

Students with Disabilities' Access to Distance Education: A Case for Transformational Leadership within the Ambit of Ubuntu

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Abstract

There has been much debate on access and social justice, and the role of distance education in redressing social injustices. However, little is known about these issues in relation to students with disabilities. The South African Department of Higher Education and Training's *Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training System* aims to improve people with disabilities' access to and success in post-school education and training. The document notes that, despite the ground gained in transforming the country's higher education landscape, systematic, institutional and personal challenges persist in relation to integrating such students into post-school education and training. This article highlights the challenges typically encountered by students with disabilities despite policy responses and why these have not worked. It proposes transformational leadership nestled within *Ubuntu* to transform the issue of disability in post-school education and training and offers directions for further research.

Key words: distance education; disability; access, social justice; *Ubuntu*; transformational leadership

Il y a eu beaucoup de débats sur l'accès et la justice sociale, et sur le rôle de l'enseignement à distance dans la réparation des injustices sociales. Cependant, on sait peu de choses sur ces questions concernant les étudiants handicapés. Le Cadre de politique stratégique sur le handicap pour le système d'éducation et de formation post-scolaire du Département sud-africain de l'enseignement supérieur et de la formation vise à augmenter l'accès des personnes handicapées à l'éducation et à la formation post-scolaires et à

améliorer leur réussite. Le document note que, malgré les progrès réalisés dans la transformation du paysage de l'enseignement supérieur du pays, des défis systématiques, institutionnels et personnels persistent en ce qui concerne l'intégration de ces étudiants dans l'enseignement et la formation post-scolaires. Cet article met en lumière les défis généralement rencontrés par les étudiants handicapés malgré les réactions politiques favorables, et pourquoi celles-ci n'ont pas porté fruit. Il propose un leadership transformationnel niché au sein de *Ubuntu* pour transformer la question du handicap dans l'éducation et la formation post-scolaires, et propose des orientations pour de nouvelles recherches.

Mots clés: enseignement à distance; handicap; accès, justice sociale; *Ubuntu*; leadership transformationnel

1 Introduction and Rationale

The status of persons with disabilities has long been regarded as an area of special concern in education (Mosia and Phasha, 2017; Mutanga, Manyonga and Ngubane-Mokiwa, 2018) due to the fact that access to higher education for people with disabilities is problematic. In the United States and Canada, people with disabilities account for almost 11% of enrolment in higher education, with the figure dropping to 5% in Australia, 1% in South Africa and 0.56 per cent in India (Kanwar, 2017). Globally, issues of social justice and access in higher education have received increased attention (Wilson-Strydom, 2015). Increased access is often cited as the rationale for distance education. Distance education is also connected to issues of social justice because it opens educational opportunities to groups that were previously denied such opportunities. It can thus be argued that it promotes equality, fairness and human rights (Aluko and Hendrikz, 2011). Research shows that increasing numbers of people with disabilities are enrolling with distance institutions because this allows them to study at their own pace, place and time (Kanwar, 2017). Technological advances are fuelling this trend (Duggan, 2013). However, access is a paradox because it often has two faces: inclusion and exclusion. This is because it should go beyond the quantitative to embrace the quality of access, in relation to which persons with disabilities are severely disadvantaged. Social inclusion should not only focus on neoliberal measures such as numbers and percentages, because these do not necessarily reflect student participation or success, nor do they reveal anything about the quality

of the education that is accessed (Gidleya et al., 2010). While differences do not inherently imply inequality, they become inequalities when they impact on capabilities (opportunity freedoms) (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

'Access' arguments usually focus on people separated by distance and time and rarely include consideration of students with disabilities (Burgstahler, 2012). There is very little data on the access provided to such students, and there is a dearth of research on this issue, especially in relation to whether distance education is reaching this group (Mutanga, 2017). The South African Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) 2018 *Strategic Policy Framework on Disability for the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) System* aimed to guide improved access to and success in post-school education and training for people with disabilities (DHET, 2018). It noted persistent systematic, institutional and personal challenges regarding the integration of students in this category into PSET.

However, policy transformation may not necessarily bring about the desired changes in the PSET system. It can be argued that the leadership of educational institutions is a crucial factor in bringing about such transformation. Scholars (Alban-Metcalfe, 2008; Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016; Opiyo, 2019) posit that in a fast-changing world, organisational leadership is a critical success factor, especially in translating policies into action. Transformational leadership is "a leadership style in which leaders encourage, inspire and motivate employees to innovate and create change that will help grow and shape the future success of the company" (White, 2018). These ideals tie in with the *Ubuntu* philosophy, a central ethical idea of African thought (Higgs and Smith, 2006, p. 47) and its view of global humanity (Boyras, n.d.) functioning as a meta-norm to correct injustices (Bennett, 2011).

