

Introduction

African Higher Education and the Praxis of Research, Innovation, and Internationalisation

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The African higher education landscape has experienced a myriad of success and challenges in the past five decades. This has turned the landscape into a complex one, enmeshed in a rich dose of colonial legacies, globalisation, decolonisation, COVID-19, and internationalisation focused on North-South partnerships amongst others. While researchers globally have contributed immensely to the growth of research in African higher education, scholars within the African higher education landscape have also contributed immensely to the growth in higher education both on the African continent and globally. The fact that some African universities make it into the top 500 universities worldwide in different rankings testifies to this assertion. Tamrat (2022) argues that the Covid-19 pandemic created an avenue for innovation in African higher education through diversified means of educational delivery, approaches to research and innovation, and in other ways. Since the wave of independence spread across Africa in the fifties and sixties, the role of education on the continent has always been a debatable one. Two schools of thoughts emerged in the wake of independence which have continued to dominate conversations around research, innovations, and internationalisation in African higher education today. Writing about these schools of thought championed by Ali Mazrui and Walter Rodney, Mamdani (2016, p. 72) argues that

“Ali Mazrui called for a university true to its classical vision, as the home of the scholar ‘fascinated by ideas’; Walter Rodney saw the university as the home of the public intellectual, a committed intellectual rooted in his time and place, and deeply engaged with the wider society. From these contrasting visions would emerge two equally one-sided notions of higher education: one accenting excellence, the other relevance”.

The decolonisation wave which is currently sweeping the African continent and the global higher education sphere at large is still a function of the question of relevance and how to make higher education more impactful. Within the higher education section in Africa countless research initiatives, attempts at innovation and internationalising engagements are happening, but there is generally no consensus on how these three should flow and in exactly what order. Jakovljevic (2019, pp. 54-55) speaking to this argues that multiple research findings have indicated that there is “no appropriate foundation for producing innovation/invention at higher education institutions (HEIs)... (Oanda, 2013; Pouris and Pouris, 2011; Sibanda, 2008)”. There are no adequate criteria for forming innovative/inventive outcomes in organisations and academic communities (Gumusluoglu and Ilsev, 2009; Heher, 2006; Hsiu-Fen, 2007) as innovation is the implementation of a new, significantly improved product, service or process that serves as a new marketing method or a new organisational method in business practices, workplace organisation or external relations (OECD, 2005). Innovation which is often produced or championed by research can take any approach or format in higher education and exploring some of the formats or approaches it has taken, is one of the concerns of this book.

While research and innovation can be situated within a particular location or context, its consumption is never situated in like manner. Internationalisation in higher education has not only resulted in exchanges and engagements in teaching and learning amongst others but also in research and internationalisation initiatives. Teferra

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(2014b) argues that the relevance of internationalisation in higher education cannot be over-emphasised especially in this era of the knowledge economy, where research has grown in leaps and bounds on the African continent. Internationalisation speaks to and contributes towards quality assurance in higher education, research and its promotion, regional/global integration, and fostering human resource capacity. This is made possible against the background of the different elements of internationalisation such as student and staff mobility, regional and international networks, research initiatives, quality regimes (accreditation and ranking bodies), publication and communication (journals and databases), curricular reform, and new forms of educational delivery. As such, research, innovation, and internationalisation in African higher education are all intertwined and work hand in glove to orchestrate new regimes within the higher education construct.

De Wit, Hunter, Howard, and Egron-Polak (2015b, p. 29) recently reconfigured the definition of internationalisation as

“the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society”.

While this definition speaks to the intentionality of the of the process and the contribution it must make to society, some like Teferra (2020a) have disagreed with the definition. He posits that this fails to engage the phenomenon of internationalisation and its reality particularly as manifested in Africa as it situates intentionality as the key component of the definition. Internationalisation in Africa is often far from being an intentional process. He continues that “African higher education is the most internationalised system in the world — not by participation but by omission” (p. 160). Africa’s participation and contribution to the global landscape

in terms of research, innovation and internationalisation are the subject of exploration in this book.

Wolhuter and Wiseman (2013, p. 3) argue that

“Africa’s unique social contexts play a transformative role in the development of higher education throughout the continent. As a geographic giant endowed with substantial natural resources and a growing population, Africa is a dynamic – albeit diverse – world player... Despite rapid growth in recent years, higher education in Africa is less developed than anywhere else in the world. Major challenges include expanding participation in higher education, poor infrastructure, isolation from society and communities, internationalization, and regional cooperation, and aligning the world of education with the world of work”.

