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32ND ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Hosted by the University of Venda

Theme: Towards Excellence: Enhancing Funding Pathways and Student Outcomes through Human-Centric AI, Impactful Research, and Operational Intelligence

27 - 31 OCTOBER 2025

Kalahari Waterfront, Thohoyandou, Limpopo

University of Venda
Creating Future Leaders

CREATING FUTURE LEADERS

Message from the SAAIR President

Dear Conference Delegates,

It is an honour to welcome you to the 32nd Annual SAAIR Conference, hosted by the University of Venda, under the theme "Towards Excellence: Enhancing Funding Pathways and Student Outcomes through Human-Centric AI, Impactful Research, and Operational Intelligence."

Since its establishment SAAIR has remained committed to advancing the understanding, planning, and operational effectiveness of higher education institutions in Southern Africa and beyond. The Association continues to serve as a professional home for practitioners dedicated to embedding data-informed decision-making, ethics, and equity within higher education systems.

The 2025 Conference builds on SAAIR Exco term office unifying framework DISCO – Data, Impact, Strategy, Capacity, and Optimisation. These five pillars guide our shared effort to strengthen institutional research practice, promote evidence-based governance, and enhance institutional resilience through innovation and collaboration. DISCO highlights the role of data in driving strategic impact, building capacity, and optimising operations through human-centred AI.

We are privileged to welcome a distinguished line-up of keynote speakers, invited speakers and workshop facilitators who bring diverse expertise and inspiration to our programme: Prof Riel Miller, Prof Thandi Lewin, Dr Erik Atchison, Dr Emily Mabote, and Prof Mosia Moeketsi, whose contributions strengthen our dialogue on futures literacy, funding sustainability, data governance, and responsible AI. We also look forward to the panel discussion on professionalising Institutional Research and related fields through a formal qualification, which will shape the future of our discipline and elevate professional standards.

My sincere appreciation goes to the SAAIR Executive Committee and Mrs Carin Strydom, the University of Venda leadership and Institutional Planning team, Conference sponsors: IDSC and Quantum Solution, and all those who have worked tirelessly to make this event possible. I also extend heartfelt thanks to all presenters and participants; your participation ensures that SAAIR remains a vibrant community of learning and professional growth. May this conference inspire meaningful connections, critical reflection, and collaborative action that advance excellence in higher education.

Warm regards,

Elizabeth Booi
President, Southern African Association for Institutional Research (2025–2026)

Dr Sannah Mativandlela

Message from Conference Chairperson, 32nd SAAIR Conference

It is my great honour and pleasure to welcome you all to the 32nd Southern African Association for Institutional Research (SAAIR) Conference, hosted by the University of Venda (UNIVEN). This Conference brings together distinguished higher education practitioners, scholars, researchers, industry leaders, academic staff and students who share a common passion for advancing knowledge and fostering innovation.

This year's theme, *"Towards Excellence: Enhancing Funding Pathways and Student Outcomes through Human-Centric AI, Impactful Research, and Operational Intelligence"*, invites us to reflect deeply on how we can collaboratively shape a future defined by excellence, sustainability, and human-centred progress within the higher education sector.

As Chairperson of the 32nd SAAIR Conference, I am grateful to the SAAIR Executive Committee, the UNIVEN Organising Committee, higher education practitioners, partners, and sponsors whose commitment and hard work have made this event possible. I also extend heartfelt appreciation to our keynote speakers, presenters and participants for their invaluable contributions and engagement.

I encourage you to take full advantage of this opportunity to share ideas and build networks that extend beyond this Conference. May our collective efforts lead to meaningful dialogue and lasting change in our various fields of knowledge and communities to enhance student access and success in higher education.

May this be a truly enriching and inspiring experience for us all.

Warm regards,
Sannah Patience Mativandlela
Conference Chairperson
Director Institutional Research and Planning, University of Venda

PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS: 27 October 2025 VENUE: MGB/ 2TEN		
08:30-09:00	**Tea and Registration**	
09:00-09:20	Welcome Address	SAAIR President
PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS		
09:30-10:30	WORKSHOP 1 **Dr E Atchison** Vice President for Strategic Research Arkansas State University System Data literacy and visualization training for institutional leaders and IR professionals with Data Governance Implementation	
10:30-11:00	**MORNING TEA BREAK**	
11:00-13:00	**PRE-CONFERENCE WORKSHOPS Continued**	
	WORKSHOP 1 (continued)	

13:00–14:00	LUNCH BREAK	
14:00–15:30	WORKSHOP 2 **Prof R Miller** Former Head of Foresight and Future Literacy at UNESCO. Senior Fellow at: Ecole des Ponts Business School (France); U. New Brunswick (Canada); NIFU (Norway); U. Witwatersrand (South Africa); Future Africa at U. Pretoria (South Africa), and East China Normal U. (China). The Future of Excellence In 2060: mini-futures literacy lab	WORKSHOP 3 **Innocent Mamvura and Sibusiso Msomi** Agentic AI and Autonomous Agents in Higher Education: From Concept to Campus Implementation
15:30–15:45	AFTERNOON TEA BREAK	
15:45–17:15	WORKSHOP 2 (continued)	WORKSHOP 3 (continued)
17:15	END OF DAY Social Event: "Tropical Sunset Soirée" @ MGB/2TEN	

Day 1: 28 October 2025 Venue: **Kalahari Waterfront,** Thohoyandou, 0950, Limpopo Province,		
08:00–09:00	**Tea and Registration**	
	Plenary Session: Nkhelebeni Conference Centre **Chair: SAAIR President**	
09:00–09:20	Welcome Remarks	Conference Chairperson: **Dr Patience Mativandlela**
09:20–09:40	Opening Address by SAAIR President	SAAIR President: **Ms Elizabeth Booi**
09:40–09:45	Introduction of Keynote Speaker	SAAIR EXCO: **Dr Mbodila Munienge**
09:45–10:30	Keynote Address: The Trouble with Solutionism: futures literacy and the value of 'not-knowing'	**Prof R Miller** Former Head of Foresight and Future Literacy at UNESCO. Senior Fellow at: Ecole des Ponts Business School (France); U. New Brunswick (Canada); NIFU (Norway); U. Witwatersrand (South Africa); Future Africa at U. Pretoria (South Africa), and East China Normal U. (China).
10:30–10:45	**Question and Answer Session**	
10:45–11:00	Sponsor Presentation	Quantum Education Systems (**Platinum partnership**)
11:00–11:30	**Morning Tea Break**	

	Plenary Session: Nkhelebeni Conference Centre Chair: Sannah Patience Mativandlela	
11:30–12:15	Keynote Address Combined Assurance in the Digital Era: Leveraging Technology and Data Governance for Effective Strategic Oversight.	**Dr E Mabote** Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Digital Transformation Tshwane University of Technology
12:15–12:45	Panel Discussion: Professionalising Institutional Research and Related Fields through a Formal Qualification	**Dr Emily Mabote (Tshwane University of Technology)** Dr Remy Nnadozie (Rhodes University) Dr Nandarani Maistry (University of Johannesburg) Dr Mxolisi Masango (Cape Peninsula University of Technology) Glen Barnes (IDSC) Papama Somgede (University of Pretoria)
12:45–13:00	Question and Answer Session	
13:00–14:00	**Lunch Break**	
	Plenary Session: Nkhelebeni Conference Centre Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele	
14:00–14:45	Keynote Address: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainability and stability for higher education systems: policy, planning, data and knowledge.	**Prof T Lewin** Associate Professor University of Johannesburg
14:45–15:00	Question and Answer Session	
15:00–15:30	**Tea Break**	

Parallel Sessions 15:30–16:00	Parallel Sessions		
	Venue: Buruvhutsi **Chair: Lufuno Netshifhefhe**	**Venue: Zwiapenga** **Chair: Tebogo Makhambeni**	**Venue: Mavhevhe** **Chair: Zolani Fana**
	Session 1.1 **Sub-theme: Bridging the Skills Gap:** Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.	**Session 1.2** **Sub-theme: Ensuring Excellence:** Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.	**Session 1.3** **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
15:30–16:00	**1: Presenter/s: Kabiru Ishola Genty and Sulaiman Olusegun Atiku** **Title: Human Resource Analytics and Higher Education Institution Efficiency: An Empirical Evidence from Nigeria**	**2: Presenter/s: Madoda Makola** **Title: Ensuring Excellence through Integrated Institutional Governance: Lessons from the Integrated Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management (IPRAQuaM) Framework in South African HEIs**	**3: Presenter/s: Elizabeth Booi and Ronald Arendse** **Title: Advancing Student Success Through Data-Informed Reform of Gateway Quantitative Modules**
16:00	**Day End and UNIVEN Campus Tour**		

Day 2: 29 October 2025 Venue: **Kalahari Waterfront,** Thohoyandou, 0950, Limpopo Province		
08:00–09:00	**Tea and Registration**	
Plenary Session: Nkhelebeni Conference Centre **Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele**		
09:00-09:20	Welcome Remarks Conference Chairperson	Conference Chairperson: **Dr Patience Mativhandlela**
09:20-09:30	Welcome and introduction of the Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda	**Dr TV Dzaga** Director Marketing, Branding and Communication at the University of Venda
09:30-09:55	Welcome Address	**Prof NB Nthambeleni** Vice Chancellor and Principal of the University of Venda
09:55-10:40	Keynote Address Excellence in Action: Leveraging Operational Intelligence and Research to Enhance Student and Institutional Outcomes	**Dr E Atchison** Vice President for Strategic Research Arkansas State University System
10:40-10:50	**Question and Answer Session**	
10:50-11:00	Sponsor Presentation	**IDSC**
11:00-11:30	**Morning Tea Break and Conference Photograph Session**	

Parallel Sessions 11:30–13:00	Venue: Buruvhutsi Chair: Innocent Mamvura	Venue: Zwiapenga Chair: Lufuno Netshifhefhe	Venue: Mavhevhe Chair: Tebogo Makhambeni
	Session 2.1 **Sub-theme: Bridging the Skills Gap:** Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.	**Session 2.2** **Sub-theme: Ensuring Excellence:** Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.	**Session 2.3** **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
11:30–12:00	**4: Presenter/s: Kirsten Lucas and Pieter Nagel** **Title: Learning from the Dragon: Chinese Higher Education Insights for South Africa**	**5: Presenter/s: Juan-Claude Lemmens** **Title: Curriculum Analytics to Inform Curriculum Quality and Programme Reviews**	**14: Presenter/s: Anri Wheeler and Laurika Wiese** **Title: Collaborative quality enhancement: A narrative analysis of the impact of a Quality Exchange Forum on quality in South African Higher Education**
12:00–12:30	**7: Presenter/s: Hossein Masoumi Karakani and Munienge Mbodila** **Title: Strategic Workforce Planning in South African Higher Education: A Data-Driven Framework for Sustainable Institutional Development and NDP 2030 Alignment**	**8: Presenter/s: Darlington Mutakwa, Nandarani Maistry, Takalani Muloiwa-Klenam and Thato Bhembe** **Title: A deep dive into male participation in higher education**	**9: Presenter/s: Mari Ford and Darlington Chigori** **Title: Tracing Graduate Pathways: Insights from a Graduate Destination Study at the University of Fort Hare**
12:30–13:00	**10: Presenter/s: Munienge Munienge, Louis Mapatagane, Anele Bangani, Nocwaka Pangwa and Xolisa Mabunu** **Title: Students' Perceptions on the Support Received from Academic Advisors: A Reflection on the Students of Interest Follow up Survey**	**11: Presenter/s: Olushola Olatunji** **Title: Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education: A Transformative Framework for the 21st Century**	**12: Presenter/s: Alugumi Ndou and Mpeiwa Thanyani** **Title: Role of library in enhancing student success in historical disadvantaged university**
13:00–14:00	**Lunch Break**		

