this chapter will theorise the UoT as an active force of *instituere*. Simultaneously, it will use the findings from Chapter Six, which detailed the constraints of the regulatory bodies and policy, to analyse the reactive dimensions of the institution. This chapter will utilise Deleuzian concepts to analyse the institutional transformations documented in the preceding chapters, exploring how the UoT navigated the tension between differentiation and isomorphism. This sets the stage for Chapter Eight, which will shift the focus from the institution (*instituere*) to the curriculum itself (*currere*).

7.3 ‘*Instituere*’: The concept

One can think of a university as a microcosm, as an **institute** of higher learning and living. In this chapter, I rethink the idea of the university by invoking the root etymology of institute that comes from the Latin word ‘*institutum*’ meaning ‘facility’ or ‘habit’ or physical space. And this comes from its past participle, *instituere* meaning ‘in/into’ ‘build’, ‘create’, ‘raise’ or ‘educate’ ([Institute](#), 2024). The association with ‘build’, ‘raise’ and ‘create’ suggests that an *instituere* is more than a physical facility/space (or a reactive force); rather it serves as a foundation for knowledge development and intellectual growth. Further, the link to “raise” implies dynamism, indicating that *instituere* lifts individuals and society, contributing to progress and innovation. The connection to “habit” underscores the idea that institutes are spaces for continuous

learning and development, drawing from foundational bases and spiralling in gyrating expansions ([Institute](#), 2024). This linguistic evolution reveals the multifaceted nature of the concept of *instituere*, emphasising it as a dynamic and transformative entity, playing pivotal roles in education and societal advancement.

Higher education institutions, including the UoT in this study, are complex dynamic systems composed of various interconnected elements: staff and students (or actors), curricula, policies, physical spaces, technologies, partnerships, and so on. In an 'assemblage', according to Livesey (2010), each element contributes to its overall function and identity. Within this assemblage, the horizontal axis can be understood as the interactions among the actors representing the machinic assemblages where various individuals and their actions combine to generate knowledge and foster community. The vertical axis represents how the 'territorial' aspects of an institution can be examined through its, governance structures, strategies, policies and institutional culture and ethos (Livesey, 2010). These meso forces can dominate and/or be dominated/subjugated by the multiplicity of forces that exerts itself at the broader micro, meso, macro and supra levels. Forces that stabilise an institution's identity while being subjected to forces of territorialisation and/or deterritorialisation.

Borrowing from several scholars (Hlatshwayo, et al., 2020; Le Grange, 2019; Wallin, 2010), I position the institution as an 'active conceptual force' meaning that it is open and fluid, and one that "does not convey an *a priori* image" of an institution (Le Grange, 2019, p.214). This discussion attempts to relate the institution's "immanent potential of [...] becoming" (Le Grange, 2019, p. 214); one that is a dynamic process that is continually shaped by both individual and collective forces and experiences.

This section extends these discourses by covering two main aspects of the findings: institutional differentiation/homogenisation or an identity of difference and distinctiveness, and programme differentiation/homogenisation or programmes of difference. Lastly, the discussion considers the tensions that arise between the individual (micro) and the structural (meso) forces in moments of organisational change and the importance of developing system literacies and comprehensive approaches that recognise the importance of individual development and system issues that affect curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making.

7.4 Institutional differentiation versus isomorphism

Literature is replete with differentiation debates in the SAHE systems, spanning two decades (CHE, 2021, 2022, 2023; Cloete, et al., 2004; Ensor, 2006; Lange, 2017). The intention here is to highlight its implications on curriculum as it relates to the UoT sector.

Exploring the differentiation of institutions by type and history within a chapter on curriculum is essential because an institution's history and culture significantly influence its curricula. This encompasses various aspects, including who has access to the university, who serves as faculty, the role of research in its mission, the types of knowledge that are validated, and the criteria for measuring success (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). All these curriculum-related matters are shaped and limited by the institution's identity. As discussed in Chapter Three, the fundamental characteristics of the academic project are affected by this institutional differentiation.

The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) policy's commitment to a differentiated system based on institutional missions and academic programmes was predicated on the recognition that i) the higher education sector must fulfil multiple functions, ii) that no single institution is able to meet all of society's needs, and iii) institutions must leverage/capitalise their unique strengths and adapt to evolving social economic and labour market needs within changing regional, national and global contexts (DHET, 2014; Ntshoe & Malebo, 2021). While there is a general sense of optimism about the transformed and differentiated SAHE system, in post-apartheid South Africa (UWN, 2024), Habib, in his recent keynote address at USAf³¹ 3rd HE Conference, raises the alarm that "its (i.e. higher education differentiation) success hides structural fault lines" (UWN, 2024).

Habib and others (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Essop, 2020; Lange, 2017) lament that the SAHE system has not achieved the intended programmatic differentiation that was envisaged at the turn of the century. So, instead of creating a landscape of distinct institutions with clear differentiated roles, what results is a rise in institutional

³¹ USAf – is a significant organisation representing all 26 public universities in South Africa. It was established to advocate for the interests of these institutions and to foster a collaborative environment that supports their growth and development. [Home - Universities South Africa](#)

isomorphism among its universities that contributes to a lack of functional diversity and transformation (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Hlatshwayo, 2022b; Lange, 2017). These scholars maintain that homogenisation, diverse missions and roles are overshadowed by a push towards global norms and rankings. Boughey and McKenna (2021, p.141) add the SAHE policy has increasingly prioritised efficiency, aligning with the “global hyper-capitalist models”, responding to the pressures of the global economy, instead of effectively achieving the desired transformation.

Habib (UWN, 2024) contends that the sector is more divided by prestige and is vertically stratified by global rankings and reputation rather than by desired horizontally distinct functions and/or missions among institutions. This view is not unknown. Studies show that the SAHE system is highly hierarchical, with research-intensive universities positioned at the highest level, and the UoTs at the lowest, sitting below the comprehensive universities (Engel-Hills, Winberg & Rip, 2019; Essop, 2020; Lange, 2017). This hierarchy has historical roots, as ‘fully-fledged’ universities benefit more from the advantages in research opportunities and rewards and access to resources. Many scholars critique performance-based funding models that prioritise research output over other educational values, leading to universities competing for limited resources, often at the expense of academic integrity and the broader educational missions (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Hlatshwayo, 2022b; Troiani & Dutson, 2021). These scholars argue that the greater concern in SA and globally, is that these incentive structures for research funding and university rankings pressure institutions to conform to similar standards and to compete rather than foster their unique strengths to cultivate a diverse human capital base essential for national development. This competitiveness was evident in the motivations to move from diploma to degree offerings in the study, particularly to improve professional parity but also strengthen postgraduate and research activities in the university (refer to Chapter Six, section 6.3).

This transnational phenomenon impacts public universities globally as these institutions continue to experience significant shifts in their missions brought on by neoliberal policies (Akala, 2021; Sarpong & Adelekan, 2024). These authors cite further implications for higher education (HE) systems in the developing world. According to Rossouw and Goldman (2023) this commodification and marketisation

of education prioritises financial sustainability and competitiveness over academic values, altering the structures and relationships within this differentiated system. These scholars advocate for a redefined understanding of interconnectedness in education that transcends the economic aspects of globalisation. To shift away from self-serving interests and instead focus on achieving a balance that serves the common good.

Bringing these discourses to the study, the UoT is not exempt from the concerns or cautioning against 'homogenisation' that can arise when attempting to transform its identity and culture and in so doing, be seen to be emulating other institutional types. This is also addressed in Chapter Two. To reiterate, the SAHE restructuring plan aimed to maintain a distinction between traditional universities and Technikons, despite the latter's push for recognition as a university, citing their status as degree-granting entities as deserving of the title. This was initially opposed but the state conceded in 2003 to officially recognised merged Technikons as UoTs, likely due to the pressure exerted by the sector (Du Pré, 2010). This change in status meant that UoTs were pulled into the mix to compete for research funding, crucial for institutional development. This competition can lead to marginalisation of 'disadvantaged' institutions that struggle to survive in market-oriented climate, thereby exacerbating inequalities. Differentiation takes on another form.

Lange (2017) contends that the concept of transformation in the SA context has become institutionalised, losing its original intellectual and moral significance. She asserts that this has led to bureaucratic approaches, driven by a preoccupation with high skills economy and globalisation, conserving the status quo rather than fostering genuine change in HEIs. Lange (2017) argues that the instrumentalist state and its policies can be detrimental to the unique contexts and histories of SAHE systems and could hinder what should be informing their academic projects. In contrast, Soudien (2011) posits that while the state and/or its HE policies are conditioned by human capital views, it also recognises the contested nature of universities and supports a humanist approach. This duality is crucial for HEIs as they navigate their relationship with the state. This heterogeneous nature of development policies is argued to provide a nuanced landscape for HEIs to leverage their transformation efforts (Soudien, 2011).

This is of relevance to this study, as the UoTs as a subset of the SAHE system, were established without a detailed concept document from government, but rather was provided a document by the SATN/THENSA (refer to Chapter Two; see also CHE, 2010). The absence of clear guidance from the government, essentially meant that the UoTs were left on their own to make decisions about their role and identity. I would argue that strategically, the UoT in the study positioned itself, drawing on the multiple levers of forces and influences “in re-imagining for itself the position of the state with respect to the humanities” (Soudien, 2011, p.28). Bringing in the ‘liberal’ agenda, especially within a UoT context, created opportunities for dialogue about the purpose of the university much more dynamic. Despite the dominant instrumentalist approaches taken within the UoT, the fact that the university leaders and some curriculum workers could “see the significance of the humanist imperative as a resource” for the institution (Soudien, 2011, p. 28). The discussion on what it means to be human will be addressed in the next chapters.

Institutions are shaped by the dynamics between active/superior/dominating and reactive/subjugated/dominated forces. Borrowing from Deleuze’s interpretation of the distinction between active and reactive forces, this discussion attempts to provide an understanding into why the UoT in this study seemed to be driven by a different set of agendas and concerns to identify its institutional distinctiveness. It suggests that the institution, as an active force, was seen as proactive and dominating over the other forces or bodies, in its attempts to impose a new ‘will’ and create a new identity. Understanding the distinction between the active and reactive forces is a fundamental concept in understanding power dynamics. According to Spinks (2010), Deleuze emphasised that what we perceive as ‘being’ or ‘reality’ is not an independent essence, but rather a product of the interplay of active and reactive forces. The institution as an assemblage is constituted through the relationships and interactions between the various forces that combine to form bodies: biographical, political, regulatory, social and so on (as shown in Chapters Five and Six). The qualities of these ‘bodies’ emerge from the dynamics of domination and subjugation between active and reactive forces. Consciousness plays a crucial role in understanding these dynamics and is often a product of reactive forces that can distort the understanding of the active forces (Spinks, 2010) – see throughout the chapter but emphasised in the next section.

The next section continues the discussion on the UoT's trajectory towards being an *institution of difference* in a differentiated system.

7.5 Instituire 'differentiation'

Since their inception, much has been written about the UoTs, including their creation, role and place in the SAHE, and ongoing debates about academic drift, homogenisation and differentiation (see Chapter Two). Some UoTs were seen to be responding to the aspirational pressures within the sector to take on a more expansive identity (Garraway & Winberg, 2019). Especially, one that deviated from the policy of purposeful differentiation that led to its creation. Recent scholarship continues to highlight the ambiguity surrounding UoTs, portraying them as occupying the “bottom rungs” within the SAHE landscape, with strong historical ties to their origins (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Garraway & Winberg, 2019, p. 41). These authors argue that UoTs embody a plurality of identities, complicating self-perception and creating confusion among stakeholders about their mission and objectives. This is expanded more in the section 7.5.1). Moreover, UoTs, like other HEIs, face conflicting pressures to adapt to the rapidly evolving HE landscape while balancing flexibility, resilience and responsiveness.

This section explores the concept of *instituire* as an active force driving and enabling the UoT to move beyond reactive compliance, embracing experimentation, diversity, and innovation to redefine its role in HE. It examines how institutional identity, shaped by historical, cultural, and strategic contexts, can be re-imagined asserting distinctiveness in the differentiated yet homogenising the SAHE system. This section examines the dynamic processes of deterritorialisation (breaking away from entrenched practices) and reterritorialisation (establishing new identities and norms) as mechanisms for transformation. The findings showed that this was driven primarily by external forces, but there were concerns internally too about entrenched curriculum and teaching practices. These concerns were coupled with the desire to ‘build’ and ‘raise’/elevate this emerging university from its low historical base. This trajectory counters earlier critiques, such as the characterisation of Technikons as a ‘glorified schools’ (see Jansen, 2005).

7.5.1 *Instituere as an active force: Asserting difference*

Differentiation, at the study site, was understood as a reflection of how an institution's historical and cultural contexts shape its identity, curriculum practices, and stakeholder experiences, rather than being limited to institutional type or qualification offerings (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; USAf, 2015). The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), despite its flaws, was perceived as a differentiating tool that disrupted the UoT sector (see next section). While aligning its programme qualification mix (PQM) with the revised HEQSF, the UoT rejected a reactive approach that adheres to established norms and traditions. Such a "status quo strategy", as described by Gwandure and Mayekiso (2021), is one that preserves conformity, limits responsiveness, and prioritises stability over innovation and adaptability. Participants at the executive level recognised that this reactive path would have resulted in minimal impact on academic programmes and offer little transformative benefit to stakeholders. This view was captured in one of the institutional documents on curriculum:

[The academic executive team] recognised that the development of a new PQM for the university could be approached in several ways. On the one hand, the university could follow the path of least resistance leading to a technical approach to the development of a new PQM. One caveat here was that there might be little or no change to the design and delivery of learning programmes and no concomitant benefit for the university. On the other hand, the university could acknowledge that the development of a new PQM offered tremendous opportunities for transforming curricula and associated teaching, learning and assessment strategies. [DAI5]

Instead, the UoT embraced a proactive stance, positioning itself as a catalyst for social change and innovation through evolving ideologies, strategies, and operational approaches. As one participant expressed, it was time to '*sieze the moment*' within the new context of institutional autonomy to make curriculum decisions instead of 'take' decisions made by others. The same participant described the push-back from the UoT, with many from the academic community expressing keenness to divorce itself from the convenorship (see Chapters Two and Five). This was not the general sentiment at the outset, perhaps overshadowed by the legacy social conditioning within the sector (see section 7.3.3). The perception at the time was that, even after the dissolving of the convenorship (as discussed in Chapter 2), that there was a new version of 'control' through the previous South African Technological network (SATN)

which is now Technological Higher Education Network South Africa (THENSA), comprising primarily of vice-chancellors (VCs) from the convenor system who seemed to want to retain their decision-making power for the sector.

The findings revealed that the UoT in this study adopted a proactive and radical approach: positioning itself as *instituere*/ an active conceptual force, shaping its environment and influencing the desired transformation, rather than passively reacting to external pressures. The UoT leaders championed experimentation, diversity, and collaboration to achieve its strategic goals that defined the UoT's distinctiveness. This involved balancing neoliberal efficiency with a commitment to equity and the public good, led through the inclusion of general education in all undergraduate curricula. This is discussed further in Chapter Eight. This shift represented a transition from efficiency-driven practices to student-centered and social reconstruction ideologies. Radical approaches, such as the one taken by the UoT, could serve as a means for the institution to completely renounce its previous identity which is often met with resistance due to the historical context (Gwandura & Mayekiso, 2021). This was very visible in the study and is discussed in the sections 7.5.2 and 7.5.3.

Deleuze's concept of '*difference in itself*' or '*immanence*' underscores this transformation (Parr, 2010). Difference³², viewed as a positive force, rejects static identities and instead emphasises the dynamic processes of becoming (Parr, 2010). For the UoT, this shift represented a celebration of creativity and transformation (i.e. perspectives at the executive level), positioning difference as a source of vitality and empowerment, rather than something to be negated or feared. This preoccupation with negativity and fear, clearly visible at the operational level, seemed to be a way of dealing with change and disruptions of normal rituals (see Chapter Five). These contrasting perspectives were highlighted in a comment made by one participant:

³² Difference – Deleuze, as the 'philosopher of difference' critiques traditional Western philosophy's focus on identity and representation. He emphasizes 'difference in itself', which highlights the uniqueness or distinctiveness of individual experiences rather than comparing them to a common standard. He argues that reality is fundamentally characterised by difference, and that identity should be understood in relation to these differences. He advocates for a shift in thinking to appreciate the singularity of each moment and entity, moving away from conventional notions of representation. (see Parr, 2010)

But with all the angst that we had and having to take some staff kicking and screaming and pulling back and so on. We have moved and I think we have ...you know [the institution] has made a lot more progress than many other UoTs. [EM2]

These sentiments were evidenced in another study that highlighted the complexities and pressures faced by academics as they navigate in a rapidly changing, HE education landscape (see Garraway, et al., 2019). Notwithstanding the internal challenges/reactive forces, there was a sense that the UoT was positioning its distinctiveness, its difference.

By positioning difference as a core element of reality, the focus shifts from static identities to dynamic processes of *becoming*. An affirmative ontology where 'being' is seen as a process of 'becoming', is a complex and dynamic process (Parr, 2010). This process highlights the fluidity of existence and the continuous nature of change, always in a state of transition/flux. Becoming-active embodies a positive force that drives change and innovation, allowing for new identities and realities. The process is about empowerment and agency (see Chapter Three).

The next sections illuminate an understanding of the tensions between *instituire* as an active/positive force and the other reactive forces at the micro, meso, macro and supra levels. Some reflections on the possibilities of a UoT "without ruins" (Waghid, 2017) are expanded at the end of this chapter (see section 7.7).

7.5.2 Instituire as deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation forces

The Deleuzeguattarian concepts of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation are multifaceted and can be applied to understand the dynamic changes within this institution. In the context of the study, *instituire* is seen as an assemblage and deterritorialisation is described as a process of the assemblage "coming undone" (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983: 322). Within this assemblage, there is constant flow/movement that challenges and/or breaks down old, rigid structures and practices, allowing for the creation of new connections that come together in fresh, innovative ways that were not possible and/or thought of before. *Instituire*, in this case the UoT, can be seen as not a destabilising force that seeks to emulate others. Rather, it should be seen as a creative force allowing for new configurations and possibilities and in the

institution *in becoming*³³ (see also simulacra in section 7.6). This sub-section examines these processes in various dimensions – strategic, ideological, historical and cultural, seen as functioning as lines of flight/synapses (see section 8.5).

7.5.2.1 Strategic and ideological changes

Strategically, the UoT was undergoing the process of ‘undoing’ or ‘breaking down’ established structures, practices and norms through its new focus on student-centredness and engagement. The study data suggests that students at the UoT are at the centre of the academic project. However, there was a deep need to understand who the UoT’s students are, to ensure both epistemic and ontologic success (Winberg & Makua, 2019). In other words, the focus on work-ready graduates (‘means to an end’) is ‘largely misplaced, even in a context where the primary purpose of HE is the provision of skilled labour. A curriculum that is overly focused on work readiness may reduce the richness of knowledge and learning experiences and prioritise practical skills at the expense of theoretical understanding and critical engagement with complex ideas. This reduction can limit students’ ability to engage with broader societal issues and contribute meaningfully to their communities and work. It was time for the UoT to rethink its mandate and understanding while the employability of its graduates remains important, it should not come at the expense of the institution’s responsibility to promote public good (‘an end in itself’) (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 148; d’Agnese, 2020).

This process of deterritorialisation was critical to support the complex balancing act between its efficiency and equity goals. Simultaneously, a process of reterritorialisation also became visible to re-establish new structures and norms and promote new practices as seen through the overarching strategic plan of the university during the study period. Ideologically, it can be argued that the strategic intent was seen as ‘cutting edge’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 88) as it challenged existing power

³³ *Becoming – together with difference, becoming is part of Deleuze’s corpus. Similarly, it challenges the Western emphasis of static being and identity. Reality is seen as dynamic and constantly changing, with ‘becoming’ representing the continuous production of difference within events. This process is argued to be the essence of change itself and not merely a transitioning. Drawing from Nietzsche’s idea of the ‘eternal return’, Deleuze views time as a flow of production rooted in difference, rather than the backdrop for events. This perspective reshapes traditional philosophical notions, suggesting that the self/object/body is not a stable entity but a constantly evolving assemblage influenced by various forces (Stagoll, 2010; Parr, 2010).*

dynamics and knowledge hierarchies within academia. Deterritorialisation challenges existing power dynamics and knowledge hierarchies within the academy.

Institutional differentiation affects curricula across different institutional types. The history and the culture of an institution play a significant role in determining what knowledge is legitimised, who gets access to education and how success is measured (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The study findings showed that this was expressed in two ways: questioning of the role of academic disciplines' capacity in its previous form and in the rethinking of its new form to adequately prepare future ready graduates; and the imperative to include diverse and inclusive perspectives in the curriculum that reflect global issues and in this way prepare graduates for a multicultural world. Chapter Eight highlights the tensions that arose with this disruption.

7.5.2.2 Historical and cultural changes: towards forging a new identity

The study findings affirmed the institutional identity is deeply intertwined with culture, forming the 'personality' of an institution. Institutional culture encompasses the underlying beliefs, shared values, and practices within an institution, which collectively define how it operates and shapes, which collectively define how it operates and shapes its members' sense of identity. This includes formal and informal codes of conduct, rituals, symbols and the overall ethos of the institution (Garraway & Winberg, 2019; USAf, 2015). Historically, deterritorialisation can be seen in how HEIs evolve in response to societal changes. Culturally, deterritorialisation can lead to the emergence of new identities and practices within the university., for example, the CRP, the revised PQM, and the new strategic direction of the UoT.

UoTs or erstwhile Technikons, with their historical legacy rooted in colonialism and apartheid, carry this influence into the curricula, their practices and stakeholder experiences (see Chapters 2 and 5). Historically focused on vocational training, applied sciences and technology, UoTs aim to address skills shortages, enhance employability and provide diverse educational pathways that cater to various aspirations of students. Boughey and McKenna (2021) argue that this differentiation is not merely administrative but should reflect deeper societal values and priorities regarding education and fostering a more skilled and capable workforce. Notably the findings show that the UoT in the study, since its inception, was still steeped in its old

practices. The findings suggest that instead of just showing compliance to the new policies, that the UoT could seize the opportunity and use a more radical approach to bring about a change in its culture and practices.

The study findings highlight the UoT's efforts to shift from its historical practices towards a student-centred and engaged university through its strategic plan; revealing that an institutional identity is open, fluid, and can change over time. The efforts extended beyond PQM renewal and alignment to include the development of a profile of graduate attributes and the fostering the culture of a holistic education. These shifts were catalysed by a charismatic new Vice Chancellor (VC), at the start of the project, who championed education as a public good. He sought to challenge performativity-focused discourses and practices by the liberal agenda imperative, despite its implementation limitations. Troiani & Dutson (2021, p.5) astutely describe the VC's vision to "resist, rethink and reclaim the space to learn/think/work" at a neoliberal university. The VC emphasised creative and critical thinking, social responsibility as critical citizenship as core education goals for a VUCA world. His vision for the UoT contrasted sharply with the existing "edufactory" practices that prioritise performativity, efficiency and quantifiable outcomes (Troiani & Dutson, 2021, p. 5). This re-imagining of education aimed to balance strategic neoliberal drivers with a commitment to equitable and socially just education. Prioritising public good shifts education beyond job preparation to nurturing critical awareness, adaptability and meaningful contributions to communities, professions, society and the environment (Rossouw & Goldman, 2023).

The current emphasis on developing 21st century skills such as creative and critical thinking, adaptability, collaboration and emotional intelligence reflects the broader historical shift towards valuing a holistic educational experience over one that prioritises graduates for specific workplaces. As alluded to earlier, literature is replete with criticisms and arguments against neoliberalism and the increasing shifting towards efficiency in traditional university settings (Akala, 2021; d'Agnese, 2020; Rossouw & Goldman, 2023; Troiani & Dutson, 2021;). These debates do not exclude UoTs, who are primarily neoliberal institutions. These calls signify the need to move away from rigid and narrow curricula towards more fluid and responsive models.

The liberal agenda was seen as a deterritorialising force. However, it can also be seen as a reterritorialising force to solidify the new values that prioritise a reconceptualising of PoE within broader societal trends. This dual focus means that UoTs have to grapple with the need to provide quality education while ensuring it addresses its original mandates. A UoT has to consider how the history of an institution influences its curriculum, its practices and its experiences of both staff and students and to recognise the past injustices have bearing on present educational practices: this is dealt with more depth in the next chapter. It is well known that in a neoliberal university, students are increasingly viewed as customers and their education is commodified. A concern is that this view, in turn, alters the students' perceptions, expectations and experiences that often lead them to prioritise employability over genuine learning and engagement. The findings show that the executives were pre-occupied with these concerns, while the participants seemed distracted by the complex array of changes buffeting them.

In Deleuze's view, historical and social changes are not linear or progressive but are recognised as novel only in retrospect (Parr, 2010). This means that becoming is not part of history but rather history provides the conditions that one transcends to create something new. This aligns with Nietzsche's notion of the 'untimely' suggesting that true change occurs outside conventional history or historical narratives (Parr, 2010). Becoming is a complex and dynamic process that challenges traditional notions of identity and stability emphasising the fluidity of existence and the continuous nature of change. This is exemplified in the deterritorialisation efforts and the breaking away from existing historical and cultural constraints, allowing for new configurations and possibilities to emerge at the UoT. This process of 'coming undone' is effectively illustrated through Deleuze and Guattari's metaphor of volcanic magma flows³⁴, as noted in Le Grange (2019). By likening institutions to flowing magma, the metaphor underscores the dynamic force that challenges the rigidity of UoTs' mantle. This symbolises the capacity for transformation, as differentiated subsets within the SAHE system. This analogy emphasises the creative potential of territories to evolve and redefine themselves. Akin to the volcanic activity reshaping the earth's surface,

³⁴ Deterritorialisation as volcanic magma flow – highlights how magma disrupts the stability of the earth's mantle, creating new pathways and altering established structures. It underscores the potential for territories to undergo significant changes and detach from fixed boundaries (Le Grange, 2019).

institutions can transcend traditional limitations, leading to new forms, cultures, identities and relationships, including new possibilities for practice.

The next section explores the tensions and contestations during the processes of disruption/deterritorialisation from established systems, fixed identities, and ways of doing and being. The section also examines reterritorialisation as a process of establishing new ways of organising and understanding, through interconnectivity and effective leadership and support. This is evidenced in the efforts made by the UoT, through its new symbols—CRP guidelines, GE principles, strategic plans and so on—and systemic literacies to foster meaningful dialogue about the university's envisioned role in society.

