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Development**



SACHES

**THE SOUTHERN
AFRICAN COMPARATIVE
AND HISTORY OF
EDUCATION SOCIETY**

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Editor of SARE (Acting): Charl C. Wolhuter - North-West University
Tel: (018) 299-1881, e-mail: Charl.Wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

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Editorial notes

Charl Wolhuter

Southern African Review of Education is the journal of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) whose purpose is to promote comparative and international education at universities in the Southern African region, and for which reason Volume 12(2) in 2006 was a special issue devoted to the field in region at that time. This is the first 2025 issue of *Southern African Review of Education* and in my editorial notes in the last issue of 2024, I pointed out that this year, the journal would celebrate its 30th year. SACHES, founded 33 years ago, has been in existence since 1991, and I signalled my intention to, in the first issue of 2025, have a special section taking stock of the field in the Southern African region. This issue therefore offers a section comprising five articles on comparative and international education in the SACHES region, and three articles in the open section.

The first article in the special section provides a frame for the section: first, portraying the historical evolution and current state of comparative and international education globally as background to survey the state of the field in the Southern African theatre. The largest university in South Africa, and in the Southern African region, is University of South Africa. Thus, in the second article, Carlo Daniels reconstructs the short but up-and-down history of comparative and international education at that university.

In recent years, the central cluster of universities in South Africa has evolved, hearteningly, as a stronghold of the field of comparative and international education. At North-West University, the University of the Free State, Sol Plaatje University, and Akademia, the field stands strong in terms of infrastructure, faculty, place in programmes, and research activity. In the section's third article Julia Correia, Desireé Pearl Larey, Chris-Mari Le Hanie, Hennie Steyn and Kevin Teise present the hive of comparative and international education at these institutions of higher education.

For the past 35 years, SACHES has been a central point of reference for the Southern African comparative and international education scholarly community. In the fourth article, Harold Herman and Charl Wolhuter survey the historical evolution and present state of SACHES, and reflect on its future trajectory. And then, the final article in the section on comparative and international education in the Southern African region offers a view from the outside. Liz Jackson (University of Hong Kong) critically examines terminology denoting space, freely used among comparative and international education scholars, such as “developed,” “developing,” and “Global South”—an aspect of scholarship scholars in Southern African should also be mindful of.

Our second section, an open section, comprises three articles. In the first, Aslam Fataar focuses on the very topical issue (in view of current developments in the United States of America and elsewhere) of academic freedom in African universities through knowledge mobilisation. Then Jerome Joorst, in the next article, investigates the scope for public-private university collaboration

in South Africa. In the last article in the open section, Bernadette Johnson and Mondli Hlatshwayo turn the focus onto five discontents of the current process of transformation in South African higher education, namely governance and leadership failures, corruption and tender systems, academic precarity, gender inequality, and access and funding.

Finally, the issue contains a review by Qili Zhou of Ruben Sungwa, Liz Jackson, and Joyce Kahembe's recent book, *Corporal Punishment in Preschool and at Home in Tanzania*. The book review and articles in the open section all complement the first section given that they all deal with issues relevant to scholars of comparative and international education in Southern Africa.

But, however rich and heartening the collection of articles and book review published in this issue, they still reveal many of the shortcomings besetting the field of comparative and international education in Southern Africa and beyond. These shortcomings include, but are not limited to patterns of authorship, methodology, theoretical frameworks, and thematic foci. This brings the discussion to the value, and need, to investigate the historical evolution of *Southern African Review of Education*, as mirror of the field, and in order to plan a future trajectory for the journal. In the near future, I plan to publish such an analysis of, and reflection on, the patterns of published articles in *Southern African Review of Education*.

Editor

Charl Wolhuter is Professor, History of Education and Comparative Education in the Faculty of Education (Research Unit: Education and Human Rights in Diversity) at North-West University (Potchefstroom, South Africa).

Address for correspondence

Charl.Wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

Section 1

**Comparative and International Education in
the SACHES**

Raising the flag of the Global South: Élan for comparative and international education and SACHES

Charl Wolhuter
North-West University

Abstract

As lead article of the issue's section on comparative and international education as a field of scholarship in the Southern African region, this article firstly provides a framework, outlining the historical evolution of the field globally, and its present state and challenges. Criticism against Northern hegemony is identified as a central feature in the field. The role of scholars of comparative and international education in Southern Africa in steering the field to a next phase in its evolution, characterised by the Global South coming to its own right, is then argued. Within this framework and assignment, a prospectus of the other four articles in the section is presented in the last part of the article.

Keywords: comparative and international education, Global South, Northern hegemony, Southern Africa, Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES)

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Introduction

In his last publication, after a lifetime in the field of comparative and international education, renowned comparativist Robert Cowen (1938–2023) at the Institute of Education, University of London, identified the need for an urgent stock-taking and resetting of the compass for the future of the field (Cowen, 2023). As a pointer for such a resetting, he cautioned that the classic flaw of the comparative and international education scholarly community has always been “the failure to notice the political framing of many of our epistemic choices, agendas for attention and action” (Cowen, 2023, p. 326). Indeed, in another article published in the same volume of *Comparative Education*, Eleftherios Klerides (2023) showed how the field, throughout its history, has always been ensnared by international political relations.

This article leads a special subsection of *Southern African Review of Education*, 30(1), offering a synthesis and prospectus of the other articles, and placing them within the frame of the theme of this subsection of five articles on comparative and international education in the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES). It connects to a theme that the author has unpacked in a recently published book (Wolhuter, 2024), namely, that it can be argued that the defining feature of the field of comparative and international education at this point in time—setting it apart from any previous stage in its historical development—is that of criticism against Northern hegemony. Taking up the assignment of raising the Global South to its rightful place may well mark a next phase in the evolution of the field (Wolhuter, 2024). Linking to the theme of this special issue, and drawing both on the cited publication of the author and on the other articles in this issue, the thesis of this article is that the comparative and international education scholarly community in the Southern African region has a valuable, even unique, role to play to catalyse or to bring about such a new phase in the evolution of the field. Within this mission, SACHES also has a special role to play, albeit that both these constituencies have to effect major reforms in order to be able to rise to the occasion of taking the field into a new phase of development.

This article commences with a survey of the history, present state, and outlook of the scholarly field of comparative and international education, worldwide. In the second section, the scope is narrowed to the Southern African theatre, and the history and state of comparative education in this region. In view of the outlook that emanated from the global survey of the field in the first section, the desideratum of the field in Southern Africa at this point in time is highlighted. In the third section, the very particular role of SACHES as the professional organisation of the comparative and international education community in Southern Africa, in that community leading the field into a phase where the Global South comes to its right, is argued. How each of the other four articles in this special section illuminates these themes, is the topic of the last part of that section.

Comparative and international education: Historical development, present state, outlook

Historical development

In the textbooks written by scholars of comparative and international education, a depiction of the historical development of the field is provided by two major reference points, namely, the publications of Noah and Eckstein (1969) and Paulston (1994). The combination of these two publications represents the historical development of comparative and international education as consisting of seven phases. These seven phases do not denote a succession of mutually exclusive stages but rather, a continual expansion of the field of comparative education. Currently, all seven phases are extant.

The first phase is a phase of informal, unsystematic travellers' tales of the customs of other cultures and societies regarding education and the raising of children. These tales stretch back to times immemorial. By the time of the formation of the first nation-states in Western Europe and North America in the beginning of the 19th century, a new, more systematic and tendentious traveller emerged. This second phase is called "the systematic study of foreign education systems for borrowing." Mostly government emissaries went on extended study tours of foreign education systems. Their reports aimed at identifying best foreign ideas, policies, and practices to be transplanted to their domestic education system. This made sense at a stage when the newly formed nation-states created national systems of public primary schools, the attendance of which was compulsory, the aim of which was to legitimise the new state and to cultivate a loyalty towards that state. These two phases are regarded as pre-scientific phases in the evolution of comparative and international education.

The year 1817 is taken as Year 1 of the existence of a *science* (scholarly field) of comparative education. This was the year in which Marc-Antoine Jullien (1775–1848)'s book *Esquisse et Vues Préliminaires d'un Ouvrage sur l'Éducation Comparée* [*Outline and Preliminary Views of a Work on Comparative Education*] was first published, and in which he pleaded for an international commission to be established with the brief to collect and collate information or data of all the national education systems in the world. The ideals and ideas of Jullien are embodied today in the work of organisations such as UNESCO and in studies international in scope—such as those of the International Association for Educational Achievement, and the International Programme for Student Assessment.

A diversion in the historical evolution of the field took place during the decades between the two world wars, when comparative education entered a fourth phase, the so-called "factors and forces" phase. Comparativists, lead by the triumvirate or "big three" of comparative education, that is Isaac Kandel (1881–1965), Nicholas Hans (1888–1969), and Friedrich Schneider (1881–1969), maintained that each national education system is unique, having been shaped by its own national contextual forces.

Then in the decades after the Second World War, and reaching a zenith in the 1960s, a new phase

in the evolution of comparative education emerged. This is the fifth stage in Noah and Eckstein's (1969) phaseology, which they called a "social science phase." It is also the first of Paulston's (1994) phases, which he called a "phase of orthodoxy" in the field. Informed by Talcott Parson's structural functionalism and by modernisation theory, comparativists held education forth as the strongest instrument to effect any desired change in society, for example, to promote social mobility, to create a meritocratic society, or to stimulate economic growth and eradicate unemployment. Most of all, in the newly independent nations of the Global South and other developing countries, education was the means to bring about modernisation. The phase coincided with the global education expansion project, which was pursued with these very same objectives in mind. The methods, paradigms, and theories of the social sciences, as well as quantitative methods, were embraced.

Within the disillusionment in societies, that the massive education investment of the 1960s did not meet the expected dividends (for example instead of economic growth, since the 1973 oil crisis, the spectre of stagflation and growing schooled—and later, even graduate—unemployment came to the fore), a new, sixth phase commenced in the 1970s. Paulston (1994) called this the "phase of heterodoxy." Paradigms opposing equilibrium theory and modernisation theory were set up. These include theories of reproduction, dependency theory, theories of neo-colonialism, and world systems analysis. Education was now seen as an instrument in the hands of the powerful in society—a tool the powerful use to subdue and to suppress the powerless.

By the 1990s, proponents of the rivalling sets of paradigms terminated their criticisms and attacks on one another, and stepped away from their claims to exclusive possession of the whole truth. A tolerance, even an appreciation of the other and of valuing of the other became visible. Comparative education entered a seventh phase, which Paulston (1994) called a "phase of heterogeneity." Paulston described the signature feature of this phase as the proliferation of the number and variety of theories and paradigms extant in the field, as new paradigms and theoretical orientations keep on emerging.

It is true that at present, an almost unwieldy plethora of paradigms and theoretical orientations permeate the field. In a recently published book, edited by Tavis Jules, Susan Shields, and Murray Thomas (2021), the following 27 major theoretical positions currently present in the field of comparative and international education are distinguished: structural-functionalism; imperialism, colonialism, and colonality; Marxism; human capital theory; dependency theory and world system theory; post-colonial theory; post-modernism and post-structuralism; post-foundationalism; neo-liberalism; neo-institutional theory; neo-realism; neo-Gramscian theory; cultural political theory; constructionism and learner-centredness; differentiation and externalisation; dependency theory and world systems analysis; policy borrowing and lending; peace education theories; human rights education; theories of race and racism; queer theories; transitiologies; actor network theory; social network theory; and capabilities theory.

At the same time, it should be pointed out at that this stage of the article this phaseology, which has

widespread currency in the field, is problematic. To suggest that nothing has happened in the field over the past 35 years further to the proliferation of the number of paradigms flies in the face of much development in the field (see Wolhuter & Wiseman, 2019). Suggestions for the extension and updating of this periodisation and how these tie in with the theme of this article and special issue will be returned to later in the article.

Present state

The most concerning problem with the above conventional depiction of the historical evolution of comparative and international education is the delineation of the seventh phase as a phase of heterogeneity; it has already spanned 35 years. To suggest that the number of paradigms is the only or overriding feature of the field can be questioned, with this recently published survey of the field in all world regions marshalled as evidence (Wolhuter & Wiseman, 2019). This author has argued in a recent publication (Wolhuter, 2024) that a signature feature of the current era of comparative and international education is criticism against Northern hegemony in the field.

The construct of criticism against Northern hegemony consists of the following strands evident in publications by scholars in the field: criticism of the imposition of one model of development; criticism of foreign aid and of international agencies; anti-globalisation; criticism of neo-liberal economics and its impact on education; calls for the decolonisation of education and of comparative and international education; criticism of racism in education and in comparative and international education; an appreciation of Indigenous knowledge systems; and allegations that scholars of the Global South find themselves on an unequal playing field (see Wolhuter, 2024). Thus, “criticism against Northern hegemony” can well be regarded as an eighth, current phase in the historical evolution of comparative and international education.

Outlook

Against Northern hegemony and the criticism against Northern hegemony evident in both education in the world and in the field of comparative and international education, stands the rise of the Global South. One of the signature features of recent world history is the rise of the Global South, geographically, demographically, economically, socially, politically, and in terms of education. To belabour the last point, in terms of enrolments, teacher numbers, and so forth, the centre of gravity of the global education expansion project has decidedly moved to the Global South—and increasingly so. While the number of higher education institutions barely changed in the Global North, remaining at approximately 20,000 from 2006 to 2018, in the Global South, the number almost doubled from a little over 40,000 to about 70,000—making a global institutional total of 90,000 (McGregor, 2022). World higher education student numbers now exceed the 200 million mark. However, the number of students in the Global North peaked in 2011 and has been declining since, to around 58.3 million in 2018. In the same period, the number of students in the Global South has almost doubled, from some 78 million in 2006 to 150 million in 2018 (McGregor, 2022). Further to the growing importance place of the Global South in the world, demographically, economically, and politically, and in as far as education is concerned, several scholars have in recent years argued that the Global South is taking up a vanguard position in the

world as far as societal dynamics and trends are concerned. For example, *Journal of Global South Studies* editor Ryan M. Alexander, has argued in a series of articles, the growing relevance of Global South studies for understanding the Global North too (see, for example, Alexander, 2021, 2024). Alexander (2024) took the example of political populism: a feature (rightly or wrongly) associated with the Global South. While for decades it has been easy to find instances of populism in the Global South, it has recently also reared its head in parts of the Global North. Comaroff and Comaroff (2012) argued that societally, the rest of the world, North America and Europe in particular, is now travelling down a trajectory that has been travelled by Africa—a statement that has also been expressed by political leaders and in the public discourse in South Africa.

Ever since Charles Oglesby (1969) first introduced the term “Global South,” it has been taken to mean roughly Latin America, Africa, and Asia minus the high-income countries of Asia. However, at the present point in time, a more nuanced definition of is apt. While Global South undoubtedly has a geographic heartland as identified by Oglesby, this demarcation has to be refined to be aligned to contemporary contextual realities. Lewis et al. (2016), as well as Brock (2016) and Brown and Schweisfurth (2024), argued that in the field of comparative and international education, the notion of space should be reconceptualised as being described and circumscribed by relations or connections, including cyber connections, rather than only physical space. Furthermore, genealogical connections (in the self-definition of people and communities, and the way their identities are constructed or assigned by others) should be acknowledged as well. Thus, while a Global South heartland can be shown on a world map, it is a rather elastic, unfixed, and not a definite term denoting a contiguous, uniform territory. The affirmation of the Global South in the field of comparative and international education can be envisioned in its future trajectory as a ninth phase in its historical evolution (Wolhuter, 2024). The significance in the Southern African region in this assignment will be the focus of the next section.

The Southern African theatre

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) includes the following 16 member jurisdictions: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. The SADC countries occupy a large swathe of territory—9.7 million square kilometres at the southern part of Africa. The region has a population of 366 million and in 2020, had a gross domestic product of US\$657.1 billion (SADC, 2024). In terms of the World Bank classification (based on per capita gross domestic product) one of the SADC countries, Seychelles, is a high-income country, four are upper-middle income countries (South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Mauritius), seven are lower-middle income countries (Lesotho, Eswatini, Angola, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania, Comoros), and four are low-income countries (Malawi, Madagascar, Mozambique, Democratic Republic of the Congo).

The countries are recently created political entities, gaining independence from 1960. Just as the

SADC countries straddle the economic development spectrum, so they also cover the political democratic spectrum. Freedom House (2024) regards six SADC countries as free (Botswana, Lesotho, Mauritius, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa), six as partially free (Comoros, Madagascar, Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia), and four as not free (Angola, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Eswatini, Zimbabwe).

Education

Commencing with education systems, very poorly developed at the time of independence, the SADC countries have been the terrain of an immense education expansion drive over the past 65 years. While within the SADC region, this expansion drive has been even more forceful than the global norm during this time, especially at higher education level, enrolment ratios are still comparatively low. The gross enrolment ratios at the level of higher education for the SADC countries compared to the global aggregate are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Gross enrolment ratios at the level of higher education for the SADC countries compared to the global aggregate (World Bank, 2024)

Jurisdiction	Gross Higher Education Enrolment Ratio (%)
Mauritius	44
Global aggregate	42
Namibia	28
South Africa	25
Botswana	23
Seychelles	15
Angola	11
Zimbabwe	10
Comoros	10
Lesotho	10

Jurisdiction	Gross Higher Education Enrolment Ratio (%)
Mozambique	7
Democratic Republic of the Congo	7
Eswatini	6
Madagascar	6
Tanzania	5
Zambia	4
Malawi	3

Apart from quantitative expansion (increase in enrolments), other vectors of post-independence education reform are mainly the same as those of sub-Saharan Africa (see Wolhuter, 2022). These include teacher education expansion and reforms, adult literacy campaigns, attempts at examination reforms, approaching the issue of learning and teaching methods, approaching the issue of language of learning and teaching, reforming curricula to take account of the natural and cultural heritage of Africa, and attempting to align the world of education with the world. In recent times, quality of education, lifelong education, and issues such as adult education and global citizenship education have begun to attract attention as well.

While some education reform initiatives in the SADC have attracted worldwide acclaim—for example, the adult literacy campaign in Tanzania in the 1970s; the accelerated teacher education programme also in Tanzania in the 1970s; the Zimbabwe Integrated Teacher Education Course in the early 1980s, which was largely based on the Tanzanian model; and the Brigades in Botswana (experimental instances of schools being turned into production units)—as a whole, education expansion and reform strategies have had mixed fortunes; and challenges regarding access to education, quality in education, and equality in education in the SADC countries remain.

Comparative and international education

It is in these societal and education contexts that comparative and international education at universities in the SADC has carved out its locus standi. Comparative and international education gained a foothold at universities in the SADC region during the 1960s. That was so because it was only in 1960 and beyond that the countries of Southern Africa (except for South Africa)

established their first universities (around or soon after independence). In South Africa too, while universities date from the mid-19th century, comparative education only appeared at universities for the first time in the 1960s (Bergh & Soudien, 2006).

Larsen et al. (2013) distinguished between three phases in the history of comparative education at Canadian universities, namely, a phase of establishment during the 1960s and 1970s, a phase of fragmentation during the 1980s and 1990s, and a phase of broadening during the 2000s. The 1960s and 1970s were golden years for the field at universities in Canada as new chairs of comparative education were created, and as comparative education programmes were introduced. Then the field fell onto hard ground during the 1980s and 1990s as chairs were discontinued, and faculty who left universities were not replaced. Programmes were also discontinued. Then in the 2000s, comparative education made a return in university programmes, not as a stand-alone subject but subsumed in modules such as “Globalisation and Education,” “Education and Colonialism,” and “Education and Human Rights.” I have used this trajectory as a model to describe the fate of comparative education in other parts of the world (Wolhuter, 2010a), including the trajectory of the field at universities in the SADC region (Wolhuter, 2009), of course with different timelines, and with due concessions to the contextual contours that have shaped the fate of the field at universities in various jurisdictions.

The geographically peripheral location of the SADC region had an unintended blessing in that it shielded comparative and international education from the disintegration of the field at universities, a trend that featured strongly not only in Canada in the 1980s and 1990s, but also in many other parts of the world especially the Northern, historically heartland of the field: the United States of America and Western Europe (see Wolhuter et al., 2013). At the level of initial teacher education programmes, comparative education survived and remains prominent in stand-alone courses at many universities in the SADC region. These include, for example, the University of Namibia, and (although slightly outside SADC) Kenyatta University in Kenya—the biggest teacher education institution in Kenya. Thus, in terms of presence in initial teacher education courses, the field still stands strong at many universities in the SADC region. At universities such as Kisii University in Kenya, there still is a chair in comparative and international education.

At graduate level, the situation is lamentably not as favourable. Very few doctoral degrees are awarded in comparative and international education. The only coursework master’s programme in comparative education at a university in the SADC region, at University of Dar es Salaam, is at present being hibernated (i.e. not on offer, although appearing in the university’s calendar)—a fate it shares with the other two of three universities in Africa where a master’s programme in comparative education exists. Lamentably, this a situation also widely existing in other parts of the Global South including Indira Gandhi National Open University in India. At this institution, the largest university in the world, with over three million students, the master’s programme in comparative education is currently not on offer (N. K. Dash, personal communication, 2024).

South Africa represents a pattern different to the other SADC countries regarding the fortunes of

comparative and international education over the past 30 years as the field fell victim to developments in education and in teacher education, in particular. Pre-1994 education in South Africa was severely criticised by progressive scholarship of education and by those set to take over the rule of the country after 1994. One of the criticisms was that education was too authoritarian and promoted rote learning and eventually, a mentality of submissiveness, rather than cultivating independent and critical thought and the development of higher-order cognitive faculties. Historically, teacher education programmes in South Africa were structured on the continental model (see Bergh & Soudien, 2006), according to which programmes consisted of the basic foundation of education disciplines (such as history of education, philosophy of education, and educational psychology; and to these were added comparative education in the 1970s and 1980s) as units. As part of the post-1994 switch to outcomes-based education, teacher education too, had to be totally overhauled. Teacher education programmes were restructured to prepare teachers for seven roles: learning facilitator; interpreter and designer of learning programmes and material; leader, administrator, and manager; learner and lifelong researcher; community, civil, and pastoral role; assessor; and learning area/subject/phase specialist (c.f. Wolhuter, 2010b). After a disastrous run in South African education, outcomes-based education was done away with by 2015. The Ministry of Higher Education's directives for initial teacher education programmes were changed accordingly.

According to directive issues in 2015 (the latest directives) 40% of credits in initial teacher education programmes shall be "focused disciplinary learning (foundations of education), general pedagogical learning, and situational learning," while this can be extended by another 10%, to make out 50% of the credits of initial teacher education programmes (Republic of South Africa, 2015, pp. 24–25). Although this is a vague description (and difficult to comprehend for the reader not acquainted with the South African education context), there can be little doubt that this would include comparative and international education. Up to now, almost a decade later, there is, lamentably, little indication that universities have seized this opportunity to introduce or strengthen comparative and international education modules in initial teacher education programmes. As a stand-alone module, comparative and international education appears only in about half a dozen of the 26 public South African universities' initial teacher education programmes, and at one private university's initial teacher education programme. A relic of colonial times, the South African degree structure still bears traces of the erstwhile Scottish degree structure, with an honours degree as a degree between a bachelors and a master's degree (roughly equivalent to the first years of master's study at European or North American universities) and at this level, Honours Bachelor of Education programmes, some half dozen South African universities have an elective comparative and international education module.

SACHES

The Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) came into existence in 1991 as a professional society serving as a node for scholars in the field in the SADC region, and as a nexus between these scholars and the global community of scholars of comparative and international education. The lead in establishing SACHES was taken by Professor Harold Herman of University of the Western Cape, assisted by then President of the World Council of Comparative Education Societies, Dr Erwin Epstein of Loyola University, Chicago, who at that time held a Visiting Professorship at University of the Western Cape. It is within this context that the articles in this special section of the first issue of *Southern African Review of Education* of 2025 are presented. University of South Africa (UNISA) is not only the largest university in Africa but globally, was the pioneer in distance education. In the second article, Carlo Daniels places focus on the history, present state, and future of comparative and international education at UNISA. By a confluence of circumstances in South Africa, the field is currently the strongest in a clutch of central universities (North-West University, University of the Free State, the young Sol Plaatje University, and the interesting new private higher education institution, Akademia). In the third article, Julia Correia, Pearl Larey, Chris-Mari Le Hanie, Hennie Steyn, and Kevin Teise explore the position of comparative and international education at these institutions.