It is therefore not surprising that this edited volume explores issues around the following questions amongst other things: What is happening in the African higher education research and innovation landscape? What are the factors driving the migration of scholars within and outside the African continent? What kinds of engagement are happening within the African higher education landscape and how is this shaping the course of education? For ease of reading, this book is divided into several sections, with each section containing several chapters dealing with similar issues.

1. Theorising Internationalisation

This is the first section of the book, and it is made up of six chapters. Chapter one which is titled “Students’ demographics in postgraduate engineering education: the case of international students” focuses on postgraduate engineering international students. The study seeks to explore the demographics of doctoral and postdoctoral non-tenure researchers in engineering education. Since academic mobility is understood as a critical part of the internationalisation process, exploring this phenomenon becomes vital. It also moves away from the usual custom of researchers from the

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global North studying phenomena from the global South to engage these phenomena while situating them in the global North. The chapter also brings to light gender and racial imbalances in enrolments in postgraduate engineering programmes. The chapter concludes by articulating approaches through which the listed challenges can be tackled.

The second chapter in this book and section is titled “The role of internationalisation in improving intra-Africa research collaboration”. The chapter focuses on the importance of internationalisation of higher education and the place of research collaboration within the same framework as it contributes towards the exchange of ideas across borders and disciplines, produces new knowledge and positively impacts the quality of research and education. The chapter also ponders the dangers of North-South cooperation at the expenses of South-South cooperation or regional collaborations as the case might be. The chapter argues that collaborations should consider Africanisation and decolonisation drives so as to promote epistemicide. The chapter focuses on exploring the role of internationalisation of higher education in contributing to a meaningful expansion of intra-Africa collaboration and research for the benefit of the African continent and based on the interests, priorities and ownership of Africa and Africans.

The third chapter of this book and this section has the title “Intercontinental collaborations and their impact on African higher education”. The chapter sees higher education on the African continent as a product of colonialism and uneven power relations. It affirms that it is no secret that some universities on the continent still offer degrees with outdated curricula which are inherently colonial in nature. However, collaborations and partnerships between the global North and South are helping to build more efficient systems and educational architecture for a better educational experience. This chapter focuses on different collaborations in place in African higher education and the impact they are having on education.

The fourth chapter in this book focusing on academic mobility is titled “Migration of Zimbabwean scholars in the SADC region in the 21st century”. The chapter situates the push for mobility from pre-independence Zimbabwe and the state of its higher education then and now. It argues that the current state of higher education in Zimbabwe has necessitated academic mobility amongst Zimbabwean scholars and students to South Africa and Botswana. This chapter seeks to explore the push and pull factors contributing to the massive movement of Zimbabwean scholars to other countries within the Southern African Development Community region with a special focus on South Africa and Botswana. The impact of such migration on the exporting and importing countries are also articulated.

The next chapter in this section is titled “Internationalisation of postgraduate research within the context of Africa”. The chapter attempts to develop insight to advance postgraduate intra-Africa research from a South African perspective, while also looking at postgraduate research data from across Africa. It also looks at post-graduate research as a strategy to advance internationalisation in general and internationalisation of research in particular. The chapter highlights key strategies for the development of an inclusive research culture towards the advancement internationalisation in postgraduate research.

Chapter six, the last in this section, is titled “Internationalisation or not we move: perspectives from an outsider”. The chapter focuses on the idiosyncrasies around the meaning of internationalisation and what constitutes internationalisation in the current era. It looks at a series ongoing debates on the subject of internationalisation and argues that the process of internationalising is a complex one, with spaces cutting across disciplines and influenced by a multitude of factors. The chapter concludes that the focus of higher education in Africa should be on enhancing responsiveness at all levels and if this constitutes internationalisation, it is an advantage.