It is against this background that this article highlights the experiences of students with disabilities; examines why they continue to suffer marginalisation despite policy reform; investigates transformational leadership framed by the principles of *Ubuntu* as one way of dealing with this exclusion; and suggests directions for further research.

The main research question is, "How can transformational leadership assist in addressing the slow transformation in the area of disability within the ambit of *Ubuntu*?"

Distance education and quality access to higher education

Distance education is a mode of education that uses technologies to deliver instruction and to support and facilitate substantive synchronous and asynchronous interaction between students, who are separated from the instructor (Southeastern Oklahoma State University, 2018). An increasing number of distance teaching institutions are explicitly framing their vision/mission in terms of social justice (Tait, 2013). However, scholars assert that as a mantra, the term 'social justice' with its related terms in higher education and various other fields, tends to have a feel-good flavour that can mask the lack of precise meaning (Wilson-Strydom, 2015).

The term 'access' can generally be assumed to mean opening opportunities for people who were once excluded to attend higher education or to give prospective students a second chance (Holmberg, 2001). However, access often presents a paradox in the form of two faces: inclusion and exclusion. Cele and Brandt (2005, p. 3) identify various forms of access to teaching and learning, including access to space; resources; knowledge; skills and competency; dialogue; workplace education, and feedback. They further group these into learner invitation (access, admission and placement) and learner hosting (academic provision, service and capacitation). This suggests that if, for instance, students with disabilities are not supported following admission to a programme (learner invitation), learner hosting becomes questionable. It invariably raises the question of access in relation to social justice.

While the law ought to show respect for people with disabilities, it also needs to go further by ensuring that they have equal access to education, even when this is costly and involves substantial changes in current methods of instruction (Nussbaum, 2009). It has been argued that the costs of including people with disabilities in all aspects of social, political, and economic life have been greatly exaggerated and are rarely a significant factor in rectifying injustice. Where those costs are substantial, they usually reflect past injustice (Stanford Encyclopaedia, 2013).

Scholars have supported the use of the capabilities approach to understand issues related to social justice. Sen (1993, p. 90), who popularised this approach, defines capability as "a person's ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; it represents the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be." Therefore, the question is, "What is each person able to do or be?" It is not concerned with total or average well-being, but with the opportunities available to each person. It has also been argued that

institutional leadership is a significant factor in promoting transformation that will positively impact the capabilities of students with disabilities (Alban-Metcalf, 2008; Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016; Opiyo, 2019).

Students with Disabilities' Experiences within Higher Education Spaces

Students with disabilities are a reality and not simply a phenomenon in the higher education sector (Pudaruth, Gunputh and Singh, 2017). In South Africa, government policy requires that higher education institutions prioritise access for students with disabilities. They are doing so by diversifying their admission policies, adopting policies with regard to students and staff members with disabilities, and providing infrastructure and resources on their campuses to accommodate them (Mutanga, 2017; Pudaruth et al., 2017; Van Jaarsveldt and Ndeya-Ndereya, 2015). However, student experiences at such institutions determine the quality of their access.

The experiences of students with disabilities have been examined by international and local scholars, with similar findings. Georgeson, Mamas and Swain's (2015) study in the United Kingdom reported inadequate facilities, a lack of access to learning materials, and a lack of understanding and respect from other students and staff. Similarly, Toohey (2012, p. 1) found that, in Australia, "students with disabilities accessing a good education and achieving good learning outcomes was a lottery rather than a certainty." According to the author, this was because "almost half of people with a disability in Australia live in or near poverty". This was confirmed by the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2012). According to the Ontario Undergraduate Student Alliance (OUSA) (2016, p. 18), Canadian students with disabilities experienced challenges with regard to physical access; some course components, inaccessibility and disclosure of disabilities, which some students may find difficult because they might need to divulge potentially sensitive information about their health, medication, and diagnoses. In similar vein, Al Hmuz (2014), Tran (2014) and Adhikari's (2018) research in Jordan, Vietnam and Nepal, respectively, concluded that students with disabilities confronted challenges in relation to physical access and inclusion. Other challenges included generic, inflexible learning support plans (Kendall, 2016); inflexible assessment practices (Redpath et al., 2013) and students' inability to access lecture notes prior to lectures (Moriña Díez, López and Molina, 2015).