The history of SACHES, its present state, and possible future are detailed by Herman and Wolhuter in the fourth article in this section of the issue. And, in the last paper in the section, a view from the outside is presented by Liz Jackson of University of Hong Kong who problematises some terms freely used in the field—"East" and "West," "developed" and "developing," and also, "Global North" and "Global South"—asking scholars to constantly critically assess these terms they use, and to ever search for more appropriate names.

Conclusion

To return to doyen of the field, Robert Cowen—in the first chapter of the *International Handbook of Comparative and International Education*, he (Cowen, 2009) bemoans the dearth of histories of the field, and pleads for a regular study of this history as an indispensable part of regular stock-taking and self-correcting exercises to be undertaken by comparativists. It is in striving to rise to this challenge that the collection of articles in this section is offered, trusting that they will stimulate discussion in the Southern African region, and inspire scholars to let the region and its scholars rise to occasion of bringing to fruition a next, ninth phase in the evolution of the field of comparative and international education—a phase marked by the Global South coming into its own.

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Notes on the author

Charl Wolhuter is Professor, History of Education and Comparative Education in the Faculty of Education (Research Unit: Education and Human Rights in Diversity) at North-West University (Potchefstroom, South Africa).

Address for correspondence

Charl.Wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

The roller coaster ride of comparative and international education at Africa's largest university

Carlo Daniels
University of South Africa

Abstract

This study explored the evolution of comparative and international education (CIE) at University of South Africa (UNISA), Africa's largest university. CIE is a unique field of study with numerous benefits for educational stakeholders. The field gained prominence after World War II, influencing educational policy and practice globally, and UNISA, with its considerable resources and diverse student body, offers a unique setting for exploring its development in the Southern African context. A qualitative document analysis of university calendars, tutorial letters, emails with module lecturers, the university's website, and module textbooks were conducted to trace the trajectory of CIE at UNISA from 1970 to date. The study is distinctive in its investigation of the field because it explored the unique context of UNISA, known for its commitment to providing increased access to quality education. The study provides insights into the field's prospects and its potential impact on the African higher education landscape. The findings reveal that CIE at UNISA is on an upward trajectory. The appointment of new lecturers for the Comparative and International Education module, the introduction of tailored textbooks for the course, and establishing Comparative and International Education as a standalone subject have resuscitated the field at Africa's largest university.

Keywords: open distance e-learning, comparative and international education, University of South Africa, comparative education in Africa

Daniels, C. (2025). The roller coaster ride of comparative and international education at Africa's largest university. *Southern African Review of Education*, 30(1), 18–42.

Introduction

Since the conclusion of the Second World War in 1945, comparative and international education (CIE) has established its legitimacy in the global academic arena and filtered into teacher education (Wolhuter et al., 2009). According to Weeks et al. (2006), CIE is a unique, interdisciplinary field of study that offers a variety of benefits to educational stakeholders. These benefits include, but are not limited to, providing an educational perspective, a societal perspective, and a comparative education (CE) perspective (Wolhuter, 2020), which few other disciplines can claim (Weeks et al., 2006). Furthermore, Weeks and colleagues pointed out that CIE is informative to a broad range of stakeholders, such as educational policymakers, officials of international agencies (UNESCO, World Bank, UNICEF, OECD), and academics in educational studies and the social sciences.

Zooming in on the context under investigation, University of South Africa (UNISA) is commonly classified as one of the world's mega universities. The institution is acknowledged as a leading comprehensive, open, distance, and e-learning university. Although enrolment rates vary, the latest figures suggest that UNISA accommodates approximately 400,000 students (UNISA, n.d.a). Using the number of students enrolled as criterion, UNISA is the largest university in South Africa and on the African continent (Okafor, 2024). Therefore, it has the necessary resources, student population, and the research capacity to offer a large cohort of students the opportunity to engage in CIE and, in turn, strengthen the field. Given that UNISA registers students from all over Africa (since 1906), the university serves as an ideal setting to examine the broader educational trends and tensions present in the field of CIE across the Southern African region (UNISA, 2025c).

Since the founding of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) in 1991 and the founding of its journal, *Southern African Review of Education*, many changes have taken place in the scholarly field of CIE and in universities located in the Southern African region and beyond. As stated on the SACHES website (n.d., para. 1), “even the year 2006, when the journal last had a Special Issue which focused . . . on comparative and international education . . . [is] in the distant past.” Against that backdrop, this study explored the roller coaster ride of CIE at UNISA. The university makes a considerable contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 4 by providing increased access to education and offering diverse educational philosophies and practices driven by the decolonisation agenda. The findings of this study are distinctive because they underscore the powerful field of CIE in a unique setting such as UNISA. The study involved a qualitative document analysis of 34 university calendars (1970–2003), 10 tutorial letters, five emails with lecturers who have experience in teaching the course, four official websites of the institution, and two CIE textbooks.

Research design and theoretical framework

The researcher employed a qualitative methodology because Leedy and Ormrod (2019) deemed it the most suitable research design to explore policy, trends, practice, and innovations such as the roller coaster ride of CIE at Africa's largest university. The study was situated in an exploratory qualitative framework, influenced by a postmodern research paradigm. According to Nieuwenhuis (2020), the primary objective of exploratory qualitative research is to enhance comprehension of a specific topic, group, process, or context. In this instance, the topic relates to CIE, the focal group was UNISA, the process refers to the roller coaster ride of CIE, and the context is Africa. Furthermore, Nieuwenhuis (2020) elaborated that exploratory research typically lacks a pre-defined theoretical structure; instead, it aims to develop an emergent theoretical framework through the process of simultaneous data collection and analysis. Consequently, researchers operating within this philosophical paradigm recognise the existence of multiple realities, rejecting the notion of a single perspective (Forghani et al., 2015; Hossienia & Khalili, 2011).

The research was initiated in this study without a pre-established theoretical framework. Nieuwenhuis (2020) noted that qualitative research generally does not commence with hypotheses designed for testing and validation. Instead, in line with an inductive approach, theories may emerge throughout the processes of data collection and analysis. Therefore, this qualitative study was based on the principles of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Furthermore, Bowen (2009) highlighted that, although many studies employing grounded theory use interviews and observational techniques, research focused solely on document analysis can also effectively draw on grounded theory as a guiding framework.

Data collection

To collect data, a document analysis method was employed, which is a systematic and structured examination of texts in documents to enhance one's understanding of the research topic (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis is adaptable, functioning effectively as a complementary method alongside other data collection techniques such as interviews and surveys. However, it is also effective in advancing the knowledge frontier when employed as an independent approach. This study drew on data obtained from publicly available documents from UNISA's library archives. As Merriam and Grenier (2019) noted, employing a diverse array of documents, literature, and reports aligns well with the principles of grounded theory research. It is important to note that the historic evolution of the field of CIE is most accurately documented in the official university documents such as university calendars, study guides, and tutorial letters. Therefore, a strategic decision was made to conduct a document analysis as opposed to qualitative interviews. Nonetheless, document analysis presents certain limitations. Bowen (2009) and Medlock (2015) highlight that some documents may not provide sufficient detail because they were not specifically created for the research purpose of a study. Access to particular documents may also be restricted, and there is a possibility that some information could be outdated or no longer relevant. In addition, the processes of selecting and interpreting documents introduce a potential for bias.

Despite these challenges, such limitations were mitigated through rigorous methodological practices and transparent reporting.

Sampling

In accordance with the recommendations made by Creswell (2009), this research employed a purposeful sampling strategy to address the potential inconsistencies and inconclusiveness that may arise from random document selection. Purposeful sampling was particularly effective because it allowed for selecting cases (documents) that were rich in information and directly aligned with the study's objectives (Harsh, 2011). By focusing on information-rich documents, the researcher could achieve an in-depth understanding of the evolution of CIE at UNISA. The study involved a qualitative document analysis of 34 university calendars (1970–2003) located in UNISA's library archive department, 10 tutorial letters, five emails with lecturers who have experience in teaching the course, four official websites of the institution, and two CIE textbooks. Each document was assigned an identifier (UNISA-DOC-1–UNISA-DOC-55, abbreviated as DOCs-1–55 in text below), which was used as a referencing system to refer to a specific document or a group of documents. Table 1 displays the identifier of each purposefully sampled document, the name of the document, its date of publication, and location.

Table 1
Purposefully sampled documents

Identifier	Document	Year	Location
UNISA-DOC-1	UNISA calendar	1970	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-2	UNISA calendar	1971	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-3	UNISA calendar	1972	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-4	UNISA calendar	1973	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-5	UNISA calendar	1974	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-6	UNISA calendar	1975	UNISA library: Archive department

Identifier	Document	Year	Location
UNISA-DOC-7	UNISA calendar	1976	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-8	UNISA calendar	1977	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-9	UNISA calendar	1978	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-10	UNISA calendar	1979	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-11	UNISA calendar	1980	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-12	Module study guide OVO 401	1980	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-13	Module study guide OVO 402	1980	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-14	UNISA calendar	1981	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-15	UNISA calendar	1982	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-16	UNISA calendar	1983	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-17	UNISA calendar	1984	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-18	UNISA calendar	1985	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-19	UNISA calendar	1986	UNISA library: Archive department

Identifier	Document	Year	Location
UNISA-DOC-20	UNISA calendar	1987	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-21	UNISA calendar	1988	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-22	UNISA calendar	1989	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-23	UNISA calendar	1990	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-24	UNISA calendar	1991	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-25	UNISA calendar	1992	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-26	UNISA calendar	1993	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-27	UNISA calendar	1994	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-28	UNISA calendar	1995	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-29	UNISA calendar	1996	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-30	UNISA calendar	1997	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-31	UNISA calendar	1998	UNISA library: Archive department

Identifier	Document	Year	Location
UNISA-DOC-32	Module study guide EDB102-Y	1998	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-33	Module study guide HBEDSSC	1998	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-34	Module study guide OVOHOD-9	1998	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-35	Module study guide OVOHOD-9	1999	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-36	UNISA calendar	1999	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-37	UNISA calendar	2000	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-38	UNISA calendar	2001	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-39	UNISA calendar	2002	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-40	Module study guide 0700-5	2002	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-41	Module study guide 0894-X	2002	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-42	UNISA calendar	2003	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-43	Module study guide ICH4801	2015	UNISA library: Archive department

Identifier	Document	Year	Location
UNISA-DOC-44	Official Comparative and International Education Textbook	2020	UNISA library
UNISA-DOC-45	The Open Distance e-Learning University	2024	UNISA website
UNISA-DOC-46	Module study guide HED4806	2024	UNISA library: Archive department
UNISA-DOC-47	Email with the official module lecturer	2024	UNISA campus
UNISA-DOC-48	Email with the official module lecturer	2024	UNISA campus
UNISA-DOC-49	Email with the official module lecturer	2024	UNISA campus
UNISA-DOC-50	Email with the official module lecturer	2024	UNISA campus
UNISA-DOC-51	Email with the official module lecturer	2024	UNISA campus
UNISA-DOC-52	Brief history	n.d.	UNISA official website (UNISA, n.d.a)
UNISA-DOC-53	Timeline and history of the institution	n.d.	UNISA official website (UNISA, n.d.b)
UNISA-DOC-54	University strategy	2025	UNISA official website (UNISA, 2025c)

Identifier	Document	Year	Location
UNISA-DOC-55	Official Comparative and International Education textbook	2025	UNISA library

Data analysis

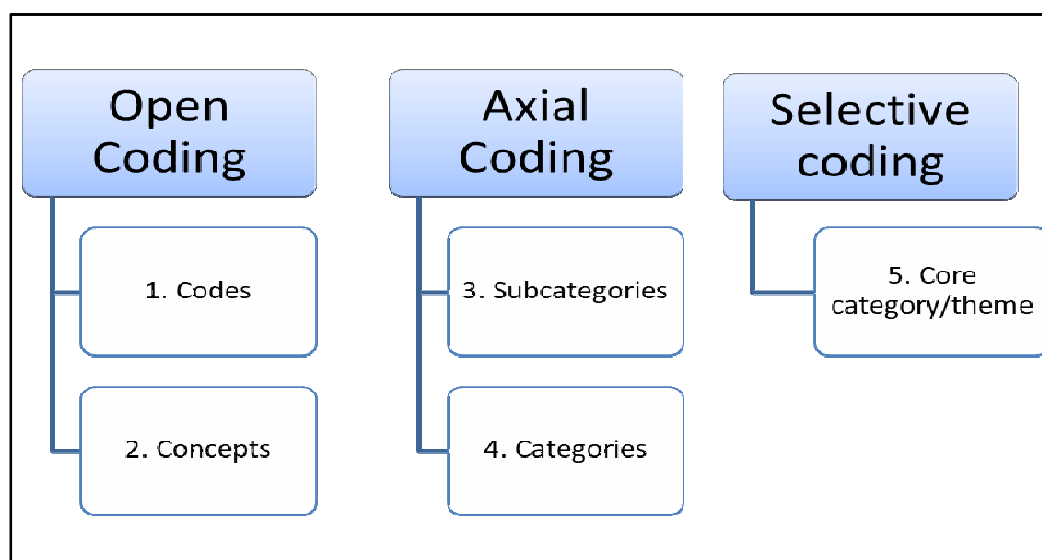
The researcher employed content analysis as a qualitative methodology to systematically assess the set of purposefully selected documents. The analysis was conducted in accordance with a rigorous framework grounded in the principles of grounded theory. A total of 55 documents were analysed through a manual colour-coding process. During the document analysis, 90 open codes were identified, which were then grouped into 12 axial codes by examining the relationships between concepts. These axial codes served as categories, leading to the development of five selective codes. Figure 1 depicts a simplified visual representation of the coding process.

Ethical considerations

Tripathy (2013) noted that document analysis is generally a low-risk study given that it involves limited ethical issues. When sources are accessible via the Internet, published works, or other public platforms and facilities, their use for analytical purposes is permissible provided that appropriate credit is given to the original authors and sources.

Figure 1

Simplified visual representation of the coding process



Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore the roller coaster ride of CIE at the largest university in Africa. A systematic document analysis, guided by the principle of grounded theory, situated in a postmodern research paradigm, was followed to achieve the abovementioned purpose. During the systematic analysis of the data, open codes were identified and subsequently organised into axial codes through a thorough examination of the relationships between the emerging concepts. These axial codes functioned as categories, ultimately leading to the development of five selective codes. These selective codes then culminated in thematic categories that were used as headings in the ensuing findings sub-sections.

History and mission of Africa's largest university

The name of Africa's largest university, UNISA, is unique because, out of the 26 public universities in South Africa, UNISA is the sole university named after the country (DOC-45). As the first university in South Africa, it is not surprising that UNISA has a rich history, spanning 150 years of responding to the shifting demands of a developing South African society (DOC-45; 52). The origins of UNISA, and indeed of higher education in South Africa, can be traced back to the establishment of the University of the Cape of Good Hope in 1873 (DOC-52). The institution was renamed "University of South Africa" in 1916 and relocated from Cape Town to Pretoria in 1918 (DOC-52; 54). Initially, the university's main purpose was not to provide teaching and learning; instead, UNISA was established to function as an examining body and was devoted the responsibility of setting examinations for schools and colleges and conferring qualifications (DOC-54).

The University of the Cape of Good Hope awarded its first degrees in 1874, a year after its establishment. In 1877, the university received a royal charter from Queen Victoria, which confirmed that its degrees were equivalent in standing to those conferred in Britain (DOC-54). As early as 1879, the curriculum had already shown evidence of inclusion when it was expanded to include African languages, such as Sesotho and isiXhosa (DOC-54). In alignment with inclusion, between 1886 and 1887, Agnes Lewis became the first woman to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree from the university. Meanwhile, Barbra Buchanan became the institution's first female recipient of a Master of Arts degree. In 1901, the University of Good Hope facilitated examinations for Boer prisoners of war. In the decades to follow, the institution provided access to education to prisoners on Robben Island, including the distinguished figure, Nelson Mandela (DOC-54).

In 1906, the University of the Cape of Good Hope began to show early characteristics of an African university by administering examinations for students from Zimbabwe, Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. Meanwhile, in 1913, Lucy Lloyd became the first woman to receive an honorary doctorate from the institution. The transition of the University of the Cape of Good Hope to the University of South Africa was formalised in 1916 through an Act of the Union Parliament. By 1918, UNISA commenced operations in a rented facility in Pretoria (DOC-54). Between the

years 1920 and 1921, three colleges, namely Huguenot University College, Potchefstroom University College, and the Johannesburg School of Mines and Technology (later known as University of the Witwatersrand), were integrated as residents of UNISA. In addition, UNISA served as the examining body for seven constituent institutions. It can, therefore, be claimed that UNISA is also the primogenitor of several of South Africa's oldest universities (UNISA, 2013).

In 1927, Gertrude Ntlabati became the first Black woman to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. She was registered with and paid tuition to the College of Fort Hare; however, UNISA conducted exams and conferred qualifications (DOC-54). Furthermore, in 1936, John Dube—a founding member of the African National Congress (ANC)—became the first Black person to receive an honorary degree from UNISA. In 1945, Anton Lembede—another notable figure in the ANC as founder of the ANC Youth League—earned his master's degree in philosophy from UNISA, which influenced his development of African nationalist ideology (DOC-54).

The year 1946 was memorable because UNISA became one of the first public universities globally to offer distance education, exclusively (UNISA, 2025b). Between 1946 and 1947, UNISA initiated its first correspondence programme, using postal tuition (DOC-54). In 1949, the institution celebrated its inaugural graduation ceremony for correspondence students who had been tutored by post (DOC-54). By 1951, UNISA became an independent university as its remaining constituent colleges parted. After over three decades of leasing facilities, UNISA moved into a newly constructed building on Skinner Street, Pretoria, in 1953 (DOC-54).

According to DOC-54, the university became one of the first universities to acquire a photocopier in 1967. Racial transformations began in 1979 when it ended the segregation of facilities for Black and White staff. Furthermore, Deuteronomy Ntuli made history as the first Black full professor in 1983, and prestigious alumnus Nelson Mandela completed his law degree at UNISA between 1988 and 1989. The university experienced transformation under Professor Marinus Wiechers (1994–1997), who decolonised the Faculty of Education and other courses to discard apartheid-era practices (DOC-54).

Upward growth continued as new UNISA campuses were established in 1997 in Cape Town, Parow, and Pretoria, Sunnyside. In 2001, Professor Nyameko Pityana, a former activist, became the first Black principal and vice chancellor (DOC-54). Pityana was a driver for racial equity and Africanisation. In the same year and in alignment with the new, fully inclusive university, the South African higher education landscape experienced a complete reconfiguration. As a result, the new UNISA emerged in 2004 as South Africa's single, dedicated, comprehensive distance education institution. The old UNISA (Technikon Southern Africa and Vista University for Distance Education) was merged (UNISA, 2013). The launch of the World Wide Web made myUNISA possible in 2006, which created a shift towards online education. The university affirmed its African identity by opening regional learning centres in Ethiopia. In 2017, Dr Thabo Mbeki was inaugurated as chancellor, and recently (in 2023), UNISA celebrated its 150th anniversary, serving a diverse student body of 400,000 students residing in 130 different countries (DOC-54). One of the main campuses, situated on Muckleneuk Ridge in Pretoria, offers a wide

range of certificate, degree, diploma, and doctoral programmes with a faculty of around 4,000 teaching staff.

Currently, the vision of UNISA is to become the leading African university that shapes futures through service to humanity in Africa and the global community. By doing so, the university prioritises transcending language and cultural barriers (DOC-53). Meanwhile, the mission of UNISA is to be a comprehensive, open, distance, and e-learning institution. The mission prides itself on conducting the three core functions of a university—teaching, research, and community engagement. Therefore, it is no surprise that UNISA aims to excel in scholarship and research, provide high-quality education, and promote active community engagement (DOC-53).

The institution is guided by principles of lifelong learning, student-centredness, innovation, and creativity. These principles are employed to contribute to a knowledge society, advance development, cultivate critical citizenship, and ensure global sustainability (DOC-53). Consistent with their values, it is grounded in ethical and collective responsibility based on respect, integrity, accountability, and excellence (DOC-53). The values of the university guide institutional conduct and decision-making processes, ensuring that all employees share responsibility for actions taken and that implementation is grounded in loyalty and solidarity with UNISA. Dignity in diversity is held in high regard through the promotion of humanness, anti-racism, and self-worth amidst cultural and intellectual differences. The university constantly strives for equality and has zero tolerance for unfair discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, and other arbitrary grounds (DOC-53).

Beginning of comparative and international education at Africa's largest university

In their article, “The Institutionalisation of Comparative Education Discourses in South Africa in the 20th Century,” Bergh and Soudien (2006) noted that CE in South Africa is not a product that stems from traditional academic practices. Instead, its content and practices were transferred from North America and Europe and embedded into the South African education system. According to the same authors, UNISA, in its ethos and intellectual character, can be classified as a historically “White Afrikaans” university. As revealed in their Annual Report of 2013, UNISA became a federal university in 1946 and was the examining body for seven constituent institutions, which today comprise most of South Africa's historically White universities (UNISA, 2013). However, it is important to note that, throughout its history, UNISA is one of the few universities in the country to have resisted exclusionary dictates, providing all people with access to education, irrespective of race, colour, or creed (UNISA, 2013).

Although CE gained a foothold at the historically Afrikaans and historically Black universities during the 1960s (Weeks et al., 2006), Didactics and Comparative Education first appeared as a module at UNISA in 1970 (DOC-1). At other universities, the subject was called Comparative Pedagogics. Meanwhile, at UNISA, CE was embedded in the Department of Didactics and Comparative Education, which consisted of a team of six lecturers (Table 2).

Table 2

Lecturers of Didactics and Comparative Education in 1970 (UNISA-DOC-1)

Name	Rank
Cilliers, D. H.	Professor
Ruperti, R. M.	Senior lecturer
Vaughan, V. H.	Senior lecturer
Naude, H. J.	Senior lecturer
Castelyn, C.	Senior lecturer
Stone, H. J. S.	Senior lecturer

In 1971, the Didactics and Comparative Education team was reduced at the departures of Vaughan and Stone (DOC-2). However, in 1972, a new junior lecturer joined the Department, namely, P. J. Conradie, who held a master's degree (DOC-3). The course grew momentum shortly after it had been introduced, and two students graduated with a Bachelor of Education with CE as their major subjects in 1972 (DOC-2). After 1973, in the fourth year of its establishment, the course content for CE remained the same. However, one addition was made—each of the three courses included an introduction to the study of the education system (DOC-4). In the same year, Conradie, the newest lecturer, published a paper on communication and reading and another paper on the use of computers for teachers (DOC-4). After 1973, the university calendars did not record publications of staff members and graduates (DOC-5). In 1974, Professor Cilliers left the institution and was replaced by Professor G. H. A. Steyn (DOC-5). Another lecturer, J. van der Merwe, joined the team, which now comprised the following lecturers, as tabulated in Table 3.

Table 3

Lecturers of Didactics and Comparative Education in 1974 (UNISA-DOC-5)

Name	Rank
Steyn, G. H. A.	Professor
Ruperti, R. M.	Senior lecturer

Name	Rank
Castelyn, H. C.	Senior lecturer
Stone, H. J. S.	Senior lecturer
Conradie, P. J.	Senior lecturer
Van der Merwe, J.	Lecturer

In 1977, the CE end-of-year exam consisted of an introductory orientation, including reference to the study of the education system and determining factors, with reference to South Africa (DOC-8).

