



Publisher: KAD International, Ghana  
Co-publisher: Cherkas Global University, USA  
Has been issued since 2014  
E-ISSN 2508-1055  
2022. 9(1): 36-48

DOI: 10.13187/jare.2022.1.36

Journal homepage:  
<http://kadint.net/our-journal.html>



## Exploring the Realities of Social Justice in South Africa: A Review of the Case of Rural Learners' Transition to Higher Institutions

Chinaza Uleanya <sup>a,\*</sup>, Oluwatoyin Ayodele Ajani <sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

<sup>b</sup> North-West University, Potchefstroom, South Africa

### Abstract

Social justice is undeniably a significant pillar of democratic government, and it's pertinent to measure the post-apartheid achievements of South African democratic governments. This study explores the efforts to make education available to all learners at universities of their choice to eradicate ostracism and exclusionary practices that had permeated the apartheid era. Critical Race Theory is used as a theoretical framework to underpin this discourse analysis, while the study adopted the review method. The researchers argue that inequalities exist between rural and urban universities, as well as between rural and urban learners. The study affirms that learners from rural areas experience inadequate access to education and lack opportunities to attend better-resourced urban universities. This paper views social justice in a democratic system as equal access to social benefits and resources among citizens. Hence, the limitations of rural learners to rural universities and inadequate resourcing of rural universities negate social justice. In accordance with the realities of social justice, the education system should be accessible to all learners of the same quality at any university of their choice and equity of learning resources should be enhanced at learners' residences regardless of their human diversity.

**Keywords:** critical race, human diversity, realities, rural learners, social justice.

### 1. Introduction

Rural learners are usually marginalised in different ways considering the quality of education provided to them (Uleanya et al., 2020). According to Uleanya et al. (2020), the lack of the desired infrastructure needed for teaching and learning tends to affect the learning abilities of learners. These challenges have led to issues such as an increase in drop-out rates (Rakoma, Schulze, 2015). In the meantime, education is not supposed to be a privilege but a fundamental human right (Right to Education Initiative, 2021; United Nations..., 2020). This position implies that social injustice becomes the case where some learners are excluded due to their geographical position. Meanwhile, on the other hand, social justice is a significant pillar of democracy in any democratic country (Frattura, Tropinka, 2006). It serves as one of the measures for successful democratic governments.

According to Wilson-Strydom (2011), "the South African higher education policy context, since the early 1990s, has supported increasing and broadening access to university study as well as the promotion of social justice in the system" (p. 407). This claim that post-apartheid education

---

\* Corresponding author  
E-mail addresses: [uleanc@unisa.ac.za](mailto:uleanc@unisa.ac.za) (C. Uleanya)

policies have been made to correct the apartheid educational imbalances that restricted equity in education. Several policies have been enacted to promote the participation of human diversity. The policies and legislative reforms include the National Plan for Higher Education and the Education White Paper 3 (Bengu, 1997) to transform higher education. Thus, changing many structures and designs in the education sector. However, mass access to higher institutions in South Africa indicated that access to higher education is still unequally distributed among the races (Council on Higher Education, 2000; Mzangwa, 2019). This suggests the need to increase black learners' enrollment in higher education for equity (Council on Higher Education, 2000; Mzangwa, 2019). This implies that increased and broad university access translates to the realities of social justice.

The National Learner Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) was established to effect social redress for poor students whose socioeconomic, racial background and other factors can limit them from accessing higher education (Soudien, 2010). Evidently, studies have shown that rural learners continue to experience social injustice in their access to resourced universities and learning resources (Dube, 2020; Hlalele, 2012). Seemingly, Dube (2020) states that rural learners are caught up in the digital divide that limits their full potential in learning experiences. In addition to the social-economic status of these learners, this digital divide hinders their effort to access higher education in their choice of universities.

The rationale for this paper is to explore the cause for social justice in South African higher education with the following questions: To what extent does social justice exist in higher education? What factors of social exclusion prevent rural learners from accessing equal education? What strategies can enhance equity in access to higher education? The researchers aim to contribute to the discourse on social justice in all higher education institutions and, most importantly, the rural learners who experience this gap and further open up new research spaces in this challenging terrain.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is adopted into this study to understand social justice in post-apartheid democratic South Africa. South Africa has gone through a long phase of segregated systems that absolutely and significantly disadvantaged the blacks from accessing or benefitting from socioeconomic, political and education systems (Conradie 2015, 2016; Soudien 2010). According to Soudien (2010), Conradie (2015) and Conradie (2016), it is pertinent to dismantle the structural legacies of apartheid which includes socioeconomic limitations to equal access to South African universities. Similarly, Vincent (2008) and Erwin (2012) affirm that apartheid had significantly segregated the people into various unequal categories. Meanwhile, social justice in education can thrust South Africans together to negotiate this situation, notably since a great deal of difficult work towards equality remains to accomplish diversity in unity. Thus, the tenets of CRT provide deeper insights into the realities of social justice within the post-apartheid South African higher education system.

The CRT is a framework that provides deep insights into systemic inequality in racism and how this disadvantage some people based on racial descriptions (Leonardo, Porter, 2010; Sue, 2013). Scholars like Steyn and McEwan (2013) and Mattes (2012) noted that the inclusion of CRT into educational practices explains how apartheid experiences in South Africa are pertinently disadvantaged. To them, these educational practices show the racialised structure and how and why the dismantling of the structures in post-apartheid society is needed. Bock and Hunt (2015) opine that race should not be the basis of the social construct to disadvantage some people. However, Conradie (2015) agrees that races connote symbolic association with progress, order, and intelligence, but the impact on others should be discouraged. Conradie (2015) concurs with Leonardo and Porter (2010) and Sue (2013) that CRT is premised on: an approach to racism, the dismantling of racism prevailing ideologies, commitment to social justice and experiential knowledge. Though South Africa has undergone many post-apartheid transformations in different sectors, CRT states that racism must be erased in all forms; as racial hierarchy and discrimination still exist (Bonilla-Silva, 2015; Jain et al., 2011; Yosso et al., 2009). Hence, CRT seeks to dismantle the existing structural disparity and diverse interpersonal prejudice. These still manifest in the unequal distribution of wealth as well as unequal access to quality higher education driven by historical structures and "racialised" educational institutions (Cloete, 2014; Mattes, 2012; Slater, 2014; Vincent, 2008).