In Africa, Pudaruth et al. (2017) reported a lack of a formal support

structure and inadequate information on support available for Mauritian students with disabilities. Mosia and Phasha (2017) reported similar findings for Lesotho, as did Mutanga's (2017) review of published studies describing the experiences of students with disabilities in South African higher education in the period 1994-2017.

Mutanga notes that, during the apartheid era, education for students with disabilities was based on a medical model that mostly excluded them from the education system, with many not being in school. Those granted access were separated from other students in 'special schools' or 'special classrooms'. Studies on the experiences of students with disabilities in South Africa have highlighted rigid practices within higher education (Mutanga, 2013); physical access without adequate support (Buthelezi, 2014; Fitchett, 2015; Tugli, Zungu, Goon and Anyanwu, 2013); systemic barriers (Ntombela and Soobrayen, 2013); dissatisfaction with library services (Phukubje and Ngoepe, 2017); lecturers' lack of disability awareness (Haywood, 2014; Swart and Greyling, 2011); students lacking assistive technologies (Mokiwa and Phasha, 2012); and a lack of curriculum responsiveness (Swart and Greyling, 2011).

These findings suggest that policy formulation at both national and institutional level is not sufficient; implementation is the central challenge. Al Hmuz (2014) observes that legislation may not necessarily enhance student experiences, while Terzi (2014, p. 483) asserts that access to education involves "every aspect of schooling, from policy to curriculum to pedagogical elements, to leadership, to ethos and culture change in order to educate learners within a common framework". Policies with regard to disability may serve institutional ends and have less to do with inclusion and more to do with funding (Mosia and Phasha, 2017). Thus, equity goals are achieved 'on paper'. This appears to be the case even in high-income contexts that are not hampered by the resource constraints often found in low-income settings. In light of this scenario, transformational leadership is called for to harness the necessary resources to change the direction of an institution.

2 Theoretical Framework

What is Transformational Leadership?

James MacGregor Burns first mooted the concept of transformational leadership in 1978. It refers to a dynamic process through which leaders "influence their followers' values, beliefs and goals, move organisations

toward the future, recognise environmental needs and facilitate appropriate changes”, thereby strengthening staff’s understanding of justice (Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016, p. 455). Scholars describe transformational leadership as the most prominent model of leadership in organisational behaviour, and research suggests that it is particularly suited to fostering organisational change (Moynihan, Pandey and Wright, 2012). According to Moynihan et al. (2012, p. 147), “Transformational leadership is centred on the assumption that leaders can change followers’ beliefs, assumptions, and behaviour by appealing to the importance of collective or organisational outcomes”.

The characteristics of a transformational leader include good communication skills, staff development, leading by example, charismatic, innovative, staff empowerment, staff support, and a strong sense of ultimate values (e.g., justice, fairness, honesty, and honour) (Chitiga, 2018; Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016; Mwambazambi and Banza, 2014). The four components (tagged the four “Is”) developed by Burns and Avolio (1993) that emanated from these ideals are *Individualised Consideration*, *Inspirational Motivation*, *Idealised Influence* and *Intellectual Stimulation*, all of which point to the strengths of a transformational leader (Towler, 2019).

The field of transformational leadership is in an embryonic stage in Africa and is not widely accepted (Chitiga, 2018, p. 62). Nonetheless, it is attracting more attention among researchers “due to [the] interdependence of cultural, global, economic, and political issues that require the collaboration and networking efforts of leaders” (Lewis, Boston and Peterson, 2017). Saunders (2008) asserts that African leaders require a pedagogy that will “enable them to engage with social reformation”, thus suggesting transformational leadership. Mwambazambi and Banza (2014) advocate for transformational leadership as a solution to leadership challenges confronting Africa due to a “lack of theoretical and practical understanding of effective leadership, the colonial history of the continent, inappropriate spirituality amongst post-colonial Africans, and poor ethical role-modelling in African communities”, among others.

While the notion of transformational leadership has been criticised for its focus on an individual (a charismatic leader) rather than leadership teams, and ideologies instead of scientific rigour (Alvesson and Einola, 2019; Alvesson and Kärreman, 2016), we would argue that it has the potential to bring about change in the PSET sector.