Bergh and Soudien (2006) noted that reason for the introduction of CE in South Africa could be attributed to the developments in the apartheid state. During the 1960s, the state was committed to developing a homelands policy that would grant independence to the Bantustans/Homelands. It was anticipated that several “new” countries would emerge from the process, and each country would need their own education system. CE would have played a critical role in the establishment of new educational systems. In fact, the first CE module at UNISA focused on the racial complexities of the country, and what this meant for schooling. As is evident in the analysed documents, in 1970, the first syllabus for Didactics and Comparative Education was structured into three courses (DOC-1). The first course served as an introduction to CE, offering an overview of the South African education system with a focus on the racial complexities of the country, including White, Bantu, Coloured, and Indian groups. The course zoomed in on topics such as policy and control, management, and the opportunities available in educational institutions (DOC-1).

The second course provided a more in-depth examination of the South African education system, allowing students to select one of the four component systems for detailed study. This component included two main areas of focus (DOC-1):

- a) Extra-school Administration and Organisation:
 - i. Compulsory free education
 - ii. Staffing in schools
 - iii. Material provision
 - iv. Educational auxiliary services
 - v. Financing education
- b) Intra-school Organisation:

- i. Grouping of pupils
- ii. Division of the school year and day
- iii. Distribution of staff

The third course of the Didactics and Comparative Education module focused on a comparative analysis of the South African education system alongside at least two other educational systems from Southern Africa, with particular attention given to extra-school administration and organisation (DOC-1). As per the societal relations of education during the period 1974 to 1979, the curriculum of Didactics and Comparative Education transitioned from race-related issues to an emphasis on the determining factors (external factors) of educational systems (DOCs-5–10). In addition, area studies relevant to the context of the South African education system were part of the course. The course study guides in the 1980s indicated that the South African education system had undergone substantial changes since 1970, particularly in relation to White education (DOC-11). Official module lecturers during this period included two professors, whose recommended readings addressed themes such as race, external factors influencing education in South Africa and Southern Africa, and the *White Paper on the Provision of Education*, 1983 (DOC-16). In 1983, the module code for Didactics and Comparative Education was introduced as DCETOO-6 (DOC-16). The compulsory recommended readings for CE during the years 1980 to 1986 were as displayed in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4

Compulsory recommended readings for Comparative Education (UNISA-DOCs-11–19)

Author	Year	Title
Ruperti, R. M.	1974	Die onderwysstelsel in Suid-Afrika
De Witt, J. T.	1979	Professionele oriëntering vir onderwyserberoep

Table 5

Additional recommended readings for Comparative Education (UNISA-DOCs-11–19)

Author	Year	Title
Behr, A. L., & MacMillian, R. G.	1971	Education in South Africa
Stone, H. J. S.	1974	Struktuur en motief van die onderwysstelsel

Author	Year	Title
Behr, A. L.	1978	New perspectives in South African education
Rupert, R. M.	1979	Organogram van die Suid Afrikaanse onderwyserstelsel
Stone, H. J. S.	1981	Gemeenskaplikheid en diversiteit: 'n Profiel van die vergelykende opvoedkunde

Challenges associated with comparative and international education

Historically, the teaching of CE and its themes held an encouragingly strong position at South African universities. However, Weeks et al. (2006) identified three challenges the field had historically faced, which were analysed against the backdrop of UNISA. The first challenge was that in South African universities, at the undergraduate level in particular, themes were not taught as part of the field of CE. Consequently, students were not adequately introduced to CE and the scope, depth, and promise of the field. In the context under investigation, since its introduction at the undergraduate level, CE was the only department to be combined with another department (Didactics). However, from 1986 to 1998, CE at the postgraduate level was established as a standalone subject at UNISA, with the module code OVOHOD-9 (DOCs-19–31). This module emphasised an intercultural education system and conducted a comparative analysis of education from the perspectives of teachers, schools as organisations, and juridical-pedagogical matters (DOC-34). In 1986, the Department of Comparative Education and Didactics was renamed the Department of Comparative Education and Educational Management (DOC-19). In fact, educational management and CE have become so closely intertwined that they are difficult to separate in the teaching programmes of South African universities (Weeks et al., 2006).

The second challenge was that, in the mid-1980s, the name Comparative Education had fallen into disuse in courses at English universities and had all but disappeared, with much of its content merged with subjects such as sociology and development studies (Weeks et al., 2006). This was not the case at UNISA; in 1980, Didactics and Comparative Education were established as standalone subjects (DOC-11). This year also marked the introduction of Bachelor of Education specialisations in school guidance and counselling, accompanied by the implementation of module codes, as revealed in the UNISA calendar (DOC-11). Comparative Education was offered as a specialisation subject through two distinct modules: Module OVO 401, which concentrated on the characteristics of CE, and Module OVO 402, which focused on the comparison of education systems (DOC-12; 13). More specifically, Module OVO 401 examined perspectives and development within CE, addressing the generality and diversity of educational systems, as well as a comparative study of South Africa's education system alongside another system (DOC-12).

Meanwhile, Module OVO 402 explored educational systems across various countries and included cross-cultural comparisons and thematic analyses (DOC-13). The module lecturers in 1980 were Professor O. J. van Schalkwyk and Mr J. G. van Wyk. Their compulsory recommended readings are displayed in Table 6.

Table 6
Lecturers of Comparative Education in 1980 (UNISA-DOC-11)

Author	Year	Title
Stone, H. J. S.	1974	Struktuur en motief van die onderwysstelsel
van Schalkwyk, O. J.	n.d.	Die onderwysstelsel in antropologiese perspektief

The third challenge was that there was an absence of full-time CE staff, which placed a question mark over how secure and sustainable CE modules were. However, by 1979, the Didactics and Comparative Education module had established a solid foundation and diverse expertise, expanding to 13 lecturers compared to the initial six in 1970 (DOC-1; 10). By 1993, the Department comprised four professors, two associate professors, four senior lecturers, and four junior lecturers (DOC-26).

Decline of comparative and international education

In the period before the 1994 democratic election in South Africa, Herman (1992, p. 13), in reflecting on meaningful participation by comparativists in a rapidly changing South Africa, asked, “What were comparativists in education doing when Rome was burning?” In those times of political uncertainty, comparativists had an opportunity to make a significant contribution to fostering sound social, economic, and educational decision-making and policies in South Africa. In the setting under scrutiny, it is promising that close to the end of the 1980s, the study guide for CE at UNISA was structured around four assignments, with questions designed to reflect on the type of education needed in South Africa as it approached the last decade of the 20th century, considering the country’s unique circumstances (DOC-11).

Despite the notable effort on the part of comparativist employed at UNISA, Herman (1992), noted that CE was losing its vibrancy in the 1990s, possibly because universities were redefining their aims, roles, and identities in the context of a new South Africa (Bergh & Soudien, 2006). This decline in the 1990s, led to a further weakening in the teaching of CE in the 2000s (Wolhuter et al., 2009). In South Africa, CE lost its strong position at universities as a consequence of the post-1994 educational reforms in teacher education. The way CE was taught at many universities—serving to justify the apartheid government’s segregation policies in education—was another factor leading to its decline (Wolhuter et al., 2009).

The societal trends affecting education in South Africa were unprecedented, and in a new democratic South Africa, comparativists had a significant role to play because of their potential to make a powerful contribution towards sound decision-making and policy formulation in the newly developed South African education system. Therefore, the exclusion of CE from South African universities is ironic. According to Wolhuter et al. (2009), it was clear that CE distanced itself from the exciting challenges of active participation in shaping educational policies for a post-apartheid dispensation and ultimately lost its vibrancy. The increasingly multicultural, multilingual, and multi-religious make-up of school populations also called for an increased presence of CE content in teacher education programmes.

In the years prior to 2000, Bergh and Soudien (2006) and Weeks et al. (2006) noted that CE had a strong foothold in South Africa, with five universities having a Department of Comparative Education. A further six universities had a department of comparative education that was combined with one or more of the other education disciplines. Sixteen universities had an optional module, and another 10 a compulsory module of CE in their honours (at that stage, called BED) programmes. However, Bergh and Soudien (2006) and Weeks et al. (2006) reported that the pressures of financial stringency and streamlining (which saw the collapse of small departments into bigger and more economical schools) had negative consequences for CE in South Africa. The same authors further stated that there was a trend of restructuring teacher training around skills instead of academic disciplines. In a democratic South Africa, new appointments of academics had to be made, and the content being taught required revision. Structural changes in departments and faculties of education in the 1990s also led to the disappearance of separate departments of CE and the subsuming of CE into other courses and programmes.

Zooming in on the context of Africa's largest university, the restructuring of teacher education was evident in the analysed documents (DOC-30). In 1997, the Faculty of Education at UNISA comprised an Institute for Educational Research and six departments, namely (DOC-30):

- Department of Comparative Education and Educational Management
- Department of Didactics
- Department of History of Education
- Department of Philosophy of Education
- Department of Orthopedagogics
- Department of Psychology of Education

The restructuring of teacher education resulted in newly established entities at UNISA and the disappearance of CE as an academic department and module. In 1998, the Department of Comparative Education and Educational Management was consolidated into the newly formed Department of Educational Studies (DOC-31). As revealed in the analysed documents (DOC-31; 32), the course consisted of two modules, namely *The School, Society and the Curriculum* (EDB101-X), and *The Education System and School Management* (EDB102-Y). The two modules contained some characteristics of CE, and the topics taught were grounded in the external

determinants of the education system such as political, social, scientific, and economic factors. Although the course content reflected the knowledge, skills, and values of the field of CE, it was clear that CE had lost its strong foothold in undergraduate and postgraduate (Bachelor of Education: Honours) courses at UNISA (DOC-31; 32).

The following were the newly established departments at UNISA (DOC-31):

- Department of Educational Studies
- Department of Primary School Teacher Education
- Department of Secondary School Teacher Education
- Department of Further Teacher Education

Additionally, an institute for Basic Adult Education and an institute for Educational Research were introduced. In alignment with newly formulated government policy and educational reforms in South Africa, teacher training at UNISA, specifically at the undergraduate level, focused on classroom management, computer literacy, special educational needs, and multicultural education (DOC-31).

Bergh and Soudien (2006) revealed that, by the year 2000, most historically White Afrikaans universities, such as UNISA, still offered CE at the postgraduate level. The analysed documents (DOCs-31–35) revealed that, by the years 1998 to 1999, CE continued to be offered at UNISA as part of a higher education diploma (postgraduate course) through one of its modules (OVOHOD-9). However, by 2000, the term CE disappeared from all UNISA study guides and tutorial letters, marking its decline in the institution (DOC-37). As a result of the restructuring in the state, CE was no longer an academic department in the Faculty of Education at UNISA, and its content was taught under names such as Schools and Society and the Education System and School Management (DOC-37; 38). In 2002, a master's degree course (0700-5) and a doctoral course (0894-X) were offered specifically in CE (DOCs-39–41). The following year, for the first time at UNISA, the term “international” was used in the course name (DOC-42). More specifically, a master's degree with a specialisation in CIE was offered. However, CE was not offered as an area of specialisation at the undergraduate and honours levels (DOC-42).

Although South African comparativists were only protesting apartheid education, their research should have been grounded in generating an alternative educational model (Bergh & Soudien, 2006). Weeks et al. (2006) noted that UNISA was not the only institution to experience the dissipation of CE. In fact, only one university in South Africa had a department of comparative education by 2005. At a further five universities, CE or themes in CE formed part of a department, while at another three, a CE subject grouping or themes within CE formed part of a school/faculty of education.

Resuscitation of comparative and international education

The Department of Higher Education and Training (2015) implemented the “Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications,” which impacted the structure and content of postgraduate courses in South African universities by necessitating a more rigorous and

specialised approach to teacher education. The new minimum requirements for educators are that educators should possess practical teaching skills and advanced knowledge in discipline-specific fields such as CIE. Following the introduction of the minimum requirements in 2015, CIE moved away from the module Schools and Society (HBEDSSC) to International, Comparative and History of Education (ICH4801; DOC-31; 33; 43). The module lecturers at the time were detailed in Table 7.

Table 7

Lecturers of Comparative and History of Education in 2015 (UNISA-DOC-44)

Lecturer	Rank
Lemmer, E.	Professor
Maluleka, K.	Primary lecturer
Davids, M. N.	Professor
Luvalo, L.	Lecturer

Prior to 2020, the recommended textbook for the International, Comparative and History of Education module was titled *Comparative Education: Education Systems and Contemporary Issues* (Wolhuter et al., 2007; DOC-44). Among the book's editors and contributing authors was Professor E. Lemmer, who has been employed with UNISA since 1987. In 2020, the recommended textbook for the International, Comparative and History of Education module was changed to *Decolonising Education in the Global South: Historical and Comparative International Perspectives* (Wolhuter et al., 2020). The new textbook was specifically developed to support the module ICH4801, with contributions from UNISA lecturers L. Luvalo and M. N. Davids. Professor Davids was one of the editors of this volume alongside Professor J. Seroto, both of whom are also faculty members at UNISA (DOC-44).

There was a proposal to separate History of Education and Comparative International Education into distinct subjects; however, this initiative faced challenges because of a shortage of qualified experts in the field of CIE (DOC-47). In 2024, the module Comparative and International Education transitioned away from History of Education, marking the establishment of CIE as a standalone subject for the first time since 1998 (DOC-46). The earlier Wolhuter et al. (2020) textbook continues to be used (DOC-54), nonetheless, a new textbook, *Comparative and International Education* (Wolhuter et al., 2025) specifically designed for the CIE module at UNISA was prescribed as recommended reading in 2025 (DOCs-48–51). Two of the book's

co-editors, Dr Luvalo and Dr Mkhize, are currently employed at UNISA (DOCs-47–51). In 2024, new lecturers with expertise in the field of CIE were appointed and the current team consists of those listed in Table 8.

Table 8

Lecturers of Comparative and International Education in 2024 (UNISA-DOCs-46–51)

Lecturers	Rank
Khambule, E.	Primary lecturer
Nhlumayo, B.	Senior lecturer
Luvalo, L.	Senior lecturer
Daniels, C.	Senior lecturer

The recruitment of new lecturers in 2024 has strengthened the CIE team at UNISA, which now comprises four specialists in the field (DOCs-48–51). The primary lecturer, Dr Khambule's research focuses on the decolonisation of education and policy transfer in higher education (DOC-48). Dr Nhlumayo has published research articles on educational policy, rural education and the integration of ICT in education. She is currently finalising an article for submission to the *International Journal of Comparative Education and Development* (DOC-49). Dr Luvalo specialises in research on the transformation of institutional policies in higher education (DOC-50). Meanwhile, Dr Daniels recently completed his doctoral studies and has an extensive publication record on education for sustainable development and sustainable research capacity building. He actively contributes to the discourse on CIE as a core executive member of SACHES and an annual presenter and publishing author at the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society (DOC-51).

The CIE module (HED4806) is designed to cultivate a critical understanding of the South African education system while interpreting historical and contemporary educational developments (DOC-46). The course content examines both the evolution and current context of education in South Africa and other countries in the Global South (UNISA, 2025a). Presently, 241 students are enrolled for the CIE module, with 73 specialising in CIE and aspiring to advance their studies at the master's level (DOC-49). This marks a notable increase from 2023, when only 17 students specialised in CIE (DOC-49). The HED4806 module has demonstrated strong class attendance and currently boasts a pass rate of 72.5%. The pass rate for 2024 was likely to reach 85% (DOC-49).

The establishment of CIE as a standalone subject in 2024, coupled with the recruitment of

specialised lecturers, reflects a strong commitment to enhancing the quality and relevance of CIE. The increase in student enrolment, particularly among those specialising in CIE, indicates a growing interest in and recognition of the importance of CE, especially in the context of the Global South. Furthermore, the promising pass rates and positive projections for 2024 suggest that the module is effectively engaging students and promoting academic success. The current arena of CIE at UNISA has the potential to contribute meaningfully to educational discourse and practice and address contemporary challenges in education.

Concluding thoughts and future perspective

The journey of CIE at UNISA mirrors a dynamic interplay of historic moments in the country and the institution. More specifically, UNISA's transformation reflects broader educational trends and societal shifts in South Africa and beyond. UNISA, as Africa's largest university, has played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of higher education and CIE in the region. With its founding in 1873 and subsequent milestones, UNISA became the first public university to offer distance education in the country. It has consistently adapted to the educational needs of a rapidly changing society. The establishment of the SACHES in 1991 played a crucial role in formalising the discourse around CIE and promoting its relevance in addressing regional educational challenges. Zooming in on CIE at UNISA, there are three important milestones, namely, the introduction of CE in 1970, its disappearance in 1998, and its resuscitation in 2015. Despite experiencing a decline as a distinct academic subject in the late 20th century, the revitalisation of CIE at UNISA in recent years has been encouraging. The resuscitation of the subject is characterised by the new minimum requirements for educator qualifications, which requires educators to possess advanced knowledge in discipline specific fields such as CIE. The university's unique context, serving a vast and multicultural student body from across Africa, positions it as a critical player in the global CIE discourse.

Looking ahead, the future of CIE at UNISA appears promising, driven by several key factors. Firstly, the university's high enrolment figures, which currently stand at approximately 400,000 students, provide a rich sample size of perspectives and experiences that can enhance the study of CIE. As UNISA continues to embrace its role as a leader in open, distance, and e-learning, it is well-positioned to contribute to the evolution of educational practices that are sensitive to the complexities of the African context. Secondly, recent appointments of lecturers with expertise in CIE and related fields signal a renewed commitment to advancing the discipline. Currently, the newly appointed academic practitioners foster innovative research and pedagogy that reflect the realities of contemporary educational challenges such as globalisation, migration, and technological advancements in the Global South. Lastly, the commitment to writing a new textbook tailored to the needs of CIE at UNISA indicates that the module (HED4806) is prioritised and of high quality. The roller coaster ride of CIE at UNISA is set to continue, with the potential for transformative impacts on educational policy and practice not only in South Africa but also

across the Southern African region. UNISA's ongoing commitment to inclusivity, academic excellence, and responsiveness to societal needs should ensure that CIE remains a vital field of study because of its potential to contribute to educational aims and objectives such as social justice and equity in the 21st century.

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Notes on the author

Carlo Daniels is Lecturer in Comparative and International Education, Department of Educational Foundations, University of South Africa.

Address for correspondence

daniece@unisa.ac.za

Exploring contributions to the development of comparative education from new and established higher education institutions in South Africa

Julia Correia

Akademia

Desireé Pearl Larey

University of the Free State

Chris-Mari Le Hanie

Akademia

Hennie Steyn

North-West University

Kevin Teise

Sol Plaatjie University

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Abstract

This article presents a comprehensive academic inquiry into the origins and growth of comparative education (CE) as a field of study in the faculties of education at North-West University, University of the Free State, Sol Plaatje University, and Akademia. Recognising the importance of CE in addressing educational challenges globally and locally, the article examines how these institutions have contributed to the development of CE, both as a scholarly field and as an integral part of teacher education curricula. It explores current practices and growth patterns in CE in these universities. Drawing on the theoretical foundations of CE, the article reflects on how each institution has developed CE as a subject area, with particular attention to their unique historical trajectories and the mentorship role of established higher education institutions. The article also highlights the relevance of CE in preparing educators to address both local and global educational issues. Through a combination of a literature review and autobiographical narratives, this research offers insights into how these institutions contributed to the evolution of CE and its potential to inform curriculum development for teacher education programmes in South Africa. Findings suggest that, despite challenges such as the diverse context of South Africa and shifts in institutional priorities, CE continues to play a vital role in shaping teacher education curricula. Furthermore, the study underscores the potential for expanding CE to further enrich pre- and postgraduate programmes, thereby enhancing the capacity of these institutions to engage with broader educational frameworks.

Keywords: comparative education, curriculum development, descriptive reflection, higher education institutions, reflexive practice

The field of comparative education (CE) is increasingly recognised as essential to addressing educational challenges both locally and globally. As higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa strive to enhance their contributions to the field, it is critical to understand the historical development and current practices of CE. By exploring the unique contributions of four HEIs, this study aims to shed light on how they can further advance CE as an academic field.

Problem statement and research objectives

It is widely acknowledged that, due to global developments and the recognition of education as a crucial tool for societal change, education is viewed as a solution to many societal challenges (Wolhuter, 2024). It enables both individuals and communities to achieve a more equitable and sustainable quality of life. Thus, educational systems must be meticulously planned and tirelessly refined to meet these evolving needs. However, it is often overlooked that the academic community is best positioned, due to its scope and methodologies, to guide the expansion and reform of education systems is the field of CE. A tailored education system is essential for addressing the specific educational needs of communities (Wolhuter, 2024). Therefore, it is critical to examine how HEIs contribute to meeting these needs and to assisting policymakers in effectively planning education systems to serve their target populations. In this context, understanding and appreciating the role of central universities in addressing this significant challenge is invaluable.

This study explores the contributions of North-West University (NWU), University of the Free State (UFS), Sol Plaatje University (SPU), and Akademia to the development of CE in their respective faculties of education. It specifically investigates how these HEIs influence and advance the field of CE. To achieve this, the study explores current CE practices within each institution, traces the historical origins and development of CE in their contexts, and evaluates how these practices can inform curriculum development for various programmes within the South African higher education landscape.

Literature review

Introduction of CE in higher education

CE is an essential field, which explores the diverse structures, functions, and operations of education systems around the world. As the global education landscape becomes increasingly interconnected, CE has become an indispensable tool for researchers, policymakers, and educators in understanding both the commonalities and unique features of education systems. This review examines the mentorship role, as well as the overarching role of HEIs in CE, which aids in informing curriculum development for teacher education and adds value and relevance to CE within the South African higher education context.

The mentorship role of established HEIs in paving the way for new HEIs

Established HEIs hold a wealth of experience and resources that can guide and support new HEIs as they develop their academic, administrative, and research frameworks. HEIs lead by example through the demonstration of effective governance structures that balance academic freedom with accountability. These models help new institutions to create transparent decision-making processes and foster institutional stability (Altbach, 2011; Marginson, 2016). Another key contribution of established HEIs is their research culture. By maintaining strong traditions in academic research, they set benchmarks for scholarly excellence, promoting high standards in publication, peer review, and ethical research practices. New HEIs can adopt these practices to build their own research capacity and reputations. Established HEIs often mentor new institutions through collaborations, joint research projects, and academic exchange programmes (Komotar, 2019; Teichler, 2017). These partnerships facilitate the transfer of knowledge and best practices, helping new HEIs develop robust research capabilities.

Curriculum development is another area where established HEIs take the lead. They have a track record of continually refining their programmes to meet the changing needs of students and society. New HEIs can learn from these institutions by adopting innovative approaches in pedagogy, such as integrating technology in teaching and promoting interdisciplinary learning (Teichler, 2017). Established HEIs are often engaged in international networks and partnerships, offering new HEIs pathways for global collaboration. Through these relationships, new institutions can gain access to international expertise, funding, and research opportunities—helping them to globalise their academic offerings and create internationally recognised programmes (Altbach, 2011; Komotar, 2019).

The role of HEIs in CE

As centres of knowledge production and intellectual exchange, HEIs serve as crucial platforms for conducting CE research, shaping future educators, and influencing policymaking on both national and international levels. One of the primary roles of HEIs in CE is advancing research that critically examines education systems across different countries and contexts. By offering specialised programmes, conferences, and collaborations, these institutions promote CE as a field of study that examines how education systems interact with social, economic, and political factors (Bray & Thomas, 1995; Manzon, 2011). This research often provides invaluable insights into how different education systems handle common challenges such as access, equity, and quality in education (Crossley & Watson, 2003). HEIs also play an essential role in the education and training of future CE scholars and researchers. Through dedicated courses and programmes in CE, HEIs equip students with the theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and critical thinking skills necessary to analyse and compare educational systems effectively. These programmes emphasise the importance of cross-cultural understanding and prepare graduates to contribute to educational reform and development in various global contexts (Cowen, 2009; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014).