Studies affirm that racism persists in South African contexts, though not significantly pronounced. Still, the existing structures reflect some atoms of racial segregation in higher education structures where some resourced and under-resourced institutions are differently dominated by some citizens (Modica, 2012; Soudien, 2010; Steyn, McEwan, 2013; Verwey, Quayle, 2012). These wide disparities in the education sector affect learners' academic engagements and achievements in these higher institutions (Gillborn et al., 2012; Yosso et al., 2009). Soudien (2010) opines that learners' experiences at various South African higher education institutions are shaped by their race in these public institutions. Thus, CRT encourages appropriate and significant attempts to address and erase racial interplay that can disadvantage some learners in accessing quality education. Hence, CRT seeks to possibly dismantle all factors that can disadvantage some groups of people based on their racial descriptions.

### 3. Materials and methods

A literature review method was employed for this study. This was based on the notion that such a method allows researchers to explore, review and present various published works of other authors in a specific field. Thomas G. Carpenter Library (2021) states that literature review allows researchers to assess the recent trend of discussion on a particular subject matter. It also identifies the main topics in the area and main question(s) about a specific topic (Thomas G. Carpenter Library, 2021). Also, other related areas needing further investigation can be identified through this approach (Snyder, 2019; Thomas G. Carpenter Library, 2021).

### 3. Discussion and results

Additionally, according to Snyder (2019) and Lewthwaite (2015), a literature review for research, especially for the social sciences, allows critical appraisal of diverse opinions of various scholars on a specific subject matter. Hence, this study explored the works of different scholars on the realities of social justice in South Africa, as it concerns the transition of rural learners' from high school to tertiary institutions. Table 1 summarises the areas of pertinent scholars, search terms and review literature for this study. Following this, the findings from the study are discussed.

**Table 1.** Areas covered in the study and search terms

Area covered	Search Item(s)	Study
Rural learners	Rural learners and quality education, the Drop-out rate	Uleanya et al. (2020); Rakoma and Schulze (2015)
Education and Human right	Education: fundamental human right	Right to Education Initiative (2021); UNESCO (2020)
Social Justice	Social Justice Ideal Social Justice	Frattura and Tropinka (2006); Gerwitz et al. (1995); Hlalele (2012); Tikly (2010); Tsanoff (1956)
Theoretical Framework	Critical Race Theory (CRT)	Soudien (2010); Conradie (2015, 2016)
Policies	The South African higher education policy. Policies, legislative reforms cum transformation of higher education	Wilson-Strydom (2011) Bengu (1997)
Access to education	Access to higher education	Mzangwa (2019); Council on Higher Education (2000); Soudien (2010)
Factors hindering social justice in South African higher education	Poverty  Educational Facilities	Du Plessis and Mestry (2019); Iwaloye et al. (2019); Uleanya et al. (2020); Misselhorn (2018) Geduld and Sathorar (2016); Koopman (2013); Bower (2010); Misselhorn (2018); Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2020); Uleanya and Gamede

	Lack of ICT knowledge	(2018); Mbatha (2016); The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996b), The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a)
	Parental Backgrounds	Ajani (2020); Cristobal-Fransi et al (2020); Dube (2020); World Bank (2020, 2018); Ajani and Govender (2019); Du Plessis and Mestry (2019); Mbatha (2016); Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2015); De Clercq (2013)
	Loss of parents	
	Learners as breadwinners	
	Limited spaces at rural universities	Du Plessis and Mestry (2019); Uleanya and Rugbeer (2020); Lucier (2019)
	Medium of Instructions	Du Plessis and Mestry (2017); Mestry (2019); Malhoit (2005)
		Dani and Shah (2016); Ebrahim (2009) Jansen (2015); Hendricks (2012)
		Fleisch et al. (2010); Jansen (2015, 2012); McQuaide (2009); Spreen and Vally (2006); Seepe (2004) Dube (2020); Uleanya, Iwaloye and Gamede, 2020); Uleanya, Rugbeer and Olaniran (2019); Du Plessis (2017); The Constitution (1996); Phathutshedzo (2016);

**The Ideal Social Justice**

As mentioned earlier, social justice is a key concept in democratic governance. According to Tsanoff's (1956) view, the word 'justice' comes from the Latin phrase 'suum cuique', which is interpreted as "to receive just due". Seemingly, it has been explained further to mean the distribution of fair justice to all in all spheres of life. Others opine that social justice encompasses redistributing institutionalised structures to avoid marginalisation (Coates, 2007; Flora, Flora, 2013; Kose, 2009). Meanwhile, social justice is about equal justice for all, not only in the law courts but in all phases of the society, where every individual has access to equal opportunities and societal rights (Stronks et al., 2016). This implies that social justice should be fair, regardless of background, race, or cultural differences, in any part of society. This concurs with social justice theories that use diverse mechanisms to advocate and regulate equity in distribution and access to social arrangements and benefits for all citizens (Gerwitz et al., 1995). The ideal social justice draws strengths from Fraser's description of social justice as 'parity of participation' (Tikly, 2010: 6).