2. Theorising topical issues in higher Education

The first chapter in this section is chapter seven and is titled “Baya funda kuthi, nathi siyafunda kubo”: Transformative community engagement that contributes to the decolonisation agenda of higher education”. The chapter uses the social constructivist approach, within the social action model of community psychology, to explore how thoughtful community engagement (CE) programmes may promote the decolonial agenda of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and promote transformative learning for students and community partners. The chapter posits that community engagement works best when approached from the asset-based community development (ABCD) approach, which recognises and draws on the skills, capabilities, and knowledge that all parties have and bring with them to a partnership. The chapter provides valuable insight into how carefully managed CE partnerships in HEIs have the potential to contribute to the transformation agenda of HEIs, while promoting equitable societies as part of the decolonial agenda.

Chapter eight is titled “A posthumanist theorisation of South African higher education in the context of Africa towards sustainable learning environments”. The focus of the chapter is the theorisation of higher education research and innovation landscape in South Africa (HESA). Furthermore, a theorisation from Egypt (Egyptian Higher Education Research and Innovation Landscape) is included because of the country’s proximity to Europe and the Middle East. The Kenyan landscape is theorised as part of Sub-Saharan Africa. A Posthuman theorisation assists the chapter to pulverise and de-centre the notion of the individual in higher education research and innovation landscape, and in its place to recognise the immersive role and influence of the relationalities at the level of the researcher, the higher education institution, and the entire system of the country and continent.

The next chapter in this section is titled “System science – an inclusive model” and this is chapter nine. The chapter

strives to offer an appraisal of prevailing scientific debates by leading scholars in the field. The failure of global South scholars to capitalise on system science research has subsequently identified prevailing western-centric scholarship rooted in western approaches and philosophical traditions. The chapter also confronts the dominant reality to ensure that scholars recognise the value systems in which they are firmly rooted. The modifications offered via a clinical model prevent scholars from inadvertently becoming custodians of the embedded value system. The chapter concludes that the delivery of a clinical model facilitates an innovative, all-encompassing, and inclusive knowledge method for systems sciences, advancing diversity and augmenting knowledge systems.

The last but one chapter in this section is chapter ten and it is titled “Adopting systems thinking philosophy to improve processes and practices in the Universities of Technology (UoTs)”. This chapter is based on a research project that explored the applicability of systems thinking philosophy in the UoTs. Given the environment in which organisations operate, it becomes necessary for organisations to continuously improve their processes and practices to remain relevant and competitive. The chapter explores an alternative management philosophy for higher education institutions informed by a number of factors that have impacted the business of higher education.

The last chapter in this section is chapter eleven and it is titled “Re-engineering sociological constellations for higher education in South Africa”. The chapter focuses on the challenges of transforming the higher education landscape in post-apartheid South Africa and posits that the merger of several South African higher education institutions in 2004 further compounded these challenges. It is anchored on the premise that there exists an epistemological backlog where access to higher education has increased drastically but epistemological access remains a challenge. The chapter argues that these amongst other things fuelled the decolonisation movement which demanded the decolonisation of knowledge, but this decolonisation process cannot be completed without

a re-engineering of the sociology of education. This chapter articulates a pathway for the re-engineering of the sociology of education by articulating four sociological constellations.

3. Theorising Online Learning and Technology

Chapter twelve is the first in this section, and is titled “Is Turnitin for punitive or educative measures in postgraduate students’ research experiences?”. The chapter focuses on how Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) use digital technologies for teaching, learning and research practices. This chapter explores Turnitin as one of the digital technologies used by HEIs to detect plagiarism and similarity contents for both academics and students. Designed as a qualitative case study, this chapter explores postgraduate master’s students’ experiences of using Turnitin for research purposes at a HEI in South Africa. The chapter reveals mixed purposes and understandings of the use of Turnitin.

Titled “Digital inequality in African higher education institutions”, chapter thirteen focuses on digital inequality in African Higher Education. Most universities across the continent are increasingly shifting courses online not only as a way of addressing the ever-increasing student numbers but also to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital divide amongst the different people on the content is also explored. The chapter examines the relationship between information and communication technologies (ICT) and digital inequality in online education in African Higher Education Institutions.

The last chapter in this section and book is chapter fourteen and is titled “Demystifying the mainstream: moving from theories to stories”. The chapter seeks to explore the relevance and place of theories in higher education and articulates the need for stories as an alternative. It asks and answers the following questions: Are theories truly problematic? How do we reconcile the place of theory in contemporary research and education? How can theorizing be rid of its abstractive tendencies? How can theorizing be

decolonized? What are the alternatives to the mainstream approach to theorizing?

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