7.5.3 Systemic literacies: A process of reterritorialisation

The process of reterritorialisation follows deterritorialisation. It involves creating new structures, identities or systems after the disruption, with the new elements evolving in a new configuration. It is not oppositional, although both processes are intricately connected (Parr, 2010). Curriculum decision-making does not happen in a vacuum; it is deeply influenced by social and systemic factors that can be inextricably linked to the processes of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. Systemic literacy is about developing nuanced understandings of and the ability to navigate university structures and complex interrelationships within higher education systems (Samuel, 2023, p. 179). During periods of disruption/deterritorialisation, understanding systemic literacies/power dynamics is an important attribute in individuals and/or groups to be able to act thoughtfully and effectively towards a deeper intellectual engagement with curriculum change. In the context of this study, it was about understanding: who the curriculum workers are, what was/is their locatedness, and what measures of support was required to '*galvanise*' the interest and capacity of the people to achieve the desired transformation. The institutional leader pointed out that recognising and understanding these systemic literacies can be seen as enabling forces for change with an institution. This will be discussed further in the sub-sections below.

7.5.3.1 Leadership matters

Institutional leaders' missions play a pivotal role in shaping the power dynamics and setting the tone for institutional culture and governance. As they define their visions,

they inevitably impact the agency of curriculum players, academics and other stakeholders (Sugrue, et al., 2019). This intrinsic drive asserts their power and influence within their environments. The intrinsic driving force can be understood through the lens of ‘will to power’, and is about thinking about what the institution does or might do. Deleuze sees power as an immanent principle arising from interactions with social context rather than it being an externally imposed force (Parr, 2010). It is fluid and contingent upon interactions among the various forces within an assemblage. This perspective challenges traditional notions of power as something held or wielded by an individual or institution; proposing instead a dynamic interplay where identities are continuously negotiated and reshaped. This perspective was eloquently captured by the institutional leader:

“trying to understand how to galvanise the capacity of people...what do we have to do to improve their capacity, build their capacity, unleash their capacity, all those kind of things...its totally nontrivial thing...the VC cannot just flick a switch...institutional approach to galvanise this kind of interest to do interesting things...there is where a VC realises that your ability to achieve something really depends on what is sitting underneath” [EM1].

This participant’s comments give meaning to the African proverb³⁵, *“if you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together”* (Author unknown). The findings suggested that this institutional leader recognised the wisdom in deliberative and collaborative curriculum making. He possessed systemic literacies to be aware of “what enables or impedes the growth of a socially-just HE system” (Samuel, 2023, p. 179). This transformational UoT leader affirmed that as entities within an academic assemblage interact, they navigate their positions and desires that may lead to both affirmations and/or transformations of identity (Parr, 2010). This process highlights the relational nature of power emphasising how curriculum workers and academics assert their own identities amidst ongoing change. Acknowledging this nuanced understanding allows for an appreciation that institutional missions are not static. They are constantly evolving through negotiation, conflict and collaboration.

³⁵ This proverb’s exact origin is unclear, although it has been attributed to various Africa communities, underscoring the value of collaboration and community in achieving long-term goals. It reflects the communal ethos that pervades many African societies and resonates across the continent ([10 African Proverbs, Their Origin, and Meaning - RefinedNG](#); [Who first said: if you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together? | Andrew Whitby](#))

Institutional leaders influence how authority and responsibility are distributed and how they lead change initiatives effectively (Phillips & Snodgrass, 2022). At the study site, senior executives were positioned to implement the structural changes, leveraging their influence to foster their environments towards the collective intended goals. They had to be aware of the internal structural and cultural nuances that shape decision-making processes. They had to recognise that these factors can either facilitate or hinder their efforts to promote change. The findings revealed that an executive deans' ability to effect change was contingent upon their perceived legitimacy within their faculties. This became more crucial, following the intensity of change/disruption at the study site. At the programme levels, the curriculum champions were nominated to support department heads and the academic staff. Additionally, the GE task teams at both institutional and faculty levels were instrumental in enhancing capacitation and support and leveraging the curriculum renewal project (CRP) goals. The study suggests that leaders at executive, middle and operation levels who can navigate internal and external pressure, are more likely to succeed in promoting meaningful change.

7.5.3.2 Social and cultural conditioning

The concept of social conditioning, as explored by Boughey and McKenna (2021), highlights how societal norms, values and structure shape the experiences and agency of academics within differentiated HEIs. They posit that this conditioning influences how they see their roles and also how they are perceived by others. This affects decision-making processes, institutional practices and seizing opportunities, emphasising the importance of contextualised approaches to curriculum practices.

Despite the multiple layers of support that was provided to support the CRP and build capacitation, the findings revealed that managing and implementing change can unsettle all players within the university community, and this could lead to challenges in adapting new ideas and expectations. For curriculum workers across HEIs in general, attachment to traditional/entrenched practices makes embracing new reforms challenging; this is compounded when there is insufficient time for adaptation. The institutional management team recognised that a supportive institutional culture can empower and motivate academics to innovate and engage meaningfully, while

attempting to minimise negative culture may lead to feelings of alienation (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). This has bearing on curriculum workers who found themselves in these new roles for the first time within a new emerging and autonomous institution. It is important to note that in the convenor system, Technikons outside the convenorship generally failed to nurture curriculum capacity.

The curriculum champions in the study, particularly in the health sciences faculty, reported high levels of anxiety and uncertainty that manifested in their faculties, amid what they perceived as conflicting agendas and stakeholders' expectations. This dynamic demonstrates how power operates at different levels within the institution. Instead of embracing roles as change agents, academics and some curriculum champions seemed to act defensively, operating as reactive or subjugated forces, in response to institutional and national policy pressures rather than actively engaging with the transformative initiatives. These feelings of angst could be attributed to the general lack of systemic literacy among the participants at the operational level. This may be illustrated by their fixations on the institution's historical roots as a Technikon and/or its lower positioning in the SAHE hierarchy, the fluid and evolving identity of the new university, the competing agendas within these settings, lack of 'professional kudos', their plurality of identity within a neoliberal space, the increasing pace of performativity. All contributed to the prominence of reactive forces that were seen to be overshadowing the proactive and creative forces within the institution.

Similar findings were evident in other studies (Garraway, et al., 2019; Garraway & Winberg, 2019) that highlight the complexities and challenges that UoTs face as they navigate their new identities in a rapidly changing SAHE landscape. In deleuzian terms, these findings underscore the interactions between proactive and reactive forces within an assemblage within times of change, illustrating how deeply rooted identities, cultures and histories can both shape and/or constrain an institution's evolution towards a re-imagined purpose. Samuel (2023, p. 180) posits that this understanding of positionalities on the part of the varied actors within the assemblage is critical to "showing how their ontological, structural and theoretical locatedness might be simultaneously a resource or a limitation." The varied positionalities or 'locatedness' of the various individuals in the study aimed to provide an integrated understanding of the systemic and personal literacies required to enact curriculum

reconceptualisation and decision-making in an evolving institutional and SAHE landscape (see previous section).

7.5.3.3 The ‘enactment of responsibility’

In South Africa, many universities grapple with systemic challenges stemming from a lack of critical thought, sound judgment, and a sense of responsibility (Waghid, 2017). These issues impede their ability to engage meaningfully with diverse perspectives and broader societal problems. When faculties neglect to evaluate educational and research priorities or fail to empower students to challenge societal norms, they undermine their core mission of fostering intellectual freedom, critical inquiry, and social justice (Waghid, 2017).

To remain relevant, faculties must actively engage in critical discourse that questions established norms and promotes institutional evolution. This dynamic engagement is essential for universities to reaffirm their role in shaping a democratic and equitable future (Waghid, 2017). This author posits that universities mirror the societies they serve and have a responsibility to confront societal crises by addressing existing deficiencies and anticipating future needs. This requires embracing risks and fostering a culture of critical reflection and active listening. Waghid (2017) highlights that listening is fundamental to responsible academic practice within universities. He posits that listening enables a better understanding of the institution’s norms and values, which is crucial for responsible action. He suggests that faculties can achieve more informed and nuanced thinking, leading to stronger justification and accountability for their practices.

This section explored the force of the institution, *instituere*, in re-imagining itself in VUCA times and why it envisioned a difference for its curricula and its operations. It also looked at how the curriculum champions experienced these forces and why. The next section deals with exploring how the external meso and macro forces influenced the macro-level curriculum decisions that led to the existing PQM.

7.6 Programme differentiation: Emulations or simulacra³⁶

The study findings showed a significant shift in its first offerings in the two faculties, from diplomas to degrees, affirming what appears to be the perceived homogenisation of the institution's academic programmes or PQM to traditional university offerings. This was also visible in other faculties that were not included in the study. This shift from diploma to degree deviated from the differentiation policy framework that characterises UoTs with a focus on career-based and undergraduate education and the offering of diplomas (DHET, 2014). This section focuses on the complexities of programme differentiation, particularly the shift from diplomas to degrees. This shift is analysed in relation to broader debates about institutional identity, differentiation, and potential risks of isomorphism in the SAHE landscape. The section highlights the external pressures—political, regulatory, and industry-related—that shape curriculum decision-making, often creating tensions between aspirations for transformation and the realities of compliance with standardised frameworks like the HEQSF, professional bodies and so on.

A meta-analysis of these findings follows in the sub-sections below and concludes by questioning whether these shifts represent merely emulations of traditional university models. Or do these changes at the UoT and in the curriculum represent genuine transformation or simulacra, in Deleuzian terms. Unlike traditional copies that need something to give them meaning, the UoT and its curriculum, as simulacra, present its own power to create a new identity and ethos from within itself (Parr, 2010). Rather than being seen to be imitating or emulating, it asserts itself while navigating external pressures.

7.6.1 Policy implications: “Sword of Damocles”

The critique of the revised HEQSF as a “sword of Damocles”—a looming threat to disrupt established practices and force substantial changes—reflects the impact of one of the policy changes on the UoT sector in SA (van Koller, 2010, p.157). While his statement may invoke negative connotations, this policy disruption presented opportunities for HEIs and UoTs in particular, to rethink their academic programmes

³⁶ Deleuze's simulacra serves as a critical lens through which to examine contemporary culture and the nature of representation (Parr, 2010; Smith, 2006). See also Section 7.7

and qualification mix. As alluded to earlier, the responses from the UoT in the study was two-fold. At the institutional level, structural changes manifested through policies and strategies to re-envision the university and its curriculum. Contrastingly, at the operational level, the implementation seemed to be generally trapped in a wave of compliance that seemed to be pervading the SAHE landscape (refer to Chapter Six).

The abolishment of the BTech degree meant that only a three-year bachelor's remained at the NQF level, which could be either generally or professionally oriented. The introduction of the Advanced Diploma (AdvDip), the replacement qualification of the BTech degree, intended to facilitate progression for diploma graduates in the UoT sector. The intended role as a bridge may have not been well established, leading to concerns about whether it effectively serves this purpose; particularly when graduates try to articulate into further studies and/or professional development. However, in the revised HEQSF, diploma graduates had to also now complete a postgraduate diploma or honours qualification to enter a master's degree, extending the study duration by a minimum of one year.

While this unintended consequence of retaining a diploma was raised as a concern in the findings, the data was generally silent about the introduction of AdvDip as a replacement qualification. In the selected two faculties in the study, the decision offer degrees over diplomas seemed to be driven by other forces—complexity of practice, prestige and professional recognition, professional registration for practice—and less motivated by the removal of the BTech qualification from the revised HEQSF. These findings could suggest that, at the operational level, the curriculum workers 'seized the moment' to bring about the long-awaited professional parity that was desired (see Chapter 6).

While the findings did not seem to focus on the newly introduced AdvDip, there are some concerns that surfaced in the data that overlap with the institutional feedback, as reported by the Council of Higher education (CHE) on the review of the HEQSF (CHE, 2022). This extensive report highlights specific shortcomings about the replacement qualification: diffusion of purpose, lack of sector awareness and need for stakeholder collaboration. Firstly, the feedback about the "diffuse" nature of the AdvDip suggests that it lacks a clear purpose and/ or defined outcomes (CHE, 2022, p. 17).

Unlike the previously established BTech degree, which had a recognised focus, the AdvDip seems to cover a wide range of objectives and seems to have multiple purposes. For example, i) professional preparation for bachelor's degree graduates and, ii) articulation between vocational and general/professional postgraduate studies. This broadness can undermine its value and lead to confusion, for both curriculum workers, academics and students (CHE, 2022). Secondly, the lack of sector awareness implies that this qualification has not been sufficiently understood or recognised in different sectors—such as HEIs, professional bodies and industry—that may affect its acceptance and understanding across the different sectors. Many voices from the academic sector stressed the importance of ensuring alignment with industry needs and professional body requirements, leading to concerns about relevance and applicability at this level of learning (CHE, 2022). Overall, there were concerns about this qualification gaining traction and credibility.

A further critique of the revised HEQSF was the absence of a unique degree variant at NQF level seven, for the UoT sector. A degree variant may have led to a different outcome for the UoT in the study. There was a suggestion, by some institutions, that a professional diploma (different to the AdvDip) may suffice to accommodate the diverse needs of vocational/professionally oriented education (CHE, 2023, 2022). The argument is that the emphasis on generic qualifications and descriptors could lead to compromise on certain aspects of vocational education to meet generic standards leading to conflicts between adherence and/or maintaining vocational relevance. While these concerns are legitimate and have implications for the UoT sector, these discourses highlight the pre-occupation with a standards-based higher education. An education that is predetermined and measured and follows standardised educational processes, and often primarily focused on work-readiness.

Contrastingly, the HEQSF has also been critiqued for this unwarranted rigidity and lack of flexibility, potentially hindering an institution's ability to adapt to economic and societal changes. This inhibited HEIs from capitalising on their strengths and responding effectively to regional and national priorities (CHE, 2023, 2022). Additionally, the constraints imposed by the revised HEQSF have been critiqued, on how it shaped and limited the ways in which knowledge is perceived and valued in higher education (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; CHE, 2023, 2022). Ironically, the policy

that was intended to bring about a transformed education system instead is the main driver of the perceived homogenisation of curricula and teaching methods. This, in turn, yields to the continuing debates around homogeneity in what is a differentiated South African higher education (SAHE) sector.

The findings in the study revealed that in the alignment to the HEQSF, the UoT optimised the opportunities to engage with questions of knowledge and transformation—what knowledge and to what ends is the knowledge meant to serve—at least at the espoused levels of curriculum planning. Additionally, the idea of a unique/variant degree for the UoT sector opens debates about the institution's relationship with knowledge, as briefly covered in the next section.

7.6.2 Regulators as reactive forces

Professional bodies, globally and in SA, play a crucial regulatory role in higher education curriculum development by guiding, setting standards, and accrediting university qualifications (Dowelani & Dowelani, 2020). Accreditation of higher education programmes/qualifications is a widely accepted practice globally, aimed at ensuring quality control and assurance in higher education. The rationale for this practice is to create uniformity across the sector. When considering the nature and purpose of curriculum in professional disciplines, the role of the professional bodies with their regulatory requirements and code of ethics, often lead to tensions. These potentially conflicting influences of liberalism, vocationalism, and professional accreditation was explored in the previous chapter.

Professional councils played a key role in regulating curriculum, as gatekeepers and custodians to protect the public, prior to the strong policy driving forces towards a social justice agenda in SA. In the post-apartheid SA context, professional councils have faced significant scrutiny and critique regarding their roles and the interests they serve. Historically, these professional councils were perceived as being bastions of particular worldviews that often aligned with the interests of specific groups, thereby marginalising broader public interests (Ballim, Mabizela, & Mubangizi, 2014; ECSA, n.d.; Naidoo & Rajcoomar, 2020). This critique has prompted a re-evaluation and transformation of these bodies, leading to several key developments in their evolution. As professional councils undergo transformation, there is a re-examination of who

qualifies as a 'professional' in various professional sectors. The criteria for professionalism are being broadened to include diverse educational backgrounds, experiences, and competencies. This evolution recognises that expertise can come from various pathways, not solely traditional academic routes (ECSA, n.d.; Meyers, Naidoo & Skinner, 2024).

The findings revealed that the professional bodies are seen as dominant external forces that were able to subdue the proactive institutional force, including other micro, meso, macro and supra forces. This influence was most visible in the engineering faculty and to a lesser degree for the programmes in the health sciences faculty. However, anecdotal evidence showed the force of the professional body/ies in other programmes in the same faculty that are, not included in the study. Certain programmes are grappling to retain their accreditation with their regulatory councils. These competing structures/bodies have positions of power and demand curriculum spaces in the curriculum decision-making and design.

It is important to recognise that these external agents sometimes subdue institutional forces; by using registration for practice as their bargaining tool (Ramrathan, 2016). With respect to professional registration, engineering graduates are required to meet specific education criteria for registration in the various categories. The findings revealed that two bachelor's degrees that exit at the same level of learning but come from two differentiated universities have different outcomes for registration to practice. This can be clearly seen in the routing for ECSA registration for professional engineer (see Figure 6.1). One could argue that considering the histories of the sector, the 'disproportionate power and particular interests that an entity possesses', to define what a curriculum should be, can act as "an ideological device for protecting privilege" (Naidoo & Ranchod 2018: p. 17-18). One participant refers to the professional body functioning as an "English Old Boys Club" (see section 6.4.1), raising concerns about the role of 'the powerful' in maintaining the status quo. In this instance, institutional differentiation remains the marginalised group, instead of race. In contrast, the HPCSA requires completion of accredited training for registration of health professionals (Ballim, Mabizela & Mubangizi, 2014; Dowelani & Dowelani, 2020), followed by ongoing continuous professional development (CPD).

This concern of the disproportionate power that professional bodies hold, is further visible in the study; where the curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making in engineering seemed to be ‘controlled’ by the professional body (ECSA) standards. The participants reported the strong need for compliance for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, the new curricula had to meet the ECSA standards and criteria to receive endorsement/approval. Secondly, this endorsement is a requirement by the CHE for programme accreditation. This situation was exacerbated by the desire to meet international standards. The exertion by the HPCSA in the health sciences programme was less severe, although there was need for some levels of compliance as it relates to the scope of practice and ethical codes of conduct. Perhaps this has to do with how these two regulatory bodies operate in their distinct domains. Their roles in HE settings exhibit different levels of control. ECSA’s focus emphasises quality assurance in engineering education, whereas HPCSA’s focus is on the protection of public health and ensuring compliance with ethical standards. Structurally and functionally, the HPCSA do not have wield the same ‘power’ over the curriculum like ECSA does. Perhaps, this has to do with the professional kudos, alluded to earlier, where medicine, engineering and law are considered powerful regions, and their curricula are “strongly classified and framed” (Muller, as cited in Clegg, 2016, p. 462). This is not the case is the newer regions, as discussed in the previous section.

These scenarios can be explained in several ways. Boughey & McKenna (2021) speak about the different kinds of freedom that different universities experience and the “emergence of compliance”. They assert that “historically black universities and [erstwhile] Technikons were structurally and culturally conditioned into the greatest compliance to the state (Boughey & McKenna, 2021, p. 45). While they reference the government, this can be extrapolated to other external forces, namely the professional bodies and/or the CHE, exerting themselves within these settings. Alternatively, this could be attributed to how curriculum workers and academics working at UoTs and equivalent settings, perceive their identities. At UoTs, academics often derive their identities from their professional expertise rather than their academic roles, especially in settings where practical skills and industry experience is prioritised over research (Meyers, Naidoo & Skinner, 2024; Garraway, et al., 2019).

This may explain why the participants perceived that the engineering faculty “*seemed to know what they were doing.*” Contrastingly, operating to the dictates of the professional body could be interpreted as a reactive force, and not as proactive as generally perceived. The debates about standards and standardisation are pervasive and it is argued that while it is important for ensuring quality and consistency, it can stifle innovation leading to frustration among curriculum workers if the standardised processes do not accommodate unique and sensible solutions to specific problems (Dowelani & Dowelani, 2020; Naidoo & Rajcoomar, 2020). This was illustrated in engineering faculty, in terms of how they responded to the imperative to include GE in the undergraduate programmes. The GE integration was scuppered by the regulatory requirements to include complementary studies in all engineering undergraduate programmes. In principle, these engineering degrees did not ‘comply’ with the institutional mandate of curriculum design, compared to the compliance the professional body requirements. This discussion is expanded in Chapter Eight.

7.6.3 Meaningful transition to UoT: A relationship with knowledge

The idea of a meaningful transition from Technikon to UoT requires a re-imagining of the institution's relationship with knowledge, is a long-standing debate about differentiation and homogenisation (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). The long-term relevance of a UoT education that prioritises immediate workplace skills, “without necessarily foregrounding access to the powerful principles underpinning such skills” has also been flagged by others (Boughey and McKenna, 2021, p.112; Clegg, 2016; Ntshoe, 2020). This is essentially about creating a balance in curriculum to facilitate access to knowledge construction (conceptual) while providing high level skills training for future oriented workplaces and society (contextual). These scholars cite two critical reasons for this: theoretical/conceptual knowledge in the curriculum contributes to the development of critical citizenry; and privileging contextual knowledge over conceptual knowledge works against the very goal of economic development proposed in the White Paper on post-school education and training in SA. Boughey & McKenna (2021) contend that unless this shift happens, it will be difficult to position UoTs in SA as a university of choice, compared to their counterparts in SA and other countries. While

the knowledge debates are outside the scope of this study, the conversations about ‘powerful regional knowledge’³⁷ within the UoT context cannot be ignored.

Powerful regional knowledge must be conceptually coherent and contextually relevant, as argued by Clegg (2016), to provide access to reliable explanations of the world; as students engage with and understand complex social and natural phenomena. Facing two-way curricula that draw from multiple disciplines and address real-world applications is essential in preparing students for future oriented workplaces. Boughey & McKenna (2021, p. 104) call this the “two characteristics of being a region”. In PoE, advocating for one should not be at the expense of the other (Garraway and Winberg, 2019). Several studies (Annala, et al., 2022; Clegg, 2016; Garraway & Reddy, 2016; Lockett & Shay, 2020; Ntshoe & Malebo, 2021; Wheelahan, 2012) have explored curricula that provide conceptually rich applied knowledge that move beyond workplace skills.

Young and Muller (2013) classify two types of theoretical knowledge: hierarchical as seen in the sciences and horizontal, typically of the humanities. These authors highlight that the core concepts advance hierarchically for both scientific and humanistic knowledge. For the sciences, it is straightforward as the concepts layer upon each other. In the humanities, while the knowledge may be presented horizontally, advancements may occur in a hierarchical fashion, as new paradigms emerge and contribute to the broader understanding of topics within relevant fields. Professional knowledge is specialised for both conceptual development and specific contextual applications (Ntshoe & Mabelo, 2021; Young & Muller, 2013). In other words, professionals are expected to grasp complex ideas that inform their practice through a deeper understanding of the underlying concepts. Professional knowledge is tailored to specific contexts, as it considers the unique demands and realities within a professional field.

³⁷ Powerful knowledge encompasses knowledge that enables profound understanding and abstract thinking, and contrasts with everyday knowledge. Regional knowledge extends this framework by situating powerful knowledge within specific locales. It stresses the importance of contextualised learning that reflects the unique characteristics of a region, including its socio-economic, historical and cultural dimensions. This enhances students’ abilities to address local/regional challenges and engage meaningfully with their communities. (Annala, et al., 2022; Clegg, 2016)

Clegg (2016) stresses the importance of recognising the contextual nature of professional practices; and argues that the curricula should be responsive to the specific needs and realities of the regions they serve, rather than adopting a standardised approach. This author adds that it should not be limited to traditional academic disciplines but should incorporate knowledge generated outside the academy. This requires an understanding of local contexts and geopolitical realities, making the curriculum responsive to the needs of diverse students. The decentralisation and quest for greater institutional autonomy in the UoT sector in SA reflects a broader desire for institutions to make decisions about what best suits their regional and contextual needs (see GE principles to include the local and regional in Chapter Five). In this way, UoTs should have the freedom to develop programmes that resonate with the specific needs of their student populations, rather than being confined to a centralised/national curriculum that may miss local realities. This study affirms institutional autonomy in as essential in fostering innovation and relevance in curriculum planning and decision-making.

Study participants at the executive levels expressed concerns about the high level of shifts to degrees and the importance of ensuring the balance for two-way facing curricula. Although there was a general sense of achievement about the status of the new PQM, there were deeper concerns about missed opportunities to think more deeply about these issues. There was also a general view among the participants that there was insufficient leadership in curriculum design and development and that this as aspect of professional development was missing at the institutional level. Many of the curriculum workers believed that they could have been better supported during these periods of transition and becoming, This could explain why there were varying degrees of angst and resistance to curriculum change, seen more forcefully in the health sciences faculty. Some of the curriculum champions affirmed that they felt incapacitated and alienated during the study period. These feelings were exacerbated, when trying to convince others while dealing with their own internal struggles (see Chapter Five).

This “professional kudos” argues Clegg (2016, p. 463), is not just about recognition, respect and prestige, rather it is about establishing authority as a newer region. She argues that this struggle for recognition can significantly hinder the development of

newer professions: i) to define and legitimise their own knowledge bases and, ii) to develop robust and coherent curricula. This will be discussed in the next section.

7.6.4 Building professional recognition/kudos

Traditional universities generally have are stronger regions, in contrast to the regions at erstwhile Technikons, that lack a strong conceptual base (Muller, 2009). A longstanding and controversial outcome is that UoT graduates enter the workforce at different, and mostly, lower entry levels compared to graduates from traditional universities. This means that, while professions/regions within the engineering and health sciences faculties at the UoT are affiliated with ‘traditional professions’, like medicine and engineering at traditional universities, they may not have the same level of recognition, prestige or established authority. In other words, they lack “professional kudos” (Clegg, 2016, p. 463). The findings revealed that the shift to degrees in the two faculties was strongly motivated in wanting to build professional recognition and respect, with the elevated status of the qualification and graduates exiting the system.

The differentiated system for the engineering field is clear, with its long history, recognised standards and established pathways for education, registration and practice. The findings revealed that the curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making for the engineering degrees was predicated on the desire to build professional kudos. This included concerted effort: i) to increase the conceptual base, ii) add the missing complementary studies to the curriculum and iii) revisit the pressing challenges associated with workplace learning in the diploma, with respect to the quality of the assessment in the modules and the low throughput rates. On the surface, it appears as if the shift to the degree affirms the current debates about emulating traditional universities as there seemed to be a preoccupation with the relation it holds with its professional body, including the disparity in professional registration for practice (see section 7.6.4 below).