	Parallel Sessions		
Parallel Sessions 14:00–15:30	**Venue: Buruvhutsi** **Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele**	**Venue: Zwiapenga** **Chair: Munienge Mbodila**	**Venue: Mavhevhe** **Chair: Valentine Maroga**
	Session 2.4 **Sub-theme: Funding the Future:** Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.	**Session 2.5** **Sub-theme: Ensuring Excellence:** Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.	**Session 2.6** **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
14:00–14:30	**13: Presenter/s: Cecilia Frans and Morongwa Selolo** **Title: Critical Analysis of University Funding for Postgraduate Programs**	**6: Presenter/s: Anri Wheeler** **Title: Leveraging longitudinal Graduate data for strategic governance: A case study from a South African higher education institution**	**15: Presenter/s: Liberty Takudzwa Nyete** **Title: Predictive Analytics in Student Support: Building a Sustainable Ecosystem at a Higher Institution.**
14:30–15:00	**16: Presenter/s: Mbongi Ndlovu and Glen Barnes** **Title: Towards resource optimisation - Differentiating the financial contributions of academic units**	**17: Presenter/s: Sulaiman Atiku and Himeesora Kaimu** **Title: Exploring the Plausible Pathways toward Inclusive and Equitable Education 5.0: An Appreciative Inquiry for Quality Higher Education in Namibia**	**38: Presenter/s: Sfiso Mabizela** **Title: From admission to graduation: the success of South Africa's graduate medical programme**
15:00–15:30	**Afternoon Tea Break**		

	Parallel Sessions		
Parallel Sessions 15:30–16:30	**Venue: Buruvhutsi** **Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele**	**Venue: Zwiapenga** **Chair: Zolani Fana**	**Venue: Mavhevhe** **Chair: Elizabeth Booi**
	Session 2.7 **Sub-theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.**	**Session 2.8** **Sub-theme: Global and Continental Commitments:** Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations.	**Session 2.9** **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
15:30-16:00	**19: Presenter/s: Thembelihle Luthuli** **Title: Policy Intentions to Practice: Analysing Planned Funding Allocations in South African Higher Education (2019–2023)**	**20: Presenter/s: Valentine Maroga and Njabulo Ngobese** **Title: Aligning Research Funding Strategies with National Development Goals: A UoT Perspective**	**21: Presenter/s: Herman Janse van Vuuren** **Title: Module Review Process to Enhance Success in High Impact Modules**
16:00-16:30	**22: Presenter/s: Darlington Mutakwa** **Title: Student Debt – Can We Resolve It or Learn to Live With It?**	**23: Presenter/s: Siphelo Mapolisa, Dorah Queen Sekhosana and Tshegofatso Kgomo** **Title: Exploring Student Safety Experiences in ODeL: Challenges and Best Practices Report**	**24: Presenter/s: Anele Bangani and Munienge Mbodila** **Title: The 'Matriculation Gap' and Students' University Success: A case student of a South African Higher Education Institution**
16:30	**End of Day 2**		
18:00–23:00	**Gala Dinner** **Dress Code: Formal/Black Tie @Porche-Villa Hotel and Conference Centre**		

**Day 3: 30 October 2025** **Venue: Kalahari Waterfront,** Thohoyandou, 0950, Limpopo Province

08:00–09:00	**Registration and Tea**

Plenary Session: Nkhelebeni Conference Centre
Chair: Zolani Fana

09:00–09:10	Welcome Remarks and Reflections of Day 1 and 2	SAAIR EXCO: **Dr Mbodila Munienge**
09:10–09:40	Keynote: From Crisis to Capability: Building AI That Works Where It Matters Most for Learning	**Prof M Mosia** Vice-Dean: Teaching and Learning University of the Free State
09:40–10:00	Demonstration: Platform Walkthrough: Making Expert Mathematics Teaching Accessible at Scale through our AI-powered platform.	**Prof M Mosia** Vice-Dean: Teaching and Learning University of the Free State
10:00–10:30		**Question and Answer Session**
10:30–11:00		**Morning Tea Break**

Parallel Sessions 11:00–11:30		**Parallel Sessions**
	Venue: Buruvhutsi **Chair: Vhutshilo Nekhubvi**	**Venue: Zwiapenga** **Chair: Innocent Mamvura**	**Venue: Mavhevhe** **Chair: Elizabeth Booi**
	Session 3.1 **Sub-theme:** Global and Continental Commitments: Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations	**Session 3.2** **Sub-theme: Bridging the Skills Gap:** Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.	**Session 3.3** **Sub-theme: Funding the Future:** Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.
11:00–11:30	**25: Presenter/s: Alugumi Ndou and Jerry Mahlangu** **Title: Information literacy instruction as a student-success ecosystem at a South-African university**	**26: Presenter/s: Hloniphile Cleopatra Zwane, Thembisile Alice Ndimande and Victor Halalisani Mlambo** **Title: Artificial Intelligence as a catalyst to Enhance Teaching, Learning, and Decision-**	**27: Presenter/s: Remy Nnadozie** **Title: The Impact of Higher Education Sector Changes on Mathematical Parameters of South Africa's Funding Formula for Public Universities**

		Making in Higher Education: A South African Perspective	
11:30–12:00	**28: Presenter/s: Loquitur Maka** **Title: Ready or Not? Unpacking Digital Divides in First-Year Students' University Preparedness**	**29: Presenter/s: Azwy Christopher Tshivhase and Denise Rosemary Nicholson** **Title: Transforming Higher Education Through AI Innovation: The Role of the University of South Africa (Comprehensive Open Distance E-Learning Institution).**	**30: Presenter/s: Valentine Maroga and Modjadji Mtsweni** **Title: The Role of Research Outputs in Attracting External Funding and Enhancing Reputation**
12:00–13:30	**Plenary Session: Main Venue** **SAAIR AGM**		**SAAIR EXCO**
13:30–14:30	**Lunch Break**		
Parallel Sessions 14:30–15:00	**Parallel Sessions**		
	Venue: Buruvhutsi **Chair: Elizabeth Booi**	**Venue: Zwiapenga** **Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele**	**Venue: Mavhevhe** **Chair: Valentine Maroga**
	Session 3.4 **Sub-theme: Ensuring Excellence:** Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.	**Session 3.5** **Sub-theme: Ensuring Excellence:** Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.	**Session 3.6** **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
14:30–15:00	**31: Presenter/s: Vakele Nobongoza and Somarie Hotlzhausen** **Title: Towards Excellence in Navigating Institutional Pressures and Contingencies: a Neo-Institutional and Contingency Analysis of Internal Quality Assurance in South African Comprehensive Universities**	**32: Presenter/s: Hossein Masoumi Karakani and Ashton Maherry** **Title: From Compliance to Collaboration: Leveraging Institutional Audit Outcomes for Strategic Improvement in South African Higher Education**	**36: Presenter/s: Innocent Mamvura and Lerato Makuapane** **Title: Falling Behind: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Male Student Success in South African Universities**
15:00–18:00	**Community Outreach: Tshakhuma Fruit & Vegetable Market**		

Day 4: 31 October 2025 **Venue: Kalahari Waterfront,** Thohoyandou, 0950, Limpopo Province	

08:00–09:00	**Registration and Tea**	
Parallel Sessions 09:00–10:00	**Parallel Sessions**	
	Venue: Buruvhutsi **Chair: Ashton Maherry**	**Venue: Zwiapenga** **Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele**
	Session 4.1 **Sub-theme: Bridging the Skills Gap:** Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.	**Session 4.2** **Sub-theme: Ensuring Excellence:** Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.
09:00–09:30	**34: Presenter/s: Elizabeth Booi** **Title: Building a Data Culture: Advancing Digital and Data Literacy**	**35: Presenter/s: Thato Mokoma** **Title: Advancing Equity Through Analytics: The Role of Eigenvalues in Strengthening Standardisation in Education**
09:30–10:00	**36: Presenter/s: Murendeni Mukwevho and Kevin Silomo** **Title: Empowering workforce development through human-centric Ai**	**Session 4.3** **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
		37: Presenter/s: Lerato Makuapane and Fezile Wagner **Title: Designed with students, for students: validating the mental health assessment tools used in the Fit Minds Survey through student voice.**
10:00–10:30	**Morning Tea Break**	

Parallel Sessions 10:30-11:30	Parallel Sessions – Panel Discussions	
	Venue: Buruvhutsi **Chair: Sannah Patience Mativandlela**	**Venue: Zwiapeng** **Chair: Benjamin Ntshabele**
	Session 4.5 **Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.	**Session 4.6** **Sub-theme: Sub-theme: From Insight to Impact:** Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.
10:30-11:30	**Panel Discussion Title: AI for Institutional Operational Excellence and Strategic Foresight: Opportunities, Risks, and Real-World Practice** **Panellist /s: Innocent Mamvura (University of the Witwatersrand)** **Dr Eric Atchison (Arkansas State University System)** **Dr Mbodila Munienge (Walter Sisulu University)** **Prof Sulaiman Olusegun Atiku (Namibia University of Science and Technology)** **Prabashnee Kisten (Durban University of Technology)**	**Panel Discuss Title: I Am: Embedding the Student Voice in Higher Education through Siyaphumelela** **Panellist /s: Panellists: Ashton Maherry (Saide)** **Simphiwe Kunene (Varsity College)** **Bradley Gawie (Central University of Technology, Free State)**
	Plenary Session: Nkhelebeni Conference Centre **Chair: Valentine Maroga / Benjamin Ntshabele**	
11:35-12:35	Panel Discussion: SAAIR Scholars	**Panellists:** Luna August (University of Cape Town) Lerato Makuapane (University of the Witwatersrand) Lebohang Mojapelo (University of Pretoria) Zanele Maloyi (University of South Africa)
12:35-12:45	**Conference Closure**	**SAAIR President: Ms Elizabeth Booi**
12:45	**Lunch and Departure**	

Eric Atchison serves as Vice President for Strategic Research with the Arkansas State University System. In this role, he is responsible for managing the system-wide data function and develops cost accounting analyses to support institutional management efforts. During his tenure, he has developed and implemented a system-wide data system and expanded data collection efforts across the seven institutions of the ASU System, supported the migration to one ERP system, and produced a wide variety of user-friendly interactive dashboard reports and statistical publications. He has over 17 years of experience in higher education at the institution, state, and system levels and also served in a variety of leadership roles within state, regional, and national IR associations; including as chair of the 2024-2025 AIR Nominations and Elections Committee, secretary of the board for the Southern Association for Institutional Research, treasurer for the Arkansas Institutional Research Organization, and president for the Mississippi Association for Institutional Research.