In addition, HEIs serve as key actors in international academic collaborations and networks. They facilitate partnerships between institutions across countries, fostering the exchange of ideas and

research through joint programmes, academic conferences, and faculty exchanges (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Teichler, 2017). These collaborations provide opportunities for scholars from different parts of the world to engage in comparative research that examines global education trends such as the impact of technology on education, educational responses to migration, or the role of education in post-conflict societies (Stromquist, 2002).

Informing curriculum development for teacher education

One of the key contributions of CE is its potential to inform curriculum development processes in teacher education programmes. In the South African context, both undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education programmes can benefit from the insights generated through CE research (Tikly & Barrett, 2011). CE allows curriculum developers to draw from successful international models while ensuring the approaches are adapted to the unique needs and challenges of the local context (Bray et al., 2007). De Wet & Wolhuter (2007) warned against the uncritical adoption of education practices from other countries, emphasising the need to consider local contextual factors. This caution is particularly relevant in the development of teacher education curricula. By drawing on CE research, curriculum developers can ensure that South African teacher education programmes are grounded in local realities while also incorporating international best practices (Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014).

Furthermore, CE research can help identify the skills and competencies that are most relevant for teachers working in a rapidly changing global landscape. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, teachers need to be equipped with skills to engage with diverse student populations, adapt to new technologies, and address emerging educational challenges (Crossley, 2009). According to Bereday (1964), CE research offers lessons that can be applied to the South African context, providing insightful information about how teacher education programmes in other nations are preparing teachers for these difficulties. Research has shown that teacher education curricula must include components that develop teachers' abilities to foster inclusive learning environments, integrate technology into teaching, and respond to global educational trends such as sustainable development and equity (Hammerness et al., 2005; Schriewer, 2000). By understanding how other countries address these challenges, South African teacher education can evolve to better prepare future educators for the complexities of contemporary classrooms.

The field of CE provides a valuable framework for analysing and understanding education systems worldwide. Its theoretical foundations emphasise the need to examine education within its broader socio-cultural, economic, and political contexts, allowing scholars to generate insights that inform global educational practices. HEIs play a pivotal role in advancing CE by fostering research, providing academic training, and facilitating international collaborations. Furthermore, CE continues to shape the development of teacher education curriculum by highlighting the importance of local context and global trends in preparing educators for the challenges of a rapidly changing world. As education systems face new challenges brought about by globalisation, inequality, and technological advancements, CE offers critical tools for navigating these

complexities and improving education systems for all.

Value and relevance of CE in the South African higher education context

Universities operate within particular contexts. Steyn and Wolhuter (2010, p. 458) asserted that universities are

institutions that originated from real life and the community and that they have the responsibility to engage in such activities as to ensure that the work in science by universities will find its application in the real world and communities.

Universities, therefore, have a societal as well as a global responsibility to develop teachers who have the skills and the knowledge to respond to the needs of both the community and the global world. In this context, CE becomes an important discipline. For Anangisye et al. (2011:n.p)

the academic place of CE and its relevance are deeply embedded in local structures, contexts and cultures, and this societal contextualisation leads to different comparative educations in different parts of the world . . . there is a need for CE courses to be functional and maximally relevant to the African context.

In principle, CE provides students with knowledge of their own education system as well as with knowledge of education systems in the outside world, and it further offers students the opportunity to compare what is familiar to them with what is happening elsewhere—thus, to study “issues comparatively” (O’Sullivan et al., 2010, p. 776). To that extent, CE serves to describe education systems within their social contexts and also aims to improve education practice, to service other fields of education, and to serve as a philanthropic ideal that focuses on improving the state of humanity (Wolhuter, 2021).

Against the backdrop of South Africa’s vision to improve the state of humanity through transformation, it can be expected that South African teacher training programmes would provide teachers with insight about their own education system and assist them to improve both it and their teaching practice. In addition, through comparison, CE also provides education students with insight about other education systems. Knowledge about their own education system can nurture students’ national identity (Balodimas-Bartolomei, 2016). However, exposure to other education systems offers valuable insights that enable education students to learn from best practices and apply them in their own teaching. CE therefore also fosters students’ “personal development” (O’Sullivan et al., 2010, p. 777) because it “can broaden one’s perspective, sharpen one’s focus and deepen an understanding of one’s own society and education system” (Balodimas-Bartolomei, 2016, p. 7). Such knowledge is important to understand strengths and weaknesses and seeking solutions to educational problems locally and universally, and to respond to the reformatory nature of CE, which seeks to “find ‘what works’ and to use such insights to inform educational policy-making and educational practice” (Broadfoot, 2000, p. 366).

South Africa is part of the global village, and the forces of globalisation have an impact on the South African education system. In this regard, CE not only provides student teachers with an

opportunity to examine other cultures, their education systems, and their teaching and learning, but also with an opportunity to understand how global and transnational forces shape their local education system (Balodimas-Bartolomei, 2016). It is also because of globalisation that an unprecedented number of foreign nationals are entering South African schools, resulting in changes in the demographic composition of schools. A need therefore exists for a programme that equips South African teachers with knowledge about other people and cultures, and with skills to effectively and competently teach in multicultural classroom settings. For Maluleka (2023, p. 128), CE aims to give an understanding of

one's own and other countries' educational systems; improving, developing and reforming educational systems, policy and practice; predicting the success and consequences of educational change; developing tools to aid in each of these endeavours through the construction of theoretical frameworks; and to build on systematic studies of common educational issues, needs or practices as these are realised in diverse cultural settings.

O'Sullivan et al. (2010) opined that CE expands and deepens students' insight into educational issues and problems in their own education system, as well as possible strategies to address them. It also enables the development of global understanding, along with an awareness of and sensitivity to the wider international context.

Research design and methodology

This study makes use of a literature review and autobiographical narratives. The different authors contributed to the study by using Google searches, online peer-reviewed articles from accredited journals, book chapters, research methodology books, university year books, and university module outlines. To avoid any form of plagiarism, all sources consulted were referenced, both in text and in the reference list. The article was submitted to Turnitin to ensure that we did not unintentionally plagiarise.

Autobiography, as a second method in this study, is used as a scientific method in human sciences. This research method is based on personal life storytelling or writing to better understand one's own lived experiences (Aleandri & Russo, 2015). Further, autobiographical narratives are reflective accounts that academics write about their personal, professional, and pedagogical experiences (de Oliveira Barbosa & Marin-Suelves, 2024) during specific periods of their lifetimes. Aleandri & Russo (2015) claimed that through autobiography we learn of social, cultural, and economic happenings that occurred in the storyteller's world. In this study, we, as CE lecturers in different HEIs, recollect personal as well as social data that are useful in identifying current practices in comparative education and international studies (CEIS) from the viewpoints of new and established HEIs. By doing this, we can learn how these universities contributed to the development of CE as a field, tracing specifically how current practices inform curriculum development processes for undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education programmes in the South African context.

We analysed a collection of autobiographies, unearthing the experiences of five academics and how they engaged in academic discourses in the field of CE. The development of CE is illuminated through their stories and scholarly reflections. The historical, social, and cultural aspects of a context are essential for the understanding of educational practices in our world. Autobiography evokes self-reflection and instigates creativity. When we talk and write about our experiences of our lived lives, we reach deeper levels of self-awareness, which will enable us to plan our future (Aleandri & Russo, 2015). Abrahão (2012) claimed that using autobiographical research means making use of the practice of memory. According to the latter author, memory is an active process of assembling the facts in different narrative contexts. Abrahão further asserted that memory is a continued re-interpretation of past facts into the present; it is about the facts or events of past times and how one remembers it in the present. Our stories, through memories, help us to shape ourselves in more lasting ways. For Abrahão, autobiographical research alludes to a system in which the plurality of experiences and memories is the outcome of a plurality of different words and social times. Ricoeur (1995) pointed to the correlation between time and narrative, and encouraged researchers to investigate the origin of a historical narration shaped by a historical consciousness in which the present, past, and future expectations merge. This multi-dimensional perspective offers opportunities to learn, find inspiration, and gain insights from how similar situations have been addressed.

Reflective insights: North-West University (NWU)

CE's initial roots can be found in the Faculty of Education of Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education (PU for CHE), predecessor of NWU. CE was added at the beginning of the 1980s as part of the undergraduate teacher training programmes and soon afterwards, as part of the postgraduate training programmes. As stated repeatedly in a non-academic manner, the goal of CE in undergraduate teacher training programmes was to prepare students to provide excellent services to their clients, specifically students and their parents, by gaining a thorough understanding of the education system and the organisation in which they will work. At the postgraduate level, the goal of CE (also expressed in a non-academic manner) was for students to contribute to the growth of theoretical knowledge about the educational system, which was the focus of CE, while also enhancing the efficiency of the South African education system. In the era of PU for CHE, this work was done in the context of its motto, "In Your Light." Academics responsible for the practice and development of CE at the HEI up to 2020 were Professors S. S. Barnard, H. J. Steyn, S. Niemann, S. C. Steyn, E. A. S. de Waal, C. C. Wolhuter, and R. Maarman. Current academics are Professors Z. L. de Beer, D. Vos, and A. Nhlapo.

Phases in the development of CE at NWU

During the first phase of CE at this HEI, focus fell on the development of CE as a science and as part of the various disciplines in Education. During this phase, the research work, the research themes of postgraduate students, the books and articles that were written, and the training programmes of the undergraduate students and postgraduate students focused on the nature and functioning of the education system (and specifically the South African education system) by

comparing it, through regional studies, with other comparable education systems. The ongoing aim of all this work was to improve the effectiveness of the South African education system.

The second phase of CE at NWU is characterised by the internationalisation of the work done in the field through the expansion of collaboration of NWU academics with academics at international level. The result can be found in articles and books authored by NWU academics and academics all over the world. This internationalisation is also characterised by the lecturers who taught abroad, research and development carried out by NWU staff abroad, as well as participation in and organisation of international conferences. At that time, the name of the field at the institution changed from Comparative Education to Comparative and International Education (CIE).

Development of the subject area at the HEI

Barnard (1984) described CE as an integral component of the scientific study of education, by briefly describing its development up to that date. He explained the rationale behind the term “Comparative Education” and elaborated on its purpose, methodology, and meaning—particularly in the context of how education experts gain insights from the study of other education systems. Wolhuter (Steyn & Wolhuter, 2013; Wolhuter, 2024) continued with this work and explained in far more detail the history, nature, and aims of CE. He also explained the phases of CE culminating in the present Phase 8, and provided a vision for a forthcoming ninth phase in the evolution of the field. He further explained that this evolution to the ninth phase features the development of models of societal and education progress, transformation, or development tested in and crafted for Global South contexts.

The education system as a research area

The education system was also recognised as a research area and field of study of CE at this HEI. Regarding the concept *education system*, much has been written since the inception of CE, and significant differences existed amongst comparative educationists regarding what should constitute the field of research. It was subsequently agreed that education systems and problems related to the education system should be dealt with through a comparative perspective to gain more insight into effective education and education provision. In all the work regarding education systems at NWU, other education systems and the HEI’s own education system were continually kept in view, with constant attempt to learn lessons from other systems in order to improve the South African education system.

National communities, because of international contact between nations, developed rapidly in the second half of the 20th century and therefore the educational needs of these communities changed and became more differentiated and detailed. This in turn, contributed to education systems becoming more complex and differentiated. Therefore, the large amounts of data to be handled posed particular challenges to the comparative methodology. The result was that the general challenges of education systems such as, for example, the control of education, the school systems,

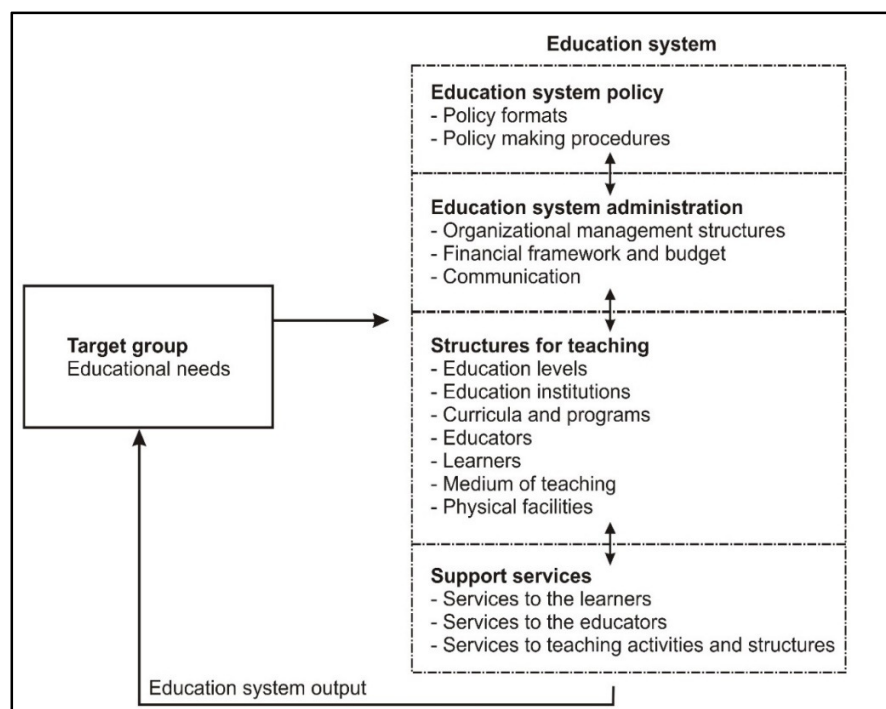
and the criteria that education systems had to meet, were neglected to some extent.

The content of CE as a subject at PU for CHE can be found in the book by Professor Barnard (1984), *Inleiding tot die Vergelykende Opvoedkunde* as well as in *Comparative Education for Student Teachers* (Barnard & Vos, 1980). Firstly, the development of CE and the nature and functioning of the education system was described. Barnard described the education system as a comprehensive cultural product of humans to provide effective education in a country. It was also described as an intertwining structure in which various societal structures work together to realise effective education within their circumstances of time and place. Theoretical analysis was applied in respect of the South African education system, some international education systems, and non-academic organisations. Attention was also paid to CE as a subfield within the broader scientific study of education (Barnard, 1984; Barnard & Vos, 1980). Furthermore, the work of international authors was also built on, for example, Bereday (1964), Eckstein & Noah (1969), Holmes (1981), King (1973), and Kandel (1933).

On the basis of this more general description of the education system as a research field of CE, more attention was later paid to the refinement of the nature, structure, and functioning of the education system (Steyn, 1991). To analyse and organise the structure of the education system in more detail, the research method and techniques of purposeful, repetitive critical reasoning were used. In carrying out the method, literature study, analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, observation and comparison were used (Steyn, 2007). Through the application of this research method, the education system was defined as the framework for effective education to meet the educational needs of a target group. It was found that the structure of the education system consists of four components, each of which consists of specific elements and that these components and elements intrinsically function together to fulfil the primary purpose of the education system, namely, to provide the education needs of a target group. This structure can be represented as in Figure 1.

Figure 1

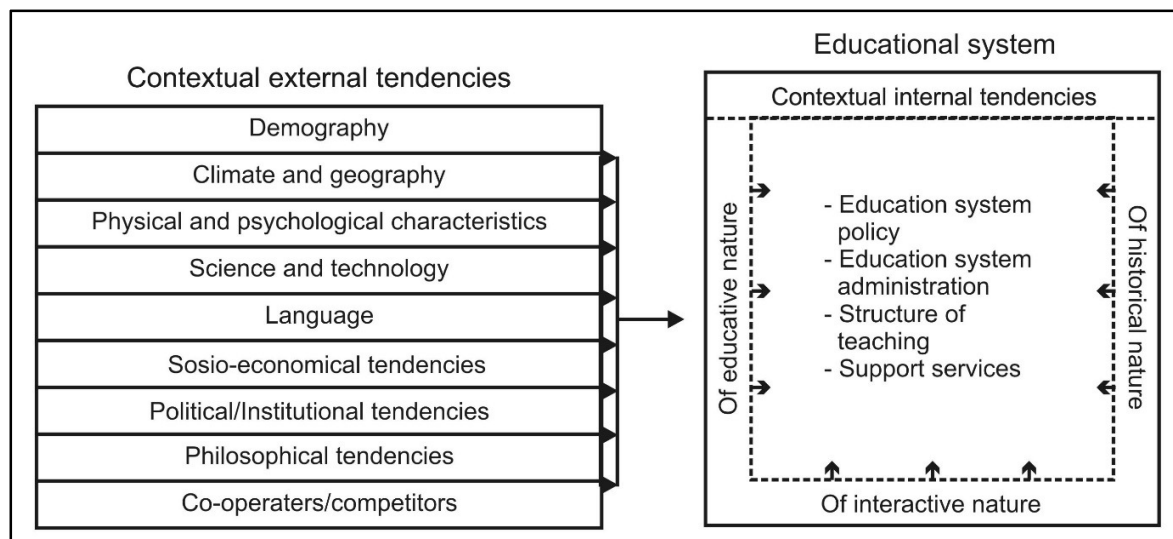
The structure of the education system (Steyn et al., 2002, p. 25)



Further research has shown that there are different types of education systems. The first type is the national education system, in which case the target group includes all the citizens of a particular state. The second type is the mini education system, in which case the target group includes a particular interest group that can extend within a state area or across the borders of different states. Based on the same research method of repetitive critical reasoning, the so-called dependent and independent education systems, as well as the formal and the non-formal education systems, were also identified (Steyn et al., 2002; 2015). Further research and development work has shown that specific shaping factors are involved to determine the nature and functioning of a particular education system. These embodying factors can be divided into the external and internal contextual factors and can be represented as in Figure 2.

Figure 2

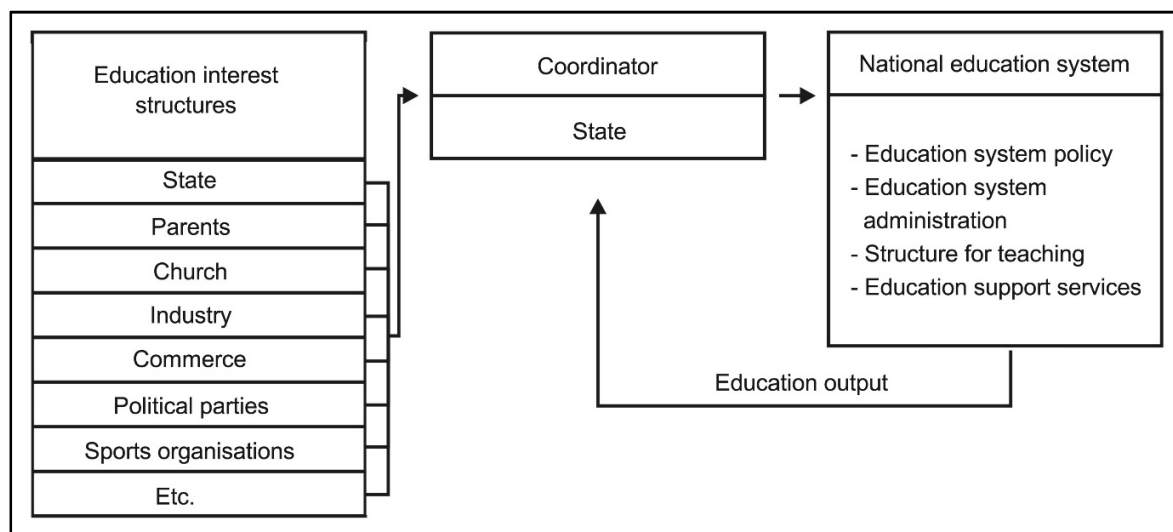
The external and internal contextual factors that determine the nature of a particular education system (Steyn et al., 2002, p. 141)



The last important finding was that educational interest groups must function in a specific pattern in order to realise a meaningful and coordinated cooperative relationship between the various interest groups for the effective functioning of the specific education system. This relationship can be represented as in Figure 3.

Figure 3

The relationship of the different education interested groups to support effective education (Steyn et al., 2002, p. 105)



On the basis of these developments at the level of education system theory, particular attention was paid to analyses of individual education systems and their various structural characteristics, among other things, by means of targeted regional studies regarding the unique nature of education provision in different countries (Barnard, 1984; de Beer et al., 2021; Steyn, 1985).

The internationalisation of CE at NWU

The internationalisation of CE at NWU has been realised on multiple levels. These include individual visits to colleagues in other countries, serving as guest lecturers at foreign universities, participating in and organising academic conferences, co-authoring articles and books to develop academic competence, and conducting advisory visits to specific organisations. A very important development regarding internationalisation was that the subject group took responsibility for research and development of education in the BRICS countries, with BRICS being one of the largest international organisations in the world. A new association, BRICSEd was founded, with Professor Niemczyk elected as its first president (News@NWU, 2018)). Several research publications have already seen the light, of which Kampfer et al. (2023) and Daniels et al. (2024) are examples. Academic visits to colleagues abroad were always accompanied by the execution of specific research projects. Of the first, were probably the research visits in the early 1980s to the United States and Europe, which were funded by the then National Road Safety Board, with the aim of making proposals for the effective introduction of road safety into the South African curricula (Steyn, 1984).

The participation of lecturers as guest lecturers did not materialise widely. It was especially the work of Professor Wolhuter who expanded this capacity of CE at NWU. He has the distinction of having acted as a guest lecturer at different universities on all five continents, namely, Brock University, Canada; University of Queensland, Australia; University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Italy; Education University of Hong Kong; Tarapaca University, Chile; and San Martin University, Argentina. Regarding the presentation of papers at national and international conferences, it was the policy of the HEI that academics had to participate in conferences on a regular basis in order to test and develop their academic competences. Professor Wolhuter was integrally involved in the organisation of SACHES in South Africa, and of the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society, in which he was part of the committee responsible for organising the yearly conference, particularly the thematic session about CE, and he serves as co-editor of the yearly conference book of the papers. Over the years, great emphasis has also been placed on the publication of articles and books, more so when these publications are done in collaboration with academics from other universities, for example, Wolhuter et al. (2008).

Advisory work

Examples of the advisory work of the subject group CIE include an extensive research visit to Madagascar in 2000 to make recommendations regarding the delivery of effective private education services in that country. Various places of education provision were visited, after which advisory work was delivered from a scholarly background (Steyn et al., 2000; Wolhuter et al.,

2003). A second example was based on the doctoral research of Compion (2012), specifically regarding the strategic planning of a private university in Zambia on behalf of the Cross-Cultural Education Foundation. Flowing from that doctoral research and the on-site visit, the advisory work culminated in an analysis of missionary education in Africa and several findings followed from this (Wolhuter et al., 2011).

Application projects

The theoretical developments regarding the nature, structure, and functioning of the education system led to development of the framework for the strategic planning of the education system (Steyn et al., 2002; 2007; Steyn & Wolhuter, 2010; Steyn & Wolhuter, 2012). This strategic planning framework has been applied in different situations, for example, at the Voortrekker High School in Bethlehem (in 2007) and in respect of the former Model C schools in Henneman (in 2016). The theoretical exposition also played a role in the discipline project that was launched, with a comparison of disciplinary problems amongst different countries (Steyn et al., 2003). The challenges regarding the provision of education to minority groups in South Africa have also been described (Mochwanaesi et al., 2005). And, the productivity of the education system was investigated and recommendations made for application at the different levels of the education system (Steyn, 2019). The subject CE was introduced in the Faculty of Education of PU for CHE as part of the pre-service training of teachers and soon after that, as part of the postgraduate field of study. The subject has steadily developed in depth and scope to the point where presently, staff from the subject area of CIE at NWU are internationally recognised as leading academics and researchers.

Reflective insights: University of the Free State (UFS)

UFS is one of the oldest HEIs in South Africa. The university was established in 1904 as Grey College with only six students and in 1906, the institution was renamed Grey University College (UFS, n.d.). In 2001, the university was again renamed to University of the Free State. Today, UFS is a multi-campus institution with two diverse campuses in Bloemfontein (the main and the South campuses) and the QwaQwa Campus in Eastern Free State. The institution accommodates more than 40,000 students (Oosthuizen, 2018).