Contrastingly, the differentiated system in the health sciences faculty is not as clear, as there have been no developments for the ‘mid-level’ worker. For the professions in the health sciences faculty, registration to practice is not stratified, compared to engineering. All these professions/regions in the study are what is considered as ‘newer professions/regions. The findings revealed that the curriculum

reconceptualising and decision-making for the health sciences professional degrees was predicated on the desire to i) build conceptual knowledge into the curriculum and ii) address the disparity within the health fraternity. Ensuring a balance in the conceptual and contextual aspects of the curriculum was even more critical for a qualification exiting at the honours level.

Additionally, both sets of degrees were developed to align with the national and institutional imperatives, the regulatory requirements, complex practices with each field, and to meet both research and practice requirements. This was requirement in order to receive accreditation for implementation. However, the findings suggest that at a deeper level, several iterations of curriculum change is necessary. Curriculum as a complex and dynamic force, is constantly evolving and is shaped/shapes by various influences/flows of desire and forces of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation. This is expanded in the next chapter).

7.7 Simulacra: Not institutional or programme emulations

In this section, I bring this notion of simulacra and its implications for understanding identity and representation into the debates about institutional and programme emulations and homogenisation. Deleuze's concept of simulacra represents a critical departure from traditional notions of representation, particularly those rooted in Platonic philosophy. In the Platonic idea, copies were considered truthful representations that maintain the resemblance to the original. In contrast, simulacra are seen as deceptive images that lack a true resemblance and are often dismissed as false or inferior (Plummer, 2019; Smith, 2006). Deleuze's framework overturns this idea and positions simulacra as not mere copies or degraded versions of originals; rather, they embody a complex interplay of difference and identity that challenges established hierarchies of meaning (Smith, 2006). This posits that difference is primary and that all images, including those we consider copies, emerge from complex systems devoid of fixed identities. This philosophical shift invites deeper exploration into how we understand identity and representation and recognises the significance of difference rather than adherence to static identities or truth, undermining the dualistic thinking (Smith, 2006). Within a differentiated SAHE system, the findings show that the UoT in the study identified the values and objectives they established for

themselves that align with their unique mission and vision statements, to shape their academic endeavours.

This philosophical framing offers a different thinking about the re-imagined PoC through the liberal agenda. I argue that the perception of UoT/s as ‘copies’ and emulations of traditional universities need revisiting. In this framework, the simulacra—the institution and its programmes/curricula—became a site of potentiality and transformation rather than what can be considered a ‘degraded’ copy. While the underlying concerns about differentiation have substance, especially in the SAHE landscape, this might also be true that while the programmes may look like copies, they may actually possess a difference (outside the scope of this study). The findings in the study suggest that the disrupted PoC (simulacra) possess their own intrinsic value and should not be regarded merely as emulations/copies (Plummer, 2019). Simulacra embody a positive difference from the ‘originals’ (curricula in traditional universities), and this is what allows them to exist independently and assert their own reality. A curriculum (simulacra) that is characterised by an internal dissimilarity that does not imitate but shows potential for transformation and the creation of new ideas/meanings independent of the original reference (Plummer, 2019). It represents a different mode of being and operates in a space of continuous change and multiplicity.

For a higher education system in any country to effectively address the demands imposed by the state, industry, students, and other stakeholders, it must exhibit differentiation (Singh 2008). Since no single institution can fulfil all these diverse requirements, the sector must reflect a variety of types, as illustrated by the South African context. This discussion will be expanded further in Chapter Nine.

7.8 The possibilities of an institutere in becoming in/for Africa

I close this chapter on the possibilities of a HE institution in Africa, for Africa; by borrowing from Waghid (2017, p. 1) the idea of a “university without ruins.” In his article, he critiques Readings’ pessimism about the contemporary university being ‘in

ruins'³⁸. Waghid (2017) posits that such a perspective may not be plausible or beneficial, as it fails to recognise the capacity of universities to adapt and flourish amidst evolving cultural and societal contexts. He contends that one must not assume that the status of a university as a free, open and responsible HEI is inherently compromised by forces of global capitalism, which are closely linked to market-driven ideologies. Furthermore, he asserts that “a university has to be responsive to the perceived ‘ruins’ within which it finds itself” (Waghid, 2017, p. 2). This statement suggests that a university must acknowledge and respond to the various challenges and crises that exist within the broader social, political, economic and ecological contexts. In other words, the university needs to be aware of issues around it, such as—societal injustices, cultural conflicts, economic hardships, ecological abuse—and it must engage with these issues through its inquiry, research and educational practices. This position resonates with the changing dynamic at the UoT to become responsive, resilient and responsible and remain relevant in society.

In exploring the notion of the university as a “task without end”, (Barnett, as cited in Waghid, 2017, p.1), he asserts that the university is perpetually in motion, continuously navigating its various spaces—social, political, economic, cultural, institutional, ecological, and so on – resulting in an evolving array of possibilities. The findings in this study illuminates the university, or a UoT functionally embodies both “an institution and an idea”, existing in the present while simultaneously harbouring “future possibilities”, and that it “embodies a set of particulars and universals”, affirming Barnett’s analysis of the contemporary university (Barnett, as cited in Waghid, 2017, p.1).

The shifting vision, strategy and ethos at the UoT exemplify a dual orientation; they are both present-focused and future-oriented and remain connected to the real world while also envisioning imaginative possibilities (Waghid, 2017). Such duality allows the institution to respond to respond to current challenges while exploring innovative avenues across various fields. The institution’s commitment to engagement with its

³⁸ Bill Readings’ 1996 work, *The University in Ruins*, presents a critical and pessimistic view of the contemporary university, which he argues is ‘in ruins’. This notion has resonated in academic discourse for more than two decades, reflecting deep concerns about the role and integrity of HE in a rapidly changing world (Waghid, 2017).

publics, was visible in the second strand of its institutional DNA. By engaging with communities and sharing its resources, the university enhances public understanding and fosters a dynamic intellectual environment. Ultimately, this approach cultivates a university that is both engaging and self-critical, open to new democratic visions and possibilities for transformation.

The UoT's intent on seeking new possibilities for itself, opened new 'lines of flight' through the new strategy, the CRP, the liberal agenda, and so on. This process can be interpreted as a form of 're-territorialisation' (Deleuze & Guattari, as cited in Waghid, 2017). Despite the tensions between the policy intentions and their practical enactments, the institution embraces creativity and change, positioning difference as a source of vitality rather than fostering homogenisation. I argue that the charismatic leadership at the study site was thinking differently about what a UoT in/of Africa *could be* and what the possibilities are to bring about the desired transformation 'as a responsible institution-in-becoming.' The concept of becoming underscores the complexity and dynamism inherent in this transformative process, highlighting the fluid nature of existence and the ongoing state of transition/flux. This state of transition and flux emphasises that the university, like becoming itself, lacks a definitive origin or destination, continually evolving to meet new challenges and embrace new possibilities. A discussion on the realm of futures and possibilities is expanded further in Chapter Nine.

7.9 Chapter Synthesis

This chapter critically explores the dynamic concept of *instituire* as both a proactive and reactive force in shaping and transforming UoTs within a broader SAHE landscape. Through a reflective meta-analysis, the chapter draws on theoretical perspectives—particularly Deleuzian concepts such as deterritorialisation, reterritorialisation, and becoming—to interrogate institutional transformation in VUCA times. The chapter positions *instituire* as more than a static institutional entity; it is conceptualised as a generative and transformative force, emphasising creativity, openness, and distinctiveness in an institution's mission and curricula. At the core of the discussion is the tension between institutional differentiation and isomorphism. While differentiation is essential for asserting institutional identities, the homogenisation trends driven by global rankings and neoliberal pressures challenge

the institution's ability to maintain their unique mandates and values. Through the lens of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, the chapter underscores the UoT's breaking away from rigid, historical practices and forging new institutional identities. These shifts are not merely reactive but are framed as proactive forces to re-imagine the UoT's purpose and role in society.

The chapter explored leadership and systemic literacies as critical enablers of institutional transformation. Effective leadership is portrayed as pivotal to fostering collaboration, navigating resistance and galvanising stakeholder capacity towards shared goals. The chapter also highlights the complexities faced by curriculum workers, particularly their struggles with entrenched practices, professional identity, and systemic inequities. The discussion also raises concerns about academic drift, the pressures of compliance, and the pervasive influence of external regulatory forces.

This chapter situates institutere as an active conceptual force with the potential to reshape SAHE by resisting instrumentalist paradigms and fostering transformation. This sets the stage for the subsequent chapter, which focuses on the transformative power of currere in rethinking PoE and integrating GE to achieve socially responsive higher education in the Global South.

CHAPTER EIGHT: CURRERE AS AN ACTIVE CONCEPT: (RE)IMAGINING CURRICULUM FOR THE PROFESSIONS

"If we teach today's students as we taught yesterday's, we rob them of tomorrow."

(John Dewey)

8.1 Introduction

In the higher contemporary higher education (HE) landscape, the re-imagining of the curriculum is not merely an academic exercise. It is a vital necessity that reflects the evolving demands of society and the professions. Chapters Five and covered an exploration of both the espoused and actual approaches for curriculum change and more specifically, for the institutional imperative, to integrate thirty per cent of the credits to general education (GE) into the undergraduate curricula. The findings revealed diverse responses and approaches to this mandate, highlighting a dissonance between policy and practice. Decision-making among the different role players was activated and shaped by an interplay of multiple and often conflicting forces. The charismatic institutional leader's visionary advocacy for including liberal arts in professionally- oriented curricula (PoC) appeared to be driven by a socio-political agenda. It aimed to (re)balance the private and public good within a neoliberal university context (deterritorialisation). This agenda reflected a concern with the disruptive (active) force of currere, or the transformative potential of education to 'will power' (Le Grange, 2019; Wallin, 2010). In contrast, the GE task team (GETT) adopted a pragmatic stance, navigating historical and cultural institutional forces, and prioritised stability over disruption. Their adoption of the GE model was framed as 'fit for purpose,' aligning with the existing culture and utilitarian character of the University of Technology (IoT).

At the operational level, curriculum workers were primarily influenced by regulatory pressures and concomitant professional demands, often prioritising compliance with external standards over institutional directives. A review of the engineering curriculum documents revealed a uniform design that adhered strictly to the professional body standards, driven by compliance with national and international professional regulations. Decision-making in this faculty appeared profession-centred, with limited engagement with the institutional GE directive. The health sciences faculty, compared to the engineering faculty, experienced institutional pressure, highlighting the tensions

between institutional and professional forces. These variations, discussed in the preceding chapters, underscore the complexities of curriculum decision-making, where competing ideals and stakeholders necessitate negotiation and compromise.

These findings were presented in the previous through the conceptual lens of *instituire*, framing institutions as dynamic entities shaped by the interplay of forces at the micro, meso, macro, and supra levels. Drawing on Deleuze's concepts of active and reactive forces (Parr, 2010), the chapter explored *instituire* as a relational and transformative force, capable of fostering innovation and challenging dominant neoliberal ideologies. The discussion underscored the potential for institutions to engage critically with systemic forces, re-imagining themselves as spaces for equitable and socially-just practices. This reconfiguration has particular relevance for the global south, where such transformative efforts can contribute to more responsive and inclusive educational practices.

The current chapter builds on the insights from the previous chapters and explores the transformative potential of *curre* as a dynamic and disruptive force in re-imagining professionally- oriented curricula (PoC) within the context of a UoT. Based on the preceding analyses, the chapter positions *curre* as an active conceptual force. The latter challenges entrenched institutional norms and deterministic curriculum practices. The study highlights the tensions and opportunities between institutional mandates and professional imperatives, in the GE integration into the undergraduate PoC. This chapter underscores the potential of GE/ liberal education (LE) to foster critical thinking, creativity and ethical reasoning, especially within the global south, where higher education institutions (HEIs) grapple with complex sociopolitical and ecological realities. Drawing on the African philosophy of *ubuntu-curre* (Le Grange, 2019, 2014), *glo-ubuntu* (Terblanche & Waghid, 2023), and *rhizo-curre* (Comier, 2008), the chapter aims to inspire a re-imagining and a reconceptualising of GE/LE for PoC within an African university or UoT that transcends utilitarian paradigms, aligning professional demands with broader socio-ethical imperatives and human development.

8.2 Chapter overview

Building on the theoretical exploration of the institution in Chapter Seven, this chapter shifts the focus to the curriculum itself, exploring the transformative potential of currere as a dynamic and disruptive force. This chapter will unfold in several interrelated sections, all of which re-engage with the core empirical dilemma presented in Chapter Five: the complex and often fraught implementation of the GE imperative.

Section 8.3 will revisit the paradoxical nature of GE, exploring how it acted as both a disruptor and a construct constrained by professional and institutional forces detailed in Chapters Five and Six. It will analyse the philosophical and structural tensions between GE and POC, drawing directly on the participants' experiences of 'ossification' and 'superficial mimicry'.

The subsequent sections will then advance a meta-analysis, integrating the concepts of ubuntu and rhizomatic thinking to envision a contextually relevant GE framework. This discussion will culminate in the proposal of a 'synaptic currere' model, offering a theoretical resolution to the practical implementation challenges that were so vividly documented in Chapter Five.

8.3 (De)territorialising professionally-oriented curricula

The study findings showed that the university leader's vision to transform the UoT was brought about by an experimentation of PoC through the liberal arts agenda. This vision was driven by a set of disrupting force/s, which are all presented in Chapter Five. While this 'drastic' imperative was perceived as imposed on a sector that was dealing with its state of flux, this strategic agenda was strongly grounded in his convictions about transforming the student experience. The thinking of the vice-chancellor (VC) pertained to the shifts that are necessary to move the curriculum beyond a pre-determined/*a priori* image of a pedagogical life to one that relates to the "immanent potential of the becoming of a pedagogical life" (Le Grange, 2019, p. 214). The VC mooted for a student-centred curriculum that contributed to the holistic development of students, in terms of identity-building at the personal, national and global levels; enhancing their literacies and literary experiences; disrupting their 'habits of mind' or dispositions to not only value education's utility but pursue public good; enhancing applied ethics and critical engagement, and so on (See Chapter Five).

Interestingly, in his paper on the creation of a unified education framework to streamline the HE landscape (see section 7.4), he advocated for “general education as the cement” as a common core to enhance articulation in the new model for curriculum (Bawa, 2013, p. 38). In his paper, he proposes a fifty percent GE integration into all of the undergraduate curriculum in the new ‘federal’ model. This demonstrates that he was invested in the criticality of addressing the nature of neoliberalism that was seen to be pervading the HE systems locally and globally.

This section provides an integrated analysis of how the GE imperative can be seen as both disrupting and/or being disrupted, thereby showing how its complexity within the UoT, and in HEIs in general, leads to other forces having a greater influence on curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making.

8.3.1 General education: Disrupted or disrupting

The findings of this study exemplified the active force of currere, activated through the institutional imperative to integrate GE into the undergraduate curricula, as detailed in Chapters Five and Six. This chapter extends these findings by analysing curriculum processes at a more abstract level, employing key theoretical perspectives to elucidate the complexities of this phenomenon. As Le Grange (2019) elaborates, thinking about curriculum, as an active conceptual force invites us to move beyond fixed notions of pedagogical life, embracing the immanent possibilities of becoming, experimentation, and transformation.

Thinking curriculum as an active conceptual force means that the concept does not have fixity or closeness—that the term does not convey an a priori image of a pedagogical life. It instead relates to the immanent potential of the becoming of a pedagogical life—the multiple coursings of a pedagogical life that exists prior to thought (p. 214).

This implies that a pedagogical life can take various pathways and trajectories, reflecting the complexity and individuality of educational experiences. Additionally, these potential pathways are rooted in the lived realities of students, valuing their actual experiences as essential to understanding and shaping the curriculum (d’Agnese 2020; Le Grange, 2019). As discussed in the previous chapter, these perspectives affirm that HE should not merely be about preparing students for specific

jobs. It should also focus on cultivating informed, engaged and critical citizens who can contribute to society.

The VC's original call to infuse fifty percent of GE into the undergraduate curriculum was clearly more about thinking differently about PoC. In other words, the GE initiative sought to effect a 'violent break' or 'deterritorialisation' from the static, predetermined frameworks that traditionally underpin PoC at UoTs. This radical vision created opportunities for "newness", "experimentation" and "creation of things unforeseen" (Le Grange, 2019, p. 215), towards a fluid and dynamic interpretation of what curriculum *could be* or *could do* [my emphasis] (see sections 8.4 and 8.5). Such a reconceptualisation underscores the creative and transformative potential of curriculum to shape and enhance students' educational experiences in ways that are both flexible and responsive to evolving professional, societal and planetary demands. One could surmise that perhaps the charismatic leader desired large-scale radical change and was signalling a 'rock the boat' approach. However, he recognised the critical need to bring the institution and its staff along in a supportive, developmental way (see section 5.5.3), which may explain why he succumbed to negotiations at the executive level.

At the executive level, the pragmatics of implementing such large-scale radical shifts of fifty percent GE infusion, came to be mediated to accommodate an incremental approach. This was negotiated to a thirty percent GE inclusion, with further decisions to disaggregate the thirty percent into ten-ten-ten, following the core, distributive and decentralised models (see Chapter Five, section 5.4). As cited by the participants at the executive level, there were grave concerns about the disruptions that this level of change could bring. This seemed to be a reasonable concern for an institution that was negotiating curriculum change for the first time in its history. This cautioned approach was viewed as bringing some level of stability to an institution that was already in flux and could be seen by some as a form of 'reterritorialisation', a process of re-establishing or reorganising structures following the call for disruption. Perhaps, this incremental approach yielded to reform transitioning (reactive force of *currere*) rather than the desired radical transformation strategies.

The findings revealed that the reactive force of currere was evident in the instrumentalist approaches that were adopted at the executive and operational levels, respectively. At the executive level, the UoT simply adopted the American (US) approaches to GE integration. A possible explanation for this is evidenced in GE's instrumental worldview, existential orientation and more pragmatic aim. This was seen to fit with the UoT's utilitarian character, and an understanding that in GE, "knowledge as such is not an end in itself as it is in liberal education, but an instrument for personal/social growth and action" (Erickson, 1992, p.18). Furthermore, there may have been concerns of a mismatch between the educational policies and the economic realities of its student body. Sociologically, there may have been concerns about foisting middle-class agendas (for what LE is) onto a student body that largely emanates from working-class and impoverished backgrounds. Many of these students prioritise a more vocationally/professionally oriented education to secure immediate employment. Contrastingly, it is precisely the high levels of unemployment that warrant a well-rounded, holistic education that can benefit students from all backgrounds; it fosters skills not only valuable in the workplace but also in civic engagement, cultural appreciation and adaptability (Boughey & McKenna, 2021).

At the operational level, an exploration of the decisions taken in the GE integration into PoC suggests a 'capturing' of the 'vision' (reactive force) to re-imagine the academic project. This was manifested in the focus on alignment with national and regulatory imperatives (see previous chapter) and the traditional, dominant Tylerian model (Tyler, 1949, 2013) of curriculum design through modularisation and credits and measured outcomes. Some of the executives expressed concern that at the operational level, less attention was paid to the fundamental purposes of education that encompassing the pursuit of knowledge, critical inquiry and the development of well-rounded individuals. One faculty manager reflected on the 'missed opportunities' to re-imagine PoC and suggested that perhaps the impediments related to the timing of the CRP and the ongoing changes within the UoT.

there's one thing I wish we had had the opportunity to have done differently, which is to have reimagined curriculum. In closer alignment with how we are imagining the university. I mean there is a measure of regret that we missed an opportunity. That we created our new curricula in an environment which didn't need new curricula, and now we find ourselves in an environment in which new curricula would be so damn useful. And we got the old ones. Old being relative, so that's a missed opportunity! [FM1]

In this comment, he was suggesting that if the Curriculum Renewal Project (CRP) project had been aligned with the new and current university strategic plan, ENVISION2030, perhaps the curriculum reconceptualisation outcomes could have been more radical and different.

The paradox is that the radical/critical nature of curriculum change or the conceptual power of currere to bring about the new and experimentation was diluted by the incrementalist approach taken by the UoT, leading to a 'terroritorialisation' of currere's active force into a reactive force. In other words, the fluid and active nature of currere was constrained and defined by specific educational practices and structures. Simply, one way of doing curriculum has become the way. This is expanded further in the next section.

8.3.2 'Ossification of potential movements, thwarting of experimentation'

It is not surprising that the new curricula were designed with a focus more on the national policy and regulatory requirements, showing a conventional high-stakes culture that is slow to change (d'Agnese, 2020). While the curricula exhibit a GE presence in whatever form it takes, it is seen to be mostly one of compliance or "superficial mimicry" (Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021, p. 14; Riley, 2015). This resulted in cosmetic changes in the curriculum with respect to GE, rather than actual engagements and genuine understanding of the strategic vision (see also section 8.3.3.2). This is not an uncommon finding, as other studies show (Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021) and underscores the agency of the curriculum workers involved in implementing the curriculum changes. It is important to acknowledge that they come from differing positions or points of reference in the curriculum renewal processes. It is also important to note that there were variations in curriculum engagements at faculty and programme levels, highlighting the tensions between the top-down imperatives for change and bottom-up curriculum decisions taken. The tensions could have resulted from curriculum workers experiencing a communication gap about the GE imperative.

The findings also highlighted that the motivations for curriculum change at an individual, programme/departmental and faculty level differed significantly from the broader institutional mandates. The curriculum champions embraced their agentic

autonomy to choose the direction on how to affect the curriculum mandates and to privilege/jettison particular selections of influence on their action. Curriculum orientations shaped their decision-making and design of the curriculum, exhibited by the market-oriented/efficiency designs. These territorialised ideologies, and associated practices, did not give way to the deterritorialising forces, namely, the introduction of the new student, and society-centred ideologies. Perhaps, the reactive forces in the historical, political, regulatory, structural and cultural spaces ossified any potential movements, thwarting the experimentation, but more importantly thwarting the agency of the curriculum workers, to rethink and re-imagine something different (Le Grange, 2019). It might be argued that despite the redirections engaged they still adhered to habituated rituals and choices which reinforced their own perspectives about what the emphasis of the curriculum should entail (Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021). Perhaps this, and the tight timeframes, did not allow for critical engagement and reflection about this vision, which may have led to deeper changes in their frames of reference (see at the end of previous section quote of one faculty manager).

Despite efforts to shift curriculum practices at the UoT, the dominant approach to curriculum design has remained firmly rooted in what Le Grange (2019, p.215) describes as “the one way of doing [that] has become [THE] way of doing.” While the integration of GE was intended to disrupt this rigidity, the curriculum design has largely adhered to the Tylerian model, characterised by the principles of outcome-based education (OBE), competency-based frameworks, and professional standards. This singular approach is often viewed as the default or standard method for engaging in curriculum practices. Within this Western model, the reactive force of currere dominates, where the act of ‘running’ the curriculum becomes the pre-determined and fixed, akin to the Grecian “chariot track” or “course to run” (Wallin, 2010, p.2). Such an approach limits openness to new interpretations or re-imaginings of what a pedagogical life could entail (see Chapter Three). Consequently, the traditional and dominant Tylerian model overshadows alternative approaches, stifling diversity, creativity and innovation which leads to what Wallin (2010) terms a ‘curriculum crisis’, and what Le Grange (2019, p. 215) refers to as the “ossification” of curriculum and pedagogical practices.

This instrumentalist approach, deeply entrenched in Western education, is not unique to the UoT. It has dominated schools and HEIs globally for the past two centuries (Le Grange, 2019, 2014). This explains why curriculum planning and reconceptualising the GE integration was constrained at the study site, as pressures to redesign curricula often emphasised measurable outcomes at the expense of broader educational goals envisioned for the UoT. Instead of exploring innovative ways to integrate GE into PoC, the process followed a territorialised path characterised by modularisation and a focus on predefined outcomes and competencies. Troiani and Duston (2021, p.5) call it the ‘factory model’ or “edufactory”.

It is possible that this commodification of the curriculum-making processes could be seen as a form of being compliant with the institutional dictates, whilst in essence simply repackaging the curriculum into units that appear changed. Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury (2021, p.14) call it a “linguistic mimicry”, where these faculties show minimal engagement with the strategy, primarily adopting its language to appear compliant. This begs the question – what deep change does it effect? The findings are similar to the Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury (2021) study that show structural and regulatory changes have been implemented, however the curricula still remain heavily focused on disciplinary knowledge/specialisations. While there may be concerns about the deep transformation agenda not being achieved, these ‘superficial’ engagements do signal the beginnings of a shared understanding for change. Further strategies are necessary to leverage the external forces, especially the professional bodies, and show the connections between the professional requirements and the imperatives of holistic education through the general education integration.

The next section expands on the misgivings or misconceptions regarding the GE integration that are deeply connected to the biographical forces of the curriculum workers.

8.3.3 Philosophical (mis)givings

Aside from the constraints in pragmatically realising the new transformed curriculum, the findings suggest that there were some misconceptions about GE/LAE that was variably experienced by both the executive and operational levels. Clegg (2016) and

Riley (2015) posit that some of these misconceptions stem from one's own prior educational experiences (micro forces).

8.3.3.1 GE is neither LE, nor instrumental professional skills

The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) and others define LE as “both a curriculum and an education philosophy whose central tenet is to empower postsecondary learners with a mindset and skill set that enables them to be critical contributors to a complex, diverse and changing society.” The common understanding of LE, according to Godwin (2015) is that it is multidisciplinary, it has a GE component (meaning a core curriculum that every student takes and it aims to develop critical skills for the 21st century (see Chapters Three and Five). Broadly speaking, GE may involve a set of core modules/courses that all students must take, while LE allows the freedom of curricular choice that aligns with their own interests and intellectual pursuits (Riley, 2015). In the study, the participants seemed to have mixed understandings of these different conceptions of what is GE. Although GE was adopted at the UoT, it is clear that it was not strictly limited to a compulsory core for all students.

More importantly, the curriculum workers grappled with the perception of GE as separate from PoE, a false dualism or oversimplified division between the two (Riley, 2015). PoE is often perceived as a bounded system, isolated from broader sociological, historical and cultural agendas, and primarily focused on operational, technical and pragmatic concerns. The professions tend to regard themselves as self-contained entities, rather than as interconnected with broader social contexts and realities within which they function. The curriculum workers seemed to overlook the interconnectedness of knowledge and the potential for interdisciplinary collaboration. This implies that they perceived that the professions operate in isolation from the broader intellectual landscape that includes GE. Framing that these fields are separate and distinct, suggests that one field cannot inform or enrich the other field. The curriculum workers did not seem to grasp that while the professional disciplines offer students their primary intellectual focus and often their career path, a well-integrated GE can contribute to the development of critical 21st century skills.