He has contributed to numerous efforts within the Association for Institutional Research, including serving as an IPEDS Educator, a subject matter expert for the National Survey of IR Offices, and mentor/lecturer for the Holistic Approach to IR course, the Foundations of IR workshop series, and the Data Literacy Institute programs. In addition, he co-curates and distributes the weekly e-newsletter, The Node for IR/IE, which is distributed weekly to more than 2,300 subscribers.

Prof Riel Miller

Riel Miller, starting in March of 2022 after a decade as Head of Foresight and Futures Literacy at UNESCO in Paris, joined several communities (see list below) seeking to transform why and how people use-the-future. He has worked as a senior manager in the Ontario public service (Ministries of Finance; Universities; Industry) and at the OECD in Paris (Economics; Science & Technology; Education; Territorial Development; Development Centre; International Futures Programme). In 2005 he founded a consultancy – xperidox to advise clients on how to use the future more effectively. In 2012 he was appointed Head of Foresight at UNESCO.

From the outset of his career, in 1982 at the OECD, Riel has accumulated hundreds of hands-on experiences, all around the world, designing and implementing efforts to think about the future. He is an experienced and innovative educator, a pioneer of the field of futures literacy and the 'discipline of anticipation'. He is widely published in academic journals and other media on a range of topics, from the future of education and the Internet to the transformation of leadership and productivity. He is an accomplished keynote speaker and facilitator. His unflagging ambition is to find ways to put the richness of complex emergence at the service of humanity's capacity to be free.

Prof Moeketsi Mosia

Moeketsi Mosia, is a Vice-Dean: Teaching and Learning and an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at the University of the Free State, where he holds the ETDP-SETA Research Chair in Mathematics Education. Previously the Director of Sol Plaatje University's Centre for Teaching, Learning and Programme Development and Acting Director of Research, he led institution-wide quality assurance, digital transformation, and research systems automation.

His work sits at the intersection of mathematics education, data science, cloud computing, and learning analytics, advancing evidence-based teaching and student success. He has delivered production-scale analytics and cloud solutions. Prof Mosia has authored over 38 peer-reviewed publications (2016–2025) spanning mathematics education, educational technology, AI/Machine Learning in education, and data analytics.

Dr Emily Mabote

Emily Mabote currently serves as Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Digital Transformation at the Tshwane University of Technology. She brings over 20 years of experience in higher education, including more than a decade in senior leadership, with expertise spanning quality assurance, institutional audits, national reviews, programme accreditation, and quality management system.

She has participated in institutional and external quality assurance projects that have advanced quality improvement in higher education. In her current executive role, Dr Mabote provides strategic leadership across a diverse portfolio that includes Strategic Management Support (covering Strategy, Statutory Reporting, and Business Intelligence), Risk Management, Quality Promotion, ICT Services, Internal Audit, Teaching and Learning with Technology, and Combined Assurance.

She also serves as the University's Deputy Information Officer. She plays an active role in institutional governance through her serving on the Executive Management Committee and academic, operational, and governance structures, where she advances evidence-based decision-making, institutional effectiveness, and digital transformation.

Prof Thandi Lewin

Thandi Lewin is an Associate Professor in the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies and the Department of Education Management and Leadership in the Faculty of Education at the University of Johannesburg.

Prior to joining UJ, she worked in the South African Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as the Chief Director for Institutional Governance and Management Support in the University Education branch. Her responsibilities included student funding policy, university governance oversight, and student development and support matters. She worked in a number of roles within the national government departments for education. She has extensive experience in higher education policy, education and social justice, education monitoring and evaluation, and education management and governance.

Her research interests are higher education policy, gender in higher education, academic careers, leadership, management and governance in higher education, funding of higher education and the history of higher education policy.

https://www.uj.ac.za/faculties/education/centres/ali-mazrui-centre-for-higher-education-studies/

Innocent Mamvura

Innocent Mamvura is a Data Scientist and AI Strategist who leads the AI & Machine Learning portfolio at the University of the Witwatersrand. With expertise spanning LLMs, AI Agents, cloud ML pipelines, and predictive analytics, he has designed and implemented solutions that directly enhance student success outcomes and institutional efficiency.

A frequent contributor to the SAAIR and Siyaphumelela networks, Innocent is deeply committed to knowledge-sharing and building capacity in data literacy, AI adoption, and analytics for higher education.

He strongly believes that with innovation and dedication we can achieve the SAAIR mandate of promoting collaboration, training and development amongst institutional researchers across the continent.

Community Outreach:
Tshakhuma Fruit & Vegetable Market

Tshakhuma Fruit and Vegetable Market was established more than 40 years ago, and today it remains the only 24-hour fruit market in South Africa. The market is situated in Venda, Tshakuma, Limpopo Province, 17km west of Thohoyandou on the Road to Makhado (Louis Trichardt), along the R524 road. The market offers quality fruits as it is near by Levubu farms which constantly supply fresh fruit.

A visit to Tshakhuma Fruit and Vegetable Market is a lively and memorable experience. The market is well known for its wide variety of fresh fruits and vegetables sold by local vendors. Stalls are filled with colourful produce such as bananas, avocados, mangoes, papayas, oranges, sweet potatoes, and leafy greens, creating a vibrant atmosphere.

The market is not only a place to buy affordable and fresh food, but also a hub of cultural exchange where visitors interact with friendly traders and learn about local farming practices. The energy, aroma of ripe fruit, and welcoming smiles make Tshakhuma Market a unique stop that showcases the richness of Limpopo's agricultural life.

Invitation To The

32ND SAAIR CONFERENCE

Gala Dinner

OCTOBER
29
2025

WEDNESDAY 18H00 – 23H00

VENUE: PORCHE-VILLA HOTEL AND CONFERENCE CENTRE, THOHOYANDOU-J

THEME: BLACK TIE

32ND SAAIR CONFERENCE

Gala Dinner

Master of the Ceremony:
Dr TV Dzaga

18h00–18h20: *Live Music Performance*

18h20–18h30: Opening and Welcome
Dr SP Mativandlela:
Chairperson of the 32nd SAAIR Conference

18h30–18h40: Starters

Live Music Performance

18h50-19h00:
Remarks from the University of Venda (UNIVEN) Executive
Dr JJ Baloyi:
UNIVEN Registrar

19h00–19h10: Speech
Mrs E Booi
SAAIR President

Live Music Performance

19h10–21h00: Main Course

Live Music Performance

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UNIVEN Task Team for the 2025 SAAIR Conference

Sannah Mativandlel

Beauty Mutheiwana

Tebogo Makhambeni

Thabani Njaba

Tiyani Mboweni

Koketjo Lekoane

Royal Nelwamond

Lufuno Netshifhefhe

Livhuwani Mudau

Lugisani Managa

Alugumi Ndou

Peter Mashishi

25

Workshop 1

Dr E Atchison

Data literacy and visualization training for institutional leaders and IR professionals with Data Governance Implementation

Workshop 2

Prof R Miller

The Future of Excellence In 2060: mini-futures literacy lab

Futures literacy laboratories (FLL) are learning-by-doing exercises that 'surface' participant's diverse anticipatory systems and processes. As with any learning voyage, the amount of time devoted to 'travelling' from one point to another matters. Given the time available for this 'living laboratory' action-research exercise it will only be practical to go through a few of the phases of what I call an 'initiation FLL'. Participants will nevertheless become acquainted with some of the key concepts and design principles of an FLL and the broader theory and practice of the 'discipline of anticipation' (Miller, 2018).

Workshop 3

Innocent Mamvura and Sibusiso Msomi

Agentic AI and Autonomous Agents in Higher Education: From Concept to Campus Implementation

As artificial intelligence matures, the concept of **agentic AI**—autonomous systems capable of proactive decision-making, task execution, and learning—has the potential to reshape operational, academic, and research functions within higher education. This practical workshop invites higher education professionals to explore how agentic AI can be meaningfully applied within their own institutional contexts. Participants will be introduced to foundational principles of **agentic AI and autonomous agents** through real-world examples. Unlike traditional AI tools that respond only to prompts, agentic AI systems are designed to pursue goals, monitor progress, and act independently based on rules, data, and learned behaviours. The session will illustrate how such systems are already being piloted in areas such as student success monitoring, curriculum alignment, admissions triage, and quality assurance auditing.

Participants will then work in **multi-functional groups** to:

- Identify a challenge or opportunity in their own domain (e.g., teaching, planning, student support, research, quality assurance);
- Use a guided **design thinking process** to conceptualise an AI agent for that context;
- Create a functional **workflow or logic map** for how the agent will operate;
- Reflect on key ethical, governance, and human-AI collaboration considerations.

Each group will present their agent prototype and receive feedback from peers and facilitator. Participants will leave with templates and practical strategies to further develop or pilot agentic AI solutions at their home institutions.

Participant Activities:

- Short introduction to agentic AI concepts with examples
- Group-based design thinking activity using supplied templates
- Mapping an agent's logic and flow for a real institutional problem
- Peer feedback and showcase
- Discussion on responsible AI, governance, and feasibility

Target Audience:

Higher education professionals across functions—data analytics, institutional research, teaching and learning, quality assurance, academic planning, student affairs, and IT—interested in understanding and applying AI practically in their roles.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Understand what distinguishes agentic AI from other AI approaches
2. Explore higher education use cases for autonomous AI agents
3. Collaboratively design a tailored AI agent using structured templates
4. Discuss critical considerations in AI adoption including ethics and institutional readiness
5. Leave with a practical workflow and resource kit to further develop agentic AI ideas

Workshop Duration:

180 minutes (including hands-on, group work, and facilitated reflection)

Requirements:

- Laptop or tablet with internet access (optional but recommended)
- Interest in AI, innovation, or institutional problem-solving
- Materials and templates will be provided

Intended Outcomes:

By the end of the session, participants will have co-designed a prototype agentic AI solution relevant to their own professional context, developed a better understanding of AI's practical and ethical dimensions, and be empowered to contribute to strategic conversations about automation and innovation at their institutions.

