

Editorial

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The need for continuous improvement within education institutions is a *sine qua non*. World-class universities whether those be in the Ivy League in the US, the Russell Group in the UK, top QS-rated universities in Asia, and school systems such as those in Finland and Singapore, all endeavour to drive up their already high achievements whilst weaker institutions embark upon quality improvement programmes. In South Africa, leaders of the research-led universities guard and promote their reputations whilst others seek prominence for their institutions' strategic niches through the achievement of their vision and mission statements. School principals scan the matric results to see how their students have fared and tellingly it is not always the preserve of the best resourced that achieve excellent results. For instance, in 2016 a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal achieved 180 distinctions whilst a recognised historically disadvantaged school achieved a 100% pass rate each year.

Needless to say, student attainment in raw figures is not the goal of education. The purpose of education is both a public and private good. Public in that the generation, dissemination and application of knowledge contributes to the socio-economic development and prosperity of a country and enhances its competitiveness in the global economy.¹ Private in that it provides students with the opportunity to gain the knowledge, skills and competencies to further their own learning so that they can strive to realise their potential, participate effectively in the economy, and be engaged citizens. In short to flourish as persons and lead fulfilled lives.²

For these desiderata to be attained, education provision at every level needs to be of the highest quality. No matter how good an education institution is, there is always room for enhancement. This is recognised by the South African government in the various grants given to institutions to enhance their provision. Improvement takes place in areas such as governance and management, teaching and learning, research, and community engagement activities. Whilst it is difficult to prioritise one over the other since all impact on the student experience and thereby student success, high quality teaching in the class or lecture rooms cannot be overemphasised. The articles in this second volume of the 2018 *Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning (IJTL)* bear testimony to this.

The relevance and currency of programme offerings provides the foundation for high quality teaching and learning to take place. In the first article of this edition, the authors examine the impact of the move

1 Dowling, *IJTL* 2006

2 Dowling, *IJTL* 2006

from industrialism to a knowledge economy and the implications for programmes. Their research findings show that the curriculum of yesteryear is no longer relevant and thus there needs to be a concomitant shift in academic programmes. They found that this has not taken place in Library and Information Science education in Zimbabwe. A number of recommendations are offered.

The role of the teacher in student learning cannot be overstated. This is the crux of the following two articles. In the first, the authors conducted a meta-analysis of the literature in Africa concerning teacher efficacy and classroom management. The correlation between student achievement and teacher efficacy was significant. This surely holds for teachers engaged at all levels of education. In the next article, the ethical and conscientious practice of teaching in ensuring quality is explored through identifying pedagogic malpractices in two sub-Saharan African universities. A number of malpractices in relation to pedagogy were found which have a negative impact on student performance. Recommendations were made to address this situation.

The fourth article deals with the thorny issue of student throughput and retention. Whilst its focus is on postgraduates, this is often a seemingly intractable problem for universities at the undergraduate level. As a result of the investigation a number of causes were identified and recommendations were given to tackle these.

The learning materials used in programme delivery are important components of successful teaching and learning. These need to be chosen thoughtfully and interrogated for effectiveness. This is the point of the next paper in which the authors discuss their study on the use of anthropomorphised graphics in student learning material. Contrary to other studies, non-significant results were found. Further exploration is needed.

The role of external consultants in supporting school improvement is under-analysed and thus often underestimated. The sixth article provides a thoughtful analysis of the attributes and skills that such consultants can bring to this complex task and be of benefit to the school's performance.

Implicit in the above articles, is the importance of professional development opportunities for faculty. The seventh article decries the one-size-fits-all approach to professional development and seeks to understand the contexts and in particular the way that culture - national and institutional - impact on pedagogy. The research was conducted in an English-speaking university in Thailand with findings compared to relevant literature. Context, individual competence, and career growth need to be considered so that tailored professional development programmes are offered to academics. Monitoring mechanisms need to be put in place to assess the effectiveness of such programmes. By doing so, the quality of programme offerings and teaching and learning will be enhanced, which will have a positive impact on student success.

The need to ensure a country has the human resources to drive and service the economy underpins the article in Practitioners' Corner. South-Africa, in common with other countries, has a shortage of engineers and technicians. The authors report on a project which seeks to increase enrolment of students in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics at higher education level. This model shows considerable promise.

Doctoral Corner comprises abstracts of recently awarded doctoral degrees which are concerned with the improvement of education provision and student success whether it be at the policy, institutional or individual level. The publication of abstracts alerts researchers and practitioners to new research in their areas of interest.

Lastly, it is with deep regret that I announce the departure of Marla Koonin, our journal managing editor. During Marla's tenure, she has guided the journal through the development and implementation of robust policies and procedures, accreditation by the Ministry of Higher Education, and the move to being a fully online journal. We wish her well as she embarks on the next stage of her already successful career. She will be sorely missed.

I take this opportunity to introduce and welcome the new managing editor of the *IJTL*, Dr Brenda van Wyk.