The findings, as reported in Chapter Five, revealed that the institution had opted for GE to address the holistic development of students and aimed to increase the breadth

in the curriculum and produce well-rounded graduates. The key decision-makers, at the executive level saw that this was possible through a 'prescribed' GE curriculum. At the executive level, the GE conceptualising and principles outlined the core and distributive models, including the ten per cent integrations at institutional, faculty and programme levels (see Chapter Five and Section 8.3.1). A key intention to adopting these models was to activate the agency of students in making curricular choices. Conversely, the findings showed that this did not materialise in the implementation in both faculties. The integration of GE may be seen to be superficial or tokenistic.

In the engineering curricula, only the compulsory core module, Cornerstone 101, was included in the curricula, out of a total of forty-four standalone institutional GE (IGE) modules (see also Chapters Five and Seven). There was greater uptake of the faculty GE (FGE) modules in the engineering curricula, although the modules suggest an orientation towards professional skills (see Tables 5.2 and 5.4). While internally, the engineering faculty was seen as 'having a plan' and 'knowing what they were doing', it was clear that the approach taken was purely instrumental and standards driven. Riley (2015, p. 140), in her critique of the integration of engineering and liberal arts, offers multiple explanations for this outcome. Of importance here, is the misapprehension of LE as application of engineering epistemology to other domains. This highlights the importance of faculty development and collaboration in cross-disciplinary integration. And Riley (2015, p. 140) argues that this oversight reveals a sense of "epistemological hubris". She adds that this over-confidence or arrogance regarding one's own knowledge and understanding of the world stems from engineering's privileged position within academic structures, often dominating discussions and decision-making processes. This 'over-confidence' was visible in this study, too, and perhaps stemmed from the participant's professional kudos and reliance on and compliance with the professional body standards. Riley (2015) contends that this hubris often leads to a dismissive attitude towards other forms of knowledge and understanding that may be seen as less rigorous or relevant, hindering interdisciplinary collaboration and limiting the potential for a more comprehensive understanding of complex issues. This position could also apply to other STEM professional fields.

In health sciences programmes, the compulsory core module and a sample of electives are included in Chapter Five (see Tables 5.3 and 5.5). This GE integration, at both the institutional and faculty levels, varied across the four programmes. While the tensions were high about balancing the GE integration with the traditional imperatives for health sciences education, the findings suggested a greater compliance with the institutional mandate. However, the curricular choices of what was included/excluded were made by the curriculum workers and not the students. Notwithstanding, although there were restrictions to the entire GE basket of modules, students were given options across the IGE clusters (see Table 5.3).

The findings suggested that the GE integration approaches, taken in both faculties, were either strategic (as in engineering) or expedient (as in health sciences) and seemed to be based on how GE was perceived. See comments in the above previous paragraphs.

In a recent critique about the GE strategies in America, Watkins (2023, p 5), advocates for HEIs to “explicitly state which specific knowledges student should learn in the general education” components of the curriculum. Of interest, in terms of this study, is that she cites several implications for a GE that is not a prescribed nor has a shared body of knowledge that aligns with the VC’s aspirations for this ‘experimentation’ at the UoT. She suggested that the refusal for a shared body of knowledge has numerous consequences. For example, it undermines the goal of developing critical thinkers; it is detrimental to nation building and broader social cohesion; and it excludes students from tackling life’s ‘complicated conversations’, that have both practical and existential importance. She cautioned about a “dumbed-down” GE that leads to unintended consequences of producing “intellectually and morally impoverished” graduates and citizens (Watkins, 2023, p. 6), who fail to contribute meaningfully to their communities, to their professions and to society.

The literature over the last four decades has examined the interplay between GE/LE and professional education, showing the latter as dominant (see Chapter Three).

8.3.3.2 GE is not “fihla” or “hiding” as professional skills

A second concern appeared to be a conflation of GE as instrumental professional skills, driven primarily by external pressures (Riley, 2015). Critical thinking and writing,

creativity, cultural awareness, and ethical reasoning seem to have less/no intrinsic value; they are considered due to industry requirements/professional standards. Integration is often narrowed down to specific and/or technical skills for professional practice, visible in the engineering curricula (see Table 5.4) and to a lesser degree in the health sciences curricula (see Table 5.5). As one of the faculty managers cited, *“every department found ways of hiding/appropriating GE, so that the thirty percent could be accounted for”*. And another participant in the health sciences faculty described it as *“fihla”*, an isiZulu term meaning to “to hide or conceal.” Riley (2015, p. 139) called this a “hide the vegetables” approach where one teaches, for example, in modules like Technical Literacy in Engineering and Professional Practice & Management in Health Sciences. This highlights the instrumental view of education, where these subjects are valued primarily for their utility in the job market.

This approach showed that the curriculum-making processes are more about checklists and compliance, rather than meaningful engagement with GE principles and its effective integration into PoC. Adopting what can be described as a disaggregated approach to GE results in a limited understanding of disciplines beyond a student’s field of specialisation/major. This occurs when students are only exposed to aspects of GE that directly align with their chosen specialisation, restricting broader interdisciplinary engagement. At a surface level, the findings in this study suggested a typical “smorgasbord” approach to GE (Lawrence, 2020, p. 14; Watkins, 2023, p. 32. In this model, students are required to select from the diverse list of alternatives, primarily with the intent to simply fulfil requirements and ‘get them out of the way’. These disconnected, superficial and narrow offerings may lack integration and a unifying framework and can lead to a disjointed educational experience.

This transcendent or dualistic thinking is what led to the oversimplification and polarisation of the GE implementation, which limited hindered genuine interdisciplinary engagement to bring about the desired balancing. In other words, for fifty percent of the curriculum in the original call to be general/liberal arts education. It seems there were insufficient deliberations, at both the institutional and operational levels, about the vision of the charismatic leader, but also about a vision of the skills, knowledge and dispositions that UoT graduates should possess upon study completion. While there were attempts to examine which knowledge is essential and what body of

knowledge should be taught (see Chapter Five), the final ‘product’ suggested that another iteration of rethinking and redesigning is critical to ensure that the grand intentions to disrupt PoC is not entirely lost.

8.3.3.3 GE is not self-indulgence nor dilettantism

One participant expressed this concern about GE.

Thirty percent of what we would traditionally have been teaching them, we are now not teaching; we are giving them a whole lot of fluff which is not professionally aligned [FM2].

What is considered ‘fluff’ or ‘navel-gazing’ in a module like Cornerstone 101, provides opportunities for self-exploration within rigorous academic engagement and critical inquiry. This perspective of fluff undermines the value of critical thinking, cultural awareness and ethical reasoning that GE/LE aims to cultivate. Self-indulgence, on the other hand, implies a focus on activities that may be entertaining but lack substantive educational value or relevance to the broader goals of GE/LE (Riley, 2015, p. 139). This critique called for a more thoughtful and intentional GE integration into PoC, emphasising the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue.

Four decades earlier, Stiles (1974, p. 53) provided many examples of the contributions that LE can make on professional practice and argues that it is the “tap root for all professional education and practices”. She stated that it “both nurtures growth and sustains life during droughts of uncertainty and the storms of controversy” (Stiles (1974, p. 53). All professionals, for example, engineers who wrestle with ecological concerns, politicians who confront corruption, and medical professionals who must respond to moral questions about genetics, need to rely on GE/LE for ethical guidance and wisdom. Social and ecological challenges that are “simultaneously intensely local and intensely global” (Bawa, 2018, p. 4) include many examples. Nationalism, xenophobia, gender-based violence (GBV), high levels of violent and political crimes, environmental crisis, global migration, pandemics, and impactful areas like the world-shaping AI, are some examples of why professional education has to be strategically designed to build in the liberal dimensions of learning. The findings suggested that the curriculum workers did not engage in these rapid shifts and challenges occurring within the broader social terrain. They seemed to myopically engage with superficial and

narrow curriculum-making processes that appear like self-indulgent activities, leading to missed opportunities for meaningful learning experiences.

GE/LE as dilettantism is critiqued for its superficial and haphazard/causal approach that lacks depth and rigour. Adopting a dilettante approach may also reduce complex disciplines to simplistic ideas or stereotypes, highlighting the danger of mischaracterising or oversimplifying entire fields of knowledge. A designed approach not only nurtures 21st century skills but also heightens objectivity to make informed ethical decisions. It provides a moral and ethical framework to help professionals confront dilemmas in their respective fields, cultivates cultural and historical awareness, and develops an appreciation for knowledge as a dynamic and evolving process. This is expanded in the next section..

This section, once again, showed the dynamic interplay between institutional, programmatic, micro and macro contextual forces, where one of the forces exerts its dominance over the other forces and then is further dominated by another force. Understanding the complexities in curriculum planning and reconceptualising it as a dynamic and evolving entity that has immanent potential for/in becoming means that some of the lost opportunities during the study period would be gained in another.

8.4 Glo-ubuntu and rhizo-currere: towards meaningful PoE

In this section, I bring the findings of the study into dialogue with insights from ubuntu-currere (Le Grange, 2019, 2014, 2011) and glo-ubuntu (Terblanche & Waghid, 2023) and rhizo-currere (Comier, 2008) to imagine anew a GE-infused professional education for an 'indeterminate' future (Barad, 2021). Borrowing from Le Grange, this discussion is an exploration of the connections between the active force of *currere*,

ubuntu, glocalisation and GE/LE, in order to generate ‘circles of convergence’³⁹ (Deleuze, as cited in Le Grange, 2019) or ‘unlikely fidelities’⁴⁰ (Wallin, 2010).

This meta-analysis explores the transformative potential of GE at the UoT through four interconnected themes. It highlights GE’s role in fostering identity and nation building by integrating citizenship education and addressing SA’s complex historical and cultural dynamics. It critiques the narrow focus of functional literacies, advocating for a pluriversal approach that values diverse ways of knowing and promotes equity, sustainability, and critical thinking. It introduces the concept of glo-ubuntu, blending with communal values of ubuntu with global citizenship education to prepare students for active engagement with both local and global contexts. Finally, it critiques the fragmented/smorgasbord implementation of GE and proposes a rhizomatic curriculum framework that is non-hierarchical, and community-driven, encouraging collaborative learning, student agency and critical engagement with diverse ideas. Together, these themes underscore GE’ potential to disrupt traditional curricula and foster inclusive, transformative higher education.

8.4.1 Beyond identity and nation building: ‘Becoming’

In the study, the VC explicated two primary motivations for the GE integration into the undergraduate PoC. These motivations centred on the immanent potential of GE merging critical elements of identity and nation building with citizenship education, alongside the imperative to develop students’ multiple literacies and literary skills. The VC posited that such outcomes cannot occur by ‘osmosis’. It required intentional and deliberate curriculum inclusion. The discourse surrounding this identity and nation building in HE is complex, particularly within the SA context, where historical legacies, cultural diversity, and the forces of the global intersect. Critics argue that global citizenship and transnational identities are increasingly relevant in the contemporary era, often supplanting fixed national identities (Jacob & Gardelle, 2022). Nonetheless,

³⁹ Circles of Convergence suggests a dynamic process where different intellectual traditions or frameworks come together, creating a space for dialogue and synthesis, leading to innovative perspectives that might not emerge when concepts are considered in isolation.

⁴⁰ Unlikely Fidelities highlights the idea that meaningful relationships can form between disparate concepts, leading to new insights or innovative practices. It suggests that even ideas that appear to be at odds can find common ground or complementary aspects when examined closely.

curricula remain instrumental in shaping national identity and fostering human development.

The institutional leader's activist stance underscored the university's direction, emphasising students as a social being whose identity building is central to their educational journeys. He viewed GE as pivotal in cultivating critical and responsible citizens who can contribute meaningfully to societal progress.

Boughey and McKenna (2021) reinforce this perspective, arguing that students entering HE do not simply acquire new information but undergo identity transformation by adopting literacy practices of the academic. They elaborate as follows.

When students enter our universities, they are not simply required to learn new things. Rather, they become different people, they develop a new identity. We all have multiple literacies available to us, and we continue to take on new literacy practices throughout our lives as we enter new contexts, and thus we build multiple ways of being in the world. Taking on the literacy practices of the academy is thus understood as an issue of identity (2021, p.64)

The focus on identity-building aligns with the broader development crisis outlined by Soudien (2011), who contended SA's challenges were not solely economic, but also deeply rooted in human flourishing (Sen, as cited in Soudien, 2011). He posited that there were few HE systems worldwide where the issues of development were so intricately woven into the daily experiences of teaching and working at a university (Soudien, 2011). In such a context, the GE imperative aims to broaden the educational experience by fostering inclusivity and intentionally challenging the *a priori* of a pedagogical image within a UoT context.

Bereketeab (2020) identified a wide range of approaches for evaluating the role of education in nation-building, highlighting two dominant perspectives: the instrumentalist value approach which aligns closely with the primary role of a UoT, and the intrinsic value approach. The instrumentalist value approach emphasises the practical role of education in addressing critical national challenges, such as fostering nation-building, enhancing social cohesion, driving economic development, and ensuring security and stability (Bereketeab, 2020). In contrast, the intrinsic value

approach focuses on the broader development aspects of education, prioritising personal growth and development (Bereketeab, 2020). At a national level, this personal evolution is integral to cultivating a conscientious, committed and engaged citizenry. It was clear that the executives at the UoT advocated for both approaches to be adopted to advance nation-building and promote critical citizenship. As one administrator noted, issues such as tolerance and GBV must be meaningfully represented in the educational content and activities that students engage with, reflecting the institution's commitment to fostering both individual and societal transformation.

As alluded to in Chapter Five, the institutional leader expressed the importance of engaging students with SA literary works and other African literature. Such engagement was argued to serve as pathways to introducing students to narratives and values that connect them to their cultural roots, ignite their imaginations, and cultivate empathy. Furthermore, adopting this integrated approach fosters a sense of agency and activism. It encourages students to question and challenge societal norms and confront uncomfortable truths. This dual focus aims to prepare students to navigate their roles as both local and global citizens. Jenkins (2024) captures these intentions, in his blog.

Literature has always been pivotal in the chronicles of human expression, serving as a repository for our collective narratives, values, and imaginations. Through the vast array of literary works, we explore the intricacies of human experience and the myriad ways in which individuals and societies understand and make sense of the world. Literature's importance extends beyond mere entertainment; it fosters empathy, challenges perceptions, and stimulates critical thinking, thus cementing its relevance in personal development and societal discourse." (Jenkins, 2024)

Throughout history, literature has played a significant role in shaping individual and cultural identities through various works that explore themes of personal growth, cultural heritage, and self-discovery. Altun (2023) affirms that literature captures the intricacies of human identity by portraying personal experiences, cultural backgrounds, and individual growth. Through the exploration of diverse perspectives and narratives, literature enables readers to gain a deeper understanding of their own sense of self. He cites a few book examples, like *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (1958), and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982) that demonstrate how literature

can provide readers with insights into the complexities of individual identity, cultural heritage, and personal development.

Colonialism has profoundly influenced the preservation of African cultural identity through mechanisms such as displacement, marginalisation of indigenous languages, suppression of traditional practices, censorship in artistic expression, and the continued challenges related to globalisation. These historical forces have contributed to the erosion of African cultural heritage, leaving deep scars on societies across the continent. However, African cultures have demonstrated remarkable resilience, showcasing their ability to adapt, reclaim, and redefine their identities in contemporary contexts. Efforts towards restitution and revitalisation are essential for addressing these historical injustices. Such initiatives are vital for healing historical wounds inflicted by colonialism and fostering a renewed appreciation for Africa's rich and unique cultural heritage (Ogbechie, 2018; Chakuda, 2024).

A contemporary example of this work can be seen in the efforts of Maseko, a scholar from Nelson Mandela University (NMU), who has been at the forefront of debates on Africanisation of HE since 2022. Maseko has been collaborating on a project titled *African Voices: Awakening a Lost Literary Canon* (Maseko, 2022). This project seeks to recover and reintegrate African knowledge systems that have been systematically erased, particularly within HEIs. Maseko critiques the 'systematic erasure' of African knowledge has deprived society of vital values and worldviews that must be revived (African voices: awakening a lost literary canon, 2022). This underscores the importance of reinstating these perspectives to enrich academic and cultural discourses. These ongoing efforts underscore restoring African cultural identity and ensuring its continuity in the face of historical and contemporary challenges. By reclaiming lost narratives and reawakening suppressed traditions, African societies are not only preserving their heritage but also fostering a sense of pride and agency that is vital for future generations.

In SA and the global south, ongoing debates focus on how to reflect African identities and integrate local knowledge systems within the context of decolonising curricula shaped by Western influences (Hlatshwayo, 2022a; Morris, 2021). Such transformation is critical for fostering inclusive and representative curricula. Scholars

have highlighted persistent issues of epistemic exclusion and the colonality that continues to pervade HE and its knowledge production processes (Heleta, 2016; Hlatshwayo, 2022a; Lange 2017; Mbembe, 2015). There is a growing movement that advocates for the decentering dominant Western knowledge systems in favour of incorporating African indigenous knowledges (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). Proponents argue that this shift is necessary to recognise and validate local ways of knowing, thereby dismantling the epistemic hierarchies established by colonial legacies. However, critics caution that Western knowledge should not be outright replaced with indigenous perspectives, warning that such an approach could inadvertently create a new form of marginalisation, wherein indigenous knowledge is still positioned at the periphery rather than integral.

Agbaje (2023) contends that the binary between Western and African knowledge systems should not be reinforced. Instead, these epistemologies should be understood as interconnected, informing and enriching one another. This perspective challenges the dichotomy between what is often perceived as 'legitimate' knowledge and localised/indigenous epistemologies, advocating for an integrated approach that values diverse knowledge systems equally. Scholars (Agbaje, 2023; Hlatshwayo, 2021; Shay & Mkhize; 2018) stress that challenging the dominance of Western knowledge in the curriculum requires more than an inclusion; it necessitates confronting the underlying belief that legitimate knowledge can only originate from the West/global north and the colonial assumption that Africans are incapable of producing knowledge.

It is notable that most undergraduate curricula at the UoT were designed prior to the transformative #Feesmustfall and #Rhodesmustfall student movements of 2015/2016 (refer to Chapter One). While these movements catalysed critical conversations about curriculum transformation, they have not been consistently translated into tangible changes in curricula. The official undergraduate curriculum, including the GE imperative, did not explicitly address the integration of African indigenous knowledges, literature and scholarly contributions, though these may have been incorporated informally into the enacted curriculum. A re-imagining of GE/LE provides an opportunity to re-examine and foreground African epistemologies. Such a re-imagining could result in the development of a unique model that blends African and Western

philosophies, moving beyond the dichotomies to foster a genuinely inclusive and transformative educational experience (see section 8.5). By doing so, deliberations on curriculum design could contribute meaningfully to the broader decolonial discourse, addressing historical exclusions while avoiding the risks of re-colonial dynamics.

Winberg and Makua (2019) highlighted an important aspect of a student's becoming is not solely epistemological access but also ontological access. They argued that this is critical in dual-facing curricula that bridge knowledge acquisition within specific disciplines and professional fields. In the context of 'disrupted' professionally oriented or vocational education, the process of identity formation and becoming extends beyond the specialisation fields of study, engaging with domains outside the academy. There is a growing recognition about the potential contribution of classical/traditional literature to GE frameworks (Al-Hendawi et al, 2019). These scholars advocate for a balanced approach that preserves culture, tradition, and identity while also accommodating the need for change. This approach introduces traditional (non-specialist) epistemologies, to various academic disciplines, highlighting rational and intuitive higher-order thinking methods (Al-Hendawi et al, 2019; Ma, 2018). This perspective reflects the importance of integrating cultural and national heritage within educational frameworks, acknowledging their central role in shaping both individual and collective identity within contemporary academic contexts.

8.4.2 Beyond functional literacies development: Pluriversality

As alluded to in the previous section, the literacies of students were a second major motivation for the GE imperative. The language seemed, however, to be shrouded in its most narrow iterations, namely industry related capacities and functional/standard literacies such as reading, writing and numeracy (Perry, 2020). The 'damning' feedback from industry partners about the functional literacy deficits observed in graduates was compounded by the VC's own observations in his engagement with students (see Chapter Five, section 5.4.3) about their numeracy skills and other essential skills. This is not unknown as the findings of various tests of SA children's literacy and numeracy revealed what Soudien (2011, p. 19) described as a "national crisis" (see also section 5.4.3). This author underscored the mortality rates in the country reflected the catastrophic impact of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) and the acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS). He argued that many South

Africans were “dying young”, without ever “having mastered the basic skills of reading and writing” (Soudien, 2011, p. 19). The ideological model of literacy emphasises that literacy practices are context dependent (Boughey & McKenna, 2021). They contend that students who have been raised in environments that align with academic literacy practices are privileged, more due to their backgrounds, rather than any inherent talent. Considering the profile of the students at the UoT, the GE imperative was about addressing some of these gaps in the students’ prior learning/experiences.

Developing intensive reading, writing, numeracy, and critical thinking skills were deemed non-negotiable to ensure that graduates were equipped to be effective in the changing economic landscape. “An educated person must be able to make, understand, and evaluate arguments on the basis of quantitative information” and students who lack this ability are severely disadvantaged, as pointed out by Yale University (2005) as cited Bourke, Bray and Horton (2009). Without strong numeracy skills, graduates face challenges in the workplace, especially for graduates entering the workforce in the wake of 4IR and 5IR. The ability to work with mathematics and handle big data is seen as crucial for success in the evolving economy. Boughey and McKenna (2021, p. 64) elaborate that an aspect of academic identity involves critically questioning the information that students read and engage. It is about recognising that knowledge is always tentative and subject to debate and change, based on new evidence that challenges it. These authors (Boughey & McKenna, 2021) argued that many students find the transition to academic practices daunting, especially if they prior learning has taught them to view printed texts as absolute truths. These new spaces where students find themselves could lead them to question their identities and previous understandings of the world.

Pluriversal literacies focuses the importance of recognising multiple ways of knowing and being that are shaped by local histories, cultures, experiences, and geopolitical contexts (Perry, 2020). This approach moves beyond traditional, standardised literacy practices to incorporate a variety of texts, languages, and modes of communication that reflect a pluralistic society. It challenges the dominant, often Eurocentric narratives of literacy that tend to universalise experiences and practices, thereby marginalising alternate forms of knowledge and expression (Perry, 2020). Perry (2020) maintained that pluriversality promotes a relational understanding of literacy that connects

individuals to their environments and to each other, fostering a sense of interdependence and shared responsibility in addressing global challenges; aligning literacy education with broader goals of sustainability, equity and social justice. This approach encourages students to engage critically with the world around them and to recognise the interconnectedness of their actions and the impact on diverse communities and ecosystems. At the executive level at the UoT, there was a recognition of the necessity for ‘building’ these other aspects of intellectual growth that is not traditionally included in PoC (see Chapter Five), through the GE integration.

Conversely, at the operational level, the data suggested that there was little/no buy-in about the conceptual power of the GE imperative to transform the curriculum. This was mostly likely due to these areas of learning being viewed by the curriculum workers as not having the same intrinsic value as the specialisations. It is true that the vagueness of/in the GE at its outset leads to a lack of clear understanding of what constitutes liberal arts. In turn, efforts to combine these fields lacked direction and coherence. This was especially noticeable in the engineering curricula (refer to Chapter Five, section 5.5.1). The liberal agenda seemed to be diminished to a set of professional skills deemed necessary for professional success, called complementary studies (Riley, 2015). The nomenclature itself is suggestive of the perception, of something that can be done without. In the health sciences curricula, it seems the curriculum workers engaged with the directive enough to be compliant. This linguistic mimicry⁴¹ serves as an initial step towards curriculum change and lays the groundwork for more meaningful discussions and transformations to occur in the future (Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021, p.14).

8.4.3 Beyond citizenship education: Glo-ubuntu

The concept of citizenship education was an important goal of the GE imperative at the UoT. The UoT leaders’ thinking about citizenship aligned well with the growing recognition that it is not only a legal status but also active participation in civic life and

⁴¹ Linguistic mimicry – When individuals or groups adopt the language or terminology associated with a new initiative without fully understanding or engaging with its underlying principles, it can serve as initial step towards establishing a shared understanding or agreement. This linguistic mimicry indicates a recognition of the new concepts, that may be necessary for fostering a collective commitment to change (Perry, 2020).

social justice advocacy (Morris, 2021). This is what led to a rethinking about how best to prepare students for responsible citizenship in increasingly pluralistic societies and how this can be brought into PoCs. The GE curriculum was to cater for this requirement and was visible in the core module, Cornerstone 101 and some of the IGE electives that fell within the languages, culture and society themes (see Appendix 4). Newer modules that focus on ethical values, historical developments and current societal issues can enhance students' understanding of their nation's complexities.

Citizenship education involves instilling specific knowledge, skills, and values in students to aid in the development of their identities (Kubow, 2009). Global citizenship education (GCE) expands this concept, emphasising an individual's or community's recognition of their interconnectedness and interdependence with the wider world, transcending geographic, social, political, and cultural boundaries (Lauwereier, 2020; Terblanche & Waghid, 2023). This concept is embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly within SDG 4, which targets GCE (Bachelet, 2018). GCE hold the potential to empower students to engage and assume active roles both locally and globally to face. They will be capacitated to resolve global challenges and ultimately become proactive and adaptable contributors to a more just, peaceful, tolerant, inclusive, secure and sustainable world. GCE seems to have the same agenda as the GE imperative at the UoT, namely, to cultivate critical citizens who can contribute meaningfully as individuals, professionals, and citizens.

The institutional leader in the study addressed some of the concerns raised by critical scholars about how the marketisation of higher education and neoliberal ideologies has led to the erosion of one of the few avenues for human and social transformation (Terblanche & Waghid, 2023). These authors critique the neoliberal approaches to GCE: it reduces its focus to developing competencies and skills primarily aimed at preparing individuals for global employment and meeting transnational mobility demands. This perspective also emphasises improving English or other language proficiencies to enhance employability, similar to the GE/LE imperative, where the curricula included other foreign languages for the exact same purpose of improving global employability. Terblanche and Waghid (2023, p. 273) argued that these neoliberal approaches to GCE is “glaringly void of the embodied humanness of students” as citizens. Swanson and Gamal (2021) raised a further tension regarding

GCE, in that it embodies a duality where individuals are seen as both subjects of their nation-state (inwardly focused) and participants of the global capitalist system (outwardly focused). They argued that this Janus-like nature⁴² creates tensions between national identity and global responsibility.