Keynote: The Trouble with Solutionism: futures literacy and the value of 'not-knowing'

Prof R Miller

Goals serve as reference points for making bets, judgements, and worth. Success, affirmation, even joy is accorded from both 'outside' and 'inside' when goals are realized. But where do the goals come from? And what does the pursuit of goals obscure? What is the cost of measuring meaning by success? The anxieties, disappointments, instrumentalisation of the world as means to an end – all symptoms of what can be called a mono-culture of time, imagination, and the capacity to imagine the later-than-now. At this particular moment in the on-going swirling of currents of global knowledge eco-systems there would seem to be a call to find entry points into efforts to understand the world that do not assume one way of knowing, including why and what it means to 'know'. Futures literacy, emerging from the exploration of the diversity of human anticipatory systems and processes, invites a pluri-epistemic view of research and competencies – including the value of not-knowing. This talk will offer a few directions for conversation and dialogue about 'excellence'.

Panel Presentation Title: Professionalising Institutional Research and Related Fields through a Formal Qualification

Dr Emily Mabote (Tshwane University of Technology); Dr Remy Nnadozie (Rhodes University); Dr Nandarani Maistry (University of Johannesburg); Dr Mxolisi Masango (Cape Peninsula University of Technology); Glen Barnes (IDSC) and Papama Somgede (University of Pretoria)

Abstract:

Institutional research (IR), quality assurance (QA), management of information (HEMIS), academic planning, and strategic planning are interlinked functions that underpin evidence-based decision-making and the advancement of higher education in South Africa. These areas provide data, frameworks, and evaluation mechanisms that shape institutional performance, guide programme planning, and align university strategies with national and global priorities. The field faces a critical transition. Many pioneering colleagues, who hold invaluable institutional memory and technical expertise, are approaching retirement, creating a risk of significant capacity loss. While SAAIR and related bodies have long recognised the professionalisation of IR and related fields as a need, the challenge has become more urgent as generational shifts accelerate. Without sustainable systems of knowledge transfer, professional development, and entry pathways for new practitioners, higher education risks losing its capacity to drive evidence-based transformation.

This panel discussion proposes the development of a structured, nationally recognised qualification for institutional research and related fields, aligned to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Such a qualification would create a formal pathway into IR, QA, HEMIS and planning; establish a pipeline of skilled practitioners; and strengthen the scholarship and practice of the profession. It would blend technical expertise with strategic thinking, embed research and critical inquiry, and support responsiveness to local challenges in global contexts. Building on SAAIR's capacity development programmes and lessons from international professionalisation efforts, this session will explore the potential scope, levels, and content of a qualification. Delegates will debate collaborative strategies for design, funding, and implementation, drawing on the experiences of universities, professional associations, and government. The discussion aims to lay the foundation for a sustainable system of professionalisation that secures the role of IR in advancing higher education in South Africa and ensures continuity of expertise for future generations.

Parallel Presentation 1

Title: Human Resource Analytics and Higher Education Institution Efficiency: An Empirical Evidence from Nigeria

Authors: Kabiru Ishola Genty and Sulaiman Olusegun Atiku

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: Descriptive Analytics; Employee Performance; HEIs Efficiency; Human Resource Analytics; Predictive Analytics; Prescriptive Analytics; Workforce Management Practices

Abstract: This study investigates the effect of Human Resource Analytics (HRA) on Higher Education Institution (HEI) efficiency in Nigeria. As HEIs increasingly adopt data-driven strategies to enhance their performances, this research explores how descriptive, predictive, and prescriptive analytics influence workforce management practices, employee performance, and overall operational efficiency. Using a quantitative approach, data were collected from 240 employees across various departments at higher education institution in Nigeria through structured questionnaires. The findings reveal that HRA tools are significantly implemented within the University HR practices, particularly in workforce planning, performance evaluation, and strategic decision-making. Descriptive analytics supports better workforce oversight, while predictive analytics enhances efficiency through forecasting, and prescriptive analytics contributes to performance optimization at the Institution. Despite some limitations in awareness and training, the study highlights the strategic value of HRA in transforming HR into a performance-driven function in HEIs. The results offer practical insights for academic leaders and HR professionals in HEIs, while also extending theoretical frameworks such as the Resource-Based View and Human Capital Theory within the Nigerian context.

Parallel Presentation 2

Title: Ensuring Excellence through Integrated Institutional Governance: Lessons from the Integrated Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management (IPRAQuaM) Framework in South African HEIs

Authors: Madoda Makola

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Integrated Institutional Governance; Quality Assurance; Strategic Planning; Resource Allocation; IPRAQuaM Framework; Higher Education Transformation

Abstract: Fragmentation between planning, budgeting, and quality assurance remains a persistent challenge in South African higher education institutions, undermining institutional effectiveness and the pursuit of excellence. This paper presents the Integrated Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management (IPRAQuaM) Framework—a systems-based governance model developed through interpretative phenomenological analysis of three public higher education institutions (HEIs). The study reveals systemic misalignments, siloed practices, and the disjunction between quality review outcomes and resource planning. In response, IPRAQuaM proposes integrative loops that align strategic planning, budget allocation, and quality management processes. The paper illustrates how this governance framework enhances institutional responsiveness, promotes continuous improvement, and advances transformation imperatives. It bridges data, impact, strategy, and sustainability, IPRAQuaM, thus aligning with data, impact, strategy, capacity, and optimisation (DISCO) pillars and offering actionable insights for HEIs aiming to embed excellence at the core of their operations.

Parallel Presentation 3

Title: Advancing Student Success Through Data-Informed Reform of Gateway Quantitative Modules

Authors: Elizabeth Booi and Ronald Arendse

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: quantitative skills; data-informed teaching; curriculum reform; student success

Abstract: This presentation highlights the university's efforts to reform and contextualise the gateway quantitative modules, particularly mathematics and statistics offered in the BCom Extended Curriculum Programme, through data-informed curriculum transformation. To address decreasing pass rates, a structured intervention was implemented, using a pathways-informed approach that emphasises conceptual understanding, collaborative learning, and practical problem-solving. The initiative involved choosing high-priority modules through trend analysis, adjusting pedagogical methods to suit the South African context, and training staff in active, student-centred facilitation. Faculty-wide consultations identified key challenges, including venue constraints, limited teaching capacity, high administrative demands, and the lack of real-time student performance monitoring. The pilot demonstrates promising practices, including team-based teaching, peer learning, and the use of digital resources. Early results show improved participation and stabilising pass rates. Evidence is drawn from pass rate trends (2019–2024), staff input, and student feedback. A performance dashboard was used to track progress and inform instructional adjustments, with early indicators showing a 5% to 10% improvement in selected modules. The presentation will share these findings, including teaching innovations and performance tracking tools. This case demonstrates how data-driven practices and inclusive teaching can enhance institutional agility and promote equitable learning outcomes.

Parallel Presentation 4

Title: Learning from the Dragon: Chinese Higher Education Insights for South Africa*

Authors: Kirsten Lucas and Pieter Nagel

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: Strategy; Curriculum; human centric AI; China

Abstract: China's economic rise and evolving higher education system offer valuable lessons for the South African Higher Education system. This abstract, stemming from the authors' two visits to explore the Chinese higher education sector through a Bilateral DHET initiative with the Chinese Ministry of Commerce, examines the relationship between the two nations' higher education models. It focuses on strategy and planning, enhancing funding pathways, AI applications, and entrepreneurship integration. China's state-led, market-influenced system, emphasising vocational training, contrasts with South Africa's decentralised approach. South Africa can adopt Chinese strategies to align education with economic needs, particularly by diversifying funding beyond government to include industry, private partnerships, and philanthropy. Regarding AI, China's technological advancement strategy could be used to assist South Africa in building capabilities, prioritising human-centric AI for ethical development and balanced employment. Chinese universities, as innovation hubs, also offer best practices for strengthening South African entrepreneurial ecosystems through enhanced curriculum, mentorship, and varied funding. Examining these areas can inform South African policy and reform, leveraging lessons from China within its distinct context. *Generative AI was used to formulate a title and to edit the abstract.

Parallel Presentation 5

Title: Curriculum Analytics to Inform Curriculum Quality and Programme Reviews

Authors: Juan-Claude Lemmens

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Curriculum Analytics; Programme Reviews; Rasch Analysis

Abstract: This paper explores how learning analytics (LA) can enhance curriculum review at the programme level by providing insights not accessible through traditional methods. Specifically, it highlights the use of Rasch analysis as a novel approach to curriculum analytics (CA) within a large South African university. A parameterised curriculum analytics report was developed to support evidence-based Curriculum Reviews and formal Academic Programme Reviews (APRs). Drawing on assessment-related data, the Rasch technique models both student ability and subject difficulty across a programme. Subject difficulty is derived from the distribution of student grades within a module, while student ability is estimated from performance across all enrolled modules. This enables a comparison of academic challenge across subjects and identifies misalignments between module complexity, academic year level, and intended learning outcomes. The Rasch-informed report offers a data-driven lens for reflecting on programme structure, pedagogical coherence, and progression. It aligns with emerging applications of curriculum analytics to improve assessment practices and academic quality assurance in higher education (Barthakur et al., 2024). As curriculum analytics gains international attention, this approach illustrates how psychometric modelling, traditionally used in assessments, can be repurposed for quality assurance and curriculum design (Dawson & Hubball, 2014).

Parallel Presentation 6

Title: Leveraging longitudinal Graduate data for strategic governance: A case study from a South African higher education institution

Authors: Anri Wheeler

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: Graduate outcomes; Employability; Labour market alignment; Data-driven decision making; Strategic governance

Abstract: This paper presents a six-year longitudinal analysis of graduate feedback at a University of Technology, revealing trends that offer valuable insights for strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies. The 6 reports with more than 5000 graduate respondents show an increase in unemployment, with most currently 63.3% indicating actively seeking work. Despite this, over 90% of employed graduates confirm their qualifications are formal job requirements, underscoring program relevance. Encouragingly, graduates report strong preparation in teamwork, problem-solving, and independent learning, though there is room for pedagogical improvement. These detailed findings highlight persistent challenges and successes, enabling leadership to tailor interventions that are faculty-specific and aligned with real market needs. Leveraging advanced data analytics and strategic intelligence frameworks, The study shows a need to refine quality assurance, enhance career services, and foster entrepreneurship through targeted support. Furthermore, insights into graduate experiences and employment sectors inform resource allocation and curriculum responsiveness. Sustained investment in robust data infrastructure and analytical capacity will empower the university to maintain agility in responding to labour market fluctuations and student needs. This case exemplifies how data-driven governance, supported by emerging technologies, can drive impactful change, ensure operational excellence, and foster a future-ready higher education institution

Parallel Presentation 7

Title: Strategic Workforce Planning in South African Higher Education: A Data-Driven Framework for Sustainable Institutional Development and NDP 2030 Alignment

Authors: Hossein Masoumi Karakani and Munienge Mbodila

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: workforce planning; higher education; data analytics; skills development; institutional planning; sustainability; NDP 2030

Abstract: Effective Strategic Workforce Planning (SWP) remains a critical yet underdeveloped component in many South African Higher Education Institutions, despite their pivotal role in advancing the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030. Most institutions lack a forward-looking, data-informed approach to workforce planning that aligns with shifting skills demands, demographic changes, and technological advancement. This paper presents a comprehensive SWP framework tailored to the higher education context, addressing gaps in institutional planning, succession management, and staff development. It promotes the use of data and digital tools to support adaptive, evidence-based workforce strategies. The framework draws on key datasets including HEMIS staff and student data for workforce demographics, as well as national labour market intelligence from the Department of Employment and Labour, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), and Stats SA to benchmark emerging skills needs. Moreover, data from LinkedIn and online job portals are leveraged to analyse real-time labour market signals and assess whether advertised positions reflect competencies aligned with Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) demands. By integrating these data sources, the framework enables universities to improve resource allocation, enhance resilience, and align workforce strategies with national priorities for sustainable institutional development.