According to Fraser (2008), "overcoming injustice means dismantling institutionalised obstacles that prevent some people from participating on a par with others as full partners in social interaction" (p. 16). Furthermore, Gerwitz (1998) affirms that social justice aims to dismantle the structural arrangements that disadvantage and enhance the marginalisation or exclusion of some people using discriminative structures or measures. Conversely, Social justice ensures fairness and equity of all systems to accommodate individual respect, absolute care, fair recognition and just empathy. The theories of social justice insist on equal access to all socioeconomic benefits to all

individuals in the same society as sensibility (Frey et al., 1996). Frey et al. (1996) posit that sensibility ensures that no form of discrimination, exclusion or segregation is allowed to thrive.

The ideal social justice drives democratic governments to eradicate diverse oppression, limitation and restrictions. The question then is: do South African higher institutions practice social justice in processes, institutional rules and regulations? Goldfarb and Grinberg (2002) state that the higher institutions in South Africa must alter many institutional structures and organisational measures to reclaim, appropriate, sustain, and advance equity and fairness of social benefits to the learners. Conclusively, Fraser (1997) also asserts that social justice seeks to improve equality and access to quality education and other social structures to deal with issues of marginalisation. The ideal social justice comprises principles of justice, classification of social resources, and expected distribution outcomes (Sabbagh, 2003). Hence, connectivity and responsibility for the distribution of social benefits or access to the structures are the basis for fairness and equality in social justice (Lloyd, 2000).

### **Conceptualising South African Rural Institutions of Learning and Learners**

Defining 'rural' in the context of this study explains the ambiguity of the connotation. Sauvageot and da Graça (2007) opine that rurality describes human endeavour mostly in agricultural activities with meagre incomes. Rural societies and learning institutions vary from place to place (Flora, Flora, 2013; Uleanya, Rugbeer, 2020). They further consent that areas referred to as rural environments in developed nations differ from those of developing and underdeveloped nations. For instance, developed nations' rural areas are majorly characterised by a lack of rail stations and airports (Flora, Flora, 2013). On the contrary, rural areas in underdeveloped and developing nations, including South Africa, are majorly characterised by a lack of good road networks, poor transport system, high level of illiteracy, high rate of unemployment, and poor health system (Uleanya, Rugbeer, 2020).

A review of the work of Uleanya, Gamede and Uleanya (2019) suggests that rural environments in underdeveloped or developing nations are characterised by spatial settlements, affecting how people access certain basic social amenities. South Africa is categorised as one of the developing nations, with 33 % of the population described as rural (World Bank, 2018). Hence, the rural environments share similar features with other rural areas in further developing and underdeveloped nations, especially as it concerns the African continent (Uleanya, Rugbeer, 2020). Thus, there is a high rate of unemployment, lack of development, high illiteracy, and high poverty level (Du Plessis, Mestry, 2019; Uleanya et al., 2019). Thus, in a quest to curb the high illiteracy, institutions of learning are being established in strategic rural areas across the nation. This concurs with the works of Gibson (2012) as well as Dani and Shah (2016), who hold the view that institutions of learning are established intentionally and strategically in specific rural areas in order to enhance certain desired development as well as help educate the people within and around such communities. This is with the aid of curbing the high level of illiteracy within and around the rural communities in South Africa. Meanwhile, according to Bookin-Weiner (2015), rural learning institutions are established in strategic locations to provide and help take care of certain peculiar needs of the people living within and around the communities while taking into cognisance of their peculiar nature. This is done through teaching and learning activities: the kind of education provided to the learners. Hall (2019) asserts in his reports that 11252 schools in South Africa are rural based, with 3060 as secondary schools while the remaining 8192 are primary schools. Most of these rural schools are majorly in Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, and Limpopo rural communities.

Additionally, the South African education system is designed to ensure that well-equipped individuals are produced to help contribute to various forms of development in the nation: personal, social, and economic (Allais, 2017). This is to be achieved in various areas of the nation, including rural communities. Thus, the reason for establishing institutions of learning in rural communities. Thus, according to Uleanya et al. (2020), rural-based learning institutions include institutes of learning situated in strategic local communities to enhance the desired development. By extension, South African rural learners are those studying in schools located in rural communities in South Africa. Similarly, in this study, rural learning institutions are secondary schools situated in rural communities in South Africa. Meanwhile, learners enrolled in schools in rural communities will be considered rural learners in this study.

### **Factors hindering social justice in South African higher education**

A review of Uleanya et al. (2020) work suggests that how rural-based institutions are handled seems devoid of the required standard. Thus, the level of quality becomes questionable. This has led to various challenges hampering the learning abilities of the learner. Hence, the issue of social justice comes to play. Suffice it to state that learners in urban-based institutions of learning in the nation seem to get more attention, being taught following due quality standards. In contrast, their rural counterparts suffer from enabling environments capable of promoting quality teaching and learning activities. The reason for this has been attributed to poverty, educational facilities, and parental backgrounds, amongst others, as explained below.

#### **Poverty**

A review of the work of Iwaloye et al. (2019) indicates that poverty is a major constraint affecting teaching and learning activities in rural-based institutions of learning. Moreover, the level of poverty in rural communities is high (Du Plessis, Mestry, 2019). They further opine that poverty affects the level of quality education provided in rural schools in South Africa. Meanwhile, Misselhorn (2018) opined that poverty deprives learners of proper education. Misselhorn (2018) further states that poverty causes learners to drop out because they become demoralised following repeated attempts to succeed, which end in failures. Meanwhile, huge investments are being made by the government in basic education, precisely around 6.4% of GDP, but lack of accountability and poor quality teaching affect the attainment of quality education in rural areas (Misselhorn, 2018).

Conversely, Uleanya et al. (2020) considered the poverty trap as an issue of poverty affecting learners' learning abilities and consequently leading to drop-out. They state additionally that certain factors promote the poverty trap, which in turn hampers the learning abilities of learners. Such factors include malnutrition, physical environment, lack of necessary basic facilities, adolescent psychology, demotivation, and lack of aspiration (Uleanya et al., 2020). Suffice it to state that the South African government strives to ensure that funds are disbursed to schools to deliver quality education. However, factors such as lack of accountability, learners' level of psychology, lack of necessary learning facilities, and poor quality of teaching affect the provision of the desired quality education in rural schools.

