TOWARDS EFFECTIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN IN OPEN DISTANCE LEARNING

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Abstract

In response to the multiplying and dynamic forces impacting on higher education curricula and on lecturer autonomy in recent years, the University of South Africa (Unisa) implemented a curriculum policy in an attempt to provide an overview of the principles according to which curricula at Unisa should be developed. It is envisaged that these principles, once implemented, will result in Unisa's curricula meeting international good practices in curriculum design, and being responsive and learner-centred. However, while Unisa's policy process could be said to have been an exemplary one, it is common knowledge that policy outcomes often diverge from their intended goals. This paper uses the Geelhoed-Schouwstra model to analyse the policy. The research results show how disalignment between implicit policy requirements and the realities of the context in which a policy is to be implemented can be determined. Recommendations are made on how requirements of the Unisa Curriculum Policy regarding essential matters such as Africanisation and the development and use of African indigenous knowledge systems could be addressed to enhance successful implementation of the policy.

INTRODUCTION

It can safely be assumed that almost everyone actively involved in higher education would agree that the forces impacting on the curriculum have multiplied in recent years. In addition to academic claims, constitutional, socioeconomic, geopolitical and cultural forces all claim a stake in higher education curricula, which have resultantly become highly contested spaces. Whereas lecturers in the past enjoyed autonomy in determining what and how they wanted to teach, regulatory bodies, market demands, the corporate sector,
regional and national development priorities, the internationalisation of higher education, ongoing demands to accommodate cultural pluralities in curricula, and changing student profiles, all claim their shares in shaping the curriculum.

It is against this background that the Senate Tuition Committee established a Curriculum Task Team to oversee the formulation of a Unisa curriculum policy which would provide all stakeholders a common understanding of how the curricula offered by the University should respond to the forces referred to above. The curriculum process was underpinned by a workshop (to which all the academic colleges at Unisa sent representatives) to critically reflect on current assumptions and practices informing curriculum development; a literature review to consider international theorising and research in the field of curriculum praxis; and a comparative study of current policies in the South African higher education sphere in order to determine how statutory bodies and different higher education institutions in South Africa approach curriculum design. Eventually a draft policy document was formulated following Dunn’s (1994) ‘procedural’ five-step model. This draft document was circulated among individuals, academic departments and colleges for comment. The finalised policy document was approved by the Unisa Senate earlier this year (2 June 2010) and this policy is now in the process of being implemented.

While Unisa’s policy process could be said to have been an exemplary one, it is common knowledge that policy outcomes often diverge from the intended goals. One of the reasons for such diversion is that: ‘[U]nderlying the goals, objectives, instruments, methods and activities chosen, policy makers have assumptions and theories on how the policy is supposed to bring about the intended effects, and hence achieve the objectives and goals’ (Schouwstra and Ellman 2006,10). According to Schouwstra and Ellman (2006) such assumptions and theories are implicitly captured in the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying a policy. Hence, any attempt to enhance policy implementation or to improve the policy should best include an analysis of the frameworks underlying the policy to determine to which extent the characteristics of the environment where the policy is to be implemented and the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the policy are aligned.

As it is yet unclear what the nature of the institutional and conceptual frameworks are that underlie the Unisa Curriculum Policy, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the Unisa Curriculum Policy to uncover such frameworks in order to enhance policy implementation. The institutional framework referred to here, include consideration of ‘all stakeholders of a
policy or programme and comprises all structures and systems which are important to and exert an influence on a policy’ (Schouwstra and Ellman 2006, 11). It includes all political, social and legal structures, all systems and all stakeholders. The conceptual framework refers to ‘the ideology, the norms and values to which people adhere, to the theories and assumptions upon which they base their policies and programmes, the definitions they use, and their attitudes and behavior’ (Schouwstra and Ellman 2006, 11).

In view of the fact that the Unisa Curriculum Policy is still in the process of being implemented, the goal of the paper is not to evaluate whether the goals and objectives have been reached, and whether this has been done effectively. Instead, it is to identify factors which might cause the policy to diverge from the intended outcomes. Put differently it could be said that the purpose is to analyse the policy document in order to determine what the most essential requirements are (according to the institutional and conceptual frameworks that underlie the policy) for successful policy implementation.

While disalignment between such requirements and the context in which the policy is to be implemented inevitably impacts negatively on policy implementation, the impact of such disalignment is even worse in open distance learning environments where institutions respond to student needs based on statistical student profiles and lecturer-student interaction through new media, rather than face to face contact. As it is envisaged that the research results will serve as vehicle for a reflective dialectic between the policy and Unisa stakeholders who need to implement it; the policy and institutional systems; and the institution and future policies the aim could be said to be heuristic in nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

While policy analysis mainly derives from fields such as political studies, economics and social sciences, it has developed into an extensive field consisting of a wide variety of approaches to policy analysis. Depending on the context, such approaches adopt micro, meso or macro approaches to policy analysis. In order to appreciate the focus below on some macro approaches, it is necessary to put the challenges faced by Unisa regarding its curricula into perspective. In this regard, contemporary views on curriculum development reveal that the Unisa reality mirrors the challenges faced by higher education institutions worldwide. Underlying the curriculum turmoil is a strong social base, which acknowledges that ‘[C]urriculum … is not an abstract concept, which has some existence outside and prior
to human experience. Rather, it is a way of organizing a set of human educational practices’ (Grundy 1987, 19).