Parallel Presentation 8

Title: A deep dive into male participation in higher education

Authors: Darlington Mutakwa, Nandarani Maistry, Takalani

Muloiwa-Klenam and Thato Bhembe

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Male participation; Enrolment; Throughput; Dropout

Abstract: South Africa's higher education landscape is experiencing a concerning shift in gender dynamics, with male participation declining significantly in recent years, prompting the national Department of Higher Education and Training to flag the decline as a significant concern. Globally, UNESCO notes that in 2023, female students outnumbered males by a gender parity index of 1.13. By 2022, only 37.9% of students enrolled in public higher education institutions in South Africa were male, compared to 62.1% female, revealing the substantial gender gap. Dropout rates among male students are also disproportionate. While males are still slightly more represented in STEM fields and doctoral degrees, their overall throughput lags that of their female counterparts. This study analyzes enrolment, throughput, and dropout trends, incorporating student experience surveys and sector-wide literature to quantify the extent of the male participation challenge at a large comprehensive university. Key focus areas include CESM-level enrolment patterns, the timing and causes of male dropout, and institutional strategies for supporting at-risk male students. The paper concludes by presenting potential evidence-based interventions aimed at reversing this trend and promoting equitable participation and academic success for male students in South African higher education.

Parallel Presentation 9

Title: Tracing Graduate Pathways: Insights from a Graduate Destination Study at the University of Fort Hare

Authors: Mari Ford and Darlington Chigori

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: Graduate employability; alumni insights; institutional policies and practices

Abstract: Understanding the post-graduation experiences of alumni is essential for institutions striving to improve academic and operational outcomes. This study, conducted by the University of Fort Hare's Planning and Quality Assurance Unit, explores the employability trajectories and reflections of alumni to inform institutional improvement and policy. In a context of rising graduate unemployment and shifting labour market demands, the study responds to national imperatives and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those focused on quality education and decent work. Data were collected via an online questionnaire administered through SurveyMonkey and distributed using the UFH alumni database via email, SMS, and LinkedIn. A total of 1,042 alumni participated, of whom 739 reported full-time employment, 39 self-employment, and 267 were unemployed. Analysis is currently underway. Preliminary insights highlight critical issues in graduate transition, skills relevance, and institutional preparation. The study generates data-driven evidence to guide curriculum enhancement, graduate support initiatives, and policy shifts. Findings are expected to inform continuous quality improvement and strengthen the university's alignment with national graduate employability agendas and global development commitments.

Parallel Presentation 10

Title: Students' Perceptions on the Support Received from Academic Advisors: A Reflection on the Students of Interest Follow up Survey

Authors: Munienge Munienge, Louis Mapatagane, Anele Bangani, Nocwaka

Pangwa and Xolisa Mabunu

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: student support; academic advising; student success; institutional support

Abstract: In recent years, Universities worldwide and South Africa increasingly recognised the need to address various aspects of student well-being, including academic through enhancing student support services. Shifts in student demographics, financial instability, mental health issues, and the complexities of remote learning, have heightened the demand for innovative and adaptive support mechanisms (Doe, 2019; University Support Report, 2020). Study aims to gain a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by students of interest (at-risk students) by reflecting on the feedback on the student follow-up survey. Study offers a comprehensive overview of their experiences, needs, and satisfaction with existing support services. Study employed mixed-methods approach, to comprehensively understand student support interventions for students identified as student of interest (at risk). Findings reveal that support systems play a critical role in shaping their academic and personal experiences. Positive contributions, such as motivational lectures, dedicated tutors, academic advisors, and counselling services, have significantly enhanced students' confidence, resilience, and ability to manage challenges. Findings help identify service gaps and guide the implementation of evidence-based strategies to improve academic performance, mental health, and student satisfaction. Study advocates for institution's commitment to creating a supportive, inclusive, and equitable educational environment, ensuring long-term success for all students.

Parallel Presentation 11

Title: Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education: A Transformative Framework for the 21st Century

Authors: Olushola Olatunji

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Quality Assurance; Higher Education; Policy; Transformation; South Africa

Abstract: Globalisation has led to a more complex higher education landscape, creating the need for constant reevaluation of existing quality assurance approaches. The rise of quality assurance frameworks in the 1980s has seen many countries, particularly in the Global North, adopt various tools to ensure higher-quality educational provisions. However, there are concerns about whether these tools improve the process, their adaptability, and whether they offer opportunities for improvement. In South Africa, especially following the end of the apartheid era, challenges such as ensuring equitable access and promoting innovation in teaching and learning persist. In essence, there is a need to shift from a system of compliance to a culture of quality that encompasses how institutions oversee quality improvement initiatives and how academics contribute to these improvements. This paper analyses the literature on the topic to show the gaps in the study of quality assurance in developing countries. It points out the limitations of the QA framework implementation in South Africa. Through analytical framing, it proposes an alternative quality evaluation framework process of transformation that emphasises a shift from quality assurance to enhancement. The paper also emphasises the importance of national evaluation agencies and higher education institutions adopting research-informed methods for evaluation.

Parallel Presentation 12

Title: Role of library in enhancing student success in historical disadvantaged university

Authors: Alugumi Ndou and Mpeiwa Thanyani

Sub-Theme: Global and Continental Commitments: Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations

Keywords: Academic library; Academic performance; Historically disadvantaged university; Library instruction; Student success

Abstract: Academic libraries play a pivotal role in supporting student success by providing access to information resources, fostering information literacy, and creating inclusive learning environments. The proposed study aims to explore the multifaceted contributions of the academic library to student success at the historically disadvantaged university. Adopting a mixed-method approach, the study will collect and analyse qualitative and quantitative data from library usage statistics and students' feedback to highlight how the historically disadvantaged university library services, including instructional support and resources, enhance academic engagement and performance. It is anticipated that the study will reveal a positive relationship between library engagement and key indicators of student success among historically disadvantaged students. Based on the expected findings, the study will recommend integrating library instructions more strategically into the institutional student success framework and enhancing collaboration between the library and academic departments.

Parallel Presentation 13

Title: Critical Analysis of University Funding for Postgraduate Programs

Authors: Cecilia Frans and Morongwa Selolo

Sub-Theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

Keywords: teaching-input-units; research-output; funding

Abstract: In the South African higher education system, postgraduate funding is driven by a fundamental tension, universities are rewarded for enrolling students, yet also for graduating them with published research. This study dissects the relationship between these two mechanisms, enrolment-based "teaching input units" and completion-based "research output funding." We analyze how this duality creates a complex web of incentives that shapes program design, resource allocation, and student progression, including time-to-degree. By examining how different enrolment tracks (e.g., full research vs. coursework) affect both funding streams, this paper questions the sustainability of the current model and its ability to simultaneously foster a large student cohort, promote world-class research, and improve institutional financial health.

Parallel Presentation 14

Title: Collaborative quality enhancement: A narrative analysis of the impact of a Quality Exchange Forum on quality in South African Higher Education

Authors: Anri Wheeler and Laurika Wiese

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Quality enhancement; Higher education; Communities of practice; Collaboration; South Africa

Abstract: This study investigated the impact of a newly established Quality Exchange Forum (QEF), comprising six South African universities, on enhancing quality for transformative and sustainable higher education. The research employed a qualitative narrative analysis, drawing on open-ended questions administered to QEF members. Guided by Wenger's Communities of Practice (CoP) framework, which emphasises learning through shared engagement, the study explored whether the QEF's objectives of fostering collaboration, exchanging knowledge and quality practices, and building meaningful partnerships within Higher Education are met through members' participation in the forum. The study further aimed to examine whether forum participation influenced members to positively impact or reconsider the quality practices at their respective universities. Data from all six participating universities is currently undergoing analysis. This research aims to provide valuable insights into the role of collaborative forums in driving excellence, resilience, quality and collaboration within diverse higher education landscapes.

Parallel Presentation 15

Title: Predictive Analytics in Student Support: Building a Sustainable Ecosystem at a Higher Institution.

Authors: Liberty Takudzwa Nyete

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: Data; Ecosystem; Predictive analytics

Abstract: Higher education institutions increasingly face pressure to improve student retention and success. At higher institutions, fragmented support systems and delayed interventions have limited timely assistance for at-risk students. This study explores how predictive analytics can proactively identify such students and guide timely, targeted interventions to enhance academic outcomes and institutional efficiency. Using a multi-source data approach, including Moodle LMS activity, academic records, appointment logs, feedback systems, and advisor referrals, a predictive analytics framework was developed to guide indicator selection and data interpretation. Although machine learning tools are not yet in use, early alerts are manually triggered based on key risk factors such as low grades, poor attendance, and financial vulnerability. Preliminary implementation has improved coordination among support units and enabled earlier identification of students in need. Academic advisors, supported by CHETL units and other stakeholders, play a central role in translating data into action. Despite the absence of automation, the system has enhanced student satisfaction and support responsiveness. The findings highlight the importance of centralised customised and computerised data systems, staff training, and ethical data use. Investing in a computerised predictive platform could institutionalise proactive support, reduce dropout rates, and foster a culture of student success.