#### **Educational Facilities**

Learning remains challenging without necessary basic learning facilities (Uleanya, Gamede, 2018). In other words, teaching and learning activities thrive, and learners' learning abilities improve academically when the necessary educational facilities are available. According to the review of the work of Misselhorn (2018), following The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), and The South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), as well as related regulations and policies on equity indicate that all South African learners are expected to have access to learning and teaching. Thus, similar facilities and equal educational opportunities are to be provided for all learners regardless of where their schools are situated. Misselhorn (2018) further posit that this is not the case as rural schools are deprived of certain educational facilities.

Meanwhile, Uleanya and Gamede (2018) state that pedagogic malpractice is experienced when teachers fail to achieve the desired objectives for which the school was established. Hence, Bower (2010) conversely opines that the teacher must improvise where the necessary needed learning facilities are unavailable. The above argument suggests that the lack of educational facilities affects teaching and learning in rural institutions of learning in South Africa. This causes pedagogic malpractices as it affects their teaching abilities. Meanwhile, they are desired to improvise. Providing adequate learning devices such as laptops and internet data bundles creates equal access to education for all learners (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2020). Learners across South African communities should be provided with equal rights in accessing learning experiences as well as learning facilities (Geduld, Sathorar, 2016; Koopman, 2013; Mbatha, 2016).

#### **Lack of ICT knowledge**

The advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution has integrated technologies and electronic devices into teaching and learning in the education system. Thus, learning has been made easily accessible to learners with no borders. According to Mbatha (2016), earners can access learning experiences from the comfort of their homes at their own convenient time. World Bank (2018,

2020) posits that online teaching and learning allows learners to acquire information, knowledge and skills at their own pace and spaces. However, most learners from rural areas are hindered by economic and social viability that can empower them with ICT knowledge and skills (Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2020). Ajani (2020) opines that most rural high schools that could empower the learners with technological know-how lack ICT resources that could be used. Furthermore, De Clercq (2013) states that in some cases where schools are provided with learning technologies, the teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills to teach with the gadgets or train their learners in using these technologies.

Ajani and Govender (2019) affirm that regular training of teachers remains one of the effective approaches that can enhance teachers' classroom practices for imparting knowledge and skills to learners in all South African schools. Dube (2020) affirms that the pandemic lockdown led many universities to embrace full online teaching and learning. According to him, "COVID-19 has made online learning inevitable, and online learning is a practicable alternative to traditional schooling. Thus, there is a need for an inclusive approach that caters to rural learners' lived realities" (Dube, 2020: 139). Du Plessis and Mestry (2019) postulate that most rural schools lack adequate support or resources to provide quality education to rural learners. The learners are hindered in their further academic exploits compared to urban schools. This implies why the quality of the South African education system is poor in rural schools (Du Plessis, Mestry, 2019).

Cognisant to the report by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group (2015), rural education, a significant component of South Africa, is faced with social injustice and requires urgent redress. Thus, the World Bank (2020) asserts that only learners who are competent in technology know-how can use learning technologies effectively for teaching and learning activities. Lack of connectivity due to poor network services hinders learners from rural communities from accessing online teaching and learning activities. Some of these learners are also restricted from making online applications to access higher institutions or learning materials. Online assessments for these learners are limited and sometimes cannot be carried out due to a lack of connectivity.

### **Parental Backgrounds**

Another factor contributing to social injustice in South African higher learning institutions is the parental background of learners (Uleanya, Rugbeer, 2020). While learners do not choose their parents, yet the level of exposure and academic qualifications of parents tend to affect and hamper the learning abilities and academic success of learners from rural communities. A review of the work of Uleanya and Rugbeer (2020) shows that learners from rural environments tend to be in disadvantaged positions following their parents' education level. Lucier (2019) opines that the case is worse if such learners are first-generation learners, the first to attain university education at home. This implies that they are likely to lack certain information and level of assistance due to their parents' academic achievement and level of exposure.

Moreover, rural environments are majorly characterised by a high level of illiteracy. Thus, the children of parents from such places are likely to experience such. In this regard, it implies that there seem to be some disparities between the parents of urban-based learners and their counterparts in rural environments. This shows some levels of social injustice. Other areas of social injustice concerning the parents of learners include the following: age of parents, unemployment level, single parenthood, orphanage, and learners as breadwinners. The age of the parents of learners influences their learning abilities. For instance, learners with ageing parents are more affected negatively than their counterparts with young parents. According to Du Plessis and Mestry (2019), parents' involvement in their children's academic pursuits influences their learning abilities and academic performance. Meanwhile, ageing parents' involvement in their children's academic goals is likely to be minimal compared to younger parents.

### **Loss of parents**

With the loss of parents by some learners in the rural areas due to ageing, sicknesses, accidents or murder, primarily where these learners have been supported for academic pursuits by the lost parents, it becomes challenging for such learners to cope academically. This implies that many orphan learners who cannot access other financial means may end up abandoning their education or being unable to afford resourced institutions due to high costs (Malhoit, 2005). Seemingly, Mestry (2019) posit that parents play a pivotal role in learners' academic pursuits as they are supported with finance, emotional inspiration and encouragement that influence learners' academic performance or exploits. With the death of such parents, learners are depressed, and

their hope of being educated becomes shattered, especially if there are no members of the families to finance their education. Du Plessis and Mestry (2017) opine that learners who lost parents during their academic years may experience a break or complete withdrawal from accessing university education at the parents' death if there is no support for them.