In spite of contextual challenges the curriculum ‘remains one of the most important products that Higher Education institutions offer to their customers’ (Barnett 2003, 23). In this regard it should be considered that a curriculum is ‘a highly symbolic concept’, which relates to ‘what the older generation chooses to tell the younger generations’ and encompasses discourses that are ‘historical, political, racial, gendered, phenomenological, autobiographical, aesthetic, theological, and international’ (Pinar 2004, 185-186). In other words, the curriculum is ‘more than a reality created by ourselves or by chance, it is a process – not of transmitting what is (absolutely) known but of exploring what is unknown’; and through exploration students' and teachers’ ‘clear land together’ (Doll 1993, 155). As such, the curriculum ‘needs to negotiate conflicts between different cultural groups … as well as take account of different versions and histories of modernity in pedagogic engagements’ (Singh & Doherty, 2004:22). In other words, curriculum is praxis – a dynamic interplay of theoretical concepts and professional work within a critically reflective mindset.

Due to the complexity of participating successfully within a global economic system and keeping abreast of ever-advancing technology, societies need not only a highly skilled workforce but also a greatly expanded one. Therefore, the Unisa Curriculum Policy restricts the concept of curriculum not only to what is to be learnt (content), but also to why it is to be learnt (rationale and underlying philosophy), how it is to be learnt (process), when it is to be learnt (structure of the learning process) and how the learning will be demonstrated in creative ways and achievement similarly assessed. As the policy has been designed within such a broad perspective on curriculum, I considered for the purposes of this study only the views of scholars who adopt a macro policy perspective. Such approaches focus on analysis for policy as well as analysis of policy, thereby providing guidelines for policy formulation as well as analysis.

Dunn (1994; 2004) adopts a pragmatic, critical and multidisciplinary approach to policy analysis. It is his opinion that although the theory and practice of policy analysis originated from a variety of fields (e.g. political science, economics and social sciences) it must be distinguished from these fields and treated within the context of its own theory. Dunn’s approach addresses five types of questions: ‘What is the nature of the problem for which a solution is sought? Which of two or more courses of activities should be chosen to solve the problem? What are the outcomes of choosing that course over the other? Does achieving
the outcomes contribute to solving the problem? What future outcomes can be expected if other courses of action are chosen?’ (Dunn 2004, 4). Within this context he proposes a procedural five step model for policy analysis.

It has been mentioned that this model of Dunn (1994) has been used during the formulation of the Unisa Curriculum Policy. The model consists of five phases: problem structuring (examining the conditions that gave rise to the policy problem); forecasting (investigating the future consequences of acting on policy alternatives – including doing nothing); recommendation (scrutinizing the relative worth of the consequences in solving or alleviating the problem), monitoring (considering information about present and past consequences of acting on policy alternatives), and evaluation (examining the value – and beneficiaries – of these consequences). It shows some correspondence with Bardach’s (1996) ‘eight-step model’.

In commenting on what policy analysis involves, Bardach (1996:4) suggests that the analyst’s final product should contain the following: ‘In a coherent narrative style you will describe some problem that needs to be mitigated or solved; you will lay out a few alternative courses of action which might be taken; to each course of action you will attach a set of projected outcomes that you think your client or audience would care about, suggesting the evidentiary grounds for your projections; if no alternative dominates all other alternatives with respect to all the evaluative criteria of interest, you will indicate the nature and magnitude of the tradeoffs implicit in different policy choices; depending on the client’s expectations, you might state your own recommendations as to which alternative should be chosen’.

According to Spicker (2006, 33) a “rational model” of policy making proceeds through the following stages: assessment of the environment; identification of aims and objectives; consideration of the alternative methods which are available; selection of methods; implementation; and evaluation. Spicker (2006:34) however, criticises such a rational model by saying that although it is ‘systematic and explicit’ it demands more from policy makers ‘than may be practical or feasible; the examination of alternative approaches and their consequences is time-consuming, expensive and often speculative’. The rational model of policy making also gives the impression that ‘there is a smooth progression from one stage of policy making to the next’ (Spicker 2006, 34), thereby ignoring the reality that policy makers learn as they go along, ‘and even if they do not learn, the things they do are likely to be changed by the experience of doing them’ (Spicker 2006, 34).
In his extended work on policy analysis, Prinsloo (2008) refers to Schwandt (2005), who emphasises the embeddedness of context in policy formulation processes and proposes that practical hermeneutics should be used as a way into the process (practical hermeneutics focuses on how individuals and groups shape and enact circumstances and events within their social world). Schwandt also highlights the importance of using both ‘operational intelligence’ and ‘critical intelligence’ in the process. In comparing these two kinds of intelligences, Schwandt (2005:87) observes that operational intelligence ‘is instruction on the status of means and means-end reasoning; it is directed at helping a client get to there from here. Critical intelligence, on the other hand, is the ability to question whether the there is worth getting to’.