Parallel Presentation 16

Title: Towards resource optimisation - Differentiating the financial contributions of academic units

Authors: Mbongi Ndlovu and Glen Barnes

Sub-Theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

Keywords: Academic unit Viability; Programme Viability; Resource allocation; Benchmarking

Abstract: The South African Higher Education space is continually looking to address the short-term financial viability and the longer-term sustainability of public institutions. One area of interest in this space is the identification of appropriate methods that describe the contributions of academic units to the overall expenditure of the institution to recognise the differences through resource allocation. This paper examines the data sampled (selectively) from the sector where the HEDA Viability model is in use specifically for the purposes of describing the viability of academic units and programmes. The data gleaned from 8 institutions over a period of 6 years (2028 to 2023) are used to describe the financial status of these institutions (collectively) to contextualise the analysis of these data at a more detailed level (faculty/school) of which 33 are included in the analysis. The results show that most of the sampled institutions adopt resourcing methods that are based on the generation of income as opposed to the consumption of resources. With the key question 'How do we resource the academic units differently but adequately?' we present data and conclusions that speak directly to quantifying the differentiation of resourcing academic units towards resource optimisation.

Parallel Presentation 17

Title: Exploring the Plausible Pathways toward Inclusive and Equitable Education 5.0: An Appreciative Inquiry for Quality Higher Education in Namibia

Authors: Sulaiman Atiku and Himeesora Kaimu

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Appreciative inquiry; Education 5.0; Graduate employability; Human-centred AI; Inclusive education; Namibia; Quality education; Sustainable development

Abstract: There is a growing global demand for inclusive and equitable quality education to offer solutions to real-world problems (Education 5.0). Education 5.0 could be referred to as a transformative shift in education that integrates advanced technologies for personalised learning and developing essential skills to prepare learners for a rapidly evolving world. Higher educational institutions within the Southern African Development Council could rise to this challenge by delivering inclusive and equitable quality education. This study explores the potential pathways toward achieving inclusive and equitable Education 5.0 in Namibia, employing an appreciative inquiry approach. The study adopted an interpretivist stance and a qualitative approach to gather in-depth insights from key stakeholders in higher education institutions. Seven focus group discussions were conducted, applying the principles of appreciative inquiry. This enables the researchers to capture the perceptions of learners, academics, administrators, employers, quality assurance agencies, and policymakers regarding inclusive and equitable Education 5.0 for sustainable development in Namibia. The qualitative data were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis to develop a comprehensive framework for the effective implementation of Education 5.0 in Namibia. Results underscore the need to transform the educational landscape by stimulating innovation and applying learning outcomes to address real-world problems in Namibia.

Parallel Presentation 18

Title: From Entry to Exit: A Data-Driven Framework for a Student-Centered Recommender System within the South African Higher Education Sector

Authors: Hossein Masoumi Karakani, Mxolisi Masango and Takalani

Muloiwa-Klenam

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: Recommender System; Student Success; Equity; HEMIS; Data-Driven

Abstract: In South Africa (SA), persistent challenges such as high dropout rates, low throughput, and inequitable student outcomes undermine the transformative potential of Higher Education (HE). These issues are compounded by fragmented decision-making tools and limited use of available data to guide student journeys, particularly when choosing qualifications and modules. In response, this paper proposes a framework for a data-driven recommender system tailored to the SA's HE landscape, aiming to enhance student success across the academic lifecycle. Leveraging the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) as a foundational data source, the system supports both pre-university and post-enrolment decision-making. Pre-university applications include optimising entry selection and matching students to programmes aligned with their academic profiles, interests, and potential. Post-enrolment, the system guides module choices, especially electives, by drawing on historical completion rates, progression patterns, and outcomes. The framework also addresses institutional goals such as improving throughput and graduation rates by identifying academic trajectories with higher success probabilities. Furthermore, it supports personalised learning pathways and early alert systems to reduce dropout risk. This adaptive, context-aware system aims to bridge equity and performance gaps, improving access, retention, and success within SA's diverse HE environment. It aligns with national strategies to strengthen data-informed, student-centered support.

Parallel Presentation 19

Title: Policy Intentions to Practice: Analysing Planned Funding Allocations in South African Higher Education (2019–2023)

Authors: Thembelihle Luthuli

Sub-Theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

Keywords: Higher education funding; Policy alignment; Earmarked grants

Abstract: This study examines trends in planned earmarked funding allocations to South African universities between 2019 and 2023, as outlined in Ministerial Statements. It focuses on key grants, including the Clinical Training Grant (CTG), Infrastructure and Efficiency Grant (IEG), University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG), and New Generation of Academics Programme (NGAP), to assess their alignment with national higher education policy frameworks such as the National Development Plan (NDP 2030) and the White Paper on Post-School Education and Training. The study draws on quantitative trend analysis and applies a structured alignment index to evaluate the extent to which planned allocations reflect strategic priorities related to transformation, institutional capacity, equity, and sustainability. As grants differ in institutional applicability, the analysis considers each allocation within its intended policy function and institutional context. Rather than evaluating the sufficiency of funding amounts, the study focuses on coherence between planning decisions and policy intent. Findings aim to inform institutional planning and funding policy, while offering a methodological base for future research across a broader timeframe or grant set.

Parallel Presentation 20

Title: Aligning Research Funding Strategies with National Development Goals: A UoT Perspective

Authors: Valentine Maroga and Njabulo Ngobese

Sub-Theme: Global and Continental Commitments: Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations

Keywords: Institutional Research; University of Technology (UoTs); Research Impact

Abstract: South Africa's development ambitions, as articulated in the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 and related policy frameworks, position research and innovation as critical drivers of economic and social transformation. Universities of Technology (UoTs), with their applied research mandate, are well-placed to contribute to these goals. This paper explores the extent to which research funding strategies at UoTs align with national development priorities. Using a case study of one UoT and supported by policy document analysis and stakeholder interviews, the paper highlights structural, operational, and strategic misalignments that undermine impact. Key challenges include fragmented funding mechanisms, limited developmental targeting, and a weak incentive culture. The study proposes a practical framework for aligning institutional funding decisions with national imperatives, drawing on best practices in performance-based funding, industry collaboration, and monitoring of research impact. The findings have significant implications for institutional planners, research managers, and policymakers committed to strengthening the developmental role of higher education institutions. The paper aligns with SAAIR's objective to advance institutional research that supports effective planning and operations in higher education.

Parallel Presentation 21

Title: Module Review Process to Enhance Success in High Impact Modules

Authors: Herman Janse van Vuuren

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: High Impact Modules; Module Review; Automated notifications

Abstract: This demonstration aims to showcase the current digital system that was developed to support and structure the Module Review process for High Impact Modules (HIMs). HIMs are identified as modules with success rates below 70% and are flagged each year for targeted academic support or identify additional resource needs. Identifications based on success rates however lack the required insight into the context of modules to reliably determine the intervention or resource needs relevant to that context. To gain deeper insights into the module contexts, a module review process is followed for identified modules. This process provides a space for reflection from academic staff on teaching, learning, and structural challenges; such as policies, processes, and practices that may affect student performance. In addition, the process allows for a space to document interventions and track changes. To facilitate these reviews, we've leaned heavily on the Microsoft environment. A centralised PowerApps platform captures departmental reflections and proposed interventions, offering secure access to relevant stakeholders. The system also automates notifications and allows tracking of interventions over time. This session will highlight how integrated technological systems enhance the Module Review process and contribute to data-informed decision-making for academic support.

Parallel Presentation 22

Title: Student Debt – Can We Resolve It or Learn to Live With It?

Authors: Darlington Mutakwa

Sub-Theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

Keywords: Student debt; Financial sustainability; Funding

Abstract: South Africa's higher education system faces a mounting student debt crisis, now exceeding R16 billion, threatening institutional sustainability and equitable access. This proposal seeks to interrogate whether student debt in South Africa can be resolved, or if new strategies are needed to manage and live with it sustainably. Drawing on recent data from NSFAS, university annual reports, and StatsSA, this presentation examines the drivers of student debt accumulation, including rising tuition, fluctuating government subsidies, and endemic socio-economic inequalities. We critique existing funding mechanisms and debt recovery approaches, highlighting both their successes and persistent shortcomings. Comparisons with international best practices are used to frame innovative, context-specific models for alleviating debt burdens such as income-contingent loans, targeted debt forgiveness, and graduate tax proposals, while considering the constraints of South Africa's fiscal environment. Ultimately, this session aims to provoke a constructive dialogue about whether "solving" student debt is feasible, or whether resilient, ethically informed frameworks for managing debt must be integrated into future university financial planning. This evidence-based discussion will appeal to policy makers, university leaders, and stakeholders seeking sustainable pathways through South Africa's higher education funding challenges.

Parallel Presentation 23

Title: Exploring Student Safety Experiences in ODeL: Challenges and Best Practices Report

Authors: Siphelo Mapolisa, Dorah Queen Sekhosana and Tshegofatso

Kgomo

Sub-Theme: Global and Continental Commitments: Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations

Keywords: Student safety; Physical safety; Cyber security

Abstract: The study explored the safety measures employed by an ODeL institution to protect and ensure students' safety. The study also focused on student safety perceptions and experiences and their understanding of safety measures, policies and procedures. Campus safety policies and protocols are intended to provide for the well-being of students and often focus on how institutions treat students throughout their academic careers from admission through graduation. Comprehensive measures catering to the safety requirements of ODeL students are lacking. The survey aimed to explore Student Safety Experiences in Open Distance Learning Institutions, focusing on the challenges and Best Practices. The study employed a descriptive research design using quantitative research methods to explore student safety experiences in the ODeL context, focusing on the challenges and best practices. A census sampling approach was used for this study, targeting all UNISA students registered in 2025. The study explored the safety measures employed by an ODeL institution to protect and ensure students' safety. The study also focused on student safety perceptions and experiences and their understanding of safety measures, policies and procedures.

Parallel Presentation 24

Title: The 'Matriculation Gap' and Students' University Success : A case student of a South African Higher Education Institution

Authors: Anele Bangani and Munienge Mbodila

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: Student Success; Matriculation gap; student funding; HEIs; matric grade

Abstract: This quantitative correlational study examines the "matriculation gap," which is the term used to describe the discrepancy between South Africa's high school graduation results and university success. The study investigates the relationship between matric results (APS), school quintile and location, student funding and students' performance during their first year of university and eventual degree completion using comprehensive student cohort data from two faculties (Business and Science). A mismatch between high school preparation and the intellectual and personal demands of university life is shown in the report by highlighting instances where students with outstanding matric grades struggle or fail to finish their degrees. This disparity, which has its roots in variations in learning settings, academic expectations, and degrees of freedom, becomes a significant contributor to student dropout rates. The results of this study are intended to give higher education institutions (HEIs) practical insights that will guide efforts to align the curriculum, improve admissions standards, and create more successful student support programs that will increase students' perseverance and success.