Global citizenry involves not only knowledge but also the ability to discern what is important and true, an understanding of different cultures, a sense of identity and purpose, and fostering responsible relationships with others (Braskamp, 2008). The overarching idea is that GCE goes beyond traditional academic subjects. It involves nurturing a sense of responsibility and awareness about pressing global challenges, encouraging active engagement, and preparing students to be informed and compassionate global citizens. Meaningful GCE or GE/LE, as Torres (2017, p. 3) elucidated, should be based on three fundamental global commons: the understanding that the “planet is our only home”, the recognition that “global peace is an intangible cultural good of humanity”, and the belief that individuals should “live together democratically in an increasingly diverse world.” When the curriculum shifts from performance-based, measured outcomes and the accumulation of knowledge for private good to prioritising the ‘quality of the being’ (humanness) of the student, it fosters human dignity and peace. Within this context, the concept of Ubuntu emerges as a meaningful pathway to bridge the divide, emphasising the importance of fostering dignified and humane relationships rooted in the desire for peaceful co-existence and mutual respect (Terblanche & Waghid, 2023).

The sub-Saharan concept of Ubuntu transcends linguistic meaning to embody normative values regarding one’s moral obligations to others (see Chapter 3). The expression ‘*Umuntu ngumuntu ngabanye Bantu*’ conveys that an individual’s humanity is best expressed through relationships with others (see Chapter 3, section 3.8.4), highlighting the interdependence of individuality and community (Waghid, 2020; Le Grange, 2014). The concept of glo-ubuntu, coined by Terblanche and Waghid (2023), describes a form of GCE that integrates the principles of Ubuntu with global

⁴² Janus-like nature – refers to the dualistic characteristic, drawing its meaning from Janus, the Roman god symbolising beginnings, transitions and duality. Janus is typically depicted with two faces: one looking into the past and the other gazing into the future. This imagery encapsulates the concept of navigating between opposing states or conditions, such as the past/future, chaos/order, youth/age, and so on; and the complexities of existence where dualities co-exist and transitions are integral to personal and collective journeys. [Janus - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janus)

citizenship: activism, inclusivity and justice. They argued that this approach can bridge the gap between the local and the global perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and just educational framework. They advocated for a re-imagined GCE that is deeply informed by the values of Ubuntu that prioritise human dignity, communal responsibility and the importance of local contexts in addressing global challenges. Similarly, I would like to advocate for a re-imagined GE/LE curriculum for sub-Saharan Africa that is deeply entrenched in the values of Ubuntu or glo-ubuntu and has the immanent potential to disrupt PoC and bring a balance to the neoliberal ideologies that pervade the UoT sector. I ask the question “How can this approach to GE cultivate the notion of an African university or UoT?” This is explored in the next section.

8.4.4 Challenging structure and hierarchy: Rhizo-currere

A further critique of the GE imperative at the UoT is that it did not comprise a core curriculum but instead took on a ‘smorgasbord’ approach (Lawrence, 2020; Watkins 2023). These authors argued that simply introducing students to different subjects (‘smorgasbord’) was insufficient, and that there was a need to facilitate deeper connections and understanding. At the UoT, this amounted to a thirty percent of the curriculum, which in principle equates to one full year of study, if applied correctly. These authors critiqued this prevalent approach to GE, where students select elective/compulsory modules (courses) from a list simply to meet the requirements. It is regrettable that the perspectives at the operational level at UoT was that GE was a ‘burden’ and to ‘get them out of the way’ as posited by one participant. Anecdotal evidence in the enacted curriculum suggested both academics and students viewed GE as fluff and irrelevant. To counter these negative perceptions about what should be meaningful learning, several scholars (Lawrence, 2020; Schejbal, 2017; Watkins, 2023) argued for adopting a deliberate and intentional strategy in designing a core curriculum and focusing on essential skills/outcomes; in other words, “what every student should know” (Aldegether, 2015, p. 8). In this way, students would understand how various disciplines pursue knowledge and address issues within their fields.

Notwithstanding these critiques about the distributive model/smorgasbord approach, one participant expressed a more positive view about this GE structure.

I think when we talk about adaptability as an institution, when we talk about innovation in curriculum, and I've always liked the idea that GenEd creates little holes in the curriculum. [FM1]

This participant suggested that offering electives allowed for a curriculum design that was flexible and adaptable to changing societal priorities and emerging contemporary issues. He appreciated the concept of GE creating 'holes' or modular components in the curriculum that can be updated and/or replaced as needed. For example, if gender issues are currently significant, then the curriculum can focus on that. If, in the future, 4IR and 5IR become the central focus, then the curriculum can shift to address that. This adaptability allows the curriculum to stay relevant and innovative, ensuring that it aligns with contemporary challenges and opportunities. This design speaks to a rhizomatic curriculum that is decentralised, non-hierarchical, and adaptive. Unlike traditional curricula, which are often structured and linear, a rhizomatic curriculum is flexible and adaptive (Comier, 2008). In this way, students explore multiple paths and create their own learning journey based on their own interests and needs, aligning to the traditions of a LE curriculum or a Montessori education.

The key characteristics of rhizome⁴³, as developed by Deleuze and Guattari (as cited by Olivier, 2015) is that it is decentralised and non-hierarchical, as discussed above. A rhizome has not central point or origin (unlike the tree model) and grows from any point, making it difficult to define its beginning or end, it is always 'in the middle'. A second feature is the multiplicities and connections: a rhizome connects any point to any other point, allowing for diverse and unpredictable connections between elements. This is useful in re-imagining GE/LE in an African or glo-ubuntu context. The third feature of a rhizome is that it is a 'map' and not a 'tracing': this suggests that it is open to experimentation and change, as described in the previous paragraph (Olivier, 2015). This distinction highlights the nature of rhizomatic thinking and learning. The fourth characteristic is the asignifying rupture (deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation). Rhizomes are characterised by processes of breaking free from established structures and forming new connections or territories (see Chapter Three,

⁴³ Rhizome - is derived from the botanical term for a type of plant stem that grows underground, producing new shoots and roots from any point along its length. In Deleuze and Guattari's work, it is a philosophical concept that suggests that 'all things in the world are rhizomatically interconnected, although such connections are not always visible' - they are rhizomes or assemblages which form part of a larger rhizome or assemblage, usually referred to as an ecology. It is a metaphorical model that challenges traditional notions of structure, hierarchy, and linear progression. (Olivier, 2015).

section 3.8.3 and Chapter Seven, section 7.5.2). Finally, a rhizome is seen as ‘antigenealogy’ because it rejects traditional notions of lineage and progression. In other words, it does not trace back to a single origin (Olivier, 2015).

When thinking about a rhizomatic curriculum, some features become relevant to the re-imagining of a GE/LE curriculum. Comier (2008) introduces the idea of community as curriculum, where the community itself acts as the curriculum; learning is constructed in real-time by the contributions of all students. This approach subverts traditional notions of curriculum design, as is in OBE and competency-based curricula. The non-hierarchical and adaptive is the second feature which was discussed above. A rhizomatic curriculum is dynamic and evolving. It is not a fixed entity but evolves as the learning process unfolds. It responds to changing environmental conditions and the interactions within the learning community (Comier, 2008). Another critical feature, as already inferred, is that it promotes collaborative learning where students work together, share knowledge and build on each other’s’ ideas to deepen their understanding of complex topics. Rhizomatic learning encourages critically thinking and making connections between diverse ideas and provides opportunities for creativity and ownership and foster independence.

In the next section, I bring the main constructs into dialogue with each other and offer a metaphorical framework for holistic curriculum reconceptualisation and integration.

8.5 Synaptic currere: A conceptual framework for holistic curriculum disruption (curriculum nexus)

Drawing inspiration from the neurological concept of a synapse⁴⁴, I propose a synaptic model to metaphorically re-present the integration of GE into PoC or specialised curricula. Without going into a detailed neuroscience discussion, I will outline a simple overview of what a synapse is (my own understandings) and why I chose this as a

⁴⁴ Synapse -- a synaptic cleft is space that separates sending (pre-) neuron from the receiving (post-) neuron. When an electrical signal, known as the action potential, travels down the sending axon, it reaches the synaptic terminal and triggers the release of chemical messengers called neurotransmitters. These are released into the synaptic cleft and diffuse to bind to specific receptors on receiving neuron, either exciting or inhibiting; influencing whether it will generate its own action potential. Synapses are classified as either chemical (use neurotransmitters for communication; or electrical (where direct ion flow occurs between the neurons through the gap junctions. This process is critical to coordinate various body functions -- [Synapse - Wikipedia](#) (see also [What Happens at The Synapse?](#))

metaphor. Knowledge of how synapses work helps understand how the brain and body function in unison. I have included some references in the footnote, but here is an explanation of my own understanding as a health professional (one of my many hats).

Simply, a synapse is the cleft or junction or gap between two nerve cells/neurons that play an important role in transmitting signals in the nervous system. The brain symbolises a vast communication network, where synapses serve as tiny bridges of communication between neurons that are physically connected. It is important to remember that each human body has billions of neurons, and each neuron has multiple synapses, leading to a network of countless synapses. This metaphor simplifies this very complex function by limiting it to a signal synapse. Further, the synapse as a framework has a double layered application, namely for the crucial physiological role synapses play in learning, as it pertains to memory formation and learning mechanisms, and applied metaphorically to illustrate a holistic approach to curriculum re-imagining and integration.

While the former is not the focus of the study, synapses play a crucial role in how we learn and the kinds of activities or signals that impact whether the synapses/connections strengthen or weaken affecting how we store and recall information. The nature of the curriculum, as it pertains to this study, impacts on whether the synapses are excitatory (promote neuron activity) or inhibitory (decrease neuron activity). Stronger synapses lead to better memory retention and synaptic plasticity allows synapses to change strength. This is explained further in the description of the metaphor.

A synapse consists of a sending (pre-synaptic) neuron's axon terminal, the gap called a synaptic cleft/junction, and the receiving (post-synaptic) neuron's dendrite or cell body (see Figure 8.1). There are two types of synapses, namely chemical synapses and electrical synapses. Chemical synapses are the most common type and use neurotransmitters to send signals, electrical synapses do not. This metaphor adopts the chemical synapse, due to its functional reliance on an electrical signal to trigger the release of neurotransmitters to send signals. These neurotransmitters cross the synaptic gap and bind to the receptors on the receiving neuron, as simply illustrated in Figure 8.1 below.

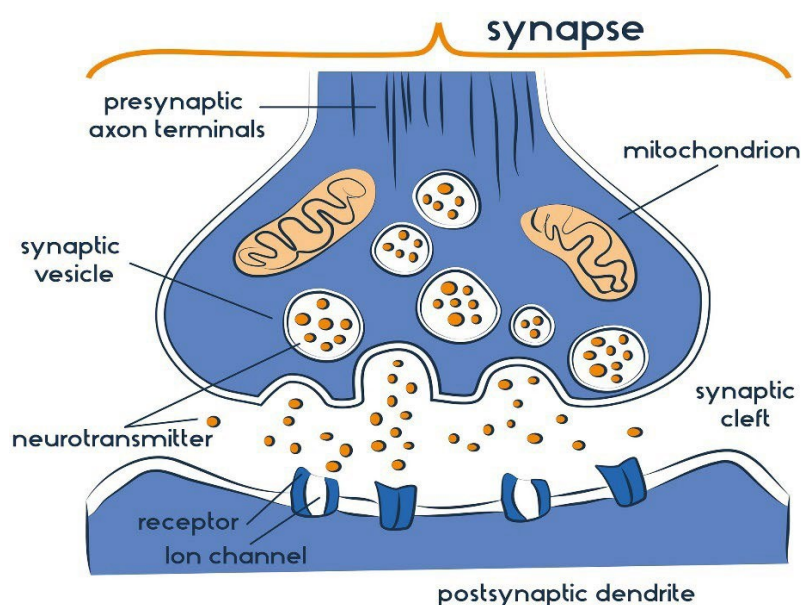


Figure 8.1: A simple representation of a chemical synapse (Guy-Evans, 2024)

In this metaphor, the sending and receiving neurons can serve as either GE or PoE (see section 8.5.2). The model in Figure 8.2 illustrates the dynamic exchange of ideas, skills and knowledge between the two interconnected realms, specialised or professional education symbolised on the left hand side and GE on the right hand side. The synaptic cleft that is depicted as a space or gap between the neurons and is depicted as a hub in the metaphor represented by the underlying philosophies that underpin the nature of the curriculum (refer to section 8.5.1). The convergence of these domains highlights the essential interplay required to cultivate well-rounded graduates who are prepared for the complexities of their professional landscapes and of contemporary society. The electric signal or action potential that reaches these neuron terminals and triggers the release of the neurotransmitters or chemical messengers, is represented by the kinds of engagement in the curriculum that draws on the underlying philosophies, strategies and ethos (see section 8.5.3).

Each of the components of this conceptual framework is detailed in the sub-sections below.

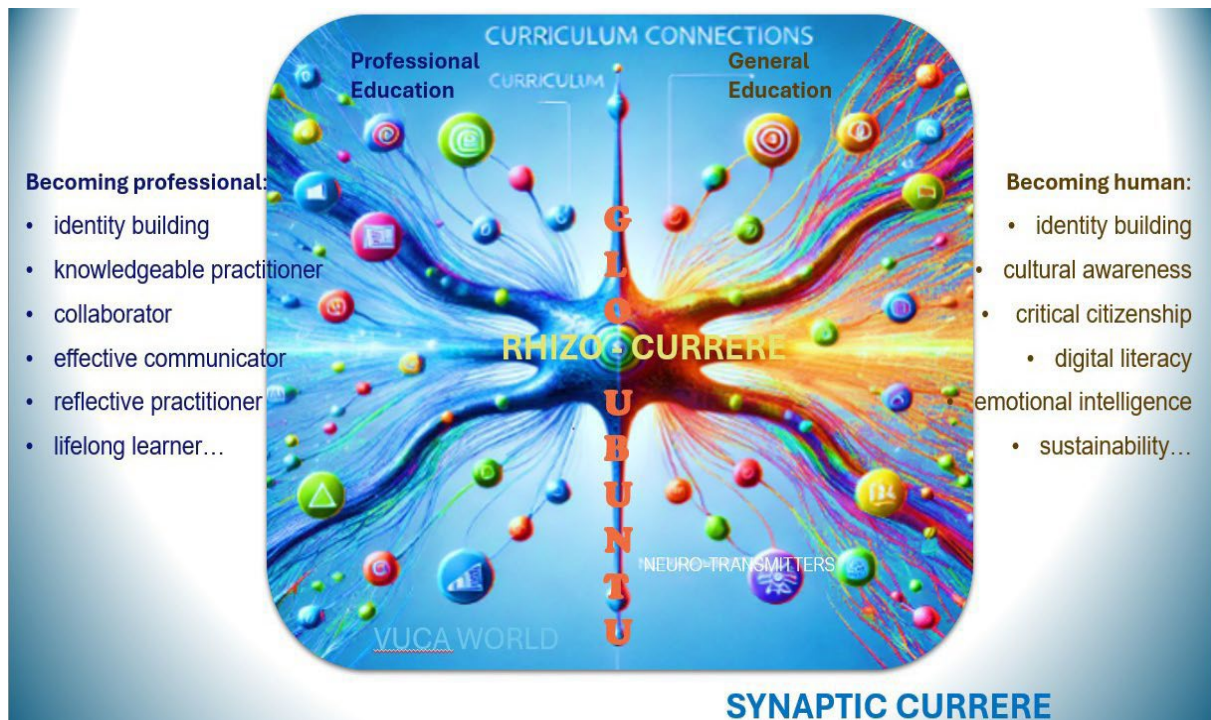


Figure 8.2: Synaptic currere: a conceptual framework for curriculum disruption

Source: Author's own assisted by AI - ChatGPT

8.5.1 Central synapse: Core of/for/in curriculum integration

At the core of the framework lies the central 'synaptic hub', re-presenting the site of intellectual and pedagogical transmission, as shown in Figure 8.2. This hub reflects the duality of the institutional frameworks, curricular strategies and pedagogical practices that serve as critical mediators between the domain-specific knowledges/expertise (PoE) and broad-based foundational knowledge (GE). However, although these appear as dual poles, the convergence at the synapse ensures that neither dimension exists in isolation: each dimension enhances the other. Similar to the synaptic cleft where neurotransmitters transfer signals to excite or inhibit a postsynaptic response, this central core/'neurotransmitters' symbolises the underlying philosophies, drawing on rhizo-currere and glo-ubuntu, allowing for an innovative and interconnected curriculum in/of/for an African university. This space represents the dynamic exchange of ideas fostering inter/trans/multi/disciplinary thinking and adaptability for complex glocalised contexts.

8.5.2 Vibrant and colourful streams: Pathways for knowledge transfer

The vibrant array of radiating pathways emanates from the central hub in Figure 8.2, symbolising *currere* (to run), and re-presenting the multidirectional flow of perspectives, values and competences, facilitating an integrative learning process. The interplay between these two realms, as presented by the interconnecting strands, emphasise the boundaries between PoE and GE are fluid and ‘borderless’ rather than rigid. These interconnections suggest that GE provides the intellectual scaffolding upon which specialised knowledge can be constructed, while specialised/professional education, in turn, refines and applies the broader competencies fostered by GE. By emphasising connectivity and fluidity, the model in Figure 8.2 demonstrates how both PoE and GE can transcend the confines of compartmentalized learning. It supports the idea that a well-rounded education is essential for addressing contemporary challenges; requiring professionals who are technically competent, ethically grounded, socially and environmentally aware, and adaptable.

On the left side in the Figure 8.2, the specialised elements highlight discipline-specific expertise, technical proficiency and professional capabilities, underscoring the role of specialised/professional education in preparing students for targeted career pathways. On the right side, the elements representing GE are marked by symbols for identity building, critical thinking, creativity, cultural awareness, ethical reasoning, digital literacy and foundation academic skills. These components are designed to instil intellectual versatility as well as human and non-human awareness, equipping students as critical and adaptive citizens. The vibrancy and diversity of colours and dynamic motion in the image metaphorically underscore the energy and the vitality of an integrated curriculum that bridges these domains. Rhizo-currere becomes possible within a network of synapses and allowing for movement or a line of flight (LOF)⁴⁵ away from existing assemblages. This LOF allows for new connections/action potentials and transformation to occur, facilitating change in the nature of the assemblages. These LOFs or synapses are not just escape routes; they are sources of creativity and innovation. They can lead to emergence of new identities, ideas, or social formations by connecting disparate elements in novel ways. The vibrant and

⁴⁵ Lines of flight describes a dynamic and transformative pathway that allows for change and escape from established structures or assemblages, using the metaphor of a rhizome that spreads out in multiple directions, allowing various connections and interactions. LOF

colourful streams also symbolise the multidimensional nature of learning encompassing the cognitive, perceptual, affective (emotional), interpersonal and practical (psychomotor) domains. Each node along the pathways re-presents specific elements of the curriculum that nurture the 'becoming of a pedagogical life'. These knowledge nodes should be designed to enrich the student's expertise by integrating universal (GCE) competences/capabilities with domain specific skills.

8.5.3 Immanent action potential of curricula: Balancing curricula

The Figure 8.2 synaptic model underscores the transformative potential of integrating GE into specialised curricula and vice versa, creating an educational ecosystem where inter/trans/multi/disciplinary synergy enriches the private and public good (professional practice and societal/environmental impact).

The synaptic cleft that 'separates' GE and PoE can both serve as sending and receiving neurons. When a signal or 'action potential' is sent to the synaptic terminal/cleft, this triggers a reaction (diffusion and binding) that can either excite or inhibit the postsynaptic GE or PoE, influencing it to generate its own action potential. It important to note that neurons receive signals from many terminal and each can form synapses with multiple other neurons, creating a complex communication networks.

When thinking about currere, the 'action potential' speaks to the reactive or active force that is either excited/enabled or inhibited in this space. So, the question is, what 'electrical signals' are communicated between the two domains/realms? In this model, the 'electrical signals' or the active forces of currere are the underpinning philosophies and ideologies that drive the synergy between the two. In other words, the electrical signals draw on the rhizo-currere and glo-ubuntu philosophies, generating a curriculum of *difference* [my emphasis] in/for an African university.

In this model, GE serves as the static synapses and represents the static or foundational knowledge or 'electrical signals', namely, communication, critical thinking, problem solving and so on. This is essential for building professional knowledge. These are core concepts that students must understand before progressing to more complex ideas. The model incorporates dynamic synapses as 'neuroplasticity' where

learning experiences shape and strengthen synaptic connections. In the context of the study, this means that professional curricula should adapt based on student feedback and real-world applications (the electrical signals) enhancing the relevance of GE components. In this way, new learning experiences will have the potential to influence future learning outcomes. Similar to the synaptic transmission relying on previous neural connections, effective curriculum decision-making and design should activate students' prior knowledge. They do not come 'empty', into new learning spaces. Activating prior knowledge helps create a framework for integrating new information, akin to how neurons utilise existing pathways to process new stimuli.

8.5.4 Creating cognitive conflict as a learning mechanism

I draw on one participant's response below that GE serves as a means to 'actively create conflict'.

...a student could in fact come into the system, enter a department, and come out three or four years later, as the professional or the person skilled for the intended job, but never have looked left or right. And never having their perspective, let alone broadened, thrown into disarray. And the notion of the university, I think, is that you taking a person at the age of 18 or 19, where from a psychological perspective, they're starting to form their sense of self and there is a measure of disarray that needs to be created. Things need to be thrown into the air a little bit, so that we can see how the pieces drop in a different way and that in many ways moulds our adult identity. Very critical time, from a psychological perspective, and I think the GenEd was a means of actively creating conflict, in the mildest sense of the word. [FM1]

The model incorporates creating 'cognitive conflict' as a learning mechanism. This mirrors how synapses respond to varying signals, adjusting their strength based on the context of the input. In other words, just as they can experience 'facilitation' and/or 'depression'⁴⁶, based on input, students can encounter cognitive conflict when integrating GE and professional knowledge. This means that when students encounter conflicting information, they are prompted to reconcile these differences. This conflict is essential and leads to deeper understanding, prompting students to reconcile theoretical concepts with practical applications. Of course, the same principles apply in curriculum designing for 'powerful regional knowledge must be conceptually coherent and contextually relevant' (see section 7.6.2 in Chapter Seven).

⁴⁶ Facilitation/depression - in synaptic terms, 'facilitation' refers to an increase in synaptic strength with repeated stimulation, while 'depression' indicates a decrease. In both neuroscience and educational contexts, this relates to retention and working memory. (see also [What Happens at The Synapse?](#))

8.5.5 Social constructivism and interdisciplinarity

The model also emphasises the social aspects of learning. Dialogue and interaction among curriculum workers, academics and students serve as essential components for memory-making and concept formation, paralleling how synaptic connections are strengthened through repeated interactions. The model promotes collaboration among academics from different disciplines, akin to how neurons communicate across synapses. An example can be integrated projects that combine GE and PoE. This emphasis on the dynamic interactions and interdisciplinary collaboration fosters an adaptive educational environment conducive to lifelong learning and professional success.

In summary, I want to add that this synaptic model bears resemblance to the often-cited illustrative relationship of a wasp and an orchid⁴⁷ that highlights how each influences and enhances the characteristics of the other through co-evolution. Similarly in this synaptic currere framework, GE and PoE does not exist in isolation to each other. Their signals/action potentials are not merely functional. They are also creative, leading to innovative pathways for curriculum interactions, enhancement, transformation and disruption.

The synaptic framework for curriculum making, while innovative and reflective of cognitive processes, may have some limitations that curriculum designers should consider. The synaptic model may oversimplify complex curriculum and pedagogical processes, by likening them to biological mechanisms. Curriculum is influenced by a multitude of factors, as demonstrated in this study. This may not be adequately captured by a purely synaptic analogy. One has to also consider the impact of the diversity of the student body, the integration of technology and other resources, or lack thereof, and the varying educational contexts for effective integration.

⁴⁷ Orchid (genus *Ophrys*) and its pollinating wasp – the orchid has evolved to mimic the appearances and chemical cues of the female wasp, attracting the male wasp to mate and become pollinators. This relationship exemplifies mutual transformation and co-evolution, where each species influences the evolution and characteristics of the other (Ray & Vendrame, 2018).

8.6 Chapter summary

This chapter presented currere as both an analytical and transformative lens for understanding and re-imagining curriculum decision-making and reconceptualisation in HEIs. By analysing the integration of GE into PoC, it critiqued the dominance of instrumentalist approaches that prioritise professional compliance over holistic education. The discussion illuminated the active force of currere in fostering innovative and socially responsive curricula, emphasising its relevance in the global south.

The synthesis proposed a reconceptualised GE framework, synaptic currere, rooted in glo-ubuntu principles and rhizomatic thinking, advocating for the integration of local knowledge systems, interdisciplinary collaboration and global citizenship education. By rethinking the curriculum as a dynamic and evolving entity, the chapter underscored the potential for HEIs to act as catalyst for equitable and inclusive education that bridges local and global challenges. This holistic perspective not only aligns with institutional imperatives; it also addresses broader societal and ecological demands, ensuring education remains a transformative force for the public good.

CHAPTER NINE: REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

(Nelson Mandela)

9.1 Introduction

The central purpose of this chapter is to focus on the 'now what' aspect of the study. Undertaking this research in volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) times has implications for the findings of the study. The unprecedented pace and intensity of change in all spheres/spaces has a profound impact on professionally-oriented curricula (PoC). The rapidly evolving demands of today's workplaces, shifts in higher education dynamics, and evolving student expectations are exerting pressure on traditional curricula, teaching methodologies, and learning paradigms that have been historically aligned in meeting industry needs. It is clear that this requires significant shifts in the institutional identity and culture of the UoT sector in particular, as well as higher education in general, as it grapples with preparing graduates for the volatile, VUCA world and workplaces.