While also considering the impact of the history and culture (as well as geography) on policy formulation, Schouwstra and Ellman (2006) present a ‘new explanatory model for policy analysis and evaluation’ referred to as the ‘extended Geelhoed and Schouwstra model’. The model is based on a previous basic (non-extended) framework which establishes what the goals and objectives of a certain policy are, what the policy methods are to be used, what activities will be undertaken, and how the intended results of that policy will be measured. This basic framework has been used by Geelhoed and Schouwstra (2005) to introduce nurses to methods of policy analysis and evaluation to determine whether policies and programs are achieving, or are likely to achieve, their intended outcomes.

According to Schouwstra and Ellman (2006) the extended framework is an improvement on the basic model in the sense that it also gives systematic attention to social factors which may cause policy ‘refraction’ or deviation from the intended outcomes. It is their opinion that:

> Explanatory factors in the outcome of policies may be ‘real world’ factors such as badly-defined performance indicators or cyclical economic problems, or they may be inherent to the conceptual and institutional framework to which policy makers adhere (Schouwstra and Ellman, 2006:30):

The extended Geelhoed-Schouwstra model could graphically be presented as follows (see Figure 1):

**INSERT Figure 1: Extended Geelhoed-Schouwstra model**
The extended Geelhoed-Schouwstra framework is influenced by the work of Leeuw (2003), and Leeuw, Van Gils, Ger and Kreft (1999) on policy theory. Leeuw et al. (1999) reconstruct and assess the underlying program logic in order to understand why policy programs and activities are successful. In doing so, they pay attention to the assumed (social and behavioural) premises or mechanisms that underly policies. Leeuw (2003) focuses on different methods for reconstructing or articulating the underlying and often implicit social and behavioral assumptions (program theory) that underlie policy instruments, programs and strategies. In doing so Leeuw (2003) also relies on the reconstruction of the program logic. In this regard it is important to note the distinction between policy or program theory and policy or program logic. Whereas program logic specifies the inputs and components of a program, as well as short-term and long-term outcomes, along with the assumed linkages among these, program theory refers to the underlying assumptions or conceptual framework on how a program is meant to cause the intended outcomes (Rogers, Hacsi, Petrosino, Huebner 2000).

Taylor (1997) adopts a critical discourse analytic approach to policy analysis by engaging with the policy as text in a specific context and with certain intended and unintended consequences. She illustrates that the policy as text is the result of a political struggle in which different discourses clash or combine to have distinctive consequences. It is her opinion that no matter how carefully policies are crafted and phrased, policy ‘refraction’ always occurs. In this regard policy refraction is not simply a matter of a ‘gap’ between policy objective and implementation. As implementation evolves, ‘older and powerful meanings may emerge,’ which not only impact on the implementation, but which changes the policy objectives’ (Taylor 1997:32). It is such refraction I focus on below when analyzing the Unisa Curriculum Policy below.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

My research approach for this paper is an analytic one in that I identify and describe ‘a single factor or a cluster of factors which at some level are constituents of one of the major systems’ being investigated’ (Seliger and Shohamy 1989, 27). The factors I focus on in this paper are the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the Unisa Curriculum Policy. As I investigate already existing data, my research design is descriptive (but not experimental) and of a practical hermeneutic nature. The latter derives from the fact that I evaluate existing conditions and explore alternatives to them.
As the extended Geelhout-Schouwstra model designed by Schouwstra and Ellman (2006) touch upon the very heart of this paper, namely the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying policies, I have used it as broad basis for my analyses. However, instead of considering the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying all six policy elements (goal, objective, method/instruments, activities, evaluation, performance), the limited scope of this paper only allowed me to analyse the policy activities and their underlying frameworks. My decision to focus on policy activities derives from the emphasis put by Shouwstra and Ellman (2006) on the link between well formulated activities and policy success. According to Shouwstra and Ellman (2006, 5):

The level of activities is the most explicit level in the policy-making cycle. On this level, the specific activities that should lead to realizing the goals and objectives are defined and implemented. It is important that the activities are defined so explicitly that they really can be implemented.

My focus on the policy activities is not to determine to what extent they are accompanied by good performance measures, instead, I look at the implicit requirements posed by the institutional and conceptual frameworks that underlie such activities. In considering the institutional framework underlying policy activities, I look specifically at implicit requirements relating to institutional systems and to stakeholders. In considering the conceptual framework underlying activities I consider implicit requirements posed by prevailing theories, assumptions, ideology and attitudes and behavior. I then compare these requirements with the characteristics of the current Unisa context to determine to which extent the requirements are aligned with the contextual reality.