Parallel Presentation 25

Title: Information literacy instruction as a student-success ecosystem at a South-African university

Authors: Alugumi Ndou and Jerry Mahlangu

Sub-Theme: Global and Continental Commitments: Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations

Keywords: Information literacy; Hybrid learning; Student success; South African university; Sustainable Development Goals

Abstract: This study explores information literacy (IL) instruction offered to first-year level students as a student-success ecosystem at a South African university. The research aimed to assess the relevance, delivery, and impact of IL programmes, while identifying challenges to effective participation. Using a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data were analysed descriptively, and qualitative responses were thematically coded. Results indicate overwhelmingly positive student perceptions, with 93% finding the programme appropriate and 91% supporting its compulsory inclusion for all first-year students. Participants highlighted benefits such as improved academic skills, enhanced use of library resources, and increased confidence in information-seeking. However, significant barriers emerged, particularly related to digital access, online fatigue, and lack of practical engagement. The findings underscore a strong preference for hands-on and face-to-face IL instructions. The study recommends a hybrid delivery model and improved digital equity strategies to enhance the programme's accessibility and effectiveness.

Parallel Presentation 26

Title: Artificial Intelligence as a catalyst to Enhance Teaching, Learning, and Decision-Making in Higher Education: A South African Perspective

Authors: Hloniphile Cleopatra Zwane, Thembisile Alice Ndimande and

Victor Halalisani Mlambo

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: higher education; Artificial Intelligence; South Africa; Growth

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to critically examine whether artificial intelligence has the potential to transform instructional methodologies, improve institutional productivity, and enhance student support systems within higher education, while also considering concerns regarding the credibility and integrity of higher education systems. Despite these fears, AI has become increasingly integrated into higher education globally, with tools such as ChatGPT, Gemini, Claude, Perplexity and Cockpit gaining prominence over the past decade. This paper adopts a systematic review approach to evaluate existing literature, drawing on studies that highlight both the benefits and drawbacks of AI adoption. The paper pays particular attention to how AI-driven innovations, such as learning analytics, intelligent tutoring systems, and administrative automation, are transforming higher education practices. By comparing and contrasting scholarly arguments, the paper interrogates whether AI serves as a catalyst for improved teaching, learning, and decision-making or whether it exacerbates existing challenges. The South African context is foregrounded, given its dynamic and often complex higher education landscape, marked by resource constraints, equity challenges, and the demand for innovation. Ultimately, this paper seeks to establish whether AI integration represents an opportunity to strengthen higher education in South Africa or a risk that could undermine its core values.

Parallel Presentation 27

Title: The Impact of Higher Education Sector Changes on Mathematical Parameters of South Africa's Funding Formula for Public Universities

Authors: Remy Nnadozie

Sub-Theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

Keywords: Funding formula; Block Grants; New Funding Framework; Higher Education Sector Changes; Funding factors

Abstract: In democratic South Africa, governmental steering of higher education relies significantly on funding through block grants and earmarked funds. The block grant, allocated via the evolved New Funding Framework (NFF), remains the largest and subsidy for public universities. This study investigates whether all parameters in the current funding model remain relevant considering shifts in the higher education landscape. Employing a mixed methods design including document analysis, quantitative data analysis and mathematical evaluation of funding parameters, the research draws on HEMIS data accessed via peer data sharing in the HEDA BI system. By examining historical and current factors of the funding formula, the study gauges redundancy and proposes a streamlined model better suited to the evolving higher education ecosystem.

Parallel Presentation 28

Title: Ready or Not? Unpacking Digital Divides in First-Year Students' University Preparedness

Authors: Loquitur Maka

Sub-Theme: Global and Continental Commitments: Advancing higher education's role in achieving the UN 2030 SDGs and Africa's Agenda 2063 aspirations

Keywords: Digital literacy; Digital divide; Academic readiness; Higher education preparedness; School type disparities; Rural and urban schools; Public vs. private schools; First-year students; Educational equity; Technology-enhanced learning; Digital inclusion; Student support strategies; Van Dijk's Digital Divide Theory; South African education; Institutional planning

Abstract: This study examines first-year education students' perceptions of digital readiness, applying Van Dijk's Theory of the Digital Divide to explore disparities in access, skills, and confidence with digital tools. It investigates how prior schooling type and socio-geographic context influence students' preparedness for university learning environments. An online survey was distributed to 1,575 first-year Faculty of Education students via EvaSys, with 325 valid responses. The survey included Likert-scale, categorical, and open-ended questions measuring digital access, basic computer skills, troubleshooting ability, confidence with digital tools, and academic readiness perceptions. Analysis involved independent samples t-tests and one-way ANOVAs to compare digital literacy and academic readiness across four school types: Rural Public, Urban Public, Rural Private, and Urban Private. Pearson correlations and regression analyses will explore relationships between digital literacy competencies and academic preparedness. Preliminary data suggest disparities linked to school type and rural-urban divides, highlighting equity concerns. By identifying these gaps, the study aims to inform institutional planning and targeted interventions that support equitable digital transformation in higher education. The research aligns with the SAAIR DISCO framework, offering data-driven insights to enhance student success, and supports SDG 4 and Agenda 2063 by promoting inclusive, quality education within a digitally evolving landscape.

Parallel Presentation 29

Title: Transforming Higher Education Through AI Innovation: The Role of the University of South Africa (Comprehensive Open Distance E-Learning Institution).

Authors: Azwy Christopher Tshivhase and Denise Rosemary Nicholson

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence; Comprehensive open distance e-learning environments; AI generated works

Abstract: In the context of teaching and learning within a comprehensive university, assessment serves as a critical tool to measure students' learning progress. However, the rapid advancement of technology and the growing prevalence of artificial intelligence (AI) in comprehensive open distance e-learning environments often elicit reactive rather than proactive institutional responses. The widespread use of AI tools by students raises significant questions about their implications, benefits, and challenges. While such tools can enhance student performance in assessments, they also prompt concerns among academics regarding authenticity, plagiarism, and copyright infringement. These concerns stem from the perception that AI-generated content may not fully reflect students' potential or original effort. This paper examines the critical issue of whether AI-generated content should be subject to copyright regulation and technological interventions to ensure ethical writing. It explores how students, lecturers, support staff, researchers, practitioners, and other stakeholders within the university ecosystem can be empowered through the development of practical guidelines for the ethical and constructive use of AI-generated content. These guidelines aim to harness AI in support of educational growth while addressing concerns related to academic integrity.

Parallel Presentation 30

Title: The Role of Research Outputs in Attracting External Funding and Enhancing Reputation

Authors: Valentine Maroga and Modjadji Mtsweni

Sub-Theme: Funding the Future: Advancing sustainable financial planning and resource optimisation in a rapidly evolving academic landscape.

Keywords: Research outputs; External funding; Institutional reputation; Strategic alignment

Abstract: The Role of Research Outputs in Attracting External Funding and Enhancing Reputation ABSTRACT In an increasingly competitive higher education landscape, research outputs act as a foundation for universities aiming to attract external funding and enhance their institutional reputation. This paper explores the strategic significance of research productivity—evaluated by publications, patents, and community impact—in boosting the credibility and visibility of Universities of Technology (UoTs). Using institutional research data, case studies, and stakeholder interviews, the study highlights key patterns connecting research performance with funding success and improved reputation. The findings show that sustained and strategically aligned research outputs greatly influence funders' perceptions and decisions, while also increasing rankings, collaborative opportunities, and policy impact. For UoTs, whose mandate includes applied research and industry engagement, a robust research portfolio not only secures funding streams but also strengthens their value proposition within the national innovation ecosystem. This paper advances the discussion on institutional effectiveness by providing practical guidance for aligning research strategies with funding models and reputation goals. The insights aim to assist institutional planners, research offices, and executive management in enhancing the role of research in institutional development.

Parallel Presentation 31

Title: TOWARDS EXCELLENCE IN NAVIGATING INSTITUTIONAL PRESSURES AND CONTINGENCIES: A NEO-INSTITUTIONAL AND CONTINGENCY ANALYSIS OF INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN COMPREHENSIVE UNIVERSITIES

Authors: Vakele Nobongoza and Somarie Hotlzhausen

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: comprehensive university; contingency theory; neo-institutional theory; internal quality assurance mechanisms; learning and teaching; research; community engagement

Abstract: Formal Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems remain relatively new in many higher education institutions (HEIs), particularly in developing contexts with constrained resources. This paper presents PhD preliminary findings on IQA mechanisms in three comprehensive South African universities, applying contingency and neo-institutional theories to examine their design, implementation, and impact. It includes a global conceptual analysis, identifies conditions for effective IQA, and explores staff perceptions through a qualitative survey. Preliminary findings reveal how universities navigate tensions between external accountability and internal organisational contingencies, offering insights into evolving quality cultures. The study aims to develop a context-sensitive IQA framework tailored to South African HEIs, with best practice guidelines to support strategic objectives and institutional effectiveness. Stakeholder perspectives—from deans, heads of departments, programme coordinators, and directors/managers responsible for quality assurance—are central to informing future QA initiatives and enhancing implementation. The research also identifies key areas for further inquiry, including the long-term influence of IQA on institutional transformation, the role of leadership and governance, and the integration of equity and inclusion. By deepening theoretical engagement and promoting participatory approaches, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of IQA complexities and supports the advancement of quality assurance in diverse higher education settings.

Parallel Presentation 32

Title: From Compliance to Collaboration: Leveraging Institutional Audit Outcomes for Strategic Improvement in South African Higher Education

Authors: Hossein Masoumi Karakani and Ashton Maherry

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Institutional Audit; Inter-institutional Collaboration; Natural Language Processing; Quality Assurance; Professional Learning Community

Abstract: This paper explores opportunities for inter-institutional collaboration by leveraging insights from institutional audit outcomes to inform strategic improvement planning in South African higher education. Building on standards-based evaluations, the proposed approach identifies institutions demonstrating excellence in specific quality assurance areas and recommends that those facing challenges be strategically matched for support. Central to this model is a cluster-based approach that groups institutions with similar performance patterns and institutional profiles, allowing for more context-sensitive comparisons and targeted collaboration. To deepen the analysis, the framework incorporates Natural Language Processing (NLP) to extract themes, trends, and sentiment from qualitative audit narratives, enhancing the interpretive power of audit data. The process is aligned with national frameworks, Institutional Audit standards, as well as transformation imperatives. By enabling structured, peer-informed partnerships within and across clusters, the approach promotes knowledge sharing, capacity building, and sustainable improvement pathways. This data-enriched strategy reframes institutional audits from static compliance exercises into dynamic tools for equity-driven, systemic enhancement - ultimately creating opportunity to greater access, and success. A structured peer-learning mechanism - such as a Professional Learning Community (PLC) within SAAIR's new Special Interest Group (SIG) on quality assurance - offers audit-informed collaboration and professional development to drive context-sensitive sector advancement.