Disability, Social Justice and Transformational Leadership

The term ‘disability’ has been described as “evolving” and as an improvement on previous derogatory terms such as “demented”, “cripple”, and “Mongol” (Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, 2012). While this debate is beyond the scope of this work, for the purposes of this article the Disabled Peoples International’s (DPI) definition is adopted. The DPI is a cross-disability, consumer-controlled international organisation of people with disabilities in more than 130 countries around the world (DPI, 2017). Based on the organisation’s principles, disability is summarised as “the loss or limitation of opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others, due to physical or social barriers.” This article focuses on the *social model* (also adopted by South Africa) as opposed to the *medical model* that has dominated the debate on disability models for a long time. The former accepts that impairments identified by the medical model are significant but asserts that far more problems are created for disabled people by social and environmental causes (theweb.ngon.d.).

According to the Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (2013), disability is of particular interest for justice due to the manner in which it juxtaposes two basic and powerful senses of *injustice*. The first is the treatment of some people as moral, social, or political inferiors based on irrelevant characteristics; and the second is the creation, perpetuation, or simple failure to correct disparities between individuals in income, wealth, health, and other aspects of well-being based on morally irrelevant factors. We advocate for transformational leadership because it is known to strengthen staff’s understanding and sense of justice (Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016). Although there has been some transformation of South Africa’s higher education landscape (Mutanga, 2017), much can still be achieved by embracing transformational leadership. This is because “such leaders are inspired by their deepest personal values (like justice, fairness, honesty, and honour)” (Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016, p. 456), which Burns (1978) refers to as “ultimate values” in the sense that one cannot bargain over or exchange them.

Transformational leaders’ characteristics lead to organisational change as, according to Eskandari (2014, p. 126), such leaders motivate change in their followers’ goals and personal beliefs in line with organisational goals. Howell and Avolio (1993, p. 891) note that this involves “inspiring followers to transcend their self-interests for a higher collective purpose, mission, or vision”. One of the hallmarks of transformational leaders is their ability to

exemplify moral standards within the organisation and encourage the same in others (Bass, 1985). Bass and Steidlmeier (cited in Copeland, 2016, p. 79) assert that, “To be truly transformational, a leader must also be moral, ethical and authentic”, although Copeland adds that further research is required to determine how such traits could be developed to add to the leader’s overall effectiveness (Copeland, 2016, p. 95). People with disabilities are often treated as inferior, with society failing to correct this perspective and indeed, perpetuating it. Transformational leadership “is a conscious, moral and spiritual process” (Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016, p. 457) that corrects injustices.

Ubuntu and Transformational Leadership

According to Letseka et al. (2012), “The question ‘What constitutes African philosophy?’ was first raised with the publication of Placide Tempels’ seminal work on Bantu philosophy in 1959”, although decades later, “there continues to be serious debate about African philosophy”, which is beyond the scope of this article. According to Nussbaum (2003), while African values have a great deal to contribute to world consciousness, Africa is deeply misunderstood, especially in the West, partly due to much of the richness of its traditional culture being inaccessible since it is oral rather than written, lived rather than formally communicated in books or journals. Though widely theorised, *Ubuntu* is a difficult word to translate because it cannot be literally translated in Western terms (Battle, 2009; Letseka, 2012; Nussbaum, 2003). A variety of interpretations thus exist and the term is plagued by misunderstanding and incorrect assumptions (Bennett, 2011; Tschaepe, 2013). Nonetheless, *Ubuntu* is the spiritual foundation of African societies which is best explained by the Zulu phrase “*Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*” which can be literally translated to mean, “A person is a person through other persons” (Battle, 2009). Described as still evolving, Broodryk (2002, p. 56) defines *Ubuntu* as “an ancient African worldview based on the primary values of intense humanness, caring, sharing, respect, compassion and associated values, ensuring a happy and qualitative human community life in the spirit of family”. It is the capacity to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining a community with justice and mutual caring (Nussbaum, 2003). *Ubuntu* is thus, a lived system of norms. This should not be taken to imply that it is chaotic, arbitrary or irrational; rather, it is a coherent and reasoned system (Bennett, 2011). Higgs and Smith (2006, p. 47) state that *Ubuntu* is “a central ethical idea of African thought”, but not African thought

in itself. It is a “collective shared experience” of African people that enables one to understand Africa’s view of global humanity (Boyras, n.d; Broodryk, 1997), but is not limited to African society (Mbigi and Maree, 1995, p. 7).

Like equity, in legal discourse *Ubuntu* functions as a meta-norm to correct injustices (Bennett, 2011). However, it involves more than entitlement to equal treatment or fair play. It also obliges the individual “to give the same respect, dignity, value and acceptance to each member of [the] community. More importantly, it regulates the exercise of rights by the emphasis it lays on sharing and co-responsibility and the mutual enjoyment of rights by all” (Bennett, 2011, p. 52). To this end, the courts have emphasised connotations of *Ubuntu* such as civility, respect, dignity, harmony and compassion, as well as compatibility with South Africa’s Bill of Rights.