Seeing that the Policy has been adopted, but is still in the process of being implemented, the analysis is partly prospective and partly retrospective. The retrospective nature of the analysis relates to the fact that the Policy has been formulated and approved and is in the process of being implemented. The prospective nature of the analysis relates to the fact that policy implementation by academic departments is only in its beginning phase, with the result that current analyses can still feed into the implementation process. According to (Dunn 2004, 10) retrospective analysis ‘involves the production and transformation of information after policies have been implemented’, while ‘[P]rospective policy analysis involves the production and transformation of information before policy actions are taken’ (Dunn 2004, 12).
Following Prinsloo (2006) I rely on Demetrio’s (2001) views that meaning is never fixed and that in analyzing policies policy analysts should engage not only with policy texts, but also with the historical and cultural context in which such texts were produced. Demetrio adopts a post-structural hermeneutic analytic approach and acknowledges that as a result of the ideologies and value judgments, which inevitably underlie texts, they do not have only one single meaning, but develop ‘an infinity of meaning’ (Demetrio 2001, online) whereby the policy analyst add yet more layers (thereby becoming part of the text). The significance of the historical and cultural contexts in which the Unisa Curriculum Policy has been formulated will become clear when I report my findings below.

FINDINGS

According to Dunn (1994) policy formulation is a response to the ‘felt existence’ (Dunn 1994, 248) of a problem situation. In view hereof, the policy analyst needs to identify the policy problem in order to be able to evaluate how valid the policy response is. The problem situation to which the Unisa Curriculum Policy responds has been referred to in the introduction of this article. It includes matters such as: the multiplication of forces impacting on higher education curricula; an increasing number of stakeholders claiming their shares in shaping higher education curricula; different definitions of graduateness and what a university education should entail; increased mobility of people, programmes and institutions; an increased interconnectedness of the higher education enterprise across the globe; a rising prominence of collaborative research; a sensitivity for the crises facing the African continent; and different approaches to teaching and learning.

Against this background, the policy problem is formulated as follows:

In the specific context of Unisa, we need to have a common understanding of how the curricula offered by the University should respond to globalisation, internationalisation, national development objectives and the skills shortage, and to the broader crises facing humanity, namely international and regional conflicts, poverty, sustainability, corruption, health priorities and pandemics, economic instability, environmental concerns and living in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world’ (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 10)

As ideological views impact on education it is proposed that Unisa should approach the policy problem in a unique way:
As no education is neutral, Unisa will critically and creatively explore its own unique contributions to seeking solutions to the challenges facing communities on the African continent without losing sight of the impact of the internationalisation and globalisation on curricula and the skills required of our graduates (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 11).

Analysis of the Unisa policy document reveals that the policy objective is aligned with these propositions. It is formulated as follows:

*The policy aims to provide an overview of the principles according to which curricula at Unisa will be developed* (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 11)

The policy goal is referred to by saying:

*Unisa is committed to continuously grow ‘Towards the African university in the service of humanity’, and it is envisaged that the Unisa curriculum policy will … help Unisa achieve its mission and vision* (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010,11)

The proposed method to realise the objective and goal is to adhere to six broad principles:

*There are six broad principles guiding curricula at Unisa, namely: responsiveness, learner-centredness, accountability, curriculum structure, quality assurance and impact* (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 12)

Due to the limited scope of this paper I do not consider all six policy principles that are proposed to guide curriculum development at Unisa. Instead, I focus on the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the ‘responsiveness’ principle. Responsiveness, within the Unisa context ‘refers to: a sensitivity and continuous awareness of societal expectations, reflected in our qualifications and curricula as they respond to the needs and challenges faced by our students and community’ (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 12). The Unisa Curriculum Policy specifies two main fields to which Unisa curricula should respond: Unisa’s ODL character and vision; and Unisa’s contexts. The latter includes: responsiveness to higher education (HE) regulatory frameworks; responsiveness to Unisa’s local context; responsiveness to Unisa’s continental context; and responsiveness to Unisa’s international context.
Responsiveness to Unisa’s character and vision and responsiveness to higher education (HE) regulatory frameworks are guided not only by the Unisa Curriculum Policy, but also by the Open Distance Learning Policy (accepted in 2008) and the National Higher Education Quality Framework (accepted in 2007) respectively. As the restricted nature of this paper does not allow analyses of these policies in addition to the Unisa Curriculum Policy, this paper will focus on the policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s local, continental and international contexts and the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying these contexts. My point of departure is that analysis and evaluation of these frameworks with regard to a segment of the policy, will give a good indication of their significance in terms of the policy as a whole, thereby emphasizing their importance for policy success. According to the Unisa Curriculum Policy (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010,14-15) the activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s local context are as follows:

Academic departments
- ‘address the development of transportable skills in all curricula depending on the focus of the curriculum’
- ‘accommodate as far as possible the diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds of learners’
- include ‘multilingual word/phrase lists in all modules’ (with the assistance of Language Services)

