

Editorial Comment

This Special Issue is organized around the theme of “transition into a new African university in the Global South in the 21st Century” to reflect on historical trajectories, contemporary challenges, and future prospects of African higher education systems. The special issue is a product of an open call that targeted a wide range of scholars with diverse experiences and viewpoints. Incorporating diverse perspectives from various conceptual, theoretical, methodological, and empirical aspects of higher education transformation, this special issue presents a collection of scholarly papers that are both grounded in empirical evidence and are conceptually rigorous. The papers featured in this special issue offer thought-provoking perspectives and inspire critical debate on the issue of the future of African higher education.

The papers have been arranged into four sub-thematic areas, namely, (i) Experiences and emerging practices within the African university, (ii) Barriers and transformation (iii) Transitioning to the new African university, and (iv) The future of the new African university.

(i) Experiences and Emerging Practices within African Universities

This sub-theme explores the emerging trends in African higher education systems that present both challenges and opportunities. This is with particular emphasis and relevance to students’ epistemic access and success. It delves into the emergence of plurilingual practices which challenge the conventional notion of English as the lingua franca. The sub-theme also addresses the pressing challenge of the growing burden of student loans and debt, particularly for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The following three papers are included in this sub-theme:

- Access and politics of higher education for refugees: Comparative contexts from Uganda and Ethiopia
 - Plurilingual practices in Higher Education: An analysis of student perceptions from a South African University
 - Against the pedagogy of debt in South African higher education
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(ii) Barriers and transformation

Although change and reforms are constant variables in higher education transformation processes, they may not equally benefit and positively impact all members of the higher education communities. This is particularly true for vulnerable communities and disadvantaged groups, including students and staff with disabilities, as seen in the case of South Africa. This subsection reflects on the implications of transformation on academics with disabilities. The paper argues that the transformation to the new imaginary of African higher education will remain incomplete without the meaningful participation of underrepresented communities in the academic enterprise. This theme is represented by the following paper:

- Academics with disabilities and transition to a new African University in South Africa

(iii) Transitioning to the new African university

In the context of "Transitioning to the new African university," three papers critically examined the challenges faced by African universities and knowledge systems, focusing on the broader framework of decolonial scholarship. These papers present a compelling argument that African universities must actively adopt decolonial perspectives to foster the integration of epistemologies that are inclusive of African perspectives and experiences. Additionally, they examine the trends of academic mobility among African higher education systems, fostering South-South partnerships that have the potential to transform and strengthen African higher education systems. The papers strongly emphasize the notion of inclusiveness, highlighting the importance of incorporating diverse perspectives, knowledge systems, and backgrounds in the future of African universities. The three papers in this sub-theme are:

- Combating colonial mentality within higher learning spaces: The case of sub-Saharan African universities
- African identity and curriculum transformation at universities in South Africa
- Intra-Africa student mobility: benefits for Africa and factors militating against it

(iv) The future of the new African university

Technology integration and digitalization will be an integral part of the future of African universities. The question of technology and the ways in which digitalisation is forcing its

reconfiguration is also discussed in this special issue. The process of learning has been intricately intertwined with the spatial context in which it occurs, whether that context is of a virtual or physical nature. The emergence of online platforms and learning management systems has reconfigured the traditional spatial context in which learning takes place, blurring the boundaries between virtual and physical spaces. This also introduces a range of distinctive features, hierarchical structures, and control mechanisms that significantly shape the dynamics of learning within the realm of higher education. Within this framework the following three papers also reflect on the notion of ICT integration, STEM education and SDGs agenda in African higher education transformation:

- Towards a context-relevant, institution-based ICT integration model of teacher education curriculum in Zimbabwe
- The SDG agenda and university transformation in Africa: the decolonial turn deferred?
- Alleviation of social injustices in STEM education: Harnessing pedagogical affordances of virtual and augmented reality applications through open learning

NB. The AMCHES editorial team acknowledges and appreciates the diligent work done by the reviewers who contributed towards the triple review of manuscripts, thus enhancing the quality of the special issue.

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