Regarding disability, this article borrows from Praeg’s (2014) work which distinguishes between what *Ubuntu* is and what we do in our attempts to put it into practice. For Praeg, “Ubuntu is never simply an intellectual investigation, a way of saying things, but first and foremost a way of conducting ... politics, of doing things ... or ... ubuntu is first and foremost a political act and ... our responsibility lies precisely in recognising this priority of the political” (Praeg, 2014, p. 5) in every context.

There is no gainsaying that *Ubuntu* could add value to any society, as its values reverberate with the universal tenets of human worth and dignity (Eliastam, 2015). However, Naudé (2013) notes that “Africa confronts us with deep ambiguities”. There would seem to be some paradoxes in the way Africans (who are supposedly the custodians of the philosophy) live their lives. How does one reconcile the prevalence of murder, rape, violent acts of xenophobia, corruption and nepotism, refusal to leave political office, and political violence in African countries with the values of *Ubuntu* (Eliastam, 2015; Naudé, 2013)? While these ills are often linked to the impact of colonialism and globalisation, as Naudé (2013) observes, it is time that we start looking inward to find solutions to our challenges.

The paradoxes characterising disability in relation to *Ubuntu* are neither new nor limited to Africa. Since the Greek period, people with disabilities have sometimes been celebrated, but most often rejected by their societies (Munyi, 2012). However, these mixed reactions are more prevalent in many African societies (Bunning, Gona, Neweton and Hartley, 2016). Etieyibo and Omiegebe (2016) associate them with religion and culture, which “promote certain beliefs and attitudes about disability and people with disabilities that

lead to discriminatory practices". Ncube (2010, p. 78) laments that "change and transformation are not strong components of traditional societies".

We would argue that, if properly practiced, the tenets of *Ubuntu* are in line with those of transformational leadership. The common features of this leadership style and *Ubuntu* are moral standards, and respect, dignity, value and acceptance of each member of society, irrespective of their abilities.

3 Discussion

One of the reasons for proposing transformational leadership as a strategy to address the issue of disability in the PSET system is the strong influence a transformational leader wields in an organisation. According to Brown and Trevino (cited in Bosch, 2013, p. 19), "it takes a special kind of leader to influence a follower's values". Transformational leaders can transform their institution in its entirety. Their influence invariably trickles down to all managers that work with them, with a ripple effect on the organisation (Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016). Research shows that, such leaders "move the organisation toward the future, recognise the environmental need and facilitate appropriate changes, thus strengthening ... the staff's understanding of justice" (Korejan and Shahbazi, 2016, p. 453). This starts with not only having or sharing a good vision (on transformation), but with how it is shared (Chitiga, 2018, p. 73), which requires the ability to carry others along. This is made possible by collective efficacy, which Bandura (1997, p. 477) defines as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organise and execute courses of action required to produce given levels of attainment".

Bosch (2013) indicates that, for this to happen, there must be congruency between the values of the leader and the followers, which leads to the achievement of organisational goals. Popper and Lipshitz (cited in Bosch, 2013, p. 21) explain that leaders can align their followers' values with those of the organisation by means of what they spend time on; what they unswervingly pay attention to, and that which they reward and recognise, thus demonstrating the importance of values to an organisation. In addition, due to their distinguishing characteristic of innovativeness, transformational leaders can stimulate staff members to "question their existing beliefs and values in order to change them" (Bass and Avolio, cited in Bosch, 2013, p. 21; Grojean and Resick, cited in Bosch, 2013, p. 21). Chitiga (2018, p. 60) asserts that, "inclusive leadership that accentuates the development and pursuance of a shared vision is crucial to a positive and genuine transformation of

institutions".

Advocates of *Ubuntu* have applied it in diverse fields, including management (Eliastam, 2015). *Ubuntu* is related to leadership/management (terms used interchangeably in this article) because at its centre is the relationship with others and it "balances the past (by learning from it), the present (by examining immediate and pressing concerns), and the future (by providing a vision)" (Ncube, 2010, p. 78). *Ubuntu* shows that leadership needs to focus on people as well as processes because leadership is a relationship between people and therefore has moral and ethical implications (Cronje, 2016).