Parallel Presentation 34

Title: Building a Data Culture: Advancing Digital and Data Literacy

Authors: Elizabeth Booi

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: Data literacy; capacity development; data culture; institutional practice

Abstract: This presentation will showcase how the University of the Western Cape (UWC) is fostering a data culture through intentional digital and data literacy initiatives. It draws on institutional practice to demonstrate how staff and students are being equipped with future-ready skills for a changing higher education and work environment. Using a capability framework, the session will detail how UWC identifies, develops, and integrates key skills in data ethics, interpretation, data-informed decision-making, and digital confidence. The initiative combines workshops, online tools, peer learning, and applied analytics to promote inclusive capacity building. The approach emphasises human-centred engagement, equitable access, and relevance to academic and professional practice. The presentation will include practical examples and participation metrics, while also addressing institutional challenges, enabling conditions, and lessons for sector-wide implementation. This use case will help illustrate how universities can bridge the digital divide by aligning strategic goals with inclusive literacy strategies and adaptable workforce skills.

Parallel Presentation 35

Title: Advancing Equity Through Analytics: The Role of Eigenvalues in Strengthening Standardisation in Education

Authors: Thato Mokoma

Sub-Theme: Ensuring Excellence: Enhancing quality assurance frameworks to support transformative, sustainable higher education systems.

Keywords: Standardisation; Subject difficulty; Eigenvalue analysis

Abstract: The pursuit of excellence in education demands robust, fair, and transparent process for evaluating learner performance. In high-stakes national assessments such as NSC, the standardisation of marks plays a crucial role in ensuring comparability and credibility across subjects. Yet, one of the most persistent challenges in this process is determining the relative difficulty of subjects in a manner that is both consistent and objective. This paper introduces the application of eigenvalue analysis as a promising innovation in the quality assurance of educational assessments. Drawing from matrix algebra, eigenvalues offer a mathematically grounded method for analysing learner performance across subjects. By constructing and interpreting a subject-by-subject performance matrix, eigenvalues can reveal patterns of consistency and disparity in results highlighting which subjects are inherently more or less challenging for the cohort. The use of this technique enhances the objectivity of the standardisation process by reducing reliance on subjective expert judgment alone. Instead, it provides a repeatable, evidence-based framework for informing mark adjustments that reflects actual learner outcomes and underlying subject relationships. This contributes directly to greater fairness, reduced bias, and increased transparency in how learner results are standardised. Importantly, the adoption of eigenvalue analysis aligns with broader Umalusi goals around data-informed decision-making.

Parallel Presentation 36

Title: Falling Behind: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of Male Student Success in South African Universities

Authors: Innocent Mamvura and Lerato Makuapane

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: Male Student Success; Student Retention; Psychosocial Barriers; Institutional Research

Abstract: Across South African universities, male students are persistently underperforming relative to their female peers—evident in lower academic achievement, higher dropout rates, and delayed graduation. This contributed paper presents findings from a mixed-methods study aimed at understanding the drivers of this gendered performance gap. The quantitative component analyses institutional Business Intelligence (BI) data from over 20,000 student records between 2016 and 2023, examining trends in first-year pass rates, course repetition, and time-to-graduation. Complementing this, a structured student survey captures qualitative insights into the lived experiences of male students, focusing on psychosocial, motivational, and structural barriers. Key findings reveal that financial pressures, reduced academic engagement, and weaker non-cognitive skills disproportionately affect male students, contributing to their academic underperformance. This paper contributes to national conversations on student success by offering evidence-informed recommendations for gender-responsive institutional support models. The findings highlight the importance of targeted interventions and policy frameworks that consider the unique challenges male students face in navigating higher education.

Parallel Presentation 36

Title: Empowering workforce development through human-centric Ai

Authors: Murendeni Mukwevho and Kevin Silomo

Sub-Theme: Bridging the Skills Gap: Empowering workforce development through human-centred AI and future-focused higher education.

Keywords: Human-Centric AI; Skills Gap; Innovation

Abstract: Bridging the skills gap:Empowering workforce development through human-centric Ai;research conducted under the university of Venda. As we stand at the crossroads of technological advancement and human potential,the university of Venda is poised to revolutionize workforce development through human-centric AI. Our approach prioritizes empathy,creativity and critical thinking ensuring that AI enhances rather than replaces human talent. By empowering our workforce with AI-driven tools and training,we can unlock new levels of productivity,innovation and collaboration. Our human-centric approach recognizes that technology isnonly effective as the human who wield it.At the University of Venda there evolvement involves fostering a culture of lifelong learning and simplicity with care. From the entrance;Admin and the overall channels of the university of venda will formed through a collective,potential and committed workforce,together let's bridge the skills gap and forge a more inclusive,more compassionate and more productive world.

Parallel Presentation 37

Title: Designed with students, for students: validating the mental health assessment tools used in the Fit Minds Survey through student voice.

Authors: Lerato Makuapane and Fezile Wagner

Sub-Theme: From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies.

Keywords: mental health; students; face validity; patient health questionnaire (PHQ); generalized anxiety disorder (GAD)

Abstract: University students face a heightened risk of mental health challenges compared to the general population. Therefore, there have been increased efforts to assess these issues through various tools. However, the validity of these instruments, such as the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) and Generalized Anxiety Disorder scale (GAD-7), in university contexts remains underexplored. This study aimed to assess the face validity of these tools among Wits University students. A simple random sample of students first received the survey, after which some were invited to participate in focus group discussions (FGDs). The FGDs explored students' reflections on the survey's clarity, emotional sensitivity, language, length, and relevance. Responses were thematically analysed. Preliminary findings suggest students generally found the survey relevant and informative, with many reporting increased self-awareness and willingness to seek support. The inclusion of resources like the Counselling and Careers Development Unit (CCDU) was appreciated. While most found the survey easy to understand, some questioned its purpose or experienced difficulty recalling their mental state during completion. In conclusion, the face validity process demonstrated that incorporating student feedback meaningfully improved the survey's clarity and relevance ahead of wider distribution across the university.

Panel Discussion Title: Panel Discussion Title: AI for Institutional Operational Excellence and Strategic Foresight: Opportunities, Risks, and Real-World Practice

Panellist /s: Innocent Mamvura (University of the Witwatersrand)
Dr Eric Atchison (Arkansas State University System)
Dr Mbodila Munienge (Walter Sisulu University)
Prof Sulaiman Olusegun Atiku (Namibia University of Science and Technology)
Prabashnee Kisten (Durban University of Technology)

Artificial Intelligence is rapidly transforming the operational and strategic landscape of higher education institutions. From predictive analytics and process automation to academic workload planning and resource optimisation, AI holds promise for enhancing operational efficiency, strategic responsiveness, and evidence-informed governance.

This panel brings together institutional research professionals, AI practitioners, and strategic planning experts to explore the integration of AI in driving institutional operational excellence. Panellists will present real-world applications of AI and machine learning in areas such as:

- Institutional performance dashboards and forecasting
- AI-driven policy simulations and what-if scenario planning
- Automation of routine administrative and reporting functions
- Data, AI Ethics and Governance
- AI in the Higher Education Funding Policy

The discussion will also tackle critical issues including data ethics, governance, and institutional capacity for responsible AI adoption.

Each panellist will offer a unique lens—practical implementation, strategic alignment, technical foundations, or ethical considerations—followed by a facilitated audience Q&A and collective discussion.

Key Questions to Explore:

- What does operational excellence mean in the age of AI?
- Where is the line between augmentation and automation in institutional decision-making?
- How can institutions prepare for AI integration without displacing human expertise?
- What governance frameworks are needed to ensure responsible, ethical AI adoption?

Panel Format:

- 5-minute opening remarks by moderator
- 4 x 8-minute panellist inputs (total 32 min)
- 20-minute audience Q&A and moderated discussion
- 5-minute group wrap-up: "Three things to take home"

Learning Objectives:

1. Identify strategic areas in which AI can meaningfully enhance institutional operations
2. Understand real-world use cases and implementation considerations
3. Engage with ethical and governance implications of AI in HE
4. Learn from cross-institutional perspectives to develop context-specific strategies

Target Audience:

Institutional researchers, academic planners, quality assurance professionals, senior management, BI/IT teams, and anyone involved in operational or strategic decision-making in HEIs.

Panel Discuss Title: I Am: Embedding the Student Voice in Higher Education through Siyaphumelela

Panellist /s: Ashton Maherry (Saide)
Simphiwe Kunene (Varsity College)
Bradley Gawie (Central University of Technology, Free State)

This panel discussion explores the critical role of student voice in shaping inclusive, responsive, and effective higher education systems. Drawing on the Siyaphumelela initiative's commitment to data-informed student success, the session will foreground the lived experiences of two Siyaphumelela Scholars through their original "I Am" poems. These personal narratives offer a powerful lens into the challenges, identities, and aspirations of students navigating the South African higher education landscape.

The panel aligns with the sub-theme "From Insight to Impact: Strengthening strategic governance through data-driven decision-making and emerging technologies" by demonstrating how qualitative, student-generated data can inform institutional research and governance. The session challenges institutions to expand their understanding of data to include student narratives as a legitimate and impactful source of insight.

The panel will begin with each scholar presenting their poem (6 minutes each), offering a deeply personal and reflective entry point into the broader conversation about student success, student perceptions of institutional culture and transformation. These poems serve as qualitative data; they are rich, emotive, and grounded in lived experience, which challenge institutions to rethink how they listen to and act on student perspectives.

Following the presentations, the facilitator will lead a discussion among the scholars. The scholars will prepare their own questions which they will then be asked back to them. This student-centred discussion will explore themes such as sense of belonging, academic support, identity, and the role of student voice in institutional decision-making. The session will conclude with a 20-minute open-floor Q&A, inviting delegates to engage with the scholars and reflect on how their institutions can better embed student voice in research, planning, and practice.

Relevance to SAAIR Objectives
This panel supports SAAIR's objective to "advance institutional research leading to improved understanding, planning and operation of institutions of higher education." By integrating student narratives into institutional research, the session promotes a more holistic understanding of student success and encourages the use of inclusive, participatory data practices.

Structure (60 minutes)

1. Introduction (5 minutes) – Overview of Siyaphumelela and the importance of student voice
2. Scholar Presentations (12 minutes) – Two "I Am" poems (6 minutes each)
3. Facilitated Dialogue (20 minutes) – Scholars pose and respond to their own questions
4. Audience Q&A (20 minutes) – Open discussion with delegates
5. Closing Reflections (3 minutes) – Final thoughts from the panel

Contribution and Learning Value

This panel offers a unique contribution to institutional research by:

- Elevating student voice as a legitimate and valuable form of data.
- Encouraging institutions to adopt participatory, student-informed approaches to planning and evaluation.

Delegates will leave with:

- A deeper understanding of the student experience.
- Practical insights into embedding student voice in institutional processes.
- Inspiration to reimagine institutional research as a collaborative, inclusive practice.