### **Learners as breadwinners**

Ebrahim (2009) affirms that poor economic situations and demands for rural families due to several financial limitations have pushed many learners into labour markets or vocational activities to support their families to meet daily needs. This is a known challenge to many rural learners, and access to education based on their financial predicaments can only be made possible through NSFAS or other funding schemes that can be accessed. Hendricks (2012) posits that learners are taking it upon themselves to struggle and provide for some family needs to support their low-income families. These poverty traps do not allow these learners to pursue education further or limit their academic pursuits to institutions that accommodate their struggles and academic tasks. Jansen (2015) posits that the transformation of higher education in South Africa should holistically include socioeconomic factors for social justice. A review of the work of Dani and Shah (2016) suggests that breadwinners learners find it difficult to concentrate or even balance academic activities with work. Consequently, they quit academics to attend to family pressure.

### **Limited spaces at rural universities**

Seepe (2004) posits that South African institutional policies on the admission of learners from high schools into universities need to be reviewed. The policies exclude or limit some learners from accessing equal education with their contemporaries in urban communities. Phathutshedzo (2016) affirms that the culture of higher learning institutions in South Africa needs to change to facilitate more access to the previously disadvantaged. He argues for radical approaches to effect necessary transformations to enable the disadvantaged access to fair and equal quality education. This implies that unequal opportunities among the segregated communities determine access to education in South African higher institutions. Jansen (2012) states that due to limited spaces in medical schools, learners are required to write the National Bench Mark exam to qualify for admission. This examination disadvantages some rural learners, especially those whose high schools are under-resourced, to prepare them for such tasks. Also, the application fees remain another approach to limit access to spaces at some universities (Jansen, 2015).

Conversely, Fleisch et al. (2010) assert that due to the low socioeconomic backgrounds of rural learners, they always prefer rural universities that can accommodate them. However, the rural universities' limited spaces prevent some from accessing university-level education. McQuaide (2009), in his longitudinal study in China, affirms that many rural universities have limited spaces that cannot accommodate willing learners who want admissions due to proximity and affordability. Admission policies in South African higher education institutions highlight social inequalities among learners from rural and urban areas (Spreeen, Vally, 2006).

### **Medium of Instructions**

Uleanya et al. (2019) state that the adopted language of instruction, consequently the medium of instruction, contributes to hampering or improving learners' learning abilities and academic performances. This also affects how they transition into higher institutions of learning. For instance, in many rural schools in South Africa, the adopted medium of instruction tilts toward local languages and practices (Uleanya et al., 2019a; Uleanya et al., 2020). Hence, transition to higher learning institutions by learners who have been taught majorly through local language may be problematic, especially when English or any other international language is adopted as the major medium of instruction. Basic education in most rural societies of South African communities uses indigenous languages for classroom instructional delivery. Consequently, using these indigenous languages poses challenges to rural learners who wish to access universities where English is the medium of instruction (Du Plessis, 2017).

Dube (2020) further posits that the use of indigenous languages in most rural basic educational institutions is to enhance learners' understanding of the curriculum being delivered in these schools; however, it promotes learners' fear of attending urban universities where the English Language is predominantly used as the medium of instructions. Thus, these learners are restricted to rural universities where indigenous languages are conveniently used. Although the Constitution



(1996) allows the learners to be taught in any of the South African official languages, including all the indigenous languages; however, some learners prefer to access university education where their own indigenous languages can be used for instructional delivery. Hence, the tendency is higher for diverse learners from different groups to pursue academic activities in universities with Multilanguage university environments without any language hindrance (Dube, 2020).

#### **4. Conclusion**

Many learners from most South African rural communities are consistently disadvantaged compared to their contemporaries in urban communities. Extant literature affirms that despite democratic governments in South Africa since 1994, learners from rural areas continue to experience social injustice in their access to quality education. The learners are disadvantaged from accessing equity in the education system due to several limiting factors. Implementing ideal social justice in practice remains the only approach to redress access to equity and equality in higher education institutions. This discourse affirms the use of ideal social justice in addressing the diverse complexities of rural learners in higher education. Education is a human right issue that should be taken seriously in a democratic system where all structural policies that exclude, restrict or disadvantage rural learners from learning opportunities are dismantled.

The study explored the issue of social justice in South Africa, considering the case of rural learners' transition to higher institutions. The study's findings show that several factors affect learners from rural schools to successfully transit to higher institutions following the quality received while in high school. Factors such as lack of adequate funds, poverty, teacher-related issues, parental qualifications and level of exposure, and medium of instruction affect the quality of education received by learners in rural schools. This affects such learners' transition from high schools to tertiary learning institutions.

#### **5. Recommendations**

In the sequel to the study's findings, the quality of education provided to schools in rural communities should be reconsidered. This can be done by thoroughly evaluating the available basic necessary facilities, teachers and their qualifications, available Learning Teaching Support Materials, and monitoring tools. This will help to aid the provision of the desired level of quality in the schools.

Relevant orientation programmes should be provided periodically to help learners in rural learning institutions acclimatise to happenings in higher learning institutions. This can be done by ensuring that orientation programmes are organised within and outside the learning institution. Rural schools should be attached to tertiary learning institutions to help oversee happenings. This will allow the tertiary institutions of learning to assist the rural schools in helping build learners that can easily fit into the activities of tertiary institutions of learning.

The study was limited to the review of relevant literature. Hence, it is suggested that a similar study be replicated using quantitative, qualitative or mixed methods.

#### **6. Declaration of Competing Interest**

The manuscript's authors declare that there is no interest in conflict, and all reference materials were dully acknowledged.

#### **7. Funding**

None.