Colleges
- ‘determine the need for an extended curriculum (and/or other academic support) appropriate for students who, after proper pre-registration assessment, need extra support and additional modules (an extended curriculum)”

Unisa as institution
- provides alternative pathways for under-prepared (academic and non-academic) when they register’
- identifies ‘students at risk, who need additional support’

As the only dedicated comprehensive distance education institution in South Africa, Unisa is the only higher education institution within reach of many students who cannot attend residential higher education institutions, or who failed to meet their entry requirements. Thus Unisa has more than 260,000 students, or whom the majority comes from disadvantaged backgrounds. The student body as a whole is hugely diverse in terms of culture, language, socio-economic income and background. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that policy activities would be geared towards: accommodation of the linguistic, cultural and religious...
background of students, extra support and alternative pathways for academically challenged students and towards minimum admission requirements for entry into the institution. However, analysis of the Unisa Curriculum Policy reveals that underlying the policy activities are institutional and conceptual frameworks which implicitly assume that the Unisa environment is geared towards an optimally geared to support the policy activities. In other words, the policy is in the process of being implemented without first considering the assumptional frameworks which might jeopardize policy success.

In Table 1 below I compare the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s local context with the prevalent Unisa reality (characteristics) in this regard.

INSET Table 1: Institutional and conceptual framework underlying the Unisa Curriculum Policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s local context

As is clear from the comparisons made above, there are various degrees of disalignment between the institutional and conceptual assumptions underlying policy activities and the prevalent state of affairs in this regard. The institutional framework underlying policy activities require that Unisa should have alternative pathways in place for under-prepared students to support them when they register. It is also assumed that: an effective Admission Policy in place to deal with the minimum criteria for admission and readmission; an effective system is in place to identifying at risk students; and that an effective student support system is in place. However, the prevalent state of affairs at Unisa is that the university is still in the process of designing certificates to allow alternative pathways for under-prepared students. The University is also still in the process of putting an Admission Policy in place and while Unisa has a fairly effective system to identify at risk students, the system is not necessarily used in a co-ordinated way in colleges. The institution is also still struggling to put an effective student support system is not in place. While it could be assumed that the necessary systems will eventually be in place, policy refraction is bound to occur until such systems have been successfully implemented and tested.

Implicit assumptions made about stakeholders is that: academic departments and lecturers would equip students with transportable skills (in addition to discipline-related skills), accommodate the diverse language background of learners, include multilingual word/phrase lists in all modules, and design modules for students who need extra support. However, the Unisa reality is that Unisa lecturers are discipline experts and not necessarily educational experts or linguists. Therefore, many academic departments and lecturers still
largely focus on the development of discipline-related skills and are not necessarily inclined towards the development of generic (transportable skills) or the accommodation of language needs in courses. In fact, academic departments largely teach in English (without consideration of the diverse language population they are serving) and do not necessarily have the capacity or desire to design and include multilingual terminology lists in the study package. While the policy suggests that Unisa Language Services should support academic departments in this endeavour, the department of Language Services does not currently have the capacity to do so).

Even harder to address, are requirements pertaining to the conceptual framework which underlies the policy. Not only are there not adequate measures in place to determine if academic departments attend to the development of transportable skills, policy makers also merely assume that student success will be enhanced if multilingual terminology lists are included in modules. As the focus of current projects promoting the inclusion of such lists in modules is on language development rather than the enhancement of student throughput, it is not yet clear if such lists will improve student success. While the university is currently busy with a research project to measure the impact of such lists, however more will have to be done to determine what the nature of such multilingual terminology lists should be in educational environments aimed at improving student performance. It is also not yet clear how colleges will determine the need for an extended curriculum and how they will respond to the challenge in a co-ordinated manner.

The disalignment between Unisa policy activities and the current state of affairs at Unisa referred to above is also prevalent when the requirements underlying policy activities relating to Unisa’s continental context are compared with the current Unisa state of affairs in this regard. According to the Unisa Curriculum Policy (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 16) the activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s continental context are as follows:

- ‘utilise existing and new African knowledge and insights that will enhance and ensure growth and sustainable development’
- ‘seek out knowledge and the application thereof that is relevant and can effectively be applied on the continent to achieve sustainable growth’
- ‘promote African thought, philosophy, interests and epistemologies’
- ‘develop African knowledges and IKS as knowledge systems in their own right’
- ‘offer alternative worldviews to the dominance of Western canons and contribute to a multiplicity of voices, alternative canons and diversity in thought’
‘do not promote a new hegemony but rather stimulate curricula as spaces for interplay between diverse knowledge systems’

Indigenous knowledge systems (IKS) referred to above include:

the systems of knowledge in philosophy, science, technology, astronomy, education, mathematics, engineering etc that are grounded in the total ‘cultural’ (very broadly defined) heritage of a nation or society, and maintained by communities as they negotiate their sustenance and livelihoods. These systems are undergirded by an interlocking web of ethical, social, religious and philosophical sub-systems that determine broad patterns of cognition which provide them with a rational essence and emotional tone (Unisa Curriculum Policy 2010, 16)