Initially, the education department existed as the Department of History of Education. In the early years of the 1970s, CE was added to this discipline, parallel to developments in HEIs in the rest of South Africa. Professor D. Vermaak was the first head of department of the then-newly established Department of History Education and Comparative Education. Under his leadership and initiative, the *Navorsingseenheid vir Onderwys-Beplanning* [Research Unit of Educational Planning] was opened. This unit did significant work on educational development in the former homelands. It is important to note that Education Management was incorporated into the Department of History of Education and Comparative Education in 1986 (UFS, 1986). Through conversations with Professors Steve Niemann and Robbie Brazelle, it is remembered that they mentioned that Professor Vermaak contributed significantly to CE in praxis, and is regarded as the founder of CE at UFS.

According to UFS (1970), CE was offered as a subject with an emphasis on Christian National Education (education for Whites), but also on planning and development for “Bantu education,” especially in the homelands for Black people. Parts of the curriculum were the Christian National Education ideas in South Africa, the consequence of divided education control since 1910, the constitution of a National Advisory Education Board in 1963, and the principles contained in national education laws of 1967 (UFS, 1975). During the 1980s, the history of education and comparative education curriculum was developed by incorporating selected themes that reflected national and international trends in education. The shift placed emphasis on developed and developing countries, education control, policy, organisational structures, and factors influencing education systems. Over time, especially in the 2000s, CE moved to the background because students perceived education management as key to their success in schools.

On my appointment as a lecturer in 2014, I mainly taught education leadership, management, and governance in the School of Education Studies, which hosted various disciplines, such as education management and leadership, philosophy of education and policy studies, psychology of education, higher education studies, and so forth. During mid-2022, schools were dissolved, and the Faculty of Education was divided into departments. CE was included in the Department of Education Management, Policy and Comparative Education. Over time, undergraduate modules in CE were allocated to me because of my academic training in the field. Currently, my teaching workload comprises undergraduate and postgraduate modules in CEIS. The focus in the undergraduate module is introductory to the different phases of development and historical trajectory of CEIS as a field. This is the only module that I share with two colleagues from Education Management. An important phase for third-year students is understanding how societal factors and forces influence education systems and, in return, how the education system influences society (Wolhuter et al., 2021). Another important aspect for the module is how national laws and legislation influence education systems (UFS, 2012a).

A few years ago, the Post-Graduate Certificate of Education (PGCE) module of CE was added to my workload. With this, the discussions in the module needed to critically reflect contemporary discourses in national and international education systems to prepare students for the teacher education programme. Other aspects of importance are internal and external determinators influencing the education system and how an understanding of key terms, concepts, principles, and theories of CE relates to other areas of teacher education. Students should demonstrate how this knowledge could influence their teaching philosophy. In addition, national laws and legislation influencing education systems form part of the PGCE curriculum (UFS, 2012b). The education legislation in these modules has affected the democratic dispensation of South Africa since 1994. On the postgraduate level, the emphasis was and still is to introduce students to the field of study, teaching them CEIS as a science—including the origin, theories, methodologies, and the value of CEIS. The focus is extensively on theories and methodologies important for the field, current trends and themes in CEIS, and agendas in CE. The themes selected for postgraduate studies are rurality and rural education, women in education, culture and education, comparative education

leadership (in developing countries), and the historically disadvantaged student in South African universities.

Through attending international and local conferences such as the World Congress of Comparative Education Societies, American Education Research Association, and SACHES, my focus is increasingly on the sustainable development of vulnerable and minority groups, especially in developing countries. For undergraduate and postgraduate modules, the focus intensified on education as a human right, based on principles of non-discrimination, social justice, human dignity, and cultural diversity (UNESCO, 2021). To conclude, education should contribute to the right of quality education everywhere, with a special focus on how the knowledge of the South has explanatory power for understanding our changing world.

Empowering change: UFS's dynamic contributions to CE

Over past decades, the curriculum of CE at UFS has reflected national and international trends in the education systems of both developed and developing countries. Key focus areas have included education control, policy, organisational structures, and the various factors influencing educational systems. As the field of CE continues to evolve, it is essential for scholars to actively engage with the democratic era of South Africa, ensuring their contributions remain relevant to contemporary challenges. Furthermore, recognising the explanatory power of the Global South is crucial for understanding our changing world. This perspective should be complemented by expanding research on sustainable development to promote human rights, equality, appreciation for cultural diversity, and peace, globally. Through these efforts, UFS plays a vital role in shaping a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape.

Reflective insights: Sol Plaatjie University (SPU)

SPU is located in central South Africa, and was established in 2014 as one of two new comprehensive public HEIs in the country. It started with 124 students in 2014 and currently has well over 3,000 full- and part-time students (SPU, 2019). As a comprehensive university, SPU offers a variety of diplomas, bachelors, honours, and master's degrees to a diverse group of students across its four faculties, including the Faculty of Education.

The Faculty of Education is the largest faculty at SPU in terms of both student population and staff complement. It prepares teachers in various subjects through a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes offered across its four departments. Since its inception, CE has been an integral part of the training of teachers. Housed within the Department of Education Studies, CE in the form of a module was included due to the close collaboration with the neighbouring UFS. An agreement between these two institutions saw academic staff from both HEIs working closely during the development of new programmes and modules for SPU. This process coincided with the 2010–2015 recirculation at the Faculty of Education, which saw modules being developed and implemented at both universities. The close collaboration with Professors L. Jacobs and C. de Wet, both at the time affiliated to the CE department of the Faculty of Education at UFS, significantly contributed towards the inclusion of CE into the BEd programme of SPU as a stand-alone module.

As part of the core curriculum, CE at SPU is currently offered at the third-year level of teacher training, and all student-teachers are required to enrol for it and to pass it as part of the requirements for the BEd programme. Entitled, “Education Systems in Global and National Contexts,” this 16-credit module is offered during Semester 1 each year. According to the SPU (2024, p. 89) *Rulebook and Programme Information*, on completion of this module, “the student should be able to critically evaluate international and national education systems and be able to examine the policy framework within which the South African education system operates.” Module content is structured into units as follows: the essence and nature of CE, particular theories and their relevance and value for CE, the general structure and components of education systems, contextual factors that impact the structure of an education system, and contemporary social and educational issues relevant to education systems from a CE perspective. We also investigate the nature and structure of the South African education system, and draw comparisons between various education systems and their educational policies. The focus on contemporary social and educational issues is in line with observations by Mazurek & Winzer (2006 in Balodimas-Bartolomei, 2016), who explained that CE courses usually either introduce students to the field of comparative studies or focus on specific, contemporary, global education issues. Over the years, slight changes were made to the original module content. However, the outcomes remained unaltered.

Teaching and learning strategies in this module comprise discussions, student presentations, active student participation, groupwork, reflections, independent self-study of prescribed texts, and face-to-face and online lectures. Although we initially prescribed a particular textbook, objections to the use of textbooks prompted the increasing use of recent scholarly articles and book chapters as texts. These texts provide the content for continuous assessment and an essay-type formative assessment. No examinations are written. However, the development of new programmes, notably the BEd in Foundation Phase, and BEd Intermediate and Senior Phase, or the Senior and Further Education and Training Phase, as well as the introduction of the PGCE, saw CE being sidelined (Anangisye et al., 2011) and subsumed under themes or modules in teacher education programmes (Wolhuter et al., 2011). Anangisye et al. (2011) observed that only a few universities in South Africa still offer CE modules under that name. Rather, CE content is now presented under various themes in education training programmes. However, whilst this could be regarded as detrimental to the field of CE, it opens the possibility to determine “how and within which various academic programmes the subject is taught” (Balodimas-Bartolomei, 2016, p. 6).

Similar to what is happening across South Africa, a lack of infrastructure, notably qualified academics and a dedicated CE department (Anangisye et al., 2011), also see CE at SPU struggling and the fate thereof left to two academics who themselves are not qualified in CE. Their expertise in education policy and their interest in contemporary social and educational issues enable them to find connections with CE through the analysis and comparisons of education policies designed to address these issues in other countries. This has enabled these lecturers to attend a CE conference in Bulgaria, and to work with local and international scholars in the field of CE, notably Professors

Jacobs and Howard from the Appalachian State University, North Carolina, USA.

Currently, no BEd honours programme in CE is offered at SPU. However, the master's programme does make provision for master's research in the field. Whilst the doctoral programme is not yet registered and accredited, provision is made to also offer CE up to doctoral level. Experience from the lecturers offering the CE module suggests that education students find CE quite interesting, especially the learning about their own education system and those of other countries as related to the structure, external factors, and policy responses to social and educational factors. These experiences correspond with the findings of O'Sullivan et al. (2010).

The dynamic contribution of CE at SPU

At SPU, the contribution of CE lies in fostering a deep understanding among students of the nature and functioning of the South African education system, while also broadening their perspective with insights into global educational systems. This contribution enables students to recognise that many educational challenges are not unique to South Africa given that similar issues are experienced worldwide. Additionally, CE at SPU cultivates sensitivity toward policy decisions, and emphasises the importance of sustainable practices within the South African education system.

Reflective insights: Akademia

Akademia, an independent HEI in South Africa providing Afrikaans-medium education, was established in 2011 by the Solidariteit Beweging to offer high-quality tertiary education. By 2025, the institution has expanded its fulltime campus programmes across five faculties: Economic and Management Sciences, Humanities, Education, Law, and Natural Sciences—all offering accredited qualifications (Akademia, 2024a). The HEI operates through a blended learning model that combines online education with contact sessions, catering to both distance and full-time students. Students have flexible study options including after-hours distance learning via a nationwide network of centres or e-learning—ideal for those balancing work or other commitments while studying. Since 2021, Akademia has also offered a full-time campus model, providing students, known as Fonties, with a safe and engaging environment for attending classes and participating in a vibrant student life. With two interim campuses in Centurion, Akademia strives to be a Christian, classical, and independent academic home for Afrikaans language and culture communities, shaping both the mind and heart with a vision for a free future (Akademia, 2024a).

From 1 March 2019 to 1 June 2025, Professor Gawie du Toit served as Dean of the Faculty of Education at Akademia. He was succeeded by Professor Johnnie Hay, who assumed the role on 1 July 2025 and is currently responsible for the development of the faculty's academic programmes. The Faculty of Education currently offers four programmes: Bachelor of Education in Foundation Phase Teaching, Bachelor of Education in Intermediate Phase Teaching, PGCE for the Senior and FET Phase, and Postgraduate Diploma in School Leadership and Management. The two BEd programmes include a CE module in the third year (second semester), which comprises 16 credits

at NQF Level 7. There are two prescribed books that contribute to the content and teaching of this module, as well as various additional literature sources. This module is compulsory, and students write an examination as a final summative assessment at the end of the semester. It was offered for the first time in 2024. The module's descriptor was originally written by the late Professor Johan Dreyer. As the Faculty of Education was newly established at the time of the programme's development, external experts were commissioned to write the module descriptors. Thereafter, Ms Reinette Blake was responsible for the initial development of the study guidelines, which was handed over for further development by Ms Julia Correia, a lecturer at Akademia who was also responsible for the teaching of the module from 2024.

The module explores the development of educational systems from ancient civilisations to modern schooling and shows how historical influences have shaped today's educational institutions (see Table 1). It looks at approaches to education from different historical periods, such as the Greek, Roman, Christian, and medieval systems, while examining key practices such as critical thinking, civic responsibility, and ethical instruction that have emerged from these frameworks. By reflecting on these values, students gain insight into how they have contributed to the development and formalisation of the structure and curriculum of contemporary education. Furthermore, the module establishes a link between these historical developments and later periods while exploring historical paradigms such as realism, scientific inquiry, and nationalisation. Through this exploration, students deepen their understanding of the processes of curriculum development and the continuity of education principles over time.

Students also learn about pioneers of 20th- and 21st-century pedagogy (including Dewey, Montessori, Ralph Tyler, Vygotsky, and Freire), and examine how their theories, such as experiential learning, student-centred approaches, and critical pedagogy, are being implemented in today's classrooms. Students relate these modern educational theories to current classroom practices, leadership structures, and policies focused on inclusion and diversity. They analyse how democratic or authoritarian governance in education affect classroom practice and management, learner engagement, and teacher professionalism. In addition, students reflect on the various policy frameworks that shape education and assess the impact of these frameworks on educational quality and equity. They explore their roles as education policy interpreters and implementors within the classroom, and how these policies can contribute towards a human rights-based approach to classroom management. As they reflect upon the professional conduct of a teacher, they reconstruct their own educational philosophies by considering the importance of continuing professional development and developing professional portfolios to ensure adaptability to new educational trends and strategies. This reflective process enables students to become lifelong learners and dynamic educators capable of influencing future educational reform.

Table 1

Key themes of Akademia's CE module (Akademia, 2024b)

Key Themes	Content Outline
Historical insights	Analysis of educational systems from Greek, Roman, Christian, and medieval periods, and how values like critical thinking and civic responsibility have shaped modern education.
Contemporary relevance	Study of 20th- and 21st-century educational theorists (e.g. Dewey, Montessori, Freire) and the application of their ideas in learner-centred and experiential learning practices today.
Policy and governance	Examination of educational policies and their impact on teaching practices, learner engagement, classroom management, and equity.
Professional growth	Development of personal educational philosophies, professional portfolios, and reflective practices to support lifelong learning and adaptability in evolving educational contexts.

The CE component of this module is integrated through exploration and comparison of the above-mentioned content within the scope of relevant contemporary issues in education. During lectures, discussions and debates take place between fellow students and the lecturer. Students are encouraged to conduct their own research on these topics and to share their viewpoints and opinions. The aim of this practice is to produce teachers who can critically evaluate contemporary issues in education, continually enrich their teaching practice through life-long learning, and formulate their own teaching philosophy, which will aid in them becoming effective managers of inclusive classrooms.

As Akademia continues to grow, there is significant potential to expand its faculty and develop additional CE modules, which could make a valuable contribution to future pre- and postgraduate programmes. This expansion would not only enrich the curriculum but also strengthen the institution's academic offerings and its capacity to engage with broader and international educational frameworks.

Nurturing minds, shaping communities: Akademia's holistic contribution to CE

Looking ahead, Akademia's integrated approach to research, teaching, community engagement,

and curriculum development aligns closely with its mission and vision, underscoring a commitment to CE that is grounded in stewardship, commitment, and a pioneering spirit. As a Christian, classical, and autonomous institution rooted in the Afrikaans language and cultural communities, Akademia fosters an academic environment that nurtures intellectual and moral growth, aiming to carry forward the goodness and beauty of the past for future generations. This approach ensures that theoretical insights are directly tied to practical teaching applications, creating a dynamic curriculum that actively addresses contemporary educational challenges. Akademia's foundational ideals uniquely position it to contribute to CE both locally and globally. Its emphasis on stewardship extends beyond knowledge preservation to a commitment to justice, friendship, and open dialogue within and beyond its communities. This dual dedication to local cultural heritage and good relations with other communities aligns well with CE's objective to cultivate inclusive, culturally responsive perspectives in education (Akademia, 2024a). Akademia's philosophy not only prepares students with specialised expertise but also instils a strong sense of social responsibility and ethical citizenship, enriching the CE discourse by nurturing educators who are grounded in faith, hope, and love.

Akademia's expansion of CE offerings at undergraduate and postgraduate levels within its Faculty of Education further affirms its pioneering role in Afrikaans-medium higher education. By incorporating CE modules that explore diverse educational systems, policies, and cultural influences, Akademia enables students to critically engage with the complex interplay between history, culture, and policy shaping education worldwide. This commitment to truth, goodness, and beauty in academic pursuits reinforces Akademia's mission to develop students who are both locally engaged and globally conscious—a balance that resonates with CE principles of fostering both local identity and international awareness (Stromquist & Monkman, 2014).

Akademia's distinctive educational approach, prepares students to navigate modern classrooms with cultural sensitivity and insight. Through this connection of theory to practice, students are encouraged to apply comparative perspectives directly to classroom management, policy analysis, and learner engagement. Such a grounded and reflective approach cultivates educators who are adaptable, attuned to the evolving needs of diverse communities, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to educational practices in ways that honour the pursuit of truth, goodness, and beauty (Beard & Wilson, 2018).

Building bridges in CE: Lessons from South African institutions

Recognising and appreciating CE as an essential discipline, science, and construct is necessary for the development of well-rounded educators and students who can build bridges between and beyond different educational contexts. By integrating elements from fields such as sociology and economics, students can critically examine the impact of CE on classroom practice and learn to navigate the complexities of different educational systems. In addition, collaboration with international institutions (through exchange programmes and joint research initiatives) can enrich

students' learning experiences in CE. This not only enhances the students' research skills but also encourages them to engage in CE studies, fostering lifelong learning and intellectual growth.

Considering the lessons learned from COVID-19, the formulation of comprehensive disaster management plans tailored to the South African education system is essential for strengthening the resilience of educational institutions. These plans should address various levels of preparedness for future crises. By focusing on practical strategies, stakeholders can improve the sustainability and continuity of learning and effectively bridge educational gaps when unforeseen challenges arise.

Finally, curriculum flexibility is critical to adapting to evolving educational trends and integrating innovative teaching practices. Aligning CE programme development with national guidelines such as the National Qualifications Framework and international benchmarks will equip graduates with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet today's educational challenges. By fostering a culture of continuing learning and professional development in CE, educational institutions can effectively build bridges between local and global educational needs, positioning CE as a dynamic and indispensable science.

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Notes on the authors

Julia Correia is a lecturer in education at Akademia, and is currently pursuing her PhD in Comparative Education at North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus).

Desireé Pearl Larey is a lecturer in the Department of Education Management, Policy, and Comparative Education at University of the Free State.

Chris-Mari Le Hanie is a senior lecturer in Education; Subject Head: Comparative Education, History of Education, Curriculum Studies and Philosophy of Education; and Faculty of Education Programme coordinator: Programme Development at Akademia.

Hennie Steyn is a retired professor in comparative education.

Kevin Teise is Acting Director at the Centre for the Advancement of Rural and Inclusive Education Research at Sol Plaatje University.

Address for correspondence

juliac@akademia.ac.za

chris-maril@akademia.ac.za

The Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society: *Élan vital* of comparative and international education in Southern Africa

Harold D. Herman

University of Western Cape

Charl Wolhuter

North-West University

Abstract

This article surveys the historical evolution and present state of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) and from that historical survey, assesses future prospects, and charts a possible future trajectory for SACHES. While SACHES has had an interesting history with many milestones and has been a centripetal force for scholars in the region the past 34 years, it has its work cut out for forthcoming years. This includes raising the publication profile of the organisation and allowing publication space for members, stabilising its membership, attend to raising its impact on practice and on policy formulation, and once again finding its critical voice, which it lost soon after its inception. But above all, it should become a force in taking the field of comparative and international education into a new era, where the Global South comes to its own.

Keywords: comparative and international education, global south, scholarly societies, Southern Africa, Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society

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Introduction

This article surveys the historical evolution and present state of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) and from that historical survey, assesses future prospects, and charts a possible future trajectory for SACHES. A professional society is a pivotal part of an organised field of scholarship in a particular region; hence, this article proceeds from the belief that a stock-taking of SACHES is indispensable in this special section on the theme of comparative and international education in Southern Africa.

It commences with an explanation of the role and place of a professional society in the life of a field of scholarship. It is followed by a survey of the historical evolution of professional societies in the field of comparative and international education, and a survey of the present gamut of professional societies in the field in the world. It is also pointed out that comparative education scholars have hitherto not paid much attention to these societies as objects of study. It is then explained where SACHES fits into this global family of comparative and international education societies. The origin of SACHES and its subsequent history is then outlined, paying special attention to the organisation and its leadership, conferences, journals, publications, and impact. In conclusion, we venture a future perspective based on a critical reflection of the stock-taking exercise presented in the article.

Professional or scholarly societies as the pulsating hearts and nerve centres of scholarly fields and communities of scholars

The second international survey (2007–2008) of the academic profession—the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) project—surveyed the academic profession in 23 countries all over the world. One of questions put to academics was to rate the importance that affiliation to each of following three was to them:

- their department or school
- their institution (university)
- their discipline or field of scholarship.

In all 23 jurisdictions, academics rated affiliation to their discipline or field of scholarship as being stronger than their affiliation to their department or school or institution (see Shin et al., 2014). It seems therefore, that affiliation to discipline or field of scholarship is a powerful determinant of the identity or self-image of members of the academic profession. Societies, binding members of a discipline or scholarly field together, have obviously become a very important part of scholarly communities.

From the vantage point of the field of comparative and international education, the value of professional societies as a centripetal force in scholarly fields is underscored by the disparate nature or state of the field. There is considerable difference of opinion among comparativists (and

certainly more outside the scholarly community) as to whether comparative and international education is a discipline or even constitutes a field (Manzon, 2007; Mason, 2007). However, within the scholarly community, the dominant view seems to be that it is a field, rather than a discipline—a scholarly or academic field then, apparently denoting a looser identity than a discipline. But the next problem is that neither protagonists of comparative and international education, nor scholars of any scholarly community, prominently and concretely specify what a scholarly or academic field is and which criteria it should meet. A dictionary defines a scholarly field as “an area of academic concentration; a discipline” (Yourdictionary, n.d.). Thus, it appears that the terms “discipline” and “field of study” are used interchangeably. One of the first volumes of the leading and oldest journal in the field, *Comparative Education Review*, published Heath’s (1958) article entitled “Is Comparative Education a Discipline?” In this article, the author listed 10 requirements of a discipline. Tellingly (as if it were the capstone of a discipline) the 10th and final requirement was:

A discipline binds its practitioners together in formal association. Through such formal association, members set and maintain their standards, assure ethical practice, encourage likely candidates to qualify for entry into the field, and exchange information and experience for the sake of helping each other to improve their service (Heath, 1958, p. 32).

This statement has a ring of easy, convincing logic in it and indeed, even a cursory look at the history of disciplines (or then, academic clusters) at universities shows the role of such professional associations in their formation. Disciplines as the basic units in the structural-organisational edifice of universities emerged only with the establishment of the Humboldt University in Berlin in 1810 (at the risk of generalisation, up to that time—lower than the advanced, specialised faculties of medicine, law, and theology—only one global-diffuse subject philosophy, developed out of the medieval and antique *trivium*, had been taught; Fallon, 2019). From Germany, the Humboldt model spread to the United States of America (the establishment of the private, Johns Hopkins University in 1876 is singled out as the most important event in exporting the Humboldt model to North America) and to the rest of the world as part of the spread of European hegemony to the rest of the world. This (the 19th century) was indeed the time when most of the current gamut of natural sciences began to crystallise as independent, fully-fledged disciplines and, following hot on their heels, the humanities and the social sciences around the beginning of the 20th century.

While universities, with the pioneering role of institutions such as Humboldt and Johns Hopkins, are recorded in literature with credit to the development of these disciplines or fields of study, their origin as university disciplines were predated by a few, but pivotal scholarly societies. The Royal Society was created in 1660 in England, and the *Academie Française* in France 1637. Although these societies owed their origin to political imperatives or contexts, rather than being societies of scholars of a common, particular field of interest, Aileen Fyfe, Professor of Modern History, St Andrews University, explained that these disciplines were actually hatched and incubated as part of the activities of these societies (Scholastica, 2019), a statement corroborated by Bill Bryson’s

(2010) narrative of the history of the Royal Society.

It seems that scholarly societies began to multiply and flourish once the transportation and communication infrastructure of the Second Industrial Revolution (that is, postal services, railways, steam ships, telegraphs, and telephones) was laid down in the late 19th century. Examples of these scholarly societies are the American Educational Research Association, established in 1916; the American Psychology Association, established in 1892; the American Sociological Association, established in 1905; the American Association of Economics, established in 1885; and the British Education Research Association, established in 1974. Currently, scholarly societies seem to be firmly entrenched, and constitute an important part of the frame of reference of scholars.