#### **References**

- Ajani Govender, 2019 – Ajani O.A., Govender S. (2019). Teachers' perspectives of in-service professional development in South African and Nigerian High Schools. *Gender & Behaviour*. 17(2): 13146-13160.
- Ajani, 2020 – Ajani, O.A. (2020). Correlations between effective teachers' clusters system and enhanced classroom practices in South Africa, *Journal of Social Sciences Research*. 6(2): 140-146.
- Allais, 2017 – Allais, S. (2017). Towards measuring the economic value of Higher Education: lessons from South Africa. *Comparative Education*. 53(1): 147-163.
- Bengu, 1997 – Bengu, M.P. (1997). *Government Gazette*. Pretoria: Government Publication.

**Bock, Hunt, 2015** – Bock, Z., Hunt, S. (2015). “It’s just taking our souls back”. In: Apartheid and Race in the Discourses of Young South Africans. *Southern African Linguistics and Applied Language Studies*. 33(2): 141-158.

**Bonilla-Silva, 2015** – Bonilla-Silva, E. (2015). More than Prejudice: Restatement, Reflections and New Directions in Critical Race Theory. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity*. 1(1): 73-87.

**Bookin-Weiner, 2015** – Bookin-Weiner, J.B. (2015). International students guide to the United States. [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://www.internationalstudentguidetotheusa.com>

**Bower, 2010** – Bower, J. (2010). *Poor Pedagogy + Technology = Accelerated Malpractice*. [Electronic resource]. URL: [www.joebower.org](http://www.joebower.org)

**Bryant, 2010** – Bryant, J.A. (2010). Dismantling rural stereotypes. *Educational Leadership*. 68: 54-58.

**Cloete, 2014** – Cloete, M. (2014). Neville Alexander: Towards overcoming the legacy of Racial Capitalism in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Transformation: *Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*. 86: 30-47.

**Coates, 2007** – Coates, R.D. (2007). Social justice and pedagogy. *American Behavioural Scientist*. 71: 571-591.

**Conradie, 2015** – Conradie, M.S. (2015). Each colour in its own place: Positioning whiteness in South Africa through the Race Talk of undergraduate students. *Race, Gender, Class*. 22(1-2): 275-295.

**Conradie, 2016** – Conradie, M.S. (2016). Critical race theory and the question of safety in dialogues on race. *Acta Theologica*. 36(1): 5-26.

**Council on Higher Education, 2000** – Council on Higher Education. *Towards a new higher education institutional landscape: Meeting the equity, quality and social development imperatives of the 21st century*. Report of the Size and Shape Task Team. Pretoria: CHE, 2000.

**Cristobal-Fransi et al., 2020** – Cristobal-Fransi, E., Montegut-Salla, Y., Ferrer-Rosell, B., Daries, N. (2020). Rural cooperatives in the digital age: An analysis of the Internet presence and degree of maturity of agro-food cooperatives’ eCommerce. *Journal of Rural Studies*. 74: 55-66.

**Dani, Shah, 2016** – Dani, S., Shah, S. (2016). Call and Definition of Rural University. *IOSR Journal of Economics and Finance*. 7(1): 64-66.

**De Clercq, 2013** – De Clercq, F. (2013). Professionalism in South African education: The challenges of developing teacher professional knowledge, practice, identity and voice. *Journal of Education*. 57: 31-53.

**Department of Education, 2005** – Department of Education. Reflections on rural education in South Africa. Pretoria: Government Printers, 2005.

**Du Plessis, 2017** – Du Plessis, P. (2017). Problems and complexities in rural schools: Challenges of education and social development. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 5(20): 1109-1117.

**Du Plessis, Mestry, 2019** – Du Plessis, P., Mestry, R. (2019). Teachers for rural schools – a challenge for South Africa. *South African Journal of Education*. 39(1): 1-9.

**Dube, 2020** – Dube, B. (2020). Rural Online Learning in the Context of COVID-19 in South Africa: Evoking an Inclusive Education Approach. *Multidisciplinary Journal of Educational Research*. 10(2): 135-157.

**Ebrahim, 2009** – Ebrahim, T. (2009). Perceptions of factors affecting the pursuit of higher education among disadvantaged Grade 12 learners, (Unpublished Master’s research report). Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

**Erwin, 2012** – Erwin, K. (2012). Race and race thinking: reflections in theory and practice for researchers in South Africa and beyond. Transformation: *Critical Perspectives on Southern Africa*. 79(1): 93-113.

**Fleisch et al., 2010** – Fleisch, B., Shindler, J., Perry, H. (2010). Who is out of school? Evidence from the community survey 2007, South Africa. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.

**Flora, Flora, 2013** – Flora, C.B., Flora, J.L. (2013). Rural communities: Legacy and change (4th ed.). New York: Routledge.

**Fraser, 1997** – Fraser, N. (1997). Justice Interruptus: Critical reflections on the ‘postsocialist’ condition. New York: Routledge.

Fraser, 2008 – Fraser, N. (2008). Scales of justice: Reimagining political space in a globalising world. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Frattura, Tropinka, 2006 – Frattura, E.M., Tropinka, C. (2006). Theoretical underpinnings of separate educational programs: The social justice challenge continues. *Education and Urban Society*. 38(3): 327-344.

Frey et al., 1996 – Frey, L.K., Pearce, W.B., Pollock, M.A., Artz, L., Murphy, B.A.O. (1996). Looking for justice in all the wrong places: On a communication approach to social justice. *Communication Studies*. 47 (1-2): 110-127.

Geduld, Sathorar, 2016 – Geduld, D., Sathorar, H. (2016). Leading curriculum change: Reflections on how Abakhwezeli stole the fire. *South African Journal of Education*. 36(4): 1-13.

Gerwitz et al., 1995 – Gerwitz, S., Ball, S.J., Bowe, R. (1995). Markets, choice and equity in education. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Gerwitz, 2008 – Gerwitz, S. (1998). Conceptualising social justice in education: Mapping the territory. *Journal of Education Policy*. 13: 469-484.

Gibson, 2012 – Gibson, C.M. (2012). New times demand new scholarship I: Research universities and civic engagement: A leadership agenda. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*. 16(4): 235-270.