Table 2 below considers the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the Unisa Curriculum Policy with regard to policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s continental context:

As can be concluded from the policy activities referred to in Table 2, Unisa has recently embarked on a concerted drive towards Africanisation and the development of indigenous knowledge systems. According to the Unisa Curriculum Policy (2010, 16):

Africanisation is rooted within the African common identities, largely defined by their histories of ethnic war and a shared struggle against colonialism. These historical legacies have impacted on growth and development, as well as the social, economic and political contexts on the continent. The historical legacies have prompted the development of more democratic governance and sounder economic policies. In addition, a sense of supportive cohesion has been created in terms of which the majority of Africans feel comfortable with embracing mutual collectiveness and ubuntu.

As is clear from the implicit requirements of the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the policy activities, the success of these activities rests on the premises that: curriculum stakeholders have adequate access to sources on African indigenous knowledge systems; that they utilise existing and new African knowledge and insights (that will enhance and ensure growth and sustainable development) in designing study material; that the
knowledge which is created can effectively be applied on the continent to achieve sustainable growth; that curriculum stakeholders promote African thought, philosophy, interests and epistemologies; and that they develop African knowledges and indigenous knowledge systems as systems in their own right. It is also assumed that: curriculum stakeholders know how to offer alternative worldviews to counteract the dominance of Western canons; and that they know how to stimulate curricula as spaces for interplay between diverse knowledge systems.

However, African indigenous knowledge systems have not necessarily been adequately documented, thus lecturers still focus on discipline related knowledge and do not necessarily utilise existing and new African knowledge and insights that will enhance and ensure growth and sustainable development. While Unisa curriculum stakeholders seek out knowledge and the application thereof that is relevant and can effectively be applied on the continent to achieve sustainable growth, they do not necessarily ‘promote African thought, philosophy, interests and epistemologies. This largely happens because lecturers do not necessarily know how to offer alternative worldviews which rest on other canons than Western ones. In this regard Ramose (2004, 138) argues that:

…for at least three centuries since the conquest of the indigenous people in the unjust wars of colonisation the education curriculum in South Africa did not include African philosophy. For the colonial conqueror and the successor in title thereto the indigenous conquered peoples had neither an epistemology nor a philosophy worth including in any educational curriculum.

Dr Gada Kadoda (computer scientist, independent researcher and collaborating lecturer from the University of Khartoum and the University of Kassala in Sudan) puts things in perspectives when she observes that: ‘In creating a shift from the reliance on Western knowledge systems to indigenous knowledge systems, we have to start form what we do not have’ (Focus 2010,13). She motivates her statement by referring to the lack of documentation on indigenous knowledge systems. In other words, the conclusion to be drawn is that while policy activities of the Unisa Curriculum Policy are admirable, the necessary foundational requirements are not yet in place to support policy success with regard to responsiveness to Unisa’s contexts. Policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s international context also seem to rest on assumptions which can not necessarily be met fully yet.
According to the Unisa Curriculum Policy (2010,11):

The internationalisation of higher education is notable for the multiple ways in which it has manifested around the world. Although each local, national and regional context presents unique characteristics, several broad trends can be identified globally. These developments include the mobility of people, programmes and institutions; the rising prominence of collaborative research; evolving curricula; approaches to teaching and learning; and an increasingly heightened sense of the interconnectedness of the higher education enterprise across the globe.

As is clear below, policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s international context requires a consideration of matters such as: the increasingly international characteristic of Unisa’s student profile; the increasing globalisation of the application contexts of curricula; the preparation of students for local and international application contexts; and encouragement of the use of different cultural viewpoints, examples and local and international case studies. According to the Unisa Curriculum Policy (2010, 17) such policy activities relate to all curriculum stakeholders and they include the following:

All stakeholders
- ‘take seriously the increasingly international characteristic of our student profile and the increasing globalisation of the application contexts of our curricula’
- ‘prepare students for local and international application contexts’
- encourage ‘the use of different cultural viewpoints, examples and local and international case studies’

In their discussion of the African university, Van Wyk and Higgs (2007, 68) refer to the tension ‘between the orientation towards indigenous values and problems, on the one hand, and addressing global problems, on the other hand, a tension that can only be alleviated or resolved by communication across cultural boundaries’. Van Wyk and Higgs (2007) hereby highlight some of the tensions in the internationalization and Africanization debate. However, Botha (2000), and Knight (2006) point out that although Africanisation and internationalisation could be seen as two different poles, ‘several points of touch’ could be identified (Botha 2000, 2008). These include cultural exchange, cultural agreements and multicultural education, cultural agreements, cultural exchange and intercultural teaching approaches. In Table 3 below I show how the institutional and conceptual frameworks
underlying policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa's international context could lead to policy refraction as a result of the tensions referred to above.