This study was inspired by one institution's imperative to transform the dominant undergraduate curriculum for professionally oriented programmes through the general education (GE) imperative. This liberal agenda was driven by a recognition that today's graduates need a broader (T-shaped) education to tackle the challenges in a VUCA world. The intention to 'liberalise' the undergraduate curriculum was seen to be the vehicle to bring about the desired transformation within a transforming UoT; it is, however, evident that the actual processes of curriculum change were not seamlessly translated. This affirms the highly complex and messy nature of curriculum change in higher education that is driven by varying ideologies and multiple levers of influence. It also highlights the challenges of associated perceptions of GE within the fixed thinking modes of major-based professional education or specialisations.

Adopting a critical interpretive approach for this case study enabled me to gain insights into contributing to the discourses on curriculum change; in particular, the

detritorialisation of undergraduate PoC through a liberal agenda; why GE matters in a Global South context especially in neoliberal higher education institutions (HEIs); and finally what a GE model/s could be for the sub-Saharan African region, in particular, within a synaptic currere philosophy that integrates glo-ubuntu and rhizo-currere. I also consider what GE could be in southern African contexts.

This final chapter begins with a brief reflection on my research journey, examining how I set up my research questions, study objectives and theoretical frameworks to respond to the phenomenon for the study. The thesis ends with contributions to understanding the phenomenon of curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making in PoC in higher education and the implications of the findings of this study for GE in higher education in southern Africa/Global South. I recognise that while the study provides valuable insights, the degree to which these insights can be applied broadly is constrained by the study's context, methodology and specific focus. It is imperative, therefore, for further research in this area to provide a deeper and richer understanding of how the liberal/general agenda can be activated in the curriculum and the classroom.

9.2 Reflections on the research journey: A postscript

Two critical questions are addressed in the study:

- i. How is the undergraduate professionally oriented curricula at a UoT transforming?
- ii. Why does it happen in the way that it does?

More specifically, the study addresses the following objectives:

- a. To explore the practices for reconceptualising professionally oriented curricula at a UoT.
- b. To examine the multiple forces at the micro, meso, macro and supra levels that influence these practices.
- c. To understand the participants' experiences of these forces and its impact on their curriculum planning and decision-making.
- d. To understand the implications for curriculum change within the UoT sector.

In this section, I synthesise the chapters of this thesis, illustrating how they interconnect and inform each other, thereby contributing to the accumulation of knowledge in addressing the study's objectives and critical questions.

Chapters One and Two

The inaugural chapter of this thesis examined the ongoing debate about the purpose of university education, and particularly within the university of technology (UoT) sector. It highlighted the interconnectedness of the key drivers in the social, geopolitical, technological, and ecological spaces shaping higher education and therefore curriculum. It underscored the false dichotomy between professionally oriented and general/ liberal education, rationalising the need to broaden/ 'liberalise' PoC to prepare graduates for the complexities of the modern world while navigating influences from vocationalism, neoliberalism, and professional accreditation. The chapter explored the role of GE/LE in fostering critical thinking, civic responsibility, and the conflicting pressures within disciplines regarding curriculum breadth and relevance. Overall, the chapter argued the importance of transformative curriculum change—reconceptualisation and decision-making—to prepare future (T-shaped) professionals for the contemporary challenges in/of a VUCA world.

Chapter Two formed the background of my study, contextualising it by providing a historical overview of the developments within the UoT sector. It was not the intention of the study to go into detail about the history of UoTs but rather to highlight some of the challenges faced in the transitioning from Technikons to UoTs in the new dispensation. Especially, challenges pertaining to the lack of clarity in its new identity within a differentiated system, resistance from stakeholders, and concerns about the neglect of humanities and social sciences. The chapter also outlined the limitations of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF)/Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework (HEQSF) in general and its unintended consequences for the UoT sector, in particular, thereby leading to a reduction in differentiation, as understood by the policy. The HEQSF turned out to be a 'sword of Damocles' for a sector that is conditioned on compliance. The HEQSF has been critiqued as an instrumental policy system that centralises control, suppresses individual desires and enforces pre-determined aims and outcomes. Such systems stifle the creative, transformative and dynamic potential of curriculum, turning it into a tool for control

rather than a space for growth, exploration and empowerment (Le Grange, 2019; Thathiah, 2013; van Koller, 2010). This policy to practice implementation can turn a curriculum's active potential into a passive, reactive force. Despite the challenges and constraints within the macro-contextual spaces, UoTs are urged to move beyond mere compliance and engage in critical reflection to redefine their identity and distinctiveness within the SAHE landscape. This chapter ends with an examination of how one UoT, through its leadership, chose a visionary path for curriculum change and renewal and, during its transitioning from a Technikon to a UoT.

Chapter Three

This chapter covers three aspects of the field relating to the phenomenon. Firstly, it highlights the curriculum as a highly contested and non-neutral space. Curriculum reconceptualising and decision-making is exerted on the multiple levers of forces in the nano, micro, meso, macro and supra levels. This chapter extends the debates on the widening divide between vocational and professional education and the false dichotomy/choice between professional and LE. Debates about the purpose of higher education (HE) have historically been polarised between specialisations for specific vocations/professions and a comprehensive, general knowledge base referred to as LE. However, proponents of LE show that LE/GE is increasing globally, even while it struggles for legitimacy in the United States of America (USA).

By bringing in the debates about neoliberalism and its reactive forces on HEIs globally, many university leaders are left with the difficult task of strategically balancing efficiency with equity goals. This has subsequently led to LE gaining a new significance of what a future-oriented education is. Many countries have adopted GE, either as a standalone curriculum or in the first year of their specialisation/major. Several scholars cite the tensions that arise when adopting and implementing a Western model in different regions and contexts. This study offers a theoretically informed understanding of why institutions follow particular approaches to curriculum transformations/disruptions/innovations. This study was not limited to understanding the form that it took but explored the processes and the substance that drove the development. Adopting (and adapting) the conceptual force of *currere*, the study sought to understand how one institutional leader attempted to strategically lead an erstwhile Technikon into a new identity as a re-imagined university through curriculum

disruptions. To this end, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of the espoused/envisioned approaches that were taken to reconceptualise and balance PoC and the actual approaches that were followed at the operational level. The study contributes to the growing scholarship of HE curriculum reform and GE outside the USA and a rethinking about the kind of professional that is needed in VUCA times.

Chapter Four

A qualitative approach was best suited to this study as it sought to understand how the curriculum is transforming at a UoT. A case study design allowed for a comprehensive exploration of the case focusing on curriculum planning and implementation for the integration of GE into the PoC, including a deeper understanding of the choices taken. This was undertaken by reviewing the relevant curriculum documents at the institutional and programme levels. Individual interviews allowed for a deeper engagement with the key participants at the executive level and the select curriculum champions from the two faculties in the study.

Individual interviews provided a useful and safe space for participants to reflect on the practices during the study period and to motivate for the curriculum decisions and actions taken. A semi-structured interview tool was used to direct the participants' reflective accounts. Participants were, however, allowed leeway to express their thoughts freely without interruption leading to an enriching of the data that was collected. Two challenges emerged during the data production phase. Firstly, the original plan in the study was to include a focus group interview with the GE module developers. However, during the fieldwork, there were great difficulties in securing the participants, especially as the key module developers were no longer at the institution. Interestingly, three of the key participants at the executive were no longer at the institution during the data production phase.

The second challenge related to the data production period. In the chapter, I explain my 'insiderness' and the confidence I had entering the field as I did not anticipate any challenges. However, I must report that my fieldwork took almost twenty months to be completed. Securing interviews proved quite a challenge. Owing to the tight schedules of the participants and the concerns with the length of time in the field, the arts-based methodologies that were also in the original plan did not materialise. Despite the

challenges in securing the interviews, the latter yielded rich data for analysis. I expand on my positionality (in the prelude) and the strategies that were used to mitigate the impact of my insider status on the production, analysis and interpretation of the data. Both inductive and deductive analyses were undertaken, as explained in the chapter.

Chapters Five and Six

These two chapters represented a descriptive and evaluative analysis of the findings of the study. Adopting the Force Field Model (Samuel, 2008) as an analytical framing for these chapters, I presented the findings addressing each of the objectives both, from a thematic and theoretical perspective. Chapter Five explored how the institutional force shaped curriculum change at the UoT and how this interplayed with other internal forces. The analysis underscored the critical role of institutional forces, led by charismatic leaders, in shaping the institution and its curriculum; as part of broader efforts to redefine the ethos of a restructured institution in response to SA's post-apartheid socio-political transformation. The analysis showed how programmatic and biographical forces played a crucial role in shaping what is valued in the academic project, and this was manifested in two ways. On the one hand, it showed that the executives' efforts sought to leverage existing institutional dynamics to drive deeper systemic change through initiatives such as the Curriculum Renewal Project (CRP) and the GE integration (curriculum innovations). However, these ideals of the institutional leader and some executives came to be contested and renegotiated as other executive managers and curriculum workers engaged with the 'translation'/interpretation of these goals into operational practice. Varied interpretations of that operationalising were evident.

On the other hand, the analysis showed that the programmatic and biographical forces are inextricably linked with how the curriculum workers interpret their roles and identities as they align the practices within the prescribed standards. The analysis also showed that biographical forces acted as 'inertial forces' (Samuel, 2008) and could be seen as restricting movement and limiting the capacity to embrace change. This disjuncture, between the espoused plans compared to the actual plans/implementation, underscores the complex interplay between the force of the institution, the programmatic and the biographical forces that enable and/or constrains the birthing of new ideas, experimentations and expansions (Le Grange, 2019).

Chapter Six explores the complex interplay between the internal forces and, in particular, the force of the institution through the liberal agenda was leveraged against the influence of macro-contextual forces on curriculum transformation at the study site. The analysis in this chapter revealed external forces, namely, policy, regulatory and industry often constrain institutional autonomy, creating tensions between regulatory demands and curriculum innovation. Industry feedback revealed gaps in students' and/or graduates' readiness, particularly in essential skills like writing, communication, teamwork, and work ethic, prompting calls for curricula to better prepare students for rapidly evolving workplaces. The analyses showed that less attention was given to the contemporary issues in the societal, geopolitical and ecological spaces, on the part of the curriculum workers, despite efforts to include these relevant areas of learning in the GE curriculum. Overall, the analyses showed that the chapter highlighted the complex and dynamic interplay of forces shaping UoT curricula and the need for balanced, responsive approaches for professionals 'yet to come'.

Chapter Seven and Eight

At the outset, I wish to clarify that I found the work of Deleuze and Guattari very complex and difficult to comprehend. Through several iterations, I realised that the readings required patience and grit to make sense of it. Admittedly, I did use two Deleuze Dictionaries to assist my understanding. Consequently, I must acknowledge that my interpretations offered in these chapters reflect my personal and stunted engagement with the deleuzegauattarian terms. I recognise that my reading may be subject to critique by others more extensively versed in their philosophy. However, throughout the writing and staying within the boundaries of my current understanding, I have endeavoured to prioritise clarity and accessibility, even if this comes at the expense of full exactness. Despite the challenges, I find their ideas deeply enriching and worth engaging with; and look forward to further disruptions and 'deterritorialisations' ... *in my becoming as a scholar* [my emphasis].

Chapters Seven and Eight focused on making sense of the research questions/objectives through further abstractions and theoretical framings to explore nuanced understandings of why curriculum change happened in the way that it did. These chapters explore the dynamic and dualistic conceptual forces of instituting and curating respectively, as both analytical and transformative frameworks.

Chapter Seven offered an integrated analysis of the findings affirming the complex nature of curriculum decision-making and change. While national, regulatory, and institutional frameworks may often constrain curriculum changes to structural adjustments, meaningful transformation occurs within ideological deliberations and negotiations in the cultural domain. The institution, conceptualised as *instituire*, emerges as a site of struggle and negotiation between active forces driving change and reactive forces maintaining entrenched practices. This dynamic process reflects a tension between re-imagining institutional identity and those of the individual, often constrained by historical, structural, and external influences. Curriculum workers, entangled within these forces, navigated layers of resistance and responses, highlighting the importance of leadership and systemic literacies in facilitating meaningful change.

The transition from diplomas to degrees addresses practical and aspirational goals but risks perpetuating hierarchical and commodified views of higher education, raising concerns about policy-driven isomorphism and the erosion of UoTs' distinctiveness. Nonetheless, the chapter emphasises the transformative potential of *instituire* as a force for rethinking institutional norms and addressing both local and global challenges. Lastly, it calls for intentional and deliberate engagement with historical, cultural, and systemic forces to position UoTs as innovative, socially just spaces that can facilitate critical conversations and advance professionally oriented education.

Similarly, Chapter Eight critiques the prevailing dominance of instrumentalist approaches to PoC that prioritise professional compliance over holistic and socially responsive education. The discussion highlights the active conceptual force of *currere* in fostering innovative and contextually relevant curricula, particularly in the Global South. It underscores the necessity of rethinking GE/LE as a means of enhancing not only technical/professional competence but also broader societal and ecological activism and engagement. In other words, the emphasis on what it means to be a professional in VUCA times is balanced with a focus on becoming human.

The synthesis offers a reconceptualised framework for curriculum-making for a liberalised PoE, referred to as synaptic *currere*. Rooted in ubuntu-*currere* and globubuntu principles and informed by rhizomatic thinking/*currere*, this framework

advocates for a meaningful integration of local knowledge systems, interdisciplinary collaboration and critical global citizenship education. By framing the curriculum as a dynamic and evolving entity, the chapter emphasises its potential to transform HEIs into catalysts for equitable and inclusive education that bridges local and global—glocal—challenges. This holistic perspective aligns with institutional imperatives, affirming the transformative potential of education as a force for public good, fostering sustainable and socially just futures.

9.3 Noteworthy contributions and insights emerging from the study

In line with the overarching argument presented, the study also offers several theoretical insights that may enhance our understanding of curriculum change, within the UoT sector, across the South African higher education (SAHE) landscape and the sub-Saharan African region. Firstly, the study contributes to a re-imagining of the global HE system more generally and the re-imagining of an African university, in/for a VUCA world. The second contribution is a re-imagining of PoC through a deliberate and intentional GE/liberal arts education (LAE)/LE integration. It argues that curriculum decision-making for the professions is preoccupied with preparing a professional as ‘technician’ as it responds to the policy, regulatory and industry demands. It argues that there is insufficient focus on the other aspects of development and questions what it means to be a professional in VUCA times. PoC should not be treated as a homogeneous entity, subject to the same forces and responding similarly to societal change. The third contribution is the re-imagining of the LE/GE imperative itself, as it can potentially serve as a curricula vaccine for professional education nationally, as well as extending across sub-Saharan Africa. The emerging insights are discussed in the following sections.

9.3.1 Re-imagining a global HE system of difference

Universities globally, face several significant challenges in the context of globalisation with respect to global and local competition, balancing tradition and innovation, third mission engagement, including insufficient resource allocation, autonomy and governance (Maassen, et al., 2019). The findings presented in the previous chapters do cover these aspects in the previous chapters; this section will foreground two or three aspects as contributions from the study as it relates to re-imagining universities for the future. The first is the increasing competition among universities on a global

scale and its negative impact on a differentiated HE system. The second centres around the third mission of universities, namely engagement. I will attempt to conflate this with a third significant challenge of balancing tradition with innovation, as I see these two as interrelated.

Universities are increasingly competing on a global scale, which necessitates a focus on excellence in teaching and learning, and research while addressing local and regional societal needs. This dual focus creates challenges in resource allocation and strategic planning. However, the bigger issue is global and local competition, driven by incentive structures for research subsidies and global ranking pressures, which have pushed institutions toward homogenisation and vertical stratification by reputation (Habib, as cited in USAf, 2024; Naidoo, 2018). This undermines the differentiation needed to produce diverse human capital for economic and social development (Boughey & McKenna, 2021; Habib, as cited in USAf, 2024; Lange, 2017). Habib⁴⁸ contends that such trends, compounded by short-term survival strategies, deepen inequalities and limit universities' abilities to address pressing national and transnational/global challenges (USAf, 2024). This lack of differentiation has created a hierarchical system, privileging research-intensive universities while marginalising others, particularly in the Global South. In his keynote address, he contends that the successes of/in the post-apartheid SAHE system hide these structural and systemic challenges in the SAHE landscape, reflected in the misalignment between policy intentions and institutional practices.

In re-imagining universities of/for the future, Habib (as cited in USAf, 2024) advocates for new forms of global partnerships and collaborations, beyond competition, to survive global and regional challenges of the current era. He highlights the critical role of local knowledge in effectively implementing global solutions. He cites the stemming of the Ebola outbreak in West Africa as an exemplar of the success of glocal, multidisciplinary and collaborative approaches⁴⁹ to solve the challenges facing the

⁴⁸ Adam Habib -former VC of a leading university in SA and political commentator, was one of several keynote speakers at the 3rd Higher Education Conference of Universities South Africa (USAf) in Pretoria in 2024.

⁴⁹ The Ebola outbreak in West Africa would have not been stemmed using a clinical approach only. What was needed was a multidisciplinary approach that factored in an understanding of Muslim burial practices and how these needed to be adapted to curb the spread of the virus – USAf, 2024

contemporary world. By grounding interventions in the ‘cultural, social and political realities of the local context’, the solutions become relevant and impactful. This requires a dismantling of boundaries: between the Global North and South, between institutions (universities, UoTs/polytechnics and vocational colleges), between disciplines (sciences and humanities), between the theory and the application, and between the universal and the local.

Maassen, et al. (2019) argue the need to bring a balance to the three missions of universities or higher education institutions (HEIs) in general. They stressed that the trend for the third mission—community/societal engagement—is not as clearly defined as the significant growth that is visible in the other two core missions of universities, namely teaching and learning, and research. They posit that a key question that ought to inform and drive the third mission of universities is: “What kind of university do we want for what kind of society?” (Maassen et al., 2019, p.9). The answer will differ based on the unique needs and aspirations of a society. This means that universities must adapt their missions and strategies to align with the specific societal contexts within which they operate. As already established, factors such as cultural context, economic conditions and socio-political environments influence the role that HEIs are expected to play. Considering the institutional diversity in the SAHE and beyond, it is clear there is no homogenous, ‘one-size-fits-all’ model that can be applied to all.

This third mission of engagement that centres around three ideas or ideologies for universities (i.e. instruments for national agendas, service to society and social institutions) is integral to the very nature of UoTs (Maassen, et al., 2019). My study reveals that re-imagining the UoT involves a re-envisioning of its identity, purpose and practices to align with contemporary societal and educational imperatives. In other words, a re-imagined UoT must broaden its ‘third’ mission to include the cultivation of socially responsible and critically engaged graduates. Within a UoT context, liberalising PoC offers a robust framework for this transformation, ensuring that the institution transcends its traditional, utilitarian focus and embraces broader social, ethical and developmental goals. Through the integration of GE/LAE/LE, UoTs can foster holistic development that prepares students for societal contributions beyond mere workplace readiness. This is expanded in the next section.

This study also contributes to the strong argument for university ‘architectures’ to be intentionally ‘designed’ to foster engagement through various dynamic interfaces that explore the intersections of humanity, in the same way as they are designed for research and, teaching and learning (Bawa, 2018, 2021; Maassen, et al., 2019). Notably, Barnett (2023), in his recent article on designing university futures, posits that the term ‘university design’ is a misnomer. He argues that universities cannot be designed in the conventional sense, as this notion implies a fixed structure that would confine them to being closed systems in an inherently open and VUCA world. Instead, he advocates that universities should be viewed as entities that can only be ‘conjectured’, ‘imagined’, encouraging a creative and exploratory approach to shaping the future of HE (Barnett, 2023, p. 116). Re-imagining the university in this way allows for adaptability in the face of uncertainty by creating physical, intellectual, political, and sociological porous boundaries that are essential for interconnectedness and collaboration for enabling the free exchange of pluralistic knowledges and perspectives (Bawa, 2018, 2021; Barnett, 2023; Habib, as cited in USAf, 2024; Maassen, et al., 2019). In this way, the third mission of HEIs displaces the ever-prevalent instrumentality with an “ethic of collective care (and responsibility) for the world” (Barnett, 2023, p. 116). This idea of the ‘collective’ is enshrined in the principles of ubuntu, which I will discuss in section 9.3.3.

The institutional leader in my study alluded to a university’s ‘engagement with its publics’ as a powerful force for institutional transformation, when reflecting on how curriculum renewal could have been done differently. He suggested that there was a greater focus on the student-centredness aspect of the strategy, and less attention was given to the second prong, namely, engagement, in this iteration of curriculum planning and reconceptualisation at the study site. However, this was foregrounded in his strategic plan for the UoT and remains central in the current strategic statement of intent of the UoT, ENVISION2030. The third mission of *engaged* with its publics (communities and society) has come to be recognised as one of the new ‘DNA’ strands/fabric of the institution, with the other input being people-centred. The current philosophy of education statement within the UoT demonstrates a radical shift away from preparing graduates for industry towards preparing graduates who are able to transform society. This vision and mission for the UoT continues on the path to re-focus its contribution to the ‘public-good.’

UoTs, positioned as distinct institutions within the SAHE system, are expected to uphold a unique identity grounded in vocational and technology-oriented education. However, the findings of my study highlight a persistent tension between differentiation and isomorphism as one negotiates these reimagined expectations in the everyday practice of curriculum making. UoTs are often pressured or perceived to emulate traditional universities, which undermines their distinctiveness and dilutes their original mission. This tension calls for a critical re-examination of the policy frameworks and institutional strategies that guide UoTs. The study demonstrates that identity information for UoTs must integrate their historical legacies and contextual realities while adapting to evolving global and national expectations.

Leadership is critical to the reimagining of UoT. Synaptic *currere* promotes relational and participatory leadership approaches that foster collaboration and inclusivity. Integrating GE into the core of the curriculum signals a commitment to these values, encouraging a shift in institutional culture toward innovation, equity and social responsibility. Re-imagining the UoT through the integration of GE that is underpinned by synaptic *currere* transforms the institution into a dynamic, socially responsive, and globally relevant space for learning. By balancing technological expertise with ethical reasoning and relationality, UoTs can prepare graduates to navigate complex societal challenges and contribute meaningfully to their communities and professions. This approach positions their re-imagined UoT as a leader in higher education innovation and societal transformation.

9.3.2 Re-imagining the professional in VUCA times

What kind of professional is needed in the 21st century, was seen as a critical driver of curriculum change by the institutional leader during the study period, who illustrated his argument below:

*Second thing is the **changes that are occurring in the profession itself**. So, one might imagine for example that one of the changes that are taking place in the profession is kind the of the **technology that underpins the profession**...It has to be kind of considered in terms of the curriculums. But of course, the nature of professions is not just dependent on technology, **it is also dependent on research that directs us towards greater levels of efficiency** and so on, which are **related to culture**. So, one can imagine, if you went to a doctor now and you went to a doctor twenty years ago, that the **relationship you had with your doctor, was a very different relationship** and that is partly to do with technology of course, but partly it is got to do*

with the culture issues. So, it is just saying well there is a whole lot of research going on, which indicates how the **education of professionals needs to change to take into account this new knowledge about effectiveness of professions**. There is a third angle... **what is happening on the demand side**. So, one can imagine that on the demand side, people are more acutely aware of things relating to themselves now because of the internet and all of that. So it is the external environments that is kind of causing **changes on the expectation side of customers** ...you cannot possibly ignore the reality that people can Google now and they can find out, or that they read or whatever the case.. so, in other words, the **nature of the customers changing**. And then, and then there is a fourth one which is also interesting and that is that there is a – there is a kind of growing set of changes that are taking place in you know, as we head into this new era of artificial intelligence and all of that, there is all the technology stuff, we have spoken about that.

But there is also **all the sociological changes that are taking place**. So, let me give you an example. It is very likely that what you'll see in the future is that **professionals will not be sitting in eight to five jobs** like that; people will be a part of what they call this **Gig economy**. That people will be **selling their labour or selling their profession**, their professional skills in very different ways and so on. So, that also has implications for the way in which you train your professionals of the future. In other words, it is like saying that you have to make sure that they can actually run businesses and all that because that is what they will be doing, that it will not be just, you know they will not be just working for the state or working for some you know some big private sector company, but that they also kind of running their own businesses... It is something quite different when a young person says, **"I do not want to be tied to kind of one enterprise, I want to work for lots of things at the same time"**... it is what they call the Gig economy. [EM1] [my emphasis added]

This is a long read, but a necessary one. This participant's arguments underscore the uncertainty of the professions in the 21st century and raises questions of how the education of professionals in indeterminate times is being re-imagined. Instead of pondering on these critical issues, there is a pre-occupation with producing 'technicians' who are indoctrinated to implement the standards of the state and the regulatory bodies. In this excerpt, key arguments were emerging about the fragility of the professions in the 21st century that has implications for the training of future professionals. The changing nature of the professions themselves, as they are driven by 4IR, AI and other technological advancements. Lifelong learning becomes critical as future professionals must show adaptability to new workplaces and new ways of working. The changing nature of the customer is driven by access to information/knowledge, including the evolving nature of customer expectations/demands. This has implications for how professionals engage with their 'clients'. Lastly, the changes on the sociological front are driven by the Gig economy, where professionals are increasingly expected to operate as entrepreneurs, independent workers who offer their skills in flexible and dynamic ways. The Gig economy is also leading to a decline in traditional full-time employment structures.

These debates suggest that training must go beyond technical skills to include business and self-management competencies, preparing professional graduates for a more flexible and independent career landscape.

The statement below made by Ballim, previous VC at another university in SA, addresses the common criticism about the work readiness of graduates/professionals (see also Chapter 6):

I have heard people say, ‘Your graduates are useless — they don’t know which button to press on the machine’; my response: ‘Well, I hope my graduates never come to work for you.’ This view tells me that people often do not understand what universities do. Our students will most probably have jobs in ten years that don’t have a name yet. But we must not forget the foundational questions about the purpose of higher education — it is not simply to serve the short-term needs of the economy. The conversation we should be having among ourselves is the need to rethink curriculum and pedagogy. For example, one of the challenges is that our humanities graduates leave without a full understanding of technological issues (Ballim, as cited in USAf, 2019, p. 21).

The same could be said of ‘technology’ graduates leaving university without a full understanding of social and other contemporary issues outside their disciplines and professions, namely the humanities. While these statements resonate with the findings in the study, of importance here is that many future jobs may not even exist yet, arguing the evolving impact of technological advancements on workplaces and professions.

The World Economic Forum (WEF) estimated that by 2030, based on current predictions, “new job creation and job displacement due to macrotrends will represent a combined total of 22% of today’s total (formal) jobs”. This report estimates that a net growth of seventy-eight million jobs by 2030 that equates to seven percent of current total employment (World Economic Forum, 2025, p. 18). A previous report indicated substantial growth in new digitised jobs across the globe for which institutions of higher learning (both academics and students) feel ill-prepared. With unprecedented levels of uncertainty of the professions, what should the curriculum for these future knowledge workers be? The rapidly changing world of work in the 4IR era is calling for techno-professionals in all fields, who have a multidisciplinary educational experience (Marwala, as cited in USAf, 2019).