Gillborn et al., 2012 – Gillborn, D., Rollock, N., Vincent, C., Ball, S. (2012). “You got a pass, so what more do you want?” Race, class, and gender intersections in the educational experiences of black middle class. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. 15(1): 121-139.

Goldfarb, Grinberg, 2002 – Goldfarb, K.P., Grinberg, J. (2002). Leadership for social justice: Authentic participation in the case of a community centre in Caracas, Venezuela. *Journal of School Leadership*. 12: 157-173.

Hall, 2010 – Hall, K. (2019). Urban-rural distribution. Children count. Statistics on children in South Africa. Children’s Institute, University of Cape Town. [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://childrencount.uct.ac.za/indicator.php?domain=3&indicator=13>

Hendricks, 2010 – Hendricks, D. (2012). Poverty traps and social exclusion among children in South Africa. Western Cape: University of Stellenbosch.

Hlalele, 2012 – Hlalele, D. (2012). Social Justice and Rural Education in South Africa. *Perspectives in Education*. 30(1): 111-118.

Jain et al., 2011 – Jain, D., Herrera, A., Bernal S., Solórzano, D. (2011). Critical race theory and the transfer function: Introducing a transfer receptive culture. *Community College Journal of Research and Practice*. 35(3): 252-266.

Jansen, 2010 – Jansen, J. (2015). UFS waives application fees for studies in 2016. Free State: University of Free State Press.

Jansen, 2012 – Jansen, J. (2012). The fourth annual Bishop Rubin Peace Lecture: Nearness by resemblance; bearing witness to transformation on troubled campuses in a wounded country. Free State: University of Free State.

Koopman, 2013 – Koopman, O. (2013). Teachers’ experiences of implementing the further education and training (FET) science curriculum (Unpublished PhD thesis). Western Cape: University of Stellenbosch.

Kose, 2009 – Kose, B.W. (2009). The principal’s role in professional development for social justice: An empirically based transformative framework. *Urban Education*. 44(6): 628-663.

Leonardo, Porter, 2010 – Leonardo, Z., Porter, R. (2010). Pedagogy of fear: Toward a Fanonian theory of “safety” in race dialogue. *Race, Ethnicity and Education*. 13(2): 139-157.

Lewthwaite, 2015 – Lewthwaite, S. (2015). Book review: creative research methods in the social sciences: A practical guide. *LSE Review of Books*. [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/73572/>

Lloyd, 2000 – Lloyd, A. (2000). Partnership: Cautious commitment or fruitless devotion? A case of redefining the relationship between the community sector and the state. Galway: Community Workers Co-operative.

Lucier, 2019 – Lucier, K.N. (2019). *What Is a First-Generation College Student?* [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-is-a-first-generation-college-student-793482>

Mahlomaholo, 2010 – Mahlomaholo, S. (2009). Critical emancipatory research and academic identity. *Africa Education Review*. 6(2): 224-237.

- Malhoit, 2005** – *Malhoit, G.C.* (2005). Providing rural students with a high quality education: The rural perspective on the concept of educational adequacy. Arlington: Rural Education and Community Trust.
- Mattes, 2012** – *Mattes, R.* (2012). The ‘Born Frees’: The Prospects for generational change in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Australian Journal of Political Science*. 47(1): 133-153.
- Mbatha, 2016** – *Mbatha, M.G.* (2016). Teachers’ experiences of implementing the curriculum and assessment policy statement (CAPS) in Grade 10 in selected schools at Ndwedwe in Durban (Unpublished Master’s dissertation). Pretoria: Unisa.
- McQuaide, 2009** – *McQuaide, S.* (2009). Making education equitable in rural China through distance learning. *International Review Research in Open and Distance Learning*. 10(1): DOI: <https://doi.org/10.19173/irrodl.v10i1.590>
- Misselhorn, 2018** – *Misselhorn, A.* (2018). *Poverty deprives pupils of a proper education*. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.iol.co.za/capeargus/opinion/poverty-deprives-pupils-of-a-proper-education-14471475>. (date of access: 31.08.2020).
- Modica, 2012** – *Modica, M.* (2012). Constructions of race among religiously conservative college students. *Multicultural Perspectives*. 14(1): 38-43.
- Mzangwa, 2019** – *Mzangwa, S.T.* (2019). The effects of higher education policy on transformation in post-apartheid South Africa. *Cogent Education*. 6(1): e1592737.
- Parliament Monitoring Group, 2020** – Parliament Monitoring Group. COVID-19 Update & Department of Basic Education. 2020/21 Annual Performance Plan; with Ministry. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://pmg.org.za/committeemeeting/30135/?via=homepage-feature-card>
- Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2015** – Parliamentary Monitoring Group. (2015). Rural schooling/multi-grade schools/farms schools/non-viable schools; inclusive education implementation; special needs schools. Department briefing. Meeting summary. 23 June 2015. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/21135/>
- Phathutshedzo, 2016** – *Phathutshedzo, M.* (2016). Experiences of rural learners in accessing institutions of higher learning. Johannesburg: University of the Witwatersrand.
- Rakoma, Schulze, 2015** – *Rakoma, M., Schulze, S.* (2015). Challenges in Adult Education in the Rural Areas of Limpopo Province in South Africa. *Studies of Tribes and Tribals*. 13(2): 163-171.
- Republic of South Africa, 1996a** – Republic of South Africa. (1996a). Act No. 84, 1996: South African Schools Act, 1996. *Government Gazette*. 377(17579), November 15. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Republic of South Africa, 1996b** – Republic of South Africa. (1996). The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act 108 of 1996). Pretoria: Government Printer.
- Right to Education Initiative, 2021** – Right to Education Initiative. (2021). Understanding education as a right. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://www.right-to-education.org/page/understanding-education-right>
- Sabbagh, 2003** – *Sabbagh, C.* (2003). The dimension of social solidarity in distributive justice. *Social Science Information*. 42(2): 255-276.
- Sauvageot, da Graça, 2010** – *Sauvageot, C., da Graça, P.D.* (2007). Using indicators in planning education for rural people: A practical guide. Paris: International Institute for Educational Planning.
- Seepe, 2004** – *Seepe, S.* (2004). Speaking truth to power: Reflections on post-1994 South Africa. Pretoria: Vista University and Skotaville Media.
- Slater, 2014** – *Slater, J.* (2014). The ethical demise of the political policy of affirmative action as a motive for enhancing women and education in South Africa: A double setback of a reverse strategy. *Studia Historiae Ecclesiae*. 40(Suppl. 1): 329-348.
- Snyder, 2019** – *Snyder, H.* (2019). Literature review as a research methodology: An overview and guidelines. *Journal of Business Research*. 104: 333-339.
- Soudien, 2010** – *Soudien, C.* (2010). Grasping the nettle? South African higher education and its transformative imperatives. *South African Journal of Higher Education*. 24(6): 881-896.
- Spreen, Vally, 2010** – *Spreen, C.A., Vally, S.* (2006). Education rights, education policies and inequality in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 26: 352-362.
- Steyn, McEwan, 2013** – *Steyn, M., McEwan, H.* (2013). Hegemonic epistemologies in the context of Transformation: Race, space, and power in one post-apartheid South African town. *Critical Race and Whiteness Studies*. 9(1): 1-18.