The roles (or, at least, potential roles) and significance of scholarly societies include:

- Serving as a lobby to promote the institutional presence of the field at universities;
- Promoting collaboration (in teaching, research and service) between scholars and promote and facilitate inter-university visitations;
- Maintaining journals for their scholarly fields; and
- Organising conferences.

Journals and conferences can then serve to:

- Shape the research agenda of a field;
- Serve as fora whereby scholars inspire one another and also new entrants to the field;
- Demonstrate to one another as well as to scholars outside the field, the vitality and value of the field; and
- Develop best pedagogy for teaching of the discipline or field.

A glaring anomaly is that, despite their obviously decisive place in the evolution of fields of scholarship, in identity formation of members of the academic profession, in publications on the historical evolution and current state of disciplines or fields of scholarship, and on the cultures of academic territories, is that scholarly societies are grossly neglected or even totally disregarded as objects of research on the historical evolution, identity, and state of disciplines or fields of scholarship. In the three successive editions, over 25 years, of Tony Becher's trailblazing and trend-setting study on *Academic Tribes and Territories* (Becher, 1989; Becher & Trowler, 2001; Trowler et al., 2012), societies are not accorded a decisive role in these three mappings of academic fields.

Societies in the historical evolution of comparative and international education

While the scholarly field of comparative and international education has a formal history as a distinct field of scholarship reaching back (arguably) to 1817 (see Wolhuter, 2019) and a pre-history reaching back much further, professional societies in the field date back barely 70

years. The oldest and largest of these scholarly societies, namely the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES), located in the United States of America but enjoying a global membership, was founded in 1956. This organisation boasts a membership of some 3,000 members, and its annual conference in the United States of America is a highlight on the field's annual calendar. Similarly, the journal it founded, the *Comparative Education Review* has now been publishing since 1957. The CIES was followed by some half a dozen more societies during the next decade and a half. Notable amongst these are the Comparative Education Society for Europe, the Japanese Comparative Education Society, and the Comparative and International Education Society of Canada. In 1970 the principals of the then existing comparative education societies came together in Ottawa, Canada and, under the leadership of Canadian comparativist, Joseph Katz, established the World Council of Comparative Education Societies (WCCES). The WCCES organises the Comparative Education World Conference every three years. Eighteen such World Conferences have been organised at sites on all the continents. The initial conference was in Ottawa, Canada in 1970 and subsequent conferences were held in Genève, Switzerland in 1973; London in 1977; Tokyo in 1980; Paris in 1984; Rio de Janeiro in 1987; Montreal in 1989; Prague in 1992; Sydney in 1996; Cape Town in 1998; Chung Buk, South Korea in 2001; Havana, Cuba in 2004; Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2007; Istanbul in 2010; Buenos Aires in 2013; Beijing in 2016; Cancun, Mexico in 2019; and the most recent, the 18th Conference, at Cornell University in the United States of America, 22–26 July 2024.

The present range of societies in comparative and international education and WCCES

At present, WCCES has 46 constituent comparative education societies, namely, Association Française pour le Développement de l'Éducation Comparée et des Échanges, Association Francophone d'Éducation Comparée, Africa for Research in Comparative Education Society, Asociación de Pedagogos de Cuba (Sección de Educación Comparada), African Society of Comparative and International Education, Technology and Youth, British Association of International & Comparative Education, Council on Comparative Education in Kazakhstan, China Comparative Education Society, Comparative Education Society of Asia, Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong, Comparative Education Society of India, Comparative Education Society of Iran, Comparative Education Society of Nepal, Comparative Education Society of Philippines, Comparative and International Education Society United States with global membership, Comparative and International Education Society of Canada, Czech Pedagogical Society (Comparative Education Section), Chinese Taipei Comparative Education Society, Egyptian Comparative Education & Educational Administration Society, Global Africa Comparative and International Education Society, The Gulf Comparative Education Society, Greek Comparative and International Education Society, Haitian Association for the Development of Comparative Education, History of Education and Comparative Hungarian Educational Research Association: History of Education and Comparative Education Section, Israel Comparative Education Society (ICES), Indian Ocean Comparative Education Society, International Society of Comparative

Education, Science and Technology Nigeria, Japan Comparative Education Society, Korean Comparative Education Society, Mondial Association for Peace by Comparative Education, Mediterranean Society of Comparative Education, Nederlandstalig Genootschap voor de Vergelijkende Studie van Onderwijs en Opvoeding, Oceania Comparative & International Education Society, Réseau Africain Francophone d'Éducation Comparée, Russian Council of Comparative Education, SACHES, Sociedade Brasileira de Educação Comparada, Sociedad Española de Educación Comparada, Sezione Italiana della CESE, Sociedad Iberoamericana de Educación Comparada, Sociedad Mexicana de Educación Comparada, Portuguese Society of Education Sciences-Section of Comparative Education, Sociedad Uruguya de Educación Comparada y Internacional, Sociedad Venezolana de Educación Comparada, and Turkish Comparative Education Society, and the Ukrainian Comparative Education Society.

However impressive the list, a few provisos should be added. Some of the most dynamic (particularly in terms of organising conferences and publishing journals and books) comparative education societies in the world are not on the list of WCCES-constituent societies. These include the Comparative Education Society of Europe, the Nordic Comparative Education Society, and the Bulgarian Comparative Education Society. Further, many of those 46 constituent societies exist little more than as a name on the WCCES list; they do not have an active website, much less organise conferences, publish journals, or display any other signs of actively promoting the field. What Mark Bray wrote in his (2003, p. 214) survey of the field, seems to still hold true:

While the total list of constituent societies was impressive, in some countries and regions the societies have been fragile. The organisations have depended on the enthusiasm of a few individuals, and have commonly operated on a voluntary basis with low budgets.

With respect to promoting publications, WCCES, and its constituent societies in general, have been unimpressive, this despite it having had a publications committee for a long time. The WCCES was co-publisher of the publication of the volume edited by Wolhuter et al. (2008) on the state of comparative education at universities, worldwide. In the first decade of the millennium, WCCES also brought out a book on its own history and the history of its constituent societies (Masemann et al., 2007), with a second book on the same topic (N'Dri et al., in press) recently completed, both of which are discussed in the next section of this article. Recently, WCCES partnered with Brill to publish a series of books, although not much has been published thus far.

The decades since the inception of WCCES in 1970, and until at least 2010, were times of a massive retrogradation of the fortunes of the field in two historically key regions in the development of the field: Western Europe (including the United Kingdom), and the United States of America. The WCCES appears to have been either unconcerned or stood by powerlessly. Despite having been in partnership with UNESCO since 1973, WCCES (or its constituent societies) do not have much of a record of practical impact on education, for example, around initiatives such as the Education for All initiative or Sustainable Development Goal 4.

The dearth of attention to scholarly societies in comparative and international education literature

The lack of attention to scholarly societies in literature on scholarly fields is evident in comparative and international education too. Publications offering an extensive survey of the state of the field in various parts of the world do not contain stand-alone chapters, or much at all, about professional societies as such (for example, see Halls, 1990; Thomas, 1990; Wolhuter et al., 2013).

Despite a strong (even at times, criticised as inordinate) focus on theoretical and methodological issues and paradigm diversity, scholars have only recently begun to attend to the societies' aspect of the field (see Easton, 2016; Wolhuter, 2008). After a one page article by Johnson (1957) in the very first issue of the *Comparative Education Review*, enumerating the goals and the members constituting the executive of the Comparative Education Society (the original name of CIES), the society as a theme of study disappeared from the pages of its flagship journal until the publication of Robert Arnove's (2001) CIES Presidential Address, focusing on challenges the society faced in the 21st century. Mark Bray's (2003) article surveying the field gave extensive coverage to the society-organisational aspects and infrastructure of the field worldwide. Two articles focusing on scholarly societies appeared in 2006 in *Current Issues in Comparative Education* (Manzon & Bray, 2006; Swing, 2006).

Two book projects followed. WCCES published a volume on its history and that of its constituent societies (Masemann et al., 2007). Then, nine years later, on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of CIES, a volume on the six decades of that society's trajectory was published (Epstein, 2016). In an edited volume surveying the state of the field, Jacob et al. (2019) published a chapter on the historical evolution of comparative education societies worldwide, and of historical trajectory of WCCES. Finally, there a book project once again surveying the history of WCCES and its constituent societies, that is, a follow-up or update of the 2007 volume, has been published (N'Dri et al., in press).

As a subject of study, SACHES has likewise not received much attention from scholars. Apart from a chapter (Soudien, 2007) in the first WCCES volume some 18 years ago, and two articles in SACHES's journal (Herman, 2002; Weeks et al., 2006)—even more dated—SACHES as a focus of scholarship has escaped the attention of comparativists in (and beyond) the Southern African region. In the second book on the history of the WCCES and its constituent societies, referred to earlier, Wolhuter and Nyatuka (2025) have a chapter on SACHES. Thus, the purpose of this article is to step into this void in Southern African Comparative Education scholarship.

SACHES in the global family of comparative and international education societies

SACHES was established in 1991 at Katberg in the Eastern Cape Province of South Africa, with 35 founding members. Noteworthy contextual features that have shaped and spurred its formation include firstly, the imminent new socio-political dispensation in South Africa, which was by then

visibly on the horizon and which came about in 1994 with the lifting of the country's academic boycott by the international community—something that had a very detrimental effect on academe, and on comparative education in particular (see Harricombe & Lancaster, 1995). For a more detailed account of the circumstances of the birth of SACHES, the interested reader is referred to the chapter by Crain Soudien (2007).

Acceding to WCCES membership

SACHES decided to apply for WCCES membership and took its application to the meeting of the Executive at the 1994 World Conference in Prague. Despite the origin of SACHES and its ideological home, some members of the Executive, who were not acquainted with the South African context and with SACHES, were hesitant to admit the society into their fold because they very wrongly saw SACHES as an attempt to get an organisation that was part of the pre-1994 dispensation into the WCCES (see Herman, 2020, p. 197). But the application was successful and SACHES became a member of the WCCES.

Leadership and membership

Harold Herman as founding president (1991–1994), was followed by Sheldon Weeks (1994–1998), Peter Kallaway (1998–2002), Brigitte Smit (2002–2006), Thobeka Mda (2006–2009), Sarie Berkhout (who did not complete her term, 2009–2010), again Harold Herman (2010–2011), Charl Wolhuter (2011–2016), Dennis Banda (2016–2020), and again, Charl Wolhuter (2020–2022), and then the current president, Juliana Smith since December 2022.

From the 35 founding members, membership numbers have rapidly increased. To give exact membership numbers is problematic. While the mailing list of SACHES runs to around 200, the precarious financial situation at many universities in the region means that even the modest membership fees cannot be enforced, and it has always been the policy of SACHES principals to not exclude scholars because of inability to pay membership dues. SACHES pays WCCES membership fees based on 100 members. A pattern evident over the years, is that when SACHES hosts a conference outside South Africa, it invariably attracts many (as a rule, 100 or even more) conference delegates and new members from the immediate hinterland of the conference venue. However, most of these new members never renew their membership and lose all contact with SACHES after such a conference. Membership (including loyal and paid-up members) is concentrated in South Africa but spread throughout the Southern African region. There is also a sprinkling of members outside the Southern African region, particularly in East Africa. It should be remembered that within the Southern African region, the language divide has affected leadership. Membership is concentrated in the Anglophone countries of Southern Africa, with very few members from the Francophone or Lusophone countries.

Conferences

A plethora of interesting conferences at spots widely distributed over the Southern African region, and once even beyond, has been held during the course of the Society's history. After the

formation at Katberg in 1991, SACHES had its inaugural conference in Broederstroom in Gauteng in South Africa in 1992. That was followed by a conference in Scottburgh in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, in 1993. A milestone was reached when SACHES held its first conference outside South Africa, in Gaborone, Botswana in 1994. That conference was followed by conferences in Grahamstown (now Makhanda) in the Eastern Province, South Africa, in 1995; Livingstone, Zambia in 1997; Windhoek, Namibia in 1998; again in Gaborone in 2001; Goudini in Western Province, South Africa in 2003; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania in 2005; Wilderness, Western Province, South Africa in 2006; Thaba Busiu, Lesotho in 2007; Maputo, Mozambique in 2009; Stellenbosch, Western Province, South Africa in 2010; Burton Speke Resort in Uganda in 2011; Port Elizabeth, Eastern Province, South Africa in 2012; Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa in 2015; Bloemfontein, Free State Province, South Africa in 2016; Livingstone, Zambia in 2017; Kruger National Park, Mpumalanga, South Africa in 2018; Windhoek, Namibia in 2019; and Cape Town, Western Province South Africa in 2022.

World conference

Another milestone was reached when SACHES won the bid to host the Tenth Comparative Education World Conference in 1998. This conference was held on the campuses of University of Cape Town and University of the Western Cape, in the Cape Town metro. It was attended by more than 800 delegates from all over the world. That was more than twice the number of delegates who had attended the previous World Conference at the University of Sydney in 1996 and was at that stage, an all-time high for the number of delegates at a comparative education World Conference.

Journal

SACHES' journal, *Southern African Review of Education (SARE)*, was launched in 1995 and merged with *Education with Production* in 1997, to become a refereed journal in 1998. In 2005, *SARE* secured accredited journal status from the South African Ministry of Higher Education—of major significance for South African faculty publishing in the journal. Issues are published bi-annually and the journal is now in its 30th year of existence. Its founding editor was Sheldon Weeks, followed by Linda Chisholm, Aslam Fataar, Azeem Badroodien, and Ewelina Niemczyk. Currently, Charl Wolhuter is interim editor. A glaring absence in SACHES scholarship is that the journal has thus far not been used as subject of a content analysis as a basis for reflecting about the journal and about scholarship in SACHES. Such a content analysis has proven valuable as basis for gaining a comprehensive understanding of fields of scholarship, including comparative and international education (see for example Wolhuter et al., 2024), and an analysis of *SARE* would be a valuable addition to literature on the field of comparative and international education in Southern Africa.

Book publications

In the early years, the proceedings of SACHES conferences were published in a book published by UNISA press. Then that practice was terminated. During the years, 2006–2012 conference proceedings were published in an in-house published book edited by Charl Wolhuter. In 2010,

Charl Wolhuter and Harold Herman published an edited volume on education in the Southern African countries, also in an in-house publication financed by SACHES (Wolhuter & Herman, 2010). Furthermore in 2006, Charl Wolhuter edited an in-house publication on comparative and international education at universities in the SADC region, a project generously funded by the Dean of the Faculty of Education, North-West University at that time—comparativist Professor H. J. Steyn (Wolhuter, 2006).

At present, there is no book project or publication active in SACHES, which is a lamentable shortcoming of the organisation, especially in view of the fact that scholars in the region, as scholars in the Global South in general, find themselves in a very unequal playing field regarding finding publication space. And also in view of the fact (as explained in the lead article of this issue) that Southern Africa is very well placed to contribute to the Global South coming to its rightful place in the field of comparative and international education.

Impact

It can reasonably expected that a scholarly society such as SACHES should make an impact on a variety of fronts: on the position of comparative and international education at universities in the Southern African region, on education practice and policy in the countries of Southern Africa (and beyond), to the public discourse on education by practising societal critique, and to bringing about a next stage in the evolution of comparative and international education, namely, the affirmation of the Global South. On all these fronts the Society has been wanting, and dearly so.

At the time of the formation of SACHES, comparative and international education was at its strongest at the South African universities in terms of programmes, infrastructure, staffing (however far such programmes had fallen behind the rest of the world). The years since the inception of SACHES have seen a serious deterioration of the state of the field (at least in terms of infrastructure, full time faculty exclusively occupied with the field, and presence as stand-alone modules or programmes). And, while the major causal factor for that lay outside the remit of SACHES (as detailed in articles in this special section dealing with case studies of the field at South African universities), SACHES could not arrest this deterioration. Nor are there any signs of SACHES constituting a force to boost the field at South African universities after teacher education directives since 2015 created a more congenial context for the field. While at universities in other Southern African countries the fortunes of the field have not been sagging as seriously as in South Africa since 1991, the position of the field is far from safe, and there have been no serious efforts to develop the field further.

There is no demonstrable impact of SACHES on the improvement of education practice, or on policy formulation in the Southern African region. In the one noteworthy regional education project, Southern and East African Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality, SACHES is not involved as an organisation—nor are, lamentably too, comparative and international education scholars in the region. Weeks et al. (2006), in their article on the state of SACHES and comparative and international education in the region, expressed concern that the progressive

comparative and international education scholarly community of pre-1994 South Africa lost its critical voice after 1994. This concern is as present today as it was in 2006, and also not only with respect to South Africa but to the entire Southern African region.

But above all, the signature feature of comparative and international education at this point in time, is criticism against Northern hegemony (in education as well as in comparative and international education). This was underscored once again in Mario Novelli's (2023) recent Presidential Address of the British Association of International Comparative Education Society. The assignment for the comparative and international education scholarly community is now to take the field into a new era, the hallmark of which will be letting the Global South come into its own in the field. This theme has recently been explained thoroughly by Wolhuter (2024) and is also taken up in the lead article to this special section.

Conclusion

While SACHES has had an interesting history with many milestones and has been a centripetal force for scholars in the region the past 34 years, it has its work cut out for forthcoming years. This includes raising the publication profile of the organisation and allowing publication space for members, stabilising its membership, raising its impact on practice and on policy formulation, and once again finding its critical voice that it lost soon after its inception. But above all, it should become a force taking the field of comparative and international education into a new era, where the Global South comes to its own.

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Notes on the authors

Harold D. Herman Harold Herman is Professor Emeritus of Comparative Education and former Dean of the Faculty of Education, University of the Western Cape.

Charl Wolhuter is Professor of History of Education and Comparative Education in the Faculty of Education (Research Unit: Education and Human Rights in Diversity) at North-West University (Potchefstroom, South Africa).

Address for correspondence

Charl.Wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

Developing, Third World, Global South, or non-WEIRD? On knowing and naming the world

Liz Jackson
University of Hong Kong

Abstract

Comparative and international educational research involves distinguishing places or communities from each other. However, this is not always easy to do. Terms like “Global North” and “Global South” come with connotations related to notions of progress and development that frame some countries as superior and others as deficient. This paper considers some of the ways that world relations have been discussed in folk (lay) knowledge and scholarship. It considers the strengths and weaknesses of various distinctions made, and ends with recommendations. The distinctions include developing/developed, First World/Third World, Global South/Global North, WEIRD/non-WEIRD (Western, educated, industrial, rich, and democratic). In the course, a few other terms come up, such as third space, periphery/core, Second World, undeveloped/underdeveloped. I argue that one should justify their level or unit of analysis, as well as the way they define terms, in order to undertake precise and rigorous comparative analyses.

Keywords: comparative and international education, Global North, Global South, development, WEIRD countries, dependency theory

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Introduction

Comparative and international educational research inevitably involves distinguishing places or communities from each other. However, at the largest scale, in terms of civilizations or world regions, this is not always easy to do (Manzon, 2014). With the rise of globalisation, markers of cultural difference, like “East” and “West,” meet, intersect, and mix. While seemingly more straightforward in terms of physical geography, terms like “Global North” and “Global South” come with connotations related to notions of progress and development that frame some countries as superior and others as deficient. Indeed, all such terms imply a privileged perspective in relation to global others at a particular historical point. Thus, using these terms risks overgeneralising and upholding key periods in time and specific locations as central and primary over others.

All of this might seem like common sense. However, it can cause challenges for comparative and international educational scholarship that aims to be mindful, reflective, and critical about the importance of place, naming, labelling, and recognising diverse contexts worldwide (Mason, 2014). It can also lead to uncertainty and lack of confidence about engaging in comparative and international work. For example, when considering the relationship between China and different countries in Africa, in comparison with the United States’ activities in the region, are African countries such as Kenya or Nigeria developing countries? Is China also a developing country? What are the implications of describing China as “developing” versus “developed”? Some young scholars in comparative and global studies might want to say that China and Kenya are both developing, which reflects a sense that they are peers and equal partners on a global stage, working together for mutual benefit (Brautigam, 2009). On the other hand, others might say that China is developed because as it is often involved in leading activities in various parts of Africa. Underneath this discussion are assumptions about what marks a country as developed or developing, which should be unpacked rather than taken for granted.

This paper considers some of the ways that world relations have been and are discussed in folk (lay) knowledge and academic scholarship. It considers the strengths and weaknesses of various major distinctions made in the field, and ends with some recommendations for writers and students focused on making international comparisons that go beyond the nation-state level, to incorporate broader regions. The distinctions I focus on here include developing/developed, first-world/third-world, Global-South/Global-North, WEIRD/non-WEIRD (“WEIRD” stands for Western, educated, industrial, rich, and democratic). In the course, a few other terms come up, such as third space, periphery/core, Second World, and undeveloped/underdeveloped.

This is an analytic and philosophical rather than empirically oriented text because I am focused more on critical evaluation of terminology in relation to the goals or aims a researcher might have. Consequently, my arguments here are about what should be, rather than what is (Jackson, 2019, 2022). I argue, based on the examination provided here, that one should justify rather than take for granted their level or unit of analysis, as well as the way they define terms, in order to undertake precise and rigorous comparative analyses.

Developing/developed

Historically, with the rise of a global system of modern nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries, a linear, hierarchical conception of how different countries fare compared to one another was developed in sociology, anthropology, and political studies. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was proposed that all countries would experience particular ordered stages of growth, involving industrialisation of the economy (Cairncross, 1961). Rostow argued that societies would develop from traditional to mature, leading to a worldwide age of mass consumption (1960, cited in Cairncross, 1961). Manufacturing and investment in production were therefore seen as pathways to development. These perspectives are based on earlier modernisation theories that considered what constituted modern or civilized societies versus basic, traditional, or premodern (or uncivilized) contexts (Gilman, 2003). Thus, the terms “developed” and “undeveloped” arose to describe which countries “required” modernisation (Wolhuter, 2024).

Dependency theory also provided a conceptual basis for distinguishing between developing and developed because it identified how some countries have been dependent upon others. In this perspective, there is a world system wherein wealthy nations at the “core” restrict opportunities for independent, autonomous engagement of poorer countries in the “periphery,” which provide natural resources, cheap labour, and markets for the core (Ahiakpor, 1985). Thus, Rodney’s (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* demonstrated a relationship between Europe and Africa as world regions: a relationship marked by exploitation and the dependency of Africa on Europe, based on European interests and designs.

Today, developing countries are defined by the United Nations (UN, 2022a) in terms of standards of living, life expectancy, and gross domestic product per capita; other measures that can be used include income per person and rates of literacy, among others. Development is also elaborated by the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2022b), which articulate 17 goals as key to development and provide universal targets to consider how different countries measure up according to a global yardstick.

There is debate in the field of comparative and international education today about whether developed/developing is a useful distinction. A country can be developed according to certain criteria and underdeveloped, undeveloped, or developing, according to others. Many argue that “developing” has inescapably negative connotations and associations with being backwards and primitive (Escobar, 1995). Cullather (2000) relatedly, notes that development discourse is an important part of our history but one in which ideology has been mistaken for reality. It is a sign of its time that serves particular functions, but which requires further reflection rather than taking it for granted.

Nonetheless, terms like “developed” and “developing” continue to be used by some scholars in comparative and international educational research as if they are non-problematic descriptors (e.g. Duke et al., 2016). In some cases, definitions of them are provided in a straightforward way while neglecting any consideration of the implications of their use. For instance, one recent paper uses

the term “least developed countries” repeatedly in quotation marks (including in the title), while the term is defined in the first paragraph of the introduction with reference to a definition from the UN (Regmi, 2022; see also Kaliisa et al., 2019).