Notwithstanding the significant technological advancements, technology is deeply rooted in historical and social contexts. Therefore, they often create and/or reinforce both existing and new opportunities that are uneven and unequal, influenced by social factors, established geographies and hierarchies of the global labour market. A typical example was the great digital divide manifested during the pandemic, when HEIs globally had to transition to emergency remote teaching and learning. Challenges of digital access and digital literacies surfaced, as a result of the global and structural inequalities of the HE system (Hlatshwayo & Mbatha, 2024). This has implications too, for how professionals from Africa will participate in the 4IR, either as consumers or creators. The impact of 4IR/5IR on higher education shows several interconnected trends—digital disruptions that affect all aspects of HEIs necessitating adaptability, the increasing demands for public service and community engagement (as discussed in earlier), the unbundling of degree programmes and the growing necessity for lifelong learning (Zezeza, as cited in USAf, 2019).

9.3.3 Re-imagining GE/LE: A ‘curricular vaccine’ for the sub-Saharan Africa

This critically examines the complexities of introducing GE within the context of a UoT, highlighting the challenges posed by Western-centric models and the need for a transformative, African-centered curriculum framework. While GE presents an opportunity for curriculum renewal and transformation, its implementation has largely mirrored the US and UK models, raising concerns about its relevance for sub-Saharan Africa. The study underscores the historical, structural, cultural, and epistemic constraints that have limited meaningful integration of GE within professional curricula, reflecting a broader global trend of skepticism regarding GE's value in applied and professional/vocational fields. The study affirms that a neoliberal approach to GE will leave a void in the desired cultivation of the embodied humanness of students (citizens). The concept of ubuntu, as an underpinning philosophy offers a meaning pathway for bridging the divide; when professional education shifts its focus from performance, measurable outcomes, and accumulation of knowledge and for individual advancement to prioritising the student's holistic development (i.e becoming professional AND becoming human).

Post colonial critique, informed by scholars such as de Sousa Santos (2015), Hlatwayo (2021, 2022a), Shilliam (2016) and Waghid, Waghid & Waghid (2020), expose the colonial legacies embedded in modern humanities and social sciences, wherein non-Western epistemologies are often marginalised. Existing GE/LE reforms are not exempt and have failed to address these epistemic injustices (Altbach, 2016), necessitating a critical engagement with Western hegemonic influences. While GE curricula aim to promote global citizenship education, social responsibility, and environmental awareness, their frameworks frequently overlooked the social cultural and economic realities of the global south. As such, a transformative shift is required—one that not only adapts existing GE models but also cultivates locally grounded, epistemically just curricular aligned with African knowledge systems and indigenous philosophies.

To address this gap, the study advances synaptic currere, underpinned by glo-ubuntu and rhizo-currere philosophies, as a theoretical and practical framework for reimagining GE integration/curricula within UoTs and HEIs across the African continent. This approach is rooted in three core tenets: i) the inclusion of local voices, activism and democratic participation; ii) fostering social cohesion and shared humanity; and iii) encouraging communal responsibility and care. Aligning with the ubuntu philosophy, the synaptic currere framework that advocates for ethical leadership, an ethics of collective care and well-being and restorative justice; challenging the dominance of transnational neoliberal agendas that exacerbate inequality and environmental degradation. By integrating the local lived experiences into GE curricula, UoTs can position themselves as transformative institutions that address social justice, epistemic diversity and the broader public good.

Additionally, the concept of synaptic currere is introduced as a framework for fostering interconnected, interdisciplinary and dynamic learning experiences. Moving beyond rigid disciplinary boundaries, this model envisions GE as a site for holistic, responsive PoC that equips students with critical, ethical and adaptive competencies necessary for navigating an increasingly VUCA world. By incorporating interdisciplinary studies and the humanities GE can provide a comprehensive framework for analyzing contemporary global challenges. These existential crises stem from environmental issues, pandemics, and AI reflect deep-seated fears about survival, moral

responsibility, and identity in an indeterminate world. Addressing these challenges requires not only practical solutions but also philosophical engagement with the underlying questions they raise about meaning, purpose, and our interconnectedness with each other and the planet. These crises highlight the critical imperative to include global citizenship education in all curricula. A re-imagining of GE ensures that graduates are not only technically skilled but also ethically conscious, socially engaged, and capable of addressing pressing societal issues.

The case study contributes to two key areas of scholarship. Firstly, it provides insights into curriculum reform in PoE, advocating for the meaningful integration of GE within UoTs to cultivate critically engaged and socially responsible graduates. The dominance of instrumentalist perspectives has often reduced GE to a superficial compliance exercise, sidelining its transformative potential. The study argues for a reconceptualisation that aligns with institutional goals while addressing the broader societal needs of a fragile and evolving South African context.

Secondly, it situates the study within the global discourse of GE/LE, positioning the case as a potential disruptor of dominantly neoliberal frameworks. As one of the first UoTs, amongst South Africa's twenty-six public universities to formally integrate GE, this initiative challenges prevailing Western models and offers a pioneering perspective for African HEIs. Given that only 2% of African HEIs have adopted GE, this study opens avenues for further research and collaboration, contributing to emerging scholarship on alternative and contextually responsive approaches to GE in the sub-Saharan context.

Ultimately, a reimagined UoT must move beyond mere emulations of traditional universities and cultivate distinct institutional identity that is both locally rooted and globally significant. A responsive and resilient GE curriculum—anchored in the synaptic currere framework—must integrate African philosophy, its history, its culture—while embracing interdisciplinary and innovative approaches. In doing so, the UoTs can challenge historical inequities, promote inclusive education, and equip graduates with competencies needed to navigate the complexities of the modern world. Future collaborative studies across Africa will further develop scholarship in this

space strengthening, the theoretical and practical foundations necessary for meaningful curriculum transformation.

9.4 Recommendations for practice

Curriculum reform is highly contested space, as it 'is a highly complex social process, which is related to individual, disciplinary and institutional identities and reflects the power relations within the academy' (Annala and Mäkinen, 2013; Annala, et al., 2022; Shay, 2015). The dynamics of curriculum change at the UoT was evidenced as a two-pronged approach that included both top-down initiatives driven by policy and bottom-up efforts focused on understanding and implementation. The top-down approaches were perceived as imposed, leaving many feeling alienated, undervalued and vulnerable. Effective strategies often involve both approaches and requires finding a balance between internal disciplinary perspectives on the curriculum and external demands for change. While efforts were in place to support this large-scale project, the most significant gap in the study, was the perceived lack of curriculum development support within the institution. The CRP took place at a time, when the curriculum workers, or what Kandiko Howson & Kingsburg (2021) call 'key translators' were no longer at the UoT. This void was visible throughout the project duration, despite the efforts from other sectors within the university. This iterates that large-scale projects need large-scale resource and ample professional development support.

In the study site, the curriculum review/conceptualising and quality assurance processes created high levels of discomfort or uncertainty among the curriculum champs and all academics that were involved in the curriculum change processes. In many instances, curriculum work was a brand-new experience for many. Much of the discomfort arose when they were confronted with the need to change established practices. However, discomfort is seen as a necessary part of the transformational learning process, as it encourages deeper engagement with the curriculum and the potential for significant change (Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021).

These authors adopt a phrase "disorientating dilemma" that refers to a challenging situation that prompts critical reflection and re-evaluation of existing beliefs and practices.

A closer look at the programme curriculum documents show that support is required at the conceptualisation phase as well as the module development phase. Curriculum workers need hands-on support throughout. Change management support is also needed during times of flux. Additionally, the relationship between participation and reification highlights how disruptive curriculum change can be, regardless of whether it comes from above or below. While efforts were in place to support the curriculum change process, at both the faculty and institutional levels; The findings show that, despite the support provided at the faculty and institutional levels, some of the curriculum champions and their peers felt alienated and 'lost'. This was likely due to the lack of curriculum and academic development experts that could have provided the much needed in the curriculum change processes.

It is important to recognise that my study is, but a reflection of an era gone by. Therefore, it is critical to acknowledge that the UoT, as with all HEIs, is constantly in a state of flux, in its responsiveness to the external environment. Therefore, the study does not capture the changes that are prevalent in the UoT in its new dispensation. The context has also significantly shifted, as it engages with new visions, strategies and practices. Anecdotal evidence suggests that some of the concerns raised in the last cycle/iteration of large-scale curriculum change at an institutional level are coming to fruition. To cite one example, there were concerns that not enough attention was given to the second curriculum or co-curriculum. This has since been addressed and the university is abuzz with learning that is happening outside the classroom. There are many other such innovations, showing that the study site is fertile for further explorations, as it continues in its trajectory of becoming.

9.5 Limitations of the study and opportunities for future research

Large-scale curriculum change is a huge undertaking that has major resource implications but is seldom explored. Furthermore, while the CRP did have a shelf-life, curriculum change is a dynamic and evolving entity and as such is in a constant state of 'becoming'. Reporting on what can be considered a long term, ongoing project, this study was limited to the study period from the onset of the CRP in 2010, up to and ending with the previous strategic plan in 2019. A new VC, with new aspirations and desires, brought in further disruptions; building on the work that started by his predecessor. To quote Deleuze, "thinkers are always, so to speak, shooting arrows in

the air [previous VC], and other thinkers [new VC] pick them up and shoot them in a different direction” (as cited in Waterhouse, 2012, p.175). The UoT’s current state of becoming is fertile for new explorations.

Although this case study research was clearly bound and limited to one UoT, as a subset within the SAHE landscape, it offered richness in detail and yielded valuable insights due to its unique response to the national policy imperatives and other dynamic forces buffeting the sector. A limitation of case study research is that the findings generally cannot be extrapolated to other settings. However, there is potential of a case study to generate deep insight into the phenomenon of one institution within a bounded period, such as it was in this case. It generates the kinds of questions to ask about the process which perhaps spans other instances of curriculum reimaginings at different points in time and in different spaces.

A further gap in the study was the absence of the student voice. Further studies need to consider student voice in matters relating to curriculum and also to consider students as partners in scholarly activities.

Additionally, this study was also limited to the official or planned curriculum, while being fully cognisant that the participants would have drawn on their practices and experiences of/in the enacted curriculum. Further research would be useful to explore the shifts from diploma to degree in the ‘reproduction’ space: learning, teaching and assessment to determine how closely the actual curriculum practices align with the plans; and more importantly, to examine the cognitive shifts from diploma to degree – in the design, learning activities, assessment and so on. Such studies should also focus on emergent/alternative pedagogies that shift away from the dominant neoliberal practices of measured outcomes, competency-based, standards driven, competitiveness and private good.

Similar to the Bologna process, the changes in the HEQSF propelled curriculum changes nationally. Larger-scale projects across all university types may prove to address some of the tensions and contestations relating to the revised HEQSF and programme differentiation. And in particular, revisit the qualification types that distinguishes UoT degrees from traditional university degrees. For example, the

suggestion for a degree variant or a professional diploma as suggested from the SAHE sector.

Broadening access to powerful knowledge in regionalised curricula is an imperative in/for HE, regardless of HEI types or student backgrounds. This study did not focus on the 'powerful knowledge' discourses/debates *per se*, although it makes small contribution towards the deterritorialisation of western hegemony and consideration of curriculum spaces for non-Western epistemologies in curriculum decision-making. It advocates for a synaptic-currere that centres Africa within the global spheres, as equal players. There is a growing body of research on 'powerful knowledge' and 'knowledge of the powerful' that has been undertaken in the SA context, including a few studies in the UoT sector. However, as Annala, et al. (2022, p. 4) posited, "the pace of regionalisation has been intensive", emerging simultaneously with the massification in higher education. Therefore, more empirical studies are necessary in the area of powerful '**regional**' knowledge as it pertains to professional and vocational fields, to inform curriculum development, renewal and transformation (Clegg, 2016). This author argues for a two-fold approach, namely a Bernsteinian approach and one that relates to knowledge generated outside the academy. She argues that both are critical if the curriculum is to be responsive to 'glocal' geo-political realities. This has bearing on the newer regions that are traditionally offered in UoT or Polytechnique settings in the Global South, as societal context matters.

In 2020, the Centre for General Education (CGE) was decentralised to the Faculty of Arts and Design. In the new structure, the CGE was responsible for only eight institutional GE modules, including the common core, Cornerstone 101; out of the original forty-four modules. These eight modules in the CGE are generally associated with the humanities, whereas the remaining IGE modules were redistributed to faculties from within which they originated and/or where they showed an association to the discipline or specialisation. This change typically reflects a limitation on the original approach taken to develop modules for GE. More recently, a second institutional GE module, *The Entrepreneurial Edge*, was also made a compulsory module, to align with the revised policies within the UoT. This led to all faculties having to revise their curriculum structures to accommodate this change. How this unfolded generally and more specifically in the two faculties in the study is yet to be established.

Although the data suggests that the health sciences curriculum structures would be minimally affected, due to inclusion of this module in many of the programmes, albeit as an elective. This change would be more complicated in the engineering faculty, as this module was not considered at the outset. Ultimately, this indicates some rethinking around the common core or ‘what all students should know.’ Perhaps this is an opportune time to rethink and re-align to the vision for the ‘liberal’ agenda, within the current institutional landscape that has also shifted. Collective and critical deliberations are needed in the next cycle of curriculum renewal and transformation.

9.6 Concluding thoughts

I always used to tell my students, *“If you are not feeling some level of disruption or discomfort, then you are not being challenged or learning anything new”*. Did these words come back to haunt me, as I embarked on this journey of being a ‘student’. When I started out on this PhD journey, I was uncertain about many things – the topic, the phenomenon and problem, the context, the theoretical framework, the fieldwork, the analysis, the writing of this thesis. It is the latter that consumed me and rendered me naked and bare, it stole my joys at many moments and at others provided a thrill. I was feeling uncertain about what to write here...I fully agree with Le Grange, Maistry & Simmonds (2022, p. 1) that the “most significant and telling feature of contemporary times”, in times of change...and disruption, “is the *condition of uncertainty*”, or so I thought. However, after reading the article above, I came across another in the same volume by Bozalek (2022), who makes a distinction between uncertainty and indeterminacy. She writes:

Uncertainty has to do with epistemology, about not knowing whether a state of affairs is or is not; for instance, one would not know whether something is here or there, now or then. Indeterminacy, however, is ontological and eschews the idea of individually existing determinate entities, proposing instead phenomena-in-their-becoming and a radically open relating of the world (p.1).

For Bozalek, understanding the difference between these concepts carries significant implications for the reconfiguration of curriculum. I do not plan to venture into a posthumanist discourse on curriculum change, although I find an interesting overlap with the conceptual forces of *currere*, that was adopted in the study. However, it got me thinking about my trajectory as a PhD student and the floods of ‘uncertainty’ I was experiencing throughout the journey and realise today that it was not uncertainty but rather indeterminacy “that has the potential to provide a radical reconfiguring of

[oneself]" (Bozalek, 2022, p. 2). Throughout this journey, I have been and continue to be, in a state of becoming...

Now turning to this study itself, the case study selected was suitable as a site of inquiry for understanding curriculum transformations and disruptions through the imperative to integrate GE into the undergraduate curricula. Notwithstanding, the findings suggesting the shortfalls in achieving the transformational goals of disrupting the undergraduate POC; the analyses suggest shifts in curriculum re-imagining and planning. It also shows that curriculum change that is undertaken at scale can be a '*disorienting dilemma*' that helps drive transformational change (Mezirow, as cited in Kandiko Howson & Kingsbury, 2021).

I conclude by extracting two quotes to highlight that, while it may appear that the 'opportunities were missed', curriculum and curriculum change is dynamic and in a constant state of flux. The excerpt below is from one of the participants, who highlights the importance of re-imagining and actively envisioning the future for curriculum work through strategic drivers.

Well, I mean, I've already mentioned to you, there's one thing I wish we had had the opportunity to have done differently, which is to have reimagined curriculum. In closer alignment with how we are reimagining the University, I mean there is a measure of regret that we missed an opportunity. That we created our new curricula in an environment which in some ways didn't need new curricular and now we find ourselves in an environment in which new curricula would be so damn useful! And we got the old ones. Old being relative...so that's a missed opportunity! And if we could have done those together or minimally, that the sort of reflection that gave rise to Envision2030 was applied when we were re-curriculating. ... But when I look at the whole University, um, if there was. Something we could have done differently... And if I could do it again I would want to reflect on how we could best ensure that there was this reimagination. That's why I think the term Envision2030 is so powerful. Actually, this idea of envision, you know, imagines put it in front of you and see how you can move towards this imagination. Envision it. It's an active word. ... and I think Envision is a much stronger word because it's a call to imagine, a call to imagine. It's not saying there's something on the horizon that's your vision for 2030. It's saying let's. Let's imagine! [FM1]

This participant echoes the arguments made by Rossouw & Goldman (2023, p. 1) about understanding how "strategic drivers can act as a reality check" to project the direction that a university can go. The new and current strategy of the UoT is visionary and future-oriented and society-centred. In fact, what the participant is suggesting is a re-turning and re-imagining to do curriculum differently. Barnett (2023) affirms this position in the excerpt below, where the same could be said of curriculum:

This is a university that has to be [re]imagined but [re]imagined in situ and on a continuing basis. This imaginative work cannot rest, for the university, in

becoming itself in open systems with which it is entangled, is faced daily with contingency and indeterminacy [as opposed to uncertainty] that it is all the time [re]imagining. If we are to speak of designing the university, it is never-ending design, for the university's future is always here and it is always now (Barnett, 2023, p. 130)

Barnett (2023) avers that the process of re-imagining the university and its curriculum is ongoing and dynamic. The university (and its curricula) must continually adapt and redesign itself in response to the changing and unpredictable contexts in which it operates. Rather than seeing this as a one-time task, the design of the university is a perpetual process, as its future is always unfolding in the present. The focus is on constant innovation and adaptability in the face of contingency and indeterminacy.

Barnett (2023, p. 116) claims that his thesis argument is two-fold. The first is that “the university should take seriously its entwinement with the world” and its large ecosystems. The second is that the prevailing focus on instrumental values needs to be “displaced by an ethics of collective care for the world.” His article concludes by reflecting that:

[U]niversity ‘design’ is a misnomer.

Rather, universities can only be conjectured, imagined and ventured forth and with some delicacy (2023, p. 116).

I contend that the same be conjectured about the curriculum!

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08 January 2019

Mrs Roshnee Sunder (216073468)
School of Education
Edgewood Campus

Dear Mrs Sunder,

Protocol reference number: HSS/1942/018D

Project title: Professionally-oriented curricula design: A University of Technology case study

Approval Notification - Expedited Application

With regards to your response received on 11 December 2018 to our letter of 27 November 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. **PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully



Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

cc Supervisor: Professor Michael Samuel
cc Academic Leader Research: Dr SB Khoza
cc School Administrator: Ms Sheryl Jeenarain

Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

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Website: www.ukzn.ac.za



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APPENDIX 1



*Directorate for Research and Postgraduate Support
Durban University of Technology
Tromso Annexe, Steve Biko Campus
P.O. Box 1334, Durban 4000
Tel.: 031-3732576/7
Fax: 031-3732946*

07 December 2018

Mrs Roshnee Sunder
c/o College of Humanities and Social Sciences
University of KwaZulu-Natal

Dear Mrs Sunder

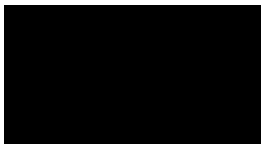
FULL PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT THE DUT

Your email correspondence in respect of the above refers. I am pleased to inform you that the Institutional Research and Innovation Committee (IRIC) has granted Full Permission for you to conduct your research "Professionally-oriented curricula design: A UoT Case Study." at the Durban University of Technology.

The DUT may impose any other condition it deems appropriate in the circumstances having regard to nature and extent of access to and use of information requested.

We would be grateful if a summary of your key research findings can be submitted to the IRIC on completion of your studies.

Kindest regards.
Yours sincerely



PROF CARIN NAPIER
DIRECTOR (ACTING): RESEARCH AND POSTGRADUATE SUPPORT DIRECORATE

APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Participant

I am undertaking a PhD study in Higher Education, registered at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN).

The proposed title of my study is: ***“Professionally-oriented curriculum design: a UoT case study”***

The purpose of the study is to understand how *curriculum recontextualisation of professionally oriented programmes within Universities of Technology are conceptualized and experienced, together with* the forces that influence the shaping. Your institution has been chosen as a site of inquiry, due to the recent overhauling of its programmes and the university’s revised PQM through the Curriculum Renewal Project; which gave rise to the development and implementation of new professional degrees and diplomas to align with the revised HEQSF. It is envisioned that the study will contribute towards philosophical/ideological/theoretical understandings of curriculum decision-making and curriculum change, particularly for UoTs. The study is limited to the official/intended/espoused curriculum and will not examine the enacted or experienced curriculum.

The critical research questions are:

1. *How is curriculum recontextualisation of professionally oriented programmes for Universities of Technology conceptualised?*
2. *How is curriculum recontextualisation of professionally-oriented programmes for Universities of Technology experienced?*
3. *What forces influence the shaping of curriculum recontextualisation of professionally-oriented programmes for a Universities of Technology?*
4. *What explains the conceptualisation and experience of forces influencing curriculum recontextualisation of professionally-oriented programmes for a Universities of Technology?*

You are invited to participate in this PhD study based on your experiences of curriculum change at either executive management, middle management and/or programme levels. It is hoped that you will benefit from your participation in the study by reflecting on your experiences of curriculum change at the institution.

Data for this study will be generated through semi-structured interviews or focus-group interviews and through the use arts-based data generation strategies; for example, reflective writing using artefacts (visual representations); which will function as reflective tools and will serve as prompts for the semi-structured interviews. All relevant curriculum documents will also be used to generate data.

Participation in the study will require that you to:

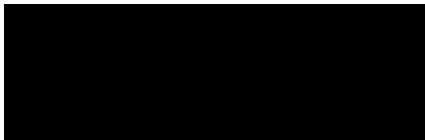
- share your experiences of curriculum change by engaging in reflective exercises using an artefact of your choice – this applies to the curriculum champions and/or relevant academics.
- agree to be interviewed at least once, which is expected to be at least an hour long. It may be necessary to have a follow up interview. All interviews will be audio recorded.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may withdraw from the research process at any time. Confidentiality will be maintained at all times through the use of pseudonyms (that you may choose) when reporting on the data. All data generated in this study will be kept for five years and will be safely stored in hard copies or password protected virtually and will be appropriately destroyed at the end of the five year period.

Upon completion of the study, a full research report can be provided should you be interested. The findings of the study will be published as a thesis and as conference presentations and/or publications.

Your participation and cooperation is greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,



15 October 2019

Roshnee Sunder (PhD Candidate)

Date

Contact Details:

UKZN Student number: 216073468

Tel: 031 373 2507

Email: roshe@dut.ac.za

Supervisor contact details:

Professor Michael Samuel

Teacher Development Studies,

School of Education, Edgewood

Campus, UKZN Tel: 031 260 1859

Email: samuelm@ukzn.ac.za

UKZN HSSREC Research Office:

Mr Premalal Mohun (Senior Administrative Officer)

Tel: 031 260 4557

Email: mohunp@ukzn.ac.za

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I, _____ understand the contents of this document and consent to participate in the study entitled - ***“Professionally-oriented curriculum design: a UoT case study”***

By agreeing to participate in the above study, I understand the following:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 1. The purpose of the study. | YES/NO |
| 2. My participation includes at least one interview, which may be either an individual interview or a focus group interview. The interview may require a follow up. | YES/NO |
| 3. My participation may include reflective writing of my experiences in curriculum change. | YES/NO |
| 4. The interview/s will be audio-recorded and transcribed. | YES/NO |
| 5. The researcher may also take field notes. | YES/NO |
| 6. I may be asked to answer questions of a personal nature, but I have a right to not answer any questions that I am uncomfortable with. | YES/NO |
| 7. I have a right to express any concerns that I may have about my participation in the study to the researcher. | YES/NO |
| 8. I am free to withdraw from the study at any time. | YES/NO |
| 9. The research report may contain information about my personal experiences, attitudes and behaviours, but that it will be designed in such a way to ensure anonymity at all times. | YES/NO |

Signature of Participant

Date

Dear Professor/Dr

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my PhD study entitled, “**Professionally oriented curriculum design: a UoT case study**”. The purpose of the semi-structured interview is to elicit responses about curriculum change for professionally oriented education, at an institutional management level. The interview will provide a structured and time bound reflection on how curriculum change is conceptualised within a UoT, the forces influencing curriculum responses as well as the institution’s position of matters related to curriculum; within a changing Higher Education (HE) landscape. The Institution’s Strategic Plans and other curriculum related documents may serve as artefacts and prompts for the interview and will be made available to you, if required. The duration of the interview will be between 60 - 90 minutes. Should more time be required, a second appointment will be scheduled around the participant’s availability.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. **BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:** tell me about **yourself and your history as an academic** and how you came to be in the institution?

[Prompts: [Position, Academic level, Permanent or contract, academic experience, Prior experience, Educational training/ qualifications and/ or experiences of educational professional development]

2. **FORCES OF INFLUENCE ON CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT:** *This section will address questions related to the multiple levers of change forces within a changing Higher Education (HE) landscape that shape POC, in particular ways.*

- a. What would you consider to be the **external forces** that influence the **curriculum decisions and changes in the programmes within the university? And how would you say it does?** *Prompts: [various stakeholders: national context – govt-policy changes, regulatory & professional bodies, ICT/technology, industry, alumni; 4th industrial revolution and entrepreneurship, and the international context – internationalization/globalisation, What were/are the tensions, if any? Within these various external sectors, which of these do you think plays a dominant role in curriculum?*
- b. Comment on what you believe to be the most important **internal** influences on curriculum decision-making and change in your new undergraduate programme? – **at programme, faculty, and institution levels? And why?** *Prompts: [philosophies, ideologies, strategic focus areas and goals/drivers]*
 - i) The CRP was conceived of, as a **strategic driver of curriculum change within the university**. Comment on how this Project affected/s curriculum decision-making. (If not covered in a.)
Prompts: [What was/is the ‘big picture’? Comment on the buy in of the project? Ownership or imposition? Can you comment on the role that student voice plays/ed in curriculum change at a programme level?
 - ii) Comment, specifically, on the **institution wide agenda to infuse liberal education (general education) into all its programmes and how this influences or shapes the curriculum** (if not covered in a.)
Prompts: What is its intention/purpose and relevance to the context? How would you say the institution’s broad goals for general education shape/influence the shape and design (POC)? What were/are the tensions, if any? What do you consider to be the benefits/drawbacks of liberal education for students/graduates in your programme?

iii) In what ways would you say that **curriculum decision-making and change within the institution is linked to transformation, in its broadest sense?** In your opinion, has it been effective? What would you change? **Prompts:** [epistemic access, decolonisation/africanisation/globalisation debates],

- c. What **philosophies/ideologies/theories/discourses about the values, purpose & assumptions of knowledge** informs curriculum change at the institutional level?