**INSERT Table 3: Institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying Unisa Curriculum**

**Policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s international context**

Underlying the policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa's international context, are the assumptions that: academic departments and lecturers have access to a thorough student profiling system showing the international characteristic of Unisa’s student profile; lecturers keep abreast of and prepare their students for the increasing globalisation of the application contexts of their curricula; lecturers from different disciplines prepare students to face national, continental and international challenges and that African thoughts and IKS are in demand in globalised application contexts.

However, while Unisa has a thorough student profiling system in place, all lecturers do not necessarily use it. As a result, they often teach towards an amorphous mass of students without necessarily being aware of the nationality of their students. As a survey has not been done yet to determine if lecturers are keeping abreast of the increasing globalisation of the application contexts of their curricula, it is not clear if Unisa curricula focus on both local and international application contexts. Research also still needs to be done to determine if Unisa curricula focus on both local and international application contexts. While the interest in indigenous knowledge systems is growing worldwide, Unisa lecturers need to be made aware in which way African thoughts and IKS tie in with internationalization.

**CONCLUSION**

What has become obvious from the analyses above is that in order to effectively analyze policies, a framework is required which not only identifies the overt characteristics of policies, but also the covert ones. While overt characteristics such as policy goals, objectives, methods and activities receive attention in a number of analytic models the overt characteristics, relating to implicit frameworks or assumptions have up to now received little attention. In this regard the extended Geelhoed-Schouwstra model used for the purposes of this paper seems to be a very useful exception as it allows the researcher to reveal what exactly the essential requirements of a policy are with regard to the institutional and conceptual framework of a particular institution. Hence, it allows for an evaluation and redress of possible factors which could cause policy refraction.
This model could be used effectively to analyse all policies during or after implementation to determine explanatory factors causing a policy to diverge from the intended outcomes. Not only does this framework allow the analyst to consider overt factors such as badly-defined policy activities and performance indicators, it also allows for an evaluation of the conceptual and institutional frameworks underlying policies and the implicit requirements posed by such frameworks. Policy evaluation by means of this model generates information to control and steer policy processes, thereby allowing for improved achievement of the objectives and goals that have been set. Such corrective activities are of particular importance with regard to institutions of open distance learning where lecturers are not necessarily in direct contact with their students, therefore they are not confronted with cultural, linguistic and socio-economic matters relating to students in a direct manner. Hence, it is fairly easy to design a curriculum without considering diversity of most every kind that can be imagined.

If it is considered that the research results presented above show that the current Unisa characteristics with regard to responsiveness to the institution’s local, continental and international responsiveness are not thoroughly aligned with the institutional and conceptual requirements posed by the frameworks underlying the policy, it should be concluded that some serious negotiation with stakeholders need to take place to ensure policy success. According to Schouwstra and Ellman (2006, 9) ‘the conceptual framework on which a policy or programme is based is very important, as people with different backgrounds tend to have different views on a specific policy or programme’. Thus, when a policy is implemented ‘the intended effects of that policy may well be very different’ because ‘people adhere to their own different definitions of central or main concepts of a policy’ without considering the implicit requirements.

Considering that the institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the policy activities of the Unisa Curriculum Policy derive from an institutional petition for transformation and that the required transformation relates (within the limited context of analyses done for this study) largely to a drive towards supporting Unisa academically challenged students in order to improve student success and Africanising the Unisa community, its practices and curricula. However, as transformation is an ongoing process to bring about fundamental, intensive and far reaching changes to the core concepts and values on which the institution is founded, stakeholders need to be suitably sensitized about the implications and scope of the change that is being introduced. It is also vitally important that the necessary support structures are put in place to sustain the change.
Considering that stakeholders affected by the policy are from diverse cultural groups (with loaded political backgrounds) and hold different views on knowledge, it is safe to assume that all might not be equally devoted to the need for Africanisation and the inclusion of indigenous knowledge systems in the curriculum. The drive towards multilingualism might also not be received in a similar positive light by all stakeholders. Moreover, the drive towards a more pluralist view to curriculum development may also cause resistance. All curriculum stakeholders may not be equally positive about an approach whereby knowledge is seen as situated and localized in various traditionally contextualised ‘knowledges’. Instead, it would be easier to stick to the comfort zone of well-known Western epistemologies.

As the transformation envisioned at Unisa on curriculum level implies the creation of instability in curriculum stakeholders’ view of curriculum, Unisa might need to embark on a new sensemaking journey by supporting the policy implementation process with situational initiatives aimed at re-envision and re-framing existing perceptions on curriculum design. However, as analyses for this paper were restricted to but a sub-section of the Unisa Curriculum Policy, it might be necessary to add to extend these analyses to include the implicit requirements underlying the activities of the whole policy in order to prevent policy refraction which might impact negatively on Unisa’s goal to continuously grow ‘Towards the African university in the service of humanity’.