Other related categories used by global financial organisations include “heavily indebted poor countries” and “transition economies,” which focus on countries shifting from centrally planned economies to global, market-driven systems. Here there is a clear bias and conflation of capitalist and free-market orientations with development and progress. Indeed, that the use of these terms is politically inspired and has political implications should not be doubted. For instance, while the World Trade Organization allows countries to self-identify as “developing,” this leads to some benefits; the United States has criticised the self-identification option for this reason (Trump, 2019). Meanwhile, the Comparative and International Education Society (CIES, 2023) offers financial support to participants at its annual meetings who come from and work in “low- and middle-income countries.” To explain what this means, it provides a link to the World Bank categorisation of “low-income economies.” For the World Bank (2025), economic measures are solely used for labelling the countries.

Today the use of these distinctions should be questioned from a political perspective. Terminology related to development notions are ideological and benefit some over others. In this case, scholars should be clear what they mean and why they are using some terms over alternatives. In categorising countries, scholars should reflect critically on what development, progress, and related ideas mean to them, to consider whether they have taken-for-granted assumptions about economic policy, politics, or cultural superiority or inferiority lingering beneath the surface (Norberg-Hodge, 1991). We may have reason to measure countries according to global measuring sticks of progress, for instance, when it comes to human rights, health care, education, welfare, and more (e.g. Rapley, 2004). But we should be explicit about these assumptions and revise them into arguments for why we are categorising countries in a particular way and how it helps us understand some phenomena more effectively. For instance, I have used the terms “core” and “periphery” in my work to indicate how some countries and their experiences are considered more central in academic research than others, comparing the United States and the United Kingdom to Hong Kong or Ukraine. Given that my work is deliberately taking up these terms, in part to criticise them, it is important to distinguish their historical use from my own intentions and interests.

First World/Third World

We might initially think that “First World” and “Third World” map onto and are thus equivalent to “developed” and “developing,” but these terms also have a distinctive history. They came into use during the Cold War. The First World was framed as the capitalist world and the Second World was communist; the Third World was unrelated countries (Leonard, 2006). Thus, the First World came to be known as the countries of the Western Bloc, comprising the United States, Canada,

most of western Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and some parts of Asia, Africa, and North America. The Second World or Eastern Bloc included the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, North Korea, Vietnam, and their allies. A large non-aligned group included India and other parts of Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America. Hence, this definition was not originally about development in the way that the developing/developed distinction was, but more about political alliances.

While this framework is Western in invention, Mao Zedong cultivated an alternative Three Worlds Theory. For Mao (as analysed by Xu, 2013), the First World included the two global superpowers after the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States. The Second World aligned more or less with the notion of the Global North (see below), while the Third World included China, India, and most of the Global South (Gillespie, 2004). This usage did not take on influence beyond China, however.

Over time, “Third World” came to be used synonymously with “developing” and “periphery” because it was seen to describe what were seen as dependent, weaker countries with colonial histories (Tomlinson, 2003). In the 1980s, “Third World” was used this way in comparative and international education research (e.g. Kelly, 1987; Kelly & Elliott, 1982). For instance, Barbara Yates’s (1984) CIES Presidential Address was dedicated to promoting understanding of the history of relations between Westerners and the Third World but throughout the text, the term itself was never queried or defined, while “South” and “North” were also occasionally used to discuss roughly the same contexts. However, in the 1990s it became less fashionable to use the term. Today the old economic divides that influenced early constructions of Third World and First World are less relevant. Thus, this binary view of the world serves primarily as an alternative to “developing” or “Global South,” and both of the latter terms are seen as more meaningful, with less negative connotations today, among many scholars in comparative and international education.

A similar-sounding, but distinctive, more contemporary term is “third space.” Two recent articles elaborate on this term in comparative and international education. For McNess and colleagues (2013), the purpose of the term is to move away from binary categorisations of insider and outsider to reveal the relationships of different players in conducting anthropological research. As such, it reveals a third perspective that is found within the meeting place of different groups, which can lead to greater creativity, mutual understanding, and new wisdom. The term is thus used to connote a new strategy for knowledge production that is not from a position of power and so-called objectivity but is more collaborative and global in its orientation. Maqbool and Cremin (2023) similarly discuss the third space as a meeting of the local and global marked by contestation and negotiation: where hybrid experiences emerge from the intersection of traditional and global flows. In contrast with the traditional term of “Third World,” “third space” provides a sense of agency in its use and articulation.

Global North/Global South

Global North/Global South is a distinction based partly on geography and partly on socioeconomics and politics. As such, it holds similar connotations to developed/developing but aims to focus more on geographic labels rather than political-economic ones. For instance, the UN (2022a, p. 21) noted, “North refers to developed economies, South to developing economies.” This classification highlights a trend between common measures of development still in use and geography given that many countries fitting in the “developed” category are in the northern hemisphere, while those in the south are often considered “developing.” Of course, this classification is more useful to represent the experience of some regions and contexts over others. Australia and New Zealand are located in the southern hemisphere but considered part of the Global North (see Collyer, 2021).

Like developed/developing, Global North/Global South became common categorisations in the mid-20th century. They became widely known through Oglesby’s (1969) use to critically discuss the Vietnam War and the new “haves” and “have-nots” (see also Wolhuter, 2024). The ideological construction of the Brandt line as a single border sitting below the United States, Europe, and Russia on the map, before turning south below Japan and around Australia and New Zealand, was another effort to demarcate the “Rich North” from the “South” (Lees, 2021). Like development and modernisation theory and dependency theory, the aim of this distinction is to articulate political economic definitions and differences.

Whether Global North/Global South is helpful depends on where and how it is used. Many feel it is less hierarchical, holds less negative connotations, and can be used to promote a positive and empowering identity from the perspective of the Global South (Dillarstone et al., 2023). A related idea is that the Global South has its own direction, which the Global North could follow in the future (Wolhuter, 2024). For Wolhuter (2024), the term requires critical contextualisation that accounts for relations and connections rather than mere geography. Accordingly, Wolhuter carefully delineated how he understands the Global South and demarcates it, rather than taking this as an assumption. However, many continue to use Global North/Global South as if it were obvious what these categories mean and as if they were unproblematic, despite some of the uncertainties surrounding their usage (for example, see Blommaert, 2011; Gorur & Arnold, 2022; Urwick, 2014). In the context of comparative and international education, where such binaries can mislead or cover up what they intend to reveal, being critical and reflective rather than hasty about the terms we use and how we use them is valuable. This is because some countries seem to share some features of both the so-called Global North and Global South, such as China, India, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates, among others.

WEIRD/non-WEIRD

A final term that is increasingly in use today is the distinction of WEIRD/non-WEIRD, with “WEIRD” being an acronym for Western, educated, industrial, rich, and democratic. This term was first found in psychology where it was used to consider how systematic sampling bias has undermined the generalisability of results toward English-speaking or European countries, which represent less than 15% of the world’s population (Henrich et al., 2010). In their article entitled “The Weirdest People in the World?” Henrich and colleagues considered the representativeness of so-called WEIRD countries, noting that 96% of the top research in psychology was based on studies with samples in North America, Europe, Australia, and Israel. In making a series of comparisons of research of WEIRD with non-WEIRD populations, they argued that while research conducted with United States Americans was predominant in the field, they were highly unrepresentative of humankind because WEIRD populations were the worst group to attempt to produce generalisable research with.

The use of WEIRD/non-WEIRD has since been influential in psychology and other social science fields, with many agreeing with Henrich and colleagues (2010) and taking note that WEIRD societies should not be the basis for generalisable research findings, providing a taken-for-granted measuring stick to compare all others (e.g. Christiansen et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021; Muthukrishna et al., 2020; Rappleye et al., 2023; Seaborn et al., 2023; Uflewski & Tordzro, 2022). However, less work has been done to consider and evaluate the concept of WEIRD as such. This is an area worth further exploration in the future in comparative and international education.

From a critical perspective, the use of WEIRD/non-WEIRD to compare and contrast societies is limited by definitional issues surrounding what it means to be (or not be) Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic. “West” (like “East”) is a spectrum term that is not useful to understand or categorise all societies. While “educated” and “industrialised” seem more straightforward, perhaps in line with previous definitions of “developed,” “rich” and “democratic” are again vaguer descriptors. Nevertheless, this term still paints the world with an overly broad brush. Many countries share some of the descriptors to be WEIRD, but not all of them. Thus, it enables some kinds of comparisons over others. On the other hand, the binary fails to recognise the diversity of identities within and across societies, fluidity and dynamism, and what apparently WEIRD and non-WEIRD societies have in common (Seaborn et al., 2023). And it still risks, without the further use of critical nuance, centring of the WEIRD experience, even while calling it “weird.” Nonetheless, the use of the term “WEIRD” is meant to challenge the assumption that certain globally dominant countries are de facto normal or compared to others. Like Global South, we may see this term emerging more in comparative and international education and other areas of research in the future to more critically orient scholarship and perception of global dynamics.

Discussion

The terms we use matter. The terms we use to understand geographical, cultural, and other social locations are of vital importance in the field of comparative and international education, a field that suffers from lack of conceptual analysis, while striving, perhaps hopelessly, for a sense of objectivity and positivistic rigour (Jackson, 2022; Manzon, 2014; Mason, 2014). If we do not critically consider our assumptions as researchers, they will come back to haunt our so-called unbiased research. They will haunt us as prejudices automatically built into our scholarship, creating self-fulfilling prophecies in place of open-minded explorations of what is.

What is striking in the field of comparative and international educational scholarship is that, apart from some notable and significant exceptions (Jackson, 2024; McNess et al., 2013; Rappleye et al., 2023; Wolhuter, 2024), much of the writing in the field has and continues to uncritically label the world without questioning the value of those labels and the performative work they do as ideological and social constructions, rather than impartial “facts” (Jackson, 2019). Within comparative and international education, there are profound conceptual questions regarding objects of comparison (Bray & Thomas, 1995; Holmes, 1981; Lauwerys, 1959; McLaughlin, 2004) that relate to bases for evaluation as well as motives and rationales. The work becomes conceptually problematic and positionally suspect when no thought is put into the categories we use, the names and labels we apply, where they come from, and who and what they serve.

When we take for granted that, for example, Third World and First World countries will have some differences, without questioning what makes them First/Third World as social constructs, we bury the lead, for it is no accident that we find the differences that we find between them. The terms themselves are not neutral and empirical but historical and political, steeped with colonial and imperial legacies and ethnocentrism that have had longstanding implications for different societies around the world. In this case, we need to define our terms for grouping locations and provide arguments rationalising one choice over another (Lee & Manzon, 2014; Mason, 2014). We need to ask who is centred and who is pushed to the background by our choices. This involves us seeing ourselves as actors in the field rather than simply taking the “view from nowhere.” This is a project we should carry out as critical scholars, peer reviewers, and teachers of the next generation of researchers in the field.

When my students say they want to compare North and South, or East and West, I ask them what they mean, who is included and excluded by their definitions, and which experiences are rendered invisible. For instance, where is the Middle East? Where is the South African whose descendants come from western Europe or Asia? The white person in China or the Asian American? In this case, do these terms stand in for more precise locations? What are the limitations of generalising from one set to the broader field? It is not necessarily the case that one term is more politically correct than all others; the importance, meanings, and connotations of words are found within their geographical, temporal, and cultural context. Thus, there may be times when developing and developed make sense, or where Third and First World make sense, such as in historically oriented

studies considering economic developments over the last few centuries. However, these decisions should not be taken lightly by scholars aiming to uphold values of criticality, reflexivity, precision, accuracy, and honesty and transparency. No matter what terms are used, reflection on them is useful to position oneself and their research in a broader field and recognise the power of language today and in the future to influence perception beyond data gathering and analysis in research.

Conclusion

This study has explored the use of terms to describe diverse parts of the world relationally in comparative and international educational research. It has focused particularly on three major common historical and contemporary distinctions—developed/developing, First/Third World, and Global North/South—as well as a fourth emerging distinction, of WEIRD/non-WEIRD. The analysis of these terms in social sciences and education was oriented here toward understanding the value and benefits of their respective usage in different historical periods, as well as their limitations as ways of depicting the state of the world for comparative and international education and related areas of inquiry. The historical use of the terms was uncovered as well as their contemporary popularity and usage and lack thereof.

Here I have argued that it is not the case that one term is better for all research going forward. Instead, I have argued that it is important that scholars make critical and reflective decisions about the use of these terms, define them in their own words in their work, and defend their choices. As theoretically influenced approaches to understanding and depicting the social world, all of these distinctions have specific social, historical, and political rationales behind them. Thus, they can serve some purposes better than others, highlight some voices, perspectives, and locations in the world better and worse, and often come with noteworthy and sometimes problematic connotations related to global hierarchy and inferiority and superiority. For all of these reasons, I recommend more scholarly reflection on the terms, their histories, and their meanings going forward—and more criticality in comparative and international education research in invoking these terms. These terms are not neutral windows to the world. They have connotations and implications. Scholars should conscientiously use these and related terms for understanding the world at their own risk.

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Notes on the author

Liz Jackson is Karen Lo Eugene Chuang Endowed Professor at the University of Hong Kong and Associate Dean Research in the Faculty of Education. She is President of the Comparative Education Society of Hong Kong and Past President of the Philosophy of Education Society of Australasia.

Address for correspondence

lizj@hku.hk

Section 2

Open Section

Reimagining academic freedom in African universities through knowledge mobilisation for the public good

Aslam Fataar
Stellenbosch University

Abstract

This paper examines the reimagination of academic freedom within African universities, inspired by the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility (1990). While the Kampala Declaration underscored the right to free inquiry, expression, and association within academia, it also emphasised universities' responsibility to address the needs of their local communities. This paper argues that African universities need to align academic freedom with knowledge mobilisation, which fosters a "public good" commitment to societal progress and sustainable development. By exploring an alternative university public good imaginary that diverges from neoliberal orientations, the paper suggests a framework for knowledge production that positions universities as critical agents of social and ecological transformation. Central to this argument is the belief that African universities must embrace a localised approach to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The commitment to trans-local community engagement underpins a renewed public mission: aligning university resources and research with community-led initiatives. Such an approach counters the globalised neoliberal model that dominates many African universities, fostering a locally responsive educational framework instead. This paper envisions a reimagined university model that sustains local livelihoods, cultivates eco-sustainable practices, and anchors the African university's role in advancing its society's development goals.

Keywords: academic freedom, Kampala Declaration, university knowledge, public good

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Introduction

African universities operate within an established vision of their societal role and commitment to the public good, a vision rooted in two critical aspects that this paper seeks to explore. The first focuses on the core substantive dimensions that shape the contemporary African university's identity and purpose. The second aspect centres on the epistemological foundations that could challenge and expand this identity to align with broader, emancipatory objectives. Globally, universities grapple with dominant narratives that shape their purpose, while the need for alternative narratives remains an urgent question. This paper posits that knowledge production—encompassing research, curriculum, teaching, learning, and the university's third mission of social engagement—must be re-centred to redefine the purpose and potential of African universities.

The paper begins by examining the prevailing vision of African universities rooted in universalist assumptions that mirror Northern conceptions of the “global university.” That alignment often results in African institutions being shaped by standards and perspectives that do not necessarily address local needs or realities. This paper critiques the prevailing global framing of African universities and advocates for a reimagined vision that integrates the aspirations of local communities. Drawing on the Kampala Declaration on Intellectual Freedom and Social Responsibility principles (1990), which underscore the need for academic freedom, social responsibility, and relevance, this paper argues for an alternative vision of the African university, which includes marginalised publics as central actors in its mission.

The latter sections of the paper expand on ideas discussed in Fataar (2023), offering a framework for reorienting the university's knowledge production to support the livelihoods and well-being of local communities. Drawing on Barnett and Bergstedt's concept of *knowledge for life* (2017) and Santos's (2012) notion of *sociologies of absences and emergences*, these sections propose an epistemological approach that prioritises the inclusion of historically excluded knowledge systems. Grounded in the Kampala Declaration's (1990) principles of academic autonomy and societal accountability, the paper advocates for a restitution-based knowledge paradigm that aligns the university's mission with community empowerment and resilient livelihoods. This vision emphasises the transformative potential of African universities as hubs for alternative knowledge production that directly serves their publics, thus promoting academic freedom while addressing local challenges. By centring knowledge creation on public good imperatives, the paper outlines a pathway for reimagining African universities as both intellectual and societal change agents, advancing sustainable development and an inclusive vision of the public good.

Alternative imaginaries of African universities

The debate surrounding the imaginary of the university centres on its role as a public good and its responsibility toward society. Universities face a choice: they may adopt a detached, laissez-faire

stance toward societal change, or they may engage actively and critically with it (Jonathan, 2001). In the post-independence era, African universities saw themselves as pivotal to social and political transformation, aligning their roles with the aspiration to address the public good and build a more just society. This commitment emerged in response to colonial legacies, and was intended to be a corrective force—making higher education instrumental in nation-building efforts across the continent.

The Kampala Declaration (1990) underscores this vision by affirming that universities should contribute to the transformation of African societies. The declaration argued that African universities should uphold academic freedom as a necessary condition for intellectual creativity, societal relevance, and social justice. These universities are called upon to engage with their communities and address pressing issues of poverty, inequality, and political exclusion. Reflecting this commitment, early African universities oscillated between nationalist allegiance to local development and the pursuit of independent scholarship. While both orientations emphasised the public good, they represented different approaches to national development and societal relevance.

However, over time, the alignment of African universities with the public good faced pressures, particularly from neoliberal restructuring that prioritised market-oriented policies and economic efficiency over social justice and community engagement. This shift diminished the strong public commitments that characterised the optimistic era of the 1960s and 1970s, when higher education was viewed as a pathway to equitable social transformation. Teferra and Altbach (2004) remarked that African universities have struggled to meet their foundational commitments, constrained by inadequate funding, lack of resources, and structural adjustment programmes that have left them vulnerable to global neoliberal trends. As a result, the higher education landscape in Africa reflects many of the same challenges faced by universities worldwide, including diminished public funding, a reliance on private resources, and the adoption of austerity measures.

Amina Mama (2006) observed that “by the end of 1989, thirty-five of Africa’s forty-five independent nations were under military rule, and conflicts had become alarmingly commonplace” (pp. 2–3). During this period, direct state repression, often intertwined with structural adjustment policies, reinforced political authoritarianism. This environment led to the systematic weakening of African public institutions and prompted a significant brain drain, severely undermining the continent’s universities in the following years. Mama highlighted that these development failures underscore the critical need for “locally grounded and accountable intellectual and strategic capacity to advance democratisation, development and social justice” (2006, p. 3). Achieving such capacity hinges on academic freedom in higher education, essential for fostering the intellectual autonomy necessary for sustainable progress.

The 2001 statement from the Association of African Universities (AAU) strongly emphasised the foundational role of academic freedom in higher education, framing universities as essential pillars within African society. The AAU (2001) argued that higher education should nurture individuals’ and communities’ intellectual and civic capacities, enabling them to champion democratic principles, uphold human rights, and contribute to sustainable development. This vision projected

universities as spaces that foster critical thinking, ethical responsibility, and active social engagement, integral to societal advancement.

The AAU's (2001) position aligned with the earlier Kampala Declaration (1990), which highlighted the responsibility of African states to secure the fundamental conditions necessary for academic freedom. The Declaration specifically called on states to respect academic autonomy, refrain from deploying armed forces on university campuses, and protect the rights of academics and students to express their views freely. As Amina Mama (2006) underscored, a flourishing higher education sector depends on the autonomy of institutions and a democratic governance structure rooted within the academic community itself. The AAU's statement thus reaffirmed these principles, emphasising that academic freedom and institutional autonomy are prerequisites for universities to fulfil their transformative role in society.

According to the AAU (2001, quoted in Mama, 2006, p. 6), universities are entrusted with the responsibility of "creating an institutional environment that fosters the development of the mind and the ennobling of the spirit, inculcating citizenship and the will to serve." Such an environment would be characterised by the encouragement of rigorous research, unrestricted inquiry, and a climate in which ideas can be openly debated and differences respected. This vision calls for African universities to serve as active scholarly agents in societal improvement, contributing to the quality of life within their communities. Through such an approach, the AAU underscored the transformative potential of African universities to shape societies grounded in knowledge, justice, and ethical leadership.

The Kampala Declaration (1990) anticipated the impact of structural adjustment and neoliberal inspired reforms during the last two decades, cautioning against the encroachment of external forces that could compromise academic integrity and social responsibility. The Declaration emphasised that African universities must resist becoming mere extensions of external economic agendas and should, instead, reinforce their roles as sites of critical inquiry and public accountability. This vision stands in contrast to the neoliberal agenda, which recast education as a private good, with universities increasingly catering to individual and corporate interests. Zeleza (2016) noted that neoliberalism has redefined higher education's purpose, shifting it from a public good to a commodified service. As private universities proliferate and student debt rises, public universities struggle to maintain both access and quality amid scarce resources.

In an era of austerity, African universities face a critical challenge: how to reclaim their role in serving the public good. The Kampala Declaration's (1990) call for academic freedom as an essential aspect of university life points to a pathway for resistance. As Jonathan (2001) argued, universities must reassert the ideal of the public good to combat structural inequalities and promote social justice. This reimagining requires a reorientation of higher education that is both democratic and transformative, fostering a democratic compact between universities and their communities. Such a compact demands that universities adopt a critical stance, holding themselves accountable to broader social goals beyond mere economic gain.

The idea of the university as a public good aligns with Marginson's (2011) notion of non-excludable benefits, whereby knowledge should be accessible to all, rather than reserved for a privileged few. In this framework, universities become spaces for advancing democratisation and human development, directly engaging with the communities they serve. This commitment to accessibility, especially for historically marginalised communities, reflects the Kampala Declaration's (1990) emphasis on inclusivity and equality. The Declaration asserted that universities have a duty to ensure that knowledge is shared equitably, and that intellectual resources are harnessed for the public welfare.

Reimagining African universities' commitment to the public good also involves contending with entrenched neoliberal logics that frame these institutions as market-driven entities. Ball (2012) used the term "neoliberal imaginary" to describe how powerful individuals, non-governmental organisations, and private interests promote privatisation and commodification in public education. African universities, thus, find themselves ensnared in a neoliberal framework that privileges private interests over social commitments, limiting their ability to address societal inequities effectively. This neoliberal imaginary, as Mamdani (2019) contended, perpetuates colonial legacies by reinforcing hierarchical knowledge systems rooted in European models, rather than promoting Indigenous epistemologies that could better serve African societies.

Mamdani's (2019) critique extends to the structural and epistemic foundations of the modern African university, which he argued is modelled after European institutions that prioritised Western forms of knowledge over local knowledge systems. This colonial legacy is evident in the exclusive use of European languages and discourses that remain alien to local African communities. As Mamdani (1993) famously noted, early African universities functioned as "outposts of civilisation," imposing a universalist intellectual framework that disregarded Indigenous cultural and linguistic diversity. The Kampala Declaration's (1990) emphasis on academic freedom and relevance underscores the need to decolonise African universities by embracing knowledge systems that resonate with local realities and contribute meaningfully to societal development.

An alternative imaginary of the African university must therefore move beyond the colonial-modern framework and adopt a decolonial perspective that centres local communities, cultures, and languages in the university's mission. Such an alternative imaginary would prioritise epistemic diversity, recognising the value of Indigenous knowledge and African intellectual traditions. Rizvi (2017) argued that despite the apparent hegemony of the neoliberal university, alternative imaginaries are both possible and necessary in a world where neoliberalism increasingly fails to address human welfare. The Kampala Declaration (1990) provided a foundation for this reimagining, calling for universities to foster knowledge that serves society, supports justice, and uplifts marginalised communities.

The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) offered one pathway for reimagining African universities' roles in a global context. The SDGs, especially Goal 4 on education, emphasised inclusive, equitable, and quality education for all (UNESCO, 2015),

aligning closely with the Kampala Declaration's (1990) principles. The SDGs presented a universal framework for sustainable development, but they also allowed for localised adaptation, enabling African universities to engage with global goals through a distinctly African lens. By committing to the SDGs, African universities can redefine their missions to include not only national development but also global sustainability, interdependence, and social equity. The Kampala Declaration's insistence on academic freedom and social responsibility complements the SDGs' call for universities to address the pressing social, economic, and environmental challenges of our time.