- Stronks et al., 2016** – Stronks, K., Toebes, B., Hendriks, A., Ikram, U., Venkatapuram, S. (2016). Social justice and human rights as a framework for addressing social determinants of health: Final report of the Task group on Equity, Equality and Human Rights Review of social determinants of health and the health divide in the WHO European Region. Marmorvej: UN.
- Sue, 2013** – Sue, D.W. (2013). Race talk: The psychology of racial dialogues. *American Psychologist*. 68(8): 663-672.
- Thomas G. Carpenter Library, 2021** – Thomas G. Carpenter Library. (2021). Benefits of Conducting a Literature Review. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://libguides.unf.edu/litreview/benefits>
- Thorson, Maxwell, 2002** – Thorson, G., Maxwell, N. (2002). Small schools under siege: Evidence of resource inequality in Minnesota public schools. Minnesota State University, MN: Centre for Rural Policy and Development.
- Tikly, 2010** – Tikly, L. (2010). A roadblock to social justice? An analysis and critique of the South African education roadmap. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 31(1): 86-94.
- Tsanoff, 1956** – Tsanoff, R.A. (1956). Social morality and the principle of justice. *Ethics*. 67(1): 12-16.
- Uleanya et al., 2019** – Uleanya, C., Gamede, B.T., Uleanya, M.O. (2019). Distance Nexus Learning Challenges among Rural Undergraduate University Students. *Journal of Gender, Information & Development in Africa*. 8(1): 129-144.
- Uleanya et al., 2019a** – Uleanya, C., Rugbeer, Y., Olaniran, S.O. (2019). Decolonisation of education: Exploring a new praxis for sustainable development. *African Identities*. 17(2): 94-107.
- Uleanya et al., 2020** – Uleanya, C., Gamede, B.T., Kutame, A.P. (2020). Rural and irrelevant: Exploration of learning challenges among undergraduates' rural Universities. *African Identities*. 18(4): 377-391.
- Uleanya, Gamede, 2018** – Uleanya, C., Gamede, B.T. (2018). Correlates of Pedagogic Malpractices. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*. 13(2): 36-52.
- Uleanya, Rugbeer, 2020** – Uleanya, C., Rugbeer, Y. (2020). Investigation of first year learning experiences in a rural university in south africa. *Journal of Student Affairs in Africa*. 8(1): 41-56.
- United Nations..., 2021** – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (2021). What you need to know about the right to education. [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://en.unesco.org/news/what-you-need-know-about-right-education>
- Verwey, Quayle, 2012** – Verwey, C., Quayle, M. (2012). Whiteness, racism, and Afrikaner identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *African Affairs*. 111(445): 551-575.
- Vincent, 2008** – Vincent, L. (2008). The limitations of Inter-Racial contact: Stories from young South Africa. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. 31(8): 1426-1451.
- Wallace, 2007** – Wallace, I. (2007). A framework for revitalisation of rural education and training systems in sub-Saharan Africa: Strengthening the human resource base for food security and sustainable livelihoods. *International Journal of Educational Development*. 27(5): 581-590.
- Williams, Nierengarten, 2010** – Williams, J., Nierengarten, G. (2010). *Rural education issues: Rural administrators speak out*. Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association (AERA), April 30 – May 4, 2010: Denver, Colorado.
- Wilson-Strydom, 2011** – Wilson-Strydom, M. (2011). University access for social justice: a capabilities perspective. *South African Journal of Education*. 31(3): 407-418.
- World Bank, 2018** – World Bank. Overcoming poverty and inequality in South Africa. An Assessment of Drivers, Constraints and Opportunities, 2018. [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/530481521735906534/pdf/124521-REV-OUO-South-Africa-Poverty-and-InequalityAssessment-Report-2018-FINAL-WEB.pdf>
- World Bank, 2020** – World Bank. Remote learning and COVID-19. The use of educational technologies at scale across an education system as a result of massive school closings in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable distance education and online learning, 2020. [Electronic resource]. URL: <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/266811584657843186/pdf/Rapid-Response-Briefing-Note-Remote-Learning-and-COVID-19-Outbreak.pdf> (date of access: 16.03.2020).
- Yosso et al., 2010** – Yosso, T., Smith, W., Ceja, M., Solórzano, D. (2009). Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate for Latina/o undergraduates. *Harvard Educational Review*. 79(4): 659-691.