Management is "the process of influencing individuals or groups so as to achieve group goals" (Hoyt and Blascovich, 2003, 679). Leadership is about knowledge, skills, and abilities for transformation, and it is increasingly about worldviews or visions of life – beliefs, values, and principles (Ncube, 2010). Ironically, worldviews are also ways of life, as beliefs direct us, values guide us, and principles motivate us to adopt certain kinds of action and behaviour. Therefore, "the relationship between a leader and those who are led is not one merely of power but a genuine sharing of mutual needs, aspirations, and values" (Chitiga, 2018, p. 71), which Chitiga avers is especially "essential in educational institutions, where the traditional core business includes intellectual stimulation of students for learning". For transformation to take place, educational institutions at all levels should be a forum for a shared vision. This should be supported and fostered by multiple people, promoting cohesion, commonality, and trust among individuals (Senge, cited in Chitiga, 2018, p. 71). It requires leaders who can lead change and find innovative ways to address problems (Cronje, 2016).

Transformational leaders in PSET are expected to set goals that are in line with policies on disability. Liu and Li (2018, p. 2) assert that such leaders "shape their team-directed perceptions such as team goal commitment and team identification through the *sense giving* process – an important mechanism of the transformational leadership-knowledge-sharing relationship". Steinmann, Klug and Maier (2018) found that transformational leaders influence the extent to which followers regard organisational goals as important.

These points are relevant to the debate on disability issues because higher education institutions reflect the larger society. Furthermore, PSET leaders grew up in and live in their society. Therefore, the slow pace of transformation in the PSET system could be a reflection of what is happening in society at large.

While this section focused on the value that transformational leadership could bring in addressing the issue of disability in the PSET sector, a transformational leader needs to be supported with capacity-building of staff members and resources that will render his/her work effective.

According to Majoko and Phasha (2018, p. 77), “gaps in policy; disjuncture between policy and practice; and issues concerning the classroom environment and training of teachers” can be addressed through capacity-building. The authors highlight “the capacity challenges within the higher education institutions that train the teachers”, which include “inadequate understanding and delivery of inclusive education training” and the lack of teaching inclusively (p. 75). To address these issues, there is a need to understand what kind of competencies are required and how these can be developed in teacher education (Pantić and Florian, 2015, p. 333). Ludeman, et al. (2020) also assert that universities require capacity to manage disability issues as an integral part of other diversity and transformation imperatives and to sensitise lecturers in order to promote open-minded attitudes towards students with disabilities.

As noted earlier, a number of studies have noted a lack of relevant resources to assist students with disabilities. Bhroin and King (2020) itemise these as the physical and administrative tools and pedagogical resources that will enable institutions to deliver on their plan. Resources need to be allocated to guarantee inclusive education (Human Rights Watch, 2015). Where resources are available, they need to be used to best effect (e.g., by training users) (UNESCO, 2017).

4 Final Thoughts and Directions for Future Research

A number of conclusions can be drawn from this conceptual article. Firstly, if distance education is meant to address social justice, it is failing to reach out to people with disabilities, which defeats part of its purpose of providing access. Distance education “courses were initially designed to support educational opportunities to students” (Erickson and Larwin, 2016, p. 76). Secondly, the slow transformation of the PSET sector noted in the literature is disheartening. Third, a shift is required in addressing the issue of disability to bring about the desired changes. Fourth, due to South Africa’s historical past (and that of the rest of Africa), the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* has the potential to bring about change in the PSET sector, although the paradoxes that exist in its practice need to be addressed. Lastly, to maximise *Ubuntu*’s

potential, transformational leadership is required in the PSET sector. This will help PSET leaders to re-assess their values and improve their self-management prior to working with their followers and students. It will also lead to a mind-shift that will cascade into society, diluting the rigidity that is the main challenge in traditional societies such as those in Africa.

Given the above, the following areas are suggested for further research: As a baseline study, it is necessary to research PSET leadership – how transformational is it, what good practices can be upheld, and what gaps need to be filled? Emanating from this should be transformational leadership programmes that will be developed to assist leaders to learn behaviours associated with the style (Bosch, 2013). Such programmes should be embedded in the values of *Ubuntu* with a view to addressing the paradoxes that exist in its practice, especially in relation to disability. The programmes should be tested because transformational leadership is an emerging area of research on the continent. The paucity of research in the field presents opportunities to develop innovative programmes. Lastly, it is not enough to cite the increase in the number of people with disabilities accessing higher education; research is required on their hosting by institutions. Such findings will help institutions to address the issue of quality access for students with disabilities, thus enhancing their experience.

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