However, as Stein and Andreotti (2017) cautioned, simply adopting the SDGs without critical reflection risks reproducing universalist assumptions that may not fully account for Africa's unique context. They argued for a critical engagement with the SDGs, encouraging universities to explore "what kind of futures we want" and to resist "narrow modes of knowing based on a universal/global Western blueprint" (Stein & Andreotti, 2017, p. 178). This approach resonates with the Kampala Declaration's (1990) emphasis on intellectual autonomy and the need for African universities to chart their own developmental pathways. By embedding the SDGs within a decolonial framework, African universities can pursue sustainable development that is both globally informed and locally relevant, fostering resilience and self-determination in African societies.

Ultimately, reimagining African universities requires a bold departure from neoliberal and colonial paradigms, calling for a radical transformation of their identities and missions. This transformation would entail a return to the foundational commitments of the Kampala Declaration (1990), which advocates for universities that are accountable to their communities and responsive to the diverse needs of African societies. Such universities would not only provide technical knowledge but would also nurture critical consciousness, ethical responsibility, and a commitment to social justice. By aligning with the Kampala Declaration and the SDGs, African universities can reclaim their roles as engines of social transformation, promoting knowledge that serves the public good and fostering futures that are equitable, inclusive, and sustainable.

The Kampala Declaration (1990) provides a compelling framework for reimagining African universities as agents of social change. By advocating for academic freedom, social responsibility, and relevance to local contexts, the declaration offers a vision of the university as a public good that is deeply connected to the needs and aspirations of African societies. In an era of neoliberal austerity, this vision challenges African universities to resist commodification and to renew their commitment to social justice and human development. By embracing alternative imaginaries grounded in decolonial principles and aligned with the SDGs, African universities can forge a new path that prioritises the public good, values Indigenous knowledge, and contributes to the sustainable development of the continent. This reimagining of the university's role has the potential to transform not only higher education in Africa but also the broader societal landscape, fostering a future that is more just, inclusive, and resilient.

Knowledge in service of the university's local public good

The role of African universities in promoting the local public good through knowledge is essential for advancing equitable development within society. In their review of academic freedom discourse across the continent, Appiagyei-Atua et al. argued that African universities should “leave their ivory towers and, where necessary, solidarise with other civil society actors to promote social transformation and human emancipation. This is guaranteed to protect academic freedom on campus” (2015, p. 315). This perspective highlights the importance of integrating the university's epistemic infrastructure—research, innovation, teaching, curriculum, and learning practices—into efforts that address pressing social, economic, educational, and developmental challenges.

At the heart of this alternative university model lies a reimagination of the university's knowledge practices, which are mobilised to inform and advance local societal transformation (see Fataar, 2023). Two intertwined dimensions frame the conceptualisation of university knowledge for the public good. The first centres on the explicit alignment of university knowledge with public good, while the second emphasises the university's engagement with diverse ways of knowing within communities, highlighting the synergy between academic knowledge and local, everyday forms of knowledge production.

In addressing the first dimension, I draw upon the conceptualisation of university knowledge as a means of reclaiming life, as proposed by Barnett and Bengtson (2020). They argued for a philosophical understanding of the intricate and intimate relationships between the university, knowledge, and life. These relationships, which have often been neglected, need to be brought to the fore to reaffirm the university's role in enhancing life, not merely through abstract or detached knowledge production but through practical engagement with the world. Barnett's work, especially his 2017 book *The Ecological University: A Feasible Utopia*, offered a compelling critique of the university's failure to align itself with the pressing ecological and social crises facing humanity. He asserted that universities need to consistently fulfil their potential as vital institutions of knowledge that engage with and contribute to sustainable life. Barnett's ecological university proposed that the university's knowledge practices must be oriented toward human and planetary well-being, fostering new relationships between humanity, knowledge, and the natural world. This calls for an epistemic shift wherein the university's research, pedagogy, and innovations are grounded in the quest to preserve and promote life, positioning the university as a dynamic force for social, environmental, and cultural regeneration.

Barnett and Bengtson's (2020) exploration further clarified that university knowledge cannot remain siloed or insular but must instead, actively engage with the totality of the world's concerns. This knowledge-life couplet demands that universities place sustainable life at the centre of their epistemic endeavours, ensuring that knowledge is directly linked to the betterment of societal and ecological conditions. They critique relativistic approaches to knowledge and instead emphasise a realist understanding where knowledge is considered integral to life. Knowledge, for them, is not a detached or neutral force but one that is fundamentally tied to life—its origins, its continuities, and

its transformative potential. As such, the university's role is not only to understand life but also to shape it, to enrich it, and to contribute to its flourishing. This vision demands that the university be vigilant about its role in the distortions and injustices of life, particularly about the planet's resources and the historical and ongoing exploitation of marginalised peoples. In this regard, universities must reclaim knowledge practices that highlight and rectify cognitive injustices, acknowledging how dominant epistemologies have obscured or suppressed alternative knowledges and ways of being.

The ecological university Barnett (2017) envisioned, when aligned with the African context, must centre the long-silenced knowledges of marginalised communities, especially those shaped by the colonial and postcolonial experiences of oppression. By forging stronger relationships with these communities, the university can create new epistemic networks that foster knowledge exchange across boundaries, contributing to a broader and more inclusive understanding of the world. Barnett and Bengtsen (2020) advocated for universities to extend their knowledge practices beyond institutional boundaries and engage with public and community concerns, contributing to life-enhancing projects beyond the academy's walls. Their call for universities to collaborate with diverse publics resonates with the need for academic knowledge to flow freely into local communities, enabling joint solutions to complex local challenges.

This brings us to the second dimension of the university's role in serving the public good: the need for a pluralised account of knowledge. In the African context, knowledge practices must be attuned to the diversity of ways in which communities produce, validate, and utilise knowledge (Fataar, 2023). This pluralism is essential for a university that seeks to serve the public good, as it must recognise and engage with the different epistemic systems that exist within local communities. Santos (2012) offered an epistemological framework that emphasises the significance of recognising multiple knowledges, particularly those rooted in the Global South. His theory of ecologies of knowledges called for a shift away from the dominance of Western epistemologies that have historically marginalised Indigenous, local, and subjugated knowledge. Santos's approach urges universities to critically engage with the knowledge of oppressed communities, drawing on these epistemologies to inform societal transformation and development. This perspective opens up possibilities for radical change by valuing the diverse ways knowledge is produced, shared, and applied in different contexts.

The plural knowledge framework advocated by Santos (2012) also underscored the importance of integrating local, contextual knowledge with academic research and scholarship. In Africa, this means engaging with the knowledge systems that both colonial legacies and Indigenous traditions have shaped. For example, Mustapha (2012) examined the role of elites and ordinary citizens in constructing the common public good, highlighting the deep inequalities within African societies. He argued that for a common public good to emerge, there must be a dialectical engagement between what he called "primordial publics" (rooted in precolonial African institutions) and "civic publics" (shaped by colonial and postcolonial institutions). The university's role in this process is

to facilitate a dialogue between these two spheres, helping bridge the gap between elites and ordinary citizens in pursuing shared societal goals. This requires a commitment to participatory and inclusive knowledge practices that engage with a broad spectrum of societal actors, enabling the university to lead in developing a shared public good.

The African university envisioned as a site of knowledge pluralism, would thus function as a critical participant in creating counter-publics—groups that emerge outside mainstream discourses to challenge dominant narratives and assert their developmental priorities. Building counter-publics is a vital political and social process that empowers marginalised communities to articulate their needs, claim their rights, and seek recognition for their developmental aspirations. In this context, the university must actively cultivate these counter-publics by working with local communities to identify their priorities and concerns and then using its epistemic resources to help address these challenges. This collaborative approach to knowledge production centred on the public good would help reshape the university's mission and position it as a central agent of social transformation (Fataar, 2023).

Santos's (2014) epistemology of the South further emphasised the importance of recognising and valorising the knowledges of the oppressed. He argued that Western epistemologies have systematically excluded and suppressed the knowledges of marginalised groups, rendering them invisible or irrelevant. His *sociology of absences* sought to recover these absences, making visible those forms of knowledge that have been systematically ignored or discarded. This task is particularly relevant in Africa, where colonial and postcolonial processes have suppressed Indigenous knowledge systems in favour of Western models. By recognising these absent knowledges, the university can play a pivotal role in reasserting the value of these epistemic traditions and incorporating them into broader societal discourses. This process of reclamation and restitution is not merely academic; it is a moral and ethical imperative for universities that seek to be genuinely committed to social justice and the public good.

The African university's knowledge, when put in service of the public good, must move beyond traditional, siloed academic boundaries and engage meaningfully with local communities. By fostering a pluralised, inclusive epistemic framework that values the knowledge of elites and ordinary citizens and creating spaces for counter-publics to emerge, the university can help shape a more just and equitable society. This requires fundamentally reimagining the university's role, not as an isolated institution of knowledge production but as a dynamic force for societal transformation. The university must engage with human, ecological, and social life, bringing new forms of understanding into the world and contributing to the realisation of a common public good.

Conclusion: Centring academic freedom in African universities for the public societal good

This paper has outlined an alternative vision for African universities, positioning them in contrast to the neoliberal, universalist frameworks currently dominating higher education systems globally.

Drawing on the Kampala Declaration (1990), this conclusion reaffirms the need for a reimagined African university that prioritises its public good mission, and is rooted in local community engagement, sustainability, and decolonial practices.

The neoliberal model of universities, which emphasises market-driven approaches and standardisation, has led to a disconnect between universities and the communities they serve. This paper advocates for an African university model that is locally grounded, transcending the individualistic and profit-driven priorities of neoliberalism. The university's responsibility to its communities is central to this reimagining, particularly in addressing their historical and socio-political legacies. As highlighted by the Kampala Declaration (1990), academic freedom is inseparable from the mission of universities to contribute meaningfully to societal transformation. Therefore, the commitment to academic freedom must also be a commitment to engage with the specific needs of local communities and challenge the status quo that marginalises these communities.

At the core of this vision is the university's role in advancing the SDGs, particularly SDG 4, which focuses on education for sustainable development and poverty eradication. The paper argues that universities must localise their approach to these goals by integrating the histories, languages, and knowledge systems of the communities they serve into their curricula and research. A localised decolonial response, as emphasised in the Kampala Declaration (1990), is essential for fostering a relevant, equitable, and transformative educational approach. In this way, African universities can become spaces for community-oriented solutions that address issues like inequality, poverty, and the environmental crises that disproportionately affect marginalised communities.

Furthermore, the knowledge infrastructure of African universities must be recalibrated to prioritise the application of academic knowledge to local problems. Drawing on Barnett's (2020) concept of the knowledge-life couplet, this paper argues for a focus on knowledge problematics that are directly tied to the challenges faced by communities. The university's role should not be limited to the production of knowledge in isolation but should be centred on the application of this knowledge in collaborative dialogues with communities. This requires a sociology of absences and emergences—an awareness of what knowledge is missing and what new forms of knowledge are emerging in response to community needs.

While this paper did not explore the university's commitment to planetary sustainability, it is a crucial component of this reimagined vision. The ecological university, as envisioned by Barnett (2017), must centre the African university's role in fostering local sustainability and environmental stewardship. This responsibility involves addressing local ecological challenges and ensuring that students are educated to engage with these issues through curricular and co-curricular activities. The paper proposes that universities create spaces for service-learning and community-based learning that help develop the necessary literacies for sustainable living.

The alternative African university presented in this paper would not only fulfil its public good mission by addressing the educational needs of its local communities but also contribute to the

broader goals of sustainable development and decolonisation. By grounding their work in the histories, cultures, and aspirations of their communities, and by engendering critical citizenship and development, African universities can realise their transformative potential. In doing so, they will contribute to the achievement of the SDGs and the creation of just, equitable, and sustainable futures. This vision aligns with the Kampala Declaration's (1990) call for universities to uphold academic freedom while taking responsibility for societal development. The reimagined African university is committed to localising global challenges, promoting sustainable futures, and contributing to the collective well-being of its communities.

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Notes on the author

Aslam Fataar is Research Professor in Higher Education Transformation, Department of Education Policy Studies, Stellenbosch University

Address for correspondence

afataar@sun.ac.za

Public-private partnerships and their implications for public schooling in South Africa

Jerome Joorst
Stellenbosch University

Abstract

The worldwide massification of education, set against the background of global economic decline, inhibits governments from providing quality education as a public good for all. Consequently, public-private education partnerships (PPEPs) are increasingly promoted as a viable solution to address resource challenges in economically disadvantaged school communities. Although these partnerships can offer financial and infrastructural support, they also introduce challenges including the potential for the private sector to prioritise commercial interests over equitable educational outcomes. This paper is a conceptual investigation into the implications of PPEPs, arguing that, despite their perceived benefits, PPEPs risk functioning as Trojan horses for privatisation, subtly undermining the principle of education as a public good. Through a comparative education lens, this study examines how South Africa's engagement with PPEPs aligns with or diverges from global trends, with a specific focus on lessons from other African and international contexts. This comparative dimension is important in understanding both the opportunities and shortcomings of PPEPs, enabling a broader discourse on equitable and context-sensitive educational collaborations that serve the needs of economically disadvantaged communities without exacerbating inequalities.

Keywords: public-private education partnerships, implications for schooling in underprivileged communities, education as public good, equitable and context-sensitive collaboration

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Introduction

The expansion of education systems globally has placed immense pressure on governments to sustain quality and accessibility. The economic downturns that have characterised the late 20th and early 21st centuries have further strained public sector resources, making it increasingly difficult to uphold education as a fundamental public service. Scholars have argued since the 1980s that business methods can better solve managerial challenges in public schools and yield more efficiency than traditional methods by the public sector (Gamedze & Ruiters, 2024). In response, governments worldwide have turned to public-private education partnerships (PPEPs) as a way of supplementing state provisions, especially in economically disadvantaged school communities. While the proponents of these partnerships often frame them as pragmatic solutions to funding, infrastructural, managerial, and learner outcome challenges in under-resourced schools, their implications extend far beyond resource allocation.

This paper is a conceptual investigation into the role of PPEPs, with a critical focus on their potential to either mitigate or exacerbate existing inequalities in education. Specifically, it argues that PPEPs, while potentially beneficial, risk embedding private sector interests in ways that undermine the long-term goals of equitable and accessible education. By examining South Africa's experience with PPEPs through a comparative education lens, this study situates the South African case within broader global and African contexts. This comparative perspective is essential for understanding how different nations have navigated the balance between public responsibility and private involvement in education.

Drawing on international and regional experiences, this paper seeks to highlight best practices while also warning against the commodification of education in South Africa. The experiences of PPEPs in other African countries provide a necessary perspective because many of these countries share similar socioeconomic challenges, which require context-sensitive approaches to educational reforms. By juxtaposing South Africa's PPEP experiences with those of other nations, this study contributes to a nuanced discussion on how governments can engage private actors in ways that reinforce, rather than erode, the public-good nature of education. The paper argues for equitable and transparent partnerships that prioritise the interests of marginalised communities, ensuring that educational interventions serve broader societal goals rather than private sector profit motives. This contribution is important because it sheds light on educational policy reforms in the Western Cape, South Africa, that are in opposition to unsettled issues of social justice and class inequalities and could perpetuate neo-apartheid policies.

The debate on public goods delivery arose after the 1973 and 1978/79 oil crises and sub-Saharan droughts (Benson & Clay, 1994; Perifanis, 2020). Until the late 1970s, nation-states invested heavily in public goods but concerns about market failures and inefficiency grew with urbanisation and industrialisation. Conservatives argued that state monopolies in services like education stifled consumer choice and led to bureaucracy. The state's role shifted from provider to facilitator, sharing responsibilities with private actors while retaining regulatory oversight via performance

management (du Gay, 2000). The New Public Management system (Tolofari, 2005) embodied this reform, enabling greater private sector involvement in education globally. The World Bank promoted state-private partnerships in Africa during the 1980s' structural adjustment programmes, which pushed economic reforms and reduced state roles, allowing private education providers entry (Mkandawire & Soludo, 1999). UNESCO (2007) supported PPEPs in reaching disadvantaged groups, while Sustainable Development Goal 17 encouraged multi-sectoral partnerships based on shared values (de Kock et al., 2018a).

In South Africa, private education involvement predates democracy, with mission schools and apartheid-era alternatives like the South African Committee for Higher Education Democracy (Sayed & Soudien, 2021). Amid ongoing inequality and crises, the post-apartheid government struggles to provide equitable, quality education. The United Nation's 2016 Sustainable Development Goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 4 for inclusive, quality education by 2030, frame current efforts (Sayed & Soudien, 2021). Policies such as the National Development Plan, the Public Finance Management Act (Republic of South Africa, 1999), and Treasury Regulation 16 provide the framework for public-private partnerships in education. The National Development Plan encourages collaboration to address infrastructure gaps, improve resource allocation, and introduce innovation in schools (National Planning Commission, 2012). Treasury Regulation 16 defines PPEPs as contracts where private partners take on significant financial, technical, and operational risk (Republic of South Africa, 2007). Globally, PPEPs involve shared responsibility, joint decision-making, risk-sharing, and mutual benefit (Mathonsi, 2012).

"Public-private partnership" broadly refers to shared responsibility between government and private actors in school finance, ownership, and management (LaRocque, 2008; Patrinos et al., 2009). Farah & Rizvi (2007) noted that international pressure and Education for All commitments have promoted such partnerships. The International Monetary Fund supported structural adjustment policies aimed at reducing public spending, shrinking the state sector, and promoting privatisation. As signatories to the Dakar Plan and the Millennium Development Goals, many governments were encouraged to collaborate with various partners to achieve educational targets. Public-private partnerships (PPEPs) between the state and private sector are thought of as a system that "recognizes the existence of alternative options for providing education services besides public finance and public delivery" (Patrinos et al., 2009, p. 1).

PPEPs are a form of educational innovation that addresses resource shortages in schools and increases access to basic education (Patrinos et al., 2009). The underlying assumption is that the state and the private actors' interests are in alignment—such as a shared commitment to providing quality education to all. Many forms of PPEPs in schools exist worldwide. Within a comparative framework, this study brings PPEPs' purported benefits and their impact on economically disadvantaged school communities across the globe into view. In the South African context, this paper builds on previous research on such partnerships in South African schools (most notably, de Kock et al., 2018a; Feldman, 2020; Herbert, 2023; Johns & Sayed, 2023; Sayed & Soudien, 2021).

A comparative analysis can identify suggestions for a context-sensitive approach that prioritises equity over market efficiency in schools.

This study followed a qualitative, interpretive perspective to understand the implications of PPEPs on public schools, and I used a conceptual research methodology. Guided by Terr Blanche et al.'s (2006) definition of conceptual research, I analysed and compared global, regional, and local literature to understand PPEPs and their impact on, and implications for, economically disadvantaged school communities. I used this to propose more equitable and context-sensitive public-private partnerships in economically disadvantaged schools.

PPEPs and their implications for marginalised communities

The original purpose of PPEPs was to improve “system efficiency, effectiveness, quality, equity and accountability” (LaRocque, 2008, p. 8). Variants of PPEPs exist around the world. In the United States, charter schools are publicly funded but privately managed, differing from traditional public schools in accountability, admissions, and teacher contracts (Cohodes & Parham, 2021). While charter schools have operational autonomy, they must “meet the accountability standards outlined in [their] charter” (National Centre for Education Statistics, 2023, p. 1). However, as Burris & Bryant (2019) argued, this has resulted in fraud and the misuse of state funds. In the United Kingdom, academy schools are state funded but managed by independent trusts with funding contracts and, although they allow certain freedoms, teachers report increased bureaucratic demands and reduced professional voice (Brown, 2023). Despite some overlap, charter schools and academies differ in purpose. Charter schools emerged to offer autonomous alternatives to public schools, while academies aimed to replace failing schools and reduce local authority control.

Sweden's free school PPEP model allows private entities to run state-funded schools to address educational inequities. Despite initial goals of promoting diversity and access, the model has been criticised for exacerbating inequality, social segregation, and low academic achievement (Gardiner, 2015). Díaz-Ríos & Urbano-Canal (2021) studied contract schools in Colombia; these publicly subsidised private schools, (contract schools) have raised equity, oversight, and sustainability concerns, often favouring advantaged students and lacking alignment with national goals. Voucher systems have been used in Chile since the 1980s to promote access and school choice (Arenas, 2004). Morgan et al. (2015) however, argued that voucher systems perpetuate inequality by concentrating the poorest students in underperforming municipal schools. Díaz-Ríos and Urbano-Canal similarly reported that these schools underperform compared to public schools, highlighting the difficulty of balancing access and quality.

In Pakistan, community support programmes aimed to increase girls' enrolment and devolve school governance (Farah & Rizvi, 2007), but Arshad (2020) warned that they risk undermining public education by neglecting equity and quality. In Bangladesh, PPEPs sought to lower education costs in rural areas by encouraging strong community involvement, local teacher

recruitment, emphasis on girls' education, relevant curricula, and flexible, cost-effective models (Watkins & Bergh, 2021). Savings came from using local materials for buildings, abolishing uniforms, repurposing community structures, and employing local facilitators on stipends (Aga Khan Foundation, 2008). However, Rashed et al. (2013) highlighted critical issues in transactions, weak regulatory oversight, and financing difficulties that limit the effectiveness of PPEPs in the country's education sector.

In Africa, similar trends are evident. In Rwanda, PPEPs appear in the form of *Fonds d'Appui aux Rescapés du Génocide* [Genocide Survivors Support Fund] with the aim of subsidising secondary education for disadvantaged learners (Human Rights Watch, 2003). While acknowledging some successes, Ntawiha et al. (2020) highlighted significant challenges including a lack of qualified staff, limited financing, and the absence of clear policies and frameworks governing these PPEPs. In September 2016, Liberia's Ministry of Education launched the Partnership Schools for Liberia, handing over 93 public primary schools to eight private organisations, including Bridge International Academies, in exchange for more cost-effective schooling. Klees (2017, p. 13) however, has argued that the initiative was "a waste of resources" given that increased spending showed little evidence of improved outcomes. In Ghana, Akyeampong (2009, p. 136) warned that despite some benefits, PPEPs often face implementation challenges, particularly where partnerships lack aligned long-term goals. Similarly, Twinomuhwezi and Herman (2020) identified Uganda's PPEP difficulties as stemming from varied stakeholder interpretations of policy intent, objectives, and context-specific applications.

The South African version of PPEPs is collaboration schools, started in 2015 in the Western Cape as a part of a pilot project of five schools to remedy underperforming public schools (Sayed & Soudien, 2021). The Western Cape's township schools are plagued by historic and continuing challenges of poverty, joblessness, gangsterism, drug abuse, and dysfunctional communities. These factors affect the functionality and stability of schools and increase absenteeism. In that context, this new schooling model was touted by a donor alliance. Collaboration schools are modelled on the United Kingdom academies and United States charter schools. The Western Cape Provincial Schools Education Amended Act (Western Cape Provincial Parliament, 2018) amended the earlier Western Cape Provincial School Education Act 12 (Western Cape Government, 1997), and it provides the policy framework for private-public partnership schools in the province.

In collaboration schools, including "turnaround," "transition," or "new" schools, philanthropic donors and non-profit organisations provide funding alongside the state. School operating partners, under contracts from the Western Cape Education Department, work to improve no-fee public schools. While the Department funds infrastructure, transport, nutrition, and full post establishment, funds for staffing are transferred to schools, allowing these partners to directly employ staff in school governing body roles. School operating partners receive management fees and gain 50% voting rights on the governing bodies in exchange for resources and support. The principal runs the school, with Departmental oversight.

However, there are concerns. Feldman (2020) warned that this PPEP shifts governance from the Western Cape Education Department to private actors, undermining