REFERENCES


Figure 1: Extended Geelhoed-Schouwstra model
Table 1: Institutional and conceptual framework underlying the Unisa Curriculum Policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s *local context*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying responsiveness to Unisa’s <em>local context</em></th>
<th>Prevalent Unisa characteristics regarding responsiveness to its <em>local context</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional (system) requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional (system) characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1 Unisa has alternative pathways in place for under-prepared (academic and non-academic) to allow them to continue with their studies</td>
<td>1.1 Unisa is in the process of designing certificates to allow alternative pathways for under-prepared students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2 Unisa’s Admission Policy deals effectively with the minimum criteria for admission and readmission to Unisa</td>
<td>1.2 Unisa is still in the process of putting an Admission Policy in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3 Unisa has a system in place to identify at risk students</td>
<td>1.3 Unisa has a fairly effective system in place to identify at risk students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4 Additional support is available for at risk students</td>
<td>1.4 Unisa is still in the process of putting a student support system in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stakeholder requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stakeholder characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.5 Lecturers actively drive the development of transportable skills (in addition to discipline-related skills)</td>
<td>1.5 In some instances academic departments and lecturers still largely focus on the development of discipline-related skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.6 Academic departments accommodate the diverse language background of learners</td>
<td>1.6 Academic departments largely teach in English with no multilingual terminology lists included in study packages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7 Unisa Language Services has the capacity to develop multilingual word/phrase lists for all modules</td>
<td>1.7 Unisa Language Services does not have the capacity to develop multilingual word/phrase lists for all modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.8 Appropriate additional modules for students who need extra support are designed and prescribed in a co-ordinated fashion</td>
<td>1.8 Colleges do not necessarily use an extended curriculum in a co-ordinated way.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theories and assumptions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theories and assumptions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9 Academic departments adopt a holistic, developmental view of curriculum development</td>
<td>1.9 Many academic departments adopt a discipline focused view on curriculum development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.10 Student success will be enhanced if multilingual word/phrase lists are included in all modules</td>
<td>1.10 Unisa does not yet have data showing that student success is enhanced if multilingual word/phrase lists are included in modules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitude and behaviour</strong></td>
<td><strong>Attitude and behaviour</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.11 All lecturers will be sensitive towards language, culture and religion</td>
<td>6.11 Lecturers are not equally sensitive towards matters relating to language and culture</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2: Institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying the Unisa Curriculum Policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s *continental* context:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying Unisa’s continental context</th>
<th>Prevailing Unisa characteristics regarding its continental context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1 Lecturers have adequate access to sources on African IKS systems</td>
<td>2.1 African IKS systems have not necessarily been documented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stake holder requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stake holder characteristics</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2 Lecturers utilise existing and new African knowledge and insights that will enhance and ensure growth and sustainable development</td>
<td>2.2 Lecturers often still focus on discipline related knowledge and do not utilise existing and new African knowledge and insights that will enhance and ensure growth and sustainable development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3 Lecturers seek out knowledge and the application thereof that is relevant and can effectively be applied on the continent to achieve sustainable growth</td>
<td>2.3 Lecturers do seek out knowledge and the application thereof that is relevant and can effectively be applied on the continent to achieve sustainable growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4 Lecturers promote African thought, philosophy, interests and epistemologies</td>
<td>2.4 Lecturers do not necessarily ‘promote African thought, philosophy, interests and epistemologies’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5 Lecturers develop African knowledges and IKS as knowledge systems in their own right</td>
<td>2.5 Lecturers do not necessarily have access to African knowledges and IKS and do not necessarily develop these as knowledge systems in their own right</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theories and assumptions**

2.6 Lecturers know how to offer alternative worldviews to the dominance of Western canons and contribute to a multiplicity of voices, alternative canons and diversity in thought

**Attitude and behaviour**

2.7 Lecturers know how to stimulate curricula as spaces for interplay between diverse knowledge systems
Table 3: Institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying Unisa Curriculum Policy activities relating to responsiveness to Unisa’s *international* context

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional and conceptual frameworks underlying Unisa’s international context</th>
<th>Unisa characteristics regarding its international context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Institutional requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Institutional requirements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1 Academic departments and lecturers have access to a thorough student profiling system showing the international characteristic of our student profile</td>
<td>3.1 Unisa has a thorough student profiling system in place, however not all lecturers make use of it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stake holder requirements</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stake holder requirements</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2 Lecturers are keeping abreast of the increasing globalisation of the application contexts of their curricula</td>
<td>3.2 A survey has not been done yet to determine if lecturers are keeping abreast of the increasing globalisation of the application contexts of their curricula</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3 Lecturers from different disciplines prepare students to face national, continental and international challenges</td>
<td>3.3 Research still needs to be done to determine if Unisa curricula focus on both local and international application contexts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theories and assumptions</strong></td>
<td><strong>Theories and assumptions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4 African thoughts and IKS are in demand in globalised application contexts</td>
<td>3.4 Lecturers need to be aware in which way African thoughts and IKS tie in with internationalisation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>