Prompts: [relating to the values, purposes, and assumptions of knowledge... Which discourses influenced the design and how - disciplinary versus credit exchange, multi-, inter- or transdisciplinary design, professional practice, research, pedagogy/ students?]

- d. What would you say are the **enabling/constraining/destabilising forces on curriculum change?** **Prompts:** [for example, to what extent did the student protests of 2015/2016 impact on the decisions about curriculum change and curriculum design]

- e. **Ranking importance of responses/influences** How would you rank the importance of all of the above influences on your curriculum design and curriculum change for POPs?

3. CURRICULUM DESIGN/CHANGE – PARTICIPATION, CAPACITY AND QUALITY

- a. What **approaches** were/are undertaken to ensure that the **academics involvement in the curriculum change processes?**
- b. What **structures** are in place to enhance the **quality of curriculum** at institution/faculty/programme level?
4. What would you **do differently if you were given an opportunity?** If so, why?
5. Is there **anything else** that you would like to share that we have not covered?

KEY:

CHE	- Council of Higher Education
CRP	- Curriculum Renewal Project
HE	- Higher Education
HEQSF	- Higher Education Quality Sub-Framework
NQF	- National Quality Framework
POC	- Professionally-oriented curriculum
POCD	- Professionally-oriented curriculum design
POP	- Professionally- oriented programme/s
QEP	- Quality Enhancement Project
SAQA	- South Africa Quality Assurance
UOT	- University of Technology

Change forces for POC:

Philosophical, ideological, political, socio-economic, cultural

Fit for purpose = well equipped or well suited for its designated role or purpose.

Dear Professor/Dr/Mr/Mrs/Ms

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my PhD study. The w of the semi-structured interview is to elicit responses about curriculum decision-making and change for professionally oriented education, at the programme level. The interview will provide a structured, time bound reflection and understanding of how academics in professional programmes experience curriculum decision-making and examine their beliefs about the key forces of influences on their decision-making, within a changing Higher Education (HE) landscape.

The interview will commence with a focus on your artifact of choice and what it represents. The Institution's Strategic Plans and CRP documents as well as your programme curriculum documents may serve as artefacts and prompts for the interview and can be made available to you, if required. The duration of the interview will be between 60 to 90 minutes. Should more time be required, a second appointment will be scheduled around your availability.

GUIDING QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION:

- a. Tell me about **yourself and your history as an academic** and how you came to be in the institution?
Prompts: [Position, Academic level, Permanent or contract, Teaching experience, P r i o r experience, Educational training/ qualifications and/ or experiences of educational professional development]
- b. What was **your role in the institution's CRP?** How has that role **shifted/evolved/changed?**
Prompts: [biographical/personal]

2. VISUAL REPRESENTATION/IMAGES:

- a. Tell me about your **choice of artifact**, what did you create/choose that and why? What does it say about your views/beliefs about curriculum decision-making and change in the professions?
Prompts: [choice of artifact; how is it symbolic about your role, experiences and practices as a curriculum champion or change agent; is there a time period?; cultural representations; are there others involved in this artifact memory and what role/influence did they play?]

3. BIOGRAPHICAL FORCES ON CURRICULUM DECISION MAKING & CHANGE:

This section will deal with how the curriculum was conceptualised and designed, by whom and why?

- a. In your own words, briefly **describe the curriculum/programme.**
Prompts: [What kind of programme is it? What is the rationale informing the nature of the curriculum for your programme? What is its purpose? What about the structure, selections of content, sequencing/pacing, etc.]
- b. When the **curriculum was being conceptualised/designed, what happened?**
Prompts: [Describe the process by which the new curriculum was negotiated in your department/faculty? Where did you begin? Who were the major stakeholders? Can you give me examples of what you did/was done? Can you describe how the new curriculum is different from the old? Did all academics agree on the content and pedagogy? If not, what were the main contestations, in your view?]
- c. **Why did you do it like that?**
Prompts: [How did your ideologies, philosophies/values to teaching, learning and assessment influence the choices you made in the content and structure? How do you think that your being a member of your profession, (i.e. clinical technologist, engineer, teacher, fashion designer, etc.) influences your decision-making? How did your own experiences as a student influence the curriculum design? what were you trying to achieve for you and your students?]

4. RHIZOMATIC FORCES OF INFLUENCES ON CURRICULUM DECISION-MAKING:

This section will address questions that relate to the forces of influences that shape it, in particular ways.

- a. What would you consider to be the **external forces** of influence on **curriculum decisions and changes in your programme? And how would you say it does?** *Prompts: [various stakeholders: national context – govt-policy changes, regulatory & professional bodies, ICT/technology, industry, alumni; 4th industrial revolution and entrepreneurship, and the international context – internationalization/globalisation, What were/are the tensions, if any?]*
- Within these various external sectors, **which of these do you think plays a dominant role in curriculum decision-making and design and why?** How would you rank the importance of all of the above influences?
- b. Comment on what you believe to be the most important **internal** influences on curriculum decision-making and change in your new undergraduate programme? – **at programme, faculty, and institution levels? And why?** *Prompts: [philosophies, ideologies, strategic focus areas and goals/drivers]*
- i) The CRP was conceived of, as a strategic driver of curriculum change within the university. Comment on how this Project affected your curriculum decision-making. (If not covered in a.)
*Prompts: [What was/is the 'big picture'? Comment on the **your buy in** of the project? Ownership or imposition? Can you comment on the role that **student voice** plays/ed in curriculum change at a programme level?]*
- ii) Comment, specifically, on the institution wide agenda to infuse liberal education (general education) into all its programmes and how this influenced or shaped the curriculum (if not covered in a.)
Prompts: What is its intention/purpose and relevance to the context? How would you say the institution's broad goals for general education shape/influence the shape and design (POC)? What were/are the tensions, if any? What do you consider to be the benefits/drawbacks of liberal education for students/graduates in your programme?
- iii) In what ways would you say that your curriculum decision-making and design of your programme is linked to transformation, in its broadest sense? In your opinion, has it been effective? What would you change? *Prompts: [epistemic access, decolonisation/africanisation/globalisation debates],*
- c. What **philosophies/ideologies/theories/discourses about the values, purpose & assumptions of knowledge** have informed the curriculum decision-making and change? *Prompts: [relating to the values, purposes, and assumptions of knowledge... Which discourses influence the design and how - disciplinary versus credit exchange, multi-, inter- or transdisciplinary design, professional practice, **research**, pedagogy/ students? What were/are the tensions, if any?]*
- d. What would you say are the **enabling/constraining/destabilising forces** that may have impacted on the POC design? *Prompts: [for example, to what extent did the student protests of 2015/2016 impact on the decisions about curriculum change and curriculum design]*
- e. To what extent do you think your approved curriculum is a) **fit for purpose** and b) **aligned to the institution's values and goals.**

5. CURRICULUM CHANGE – PARTICIPATION, CAPACITY AND QUALITY

- a. What **approaches** were undertaken to ensure that the **academics involvement in the curriculum change processes?** *[Prompts: did you feel adequately supported at department, faculty and institutional level?]*
- b. What **structures** are in place to enhance the quality of curriculum design at institutional, faculty and programme levels?
6. In the design of your curriculum, what would you **do differently if you were given an opportunity?**
If so, why?
7. Is there **anything else** that you would like to share that we have not covered?

KEY:

CHE	- Council of Higher Education
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UOT	- University of Technology

Change forces for POC:

Philosophical, ideological, political, socio-economic, cultural

Fit for purpose = well equipped or well suited for its designated role or purpose.

- Institutional Statutory Submissions/Documents

Target Sources: Strategic Plans v1 & v2; CRP & GE

Senate Guidelines; CHE QEP Institutional Report: Phase 2

This document analysis will respond to the **national and institutional statutory requirements and how it drives curriculum change**. It will also provide insight into the internal forces that influence/shape POCD in select professionally-oriented programmes.

1. Document name**2. What are the contracting/statutory obligations evident in the document?****3. What are the broad principles underpinning curriculum change (CRP) at the institution?**

What **philosophies/ideologies/theories/discourses** about professionally-oriented curriculum design are evident in the document?

4. What are the underlying assumptions being made about the curriculum change and curriculum design for professionally oriented programmes/qualifications/education?**5. What are the driving forces** seen to be influencing the approaches to curriculum change at the institution?

Prompt: *various stakeholders: institutional context – philosophical, ideological, pragmatic; national context – govt-policy changes, decolonisation/africanisation debates, ICT/technology, industry, professional bodies, alumni; and the international context – globalisation, 4th industrial revolution;*

6. How does the curriculum change processes seem to be linked to transformation, in its broadest sense?**7. What approaches** were undertaken to ensure that academics were capacitated and involved in the curriculum change processes?**8. What is the document not saying?****9. Whose interests are being served/ not served** in this document?**Key:**

CHE – Council of Higher Education

CRP – Curriculum Renewal Project

QEP – Quality Enhancement Project

UoT – University of Technology

Factors/forces/influences:

philosophical, ideological, political, socioeconomic, cultural

¹ Adapted from Subbaye 2017.

- institutional Programme Documents

The purpose of the critical document analysis is to understand how the official curriculum for the selected professionally-oriented programmes was conceptualised and constructed and in what ways has it responded to the macro-, meso-, and micro- forces within a changing Higher Education landscape.

Target sources: SAQA submissions for selected qualifications/programmes; programme overview/curriculum map

1. Document name

2. What are the **contracting/statutory obligations** evident in the document?

3. What is the **qualification type**?

Prompt: [as listed on HEQSF: professionally oriented degrees at NQF level 7 and/or 8, diploma,...]

4. What is the **rationale** informing the nature of the professionally oriented curriculum?

Prompt: [ideological/philosophical/pragmatic/pedagogical/political/economic/cultural...]

5. What is the purpose of the *official/intended* curriculum/programme?

6. What is/are the **key change features** emphasised in the document (s)?

7. What is the **curriculum design** responding to?

Prompt: [macro- national & international forces; meso- institutional forces including professional bodies, industry & other stakeholders; and micro- programmatic and biographical forces]

8. What is the document **not saying**?

9. Whose **interests are being served/ not served** in this document?

A comparative analysis of the data generated from Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 will be conducted.

Key:

HEQSF – Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework

NQF – National Qualifications Framework

SAQA – South African Qualifications Authority

Factors/forces/influences: ideological, philosophical, political, socioeconomic, cultural

- Macro - international and national
- Meso - institutional
- Micro - programmatic

APPENDIX 4

Table 5.1: GE Guiding Principles for implementation (adapted from the UoT document)

Aims:

1. To build a student-centred educational experience embedded in the local context.
2. To prepare students for an increasingly diverse and complex globalised work environment.
3. To cultivate an engaged and critical citizenry in the context of an emerging and fragile democracy in an ever-changing world order.

Objectives:

Through their participation in General Education during the course of their studies at the UoT, it is expected that students will develop and gain capacity in knowledge, skills and attitudes, such as:

1. intellectual and practical skills, including written and oral communicative competence in English, Mathematical and/or quantitative reasoning (QR), analytical and critical inquiry and technology applications
2. innovative and creative initiative, including entrepreneurship and leadership
3. understanding and appreciation of diversity within a local and global context
4. social responsibility, including understanding of the physical and natural world and ethical reasoning in dealing with complex societal challenges and dilemmas
5. personal development, including self-awareness, self-directed and life-long learning
6. integrative learning strategies across general and chosen fields of study

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

1. GE component should include: mathematics or quantitative reasoning; writing intensive modules; modules on Kwa-Zulu Natal (local content).
GE is to be anchored in innovative and high impact teaching and learning practices. For example: community engagement or service learning, internationalisation of the curriculum, technology enabled pedagogy.
Assessment plans should measure GE outcomes and provide validation of exemptions and RPL.
A suite of GE modules elective modules is to be made available for students.
A coherent sequence and range of both compulsory and/or elective modules to culminate in capstone learning experiences.
GE is to be managed and coordinated by permanent academic staff.
2. **30 % of actual total credits of undergraduate programmes to cover general education**
10% IGE modules comprising of core (compulsory for all students) and distributive (elective) modules 10% FGE modules comprising of decentralised (elective) modules 10% of GE integrated into the programme modules (analysis of this was outside the scope of this study).

Institution-wide:

- a. Cornerstone 101 – compulsory core, 12-credits at NQF level 5, for all first year students
- b. IGE electives x 3 (3-year programme) or x 4 (4-year programme) at NQF levels 5/6/7/8 from outside the faculty

Faculty-wide:

- a. One elective, minimum 8 credits at NQF level 5
- b. Other FGE options covering themes and outcomes at NQF levels 5/6/7/8

Programme:

GE is embedded and could include capstone learning experiences.

3. **SEVEN THEME DESCRIPTORS FOR MODULE DEVELOPMENT**

Cascade the entire UG programme from first to final year and may include stand-alone modules or be embedded.

Elective modules of 8 credits each to be developed – see full list of modules in [this Annexure](#)

**Social
cluster:**

History, politics, economics and philosophical systems:

Addresses students' awareness of their place in global human systems, promoting access to diverse information and viewpoints. It encourages critical thinking about how humans shape these systems, the values they embody, and the coexistence of various systems. It also tackles challenging questions about inequality. Success in this area requires reading, reflection, and communication skills to understand differing perspectives.

Languages, Culture and Society:

This perspective on social justice explores the impact of collective meanings, relationships, and power dynamics on culture and society. It delves into how gender, race, and other identities are socially constructed, considers issues of 'otherness' within culture, and examines conflict resolution methods with implications for violence or peace, across various sectors like sports, media, and education. It emphasises the need for students to develop effective thinking and communication skills in social contexts to act ethically.

Personal Cluster:	Personal Development: Develop a critical understanding of rationalised behaviours and their public consequences, while also exploring one's societal roles and obligations. Health and Wellness: Provide structured learning activities to foster a critical understanding of cross-cultural healing practices and healthcare delivery, encompassing the analysis of health, its maintenance, the interplay between human health and biology in diverse cultural settings, and healing practices.
Global Work Cluster	& Environmental sustainability: Fosters informed and ethical perspectives on human interactions within global ecosystems. This entails cultivating critical awareness of environmental consequences on various aspects of society and the pursuit of sustainable coexistence with nature, examining concepts like 'development' and 'biodiversity' from both local and global viewpoints, and effectively articulating connections between theory and real-world experiences through extensive reading and communication. Work preparedness: Provide students the chance to gain insights into diverse business practices, cultures, norms, and the factors influencing graduates' success and failure in the labour market, as well as their role in a knowledge and innovation society. Entrepreneurship: Empower students with innovative skills, financial expertise, and entrepreneurial acumen to enable them to convert innovative ideas into economic value, potentially fostering new enterprises or rejuvenating existing ones, including social and political entrepreneurial endeavours.

CORNERSTONE MODULE – Compulsory General Education Module for every first year student. 12 credit HEQSF level 5 module.

FRAMEWORK FOR CLUSTERING OF INSTITUTIONAL WIDE GEN ED MODULES

To facilitate logistics the current Institutional Gen Ed modules have been clustered as per table 1. The GETT propose that each student select 1 module, of 8 Credits each, from each cluster as an Institutional Gen Ed module. These modules will be offered on SEMESTER basis. Further Institutional Gen Ed modules will be made available as they have been completed

Table 1 (some modules will be offered in more than one cluster- indicated in brackets after module name

1. PERSONAL		2. SOCIAL		3. GLOBAL & WORK	
THEMES					
*Health & Wellness		* History, Politics, Economics & Philosophical Systems		* Entrepreneurship	
* Personal Development				* Environmental Sustainability	
		* Languages, Culture & Society		* Work Preparedness	
INSTITUTIONAL WIDE GEN ED MODULES					
Alternate Healing Practices	HEQSF 5	Basics of Geopolitics (2/3)	HEQSF 5	Basics of Geopolitics	HEQSF 5
HIV & Communicable Diseases in KZN (1/2)	HEQSF 6	HIV & Communicable Diseases in KZN	HEQSF 6	Information & Communication Technology Literacy & Skills	HEQSF 5
		Constitutional Law & Human Rights	HEQSF 5		
Interpersonal Communication & Self (1/2)	HEQSF 5	Interpersonal Communication & Self	HEQSF 5	Introduction to Technopreneurship	HEQSF 5
Introduction to Technopreneurship (1/3)	HEQSF 5	Equality & Diversity	HEQSF 6		
Me, My World, My Universe	HEQSF 5	Gender Studies	HEQSF 6	Sustainable Earth Studies	HEQSF 5
Philosophies & History of Healing (1/2)	HEQSF 7	Hands Filled with Meaning: Introducing South African Sign Language & The Deaf Community	HEQSF 5	The Entrepreneurial Edge	HEQSF 6
Doing it Differently: Child Development in the 21st Century	HEQSF 5			The Global Environment	HEQSF 6
				World of Work	HEQSF 5
Reflections on Quantitative Thinking	HEQSF 6	Kwa-Zulu Natal's Maritime Heritage	HEQSF 5	Technology Awareness	HEQSF 5
Values in the Workplace (1/3)	HEQSF 5	Law for Life	HEQSF 5	Values in the Workplace	HEQSF 5
		Literacies through Literature	HEQSF 5	Management of the Maritime Environment	HEQSF 6
		Restorative Justice	HEQSF 7	Financial Literacy	HEQSF 5
		Leadership(2/3)	HEQSF 5	Leadership(2/3)	HEQSF 5
		Technology Awareness (2/3)	HEQSF 5		
		Violence & Nonviolence	HEQSF 5		
		Community Engagement Project	HEQSF 6		
		Cultural Diversity	HEQSF 5		

General Education Task Team (GETT)

1. To build a **student-centred educational experience** embedded in the local context.
2. To prepare students for an increasingly diverse and **complex globalised work environment**.
3. To cultivate an engaged and **critical citizenry** in the context of an emerging and fragile democracy in an ever changing world order.

General Education is a framework for programme design with a particular philosophy and Graduate Attributes. Its goals are to help students think critically, develop values, understand traditions, respect diverse cultures and opinions, and most important, put that knowledge to use. It is holistic, not specialised; integrative, not fragmented. Students thus develop such attributes as the capacity to cope with daily challenges, master the self and understand their role in the broader context through social interaction. General Education is grounded in the daily life of a person: dealing with supervisors and co-workers, choosing associates, managing the family, and spending leisure time in socially desirable and personally satisfying ways.



General Education

Institution-wide Modules



Revised 10 March 2015



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CHAPTER ONE: ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

We are living in unprecedented times marked by an extraordinary pace of change in the technological, economic, geopolitical and societal spaces, in what is captured as the volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity (VUCA) era. Leaders need to adapt to this new reality of an increasingly VUCA¹ world. The International Bureau of Education (IBE) UNESCO declares that the pace and intensity of change in the current century will have a more profound impact on curricula than all previous centuries combined (IBE UNESCO, 2015). This holds significant implications for contemporary higher education (HE), particularly for the university of technology (UoT) sector in South Africa (SA). Traditionally, universities of technologies (UoTs) in SA have been closely associated with preparing graduates for specific workplaces, operating within the confines of tightly prescribed technical and vocational curricula. The VUCA era calls for individual citizens and organisations to be more agile, resilient and adaptable, demonstrating the ability to embrace change, unlearn and relearn, think critically and creatively and innovate to solve the complex challenges facing global society. The VUCA world is looking for citizens with what is called a T-shaped education who are able to demonstrate an integration of specialised knowledge and expertise (the vertical stroke of the letter 'T') with a comprehensive grasp (the horizontal stroke) of diverse disciplines and their interconnectedness (Brown, 2008; Santos & Bae, 2022; Saviano, et al., 2016).

The research project in this thesis constitutes a critical interpretive analysis of how a UoT in SA, in its transition from a 'technikon' to a university, deliberately and intentionally resisted the temptation to re-entail a model for professionally oriented education (PoE) committed to specialisation alone. It did this by mandating an integration of general education (GE) into all undergraduate curricula, thereby

¹ VUCA - the term was popularised by Dennis and Haras (1988) in their book, 'Leaders: The Strategies for Making Change'. VUCA stands for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, describing the unpredictable and fast-changing nature of the world and the new reality in the 21st century. Volatility refers to the unpredictable changes that are making planning difficult. Uncertainty refers to the lack of clarity about the future. Complexity refers to the interconnectedness of global events making predicting impacts challenging. Ambiguity refers to the missing of events is unclear, even when information is available. 'VUCA - Learning and Living in a Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous World'.

Professionally-oriented Curriculum Design: A UoT Case Study

by Roshnee SUNDER

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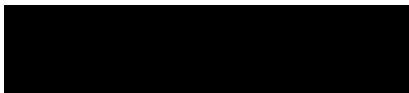
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Yours faithfully



MLC Munro: ND Rad (D), MA, P Grad Dip: Public Admin, Certificate for trainers

APPENDIX 7

GLOSSARY OF TERMS		
Term	Definition	Reference
Chronotope	<i>A concept developed by the Russian literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin to describe the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships as they are artistically expressed in literature. In a chronotope, time thickens and becomes palpable, while space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. It serves as the primary means for materializing time in space within a narrative.</i>	Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). <i>The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays</i> . (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
Currere	<i>A term reconceptualized by curriculum theorist William F. Pinar from its Latin root, meaning "to run the course." Pinar reframed curriculum from a static noun (the course to be run) into the active verb currere, representing the lived, autobiographical, and interpretive experience of the educational journey. The method of currere involves a four-step process of reflecting on one's past, future, and present to understand the complex relationship between individual experience and education.</i>	Pinar, W. F. (2004). <i>What Is Curriculum Theory?</i> Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
Glo-ubuntu	<i>A contemporary philosophical concept that extends the African philosophy of ubuntu into the context of global citizenship. It advocates for a form of global engagement that is deeply informed by the values of ubuntu—such as communal responsibility, human dignity, and relationality—to foster a more just, inclusive, and interconnected global educational framework that challenges neoliberal individualism.</i>	Terblanche, J., & Waghid, Y. (2023). Glo-ubuntu as an extension of Global Citizenship Education: Cultivating the notion of an African university. <i>South African Journal of Higher Education</i> , 37(2), 272–282.

Instituere	<i>A conceptual term derived from its Latin etymology, meaning to 'build,' 'create,' 'raise,' or 'educate.' In a Deleuzian theoretical context, it is re-imagined not as a static institution, but as an active, dynamic force or assemblage. Instituere represents the institution in a perpetual state of 'becoming,' a fluid entity constantly being shaped by the interplay of internal and external forces, and capable of generating new possibilities and identities.</i>	This is a conceptual coinage based on etymology and Deleuzian theory, as used in my thesis. It is best cited by referring to its conceptual development within my own work, or to scholars who have similarly re-engaged with Latin roots, e.g., Le Grange, 2019, on <i>currere</i>).
Rhizo-currere	<i>A theoretical hybrid that combines the Deleuzian concept of the 'rhizome' with the curriculum theory of currere. It conceptualises the educational journey not as a linear, predetermined path, but as a rhizomatic process: non-hierarchical, decentralized, and interconnected. Rhizo-currere emphasizes learning as a dynamic network of connections where any point can be linked to any other, fostering a curriculum based on community, adaptation, and emergent knowledge.</i>	Cormier, D. (2008). Rhizomatic Education: Community as Curriculum. <i>Innovate: Journal of Online Education</i> , 4(5)
Simulacra	<i>A philosophical concept, central to the work of Gilles Deleuze and Jean Baudrillard, that describes a copy without an original. Unlike a representation that refers to a real-world model, a simulacrum stands on its own, producing its own reality. In Deleuze's view, simulacra are not degraded copies but possess a positive power to challenge established notions of identity and representation, creating new meanings and differences.</i>	Deleuze, G. (1994). <i>Difference and Repetition</i> . (P. Patton, Trans.). Columbia University Press.
Technikon	<i>A historical type of tertiary institution in South Africa, analogous to a polytechnic or institute of technology. Technikons were primarily focused on providing career-oriented and vocational education and training (VET), emphasising practical skills and applied knowledge for industry. They were officially merged into the national higher education system and rebranded as Universities of Technology or comprehensive universities from 2004 onwards.</i>	Kraak, A. (2006). "Academic Drift" in South African universities of technology: beneficial or detrimental? <i>Perspectives in Education</i> , 24(3), 135-152.
Ubuntu-currere	<i>A conceptual framework developed by Lesley le Grange that brings the African philosophy of Ubuntu (I am because we are) into dialogue with the curriculum theory of currere. It infuses the individual, autobiographical reflection of currere with the relational, communal, and ethical principles of ubuntu. This</i>	Le Grange, L. (2019). Currere's Active Force and the Concept of Ubuntu. In <i>Internationalizing Curriculum</i>

	<i>creates a vision of curriculum as a journey of becoming that is not just personal but is also deeply interconnected with one's community, environment, and shared humanity.</i>	<i>Studies</i> (pp. 207–226). Palgrave Macmillan.
University of Technology	<i>A specific category of university within South Africa's differentiated higher education system, formed from the former Technikons. A UoT's primary mandate is to provide technology-focused, career-oriented education and research that is responsive to the needs of industry and society. It emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, often through work-integrated learning, to produce employable graduates.</i>	Du Pré, R. (2010). <i>Universities of Technology in the context of the South African Higher Education Landscape</i> . Kagisano No. 7, Council on Higher Education.
Pluriversity	<i>A concept emerging from decolonial theory, often contrasted with the traditional, Eurocentric 'university'. A 'pluriversity' is an institution that rejects the idea of a single, universal knowledge system and instead embraces epistemic diversity. It is a space where multiple ways of knowing, being, and sensing the world (epistemologies, ontologies, and aesthesis) can coexist and engage in dialogue, fostering a more inclusive and globally just approach to higher education.</i>	Mignolo, W. D. (2018). <i>On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis</i> . Duke University Press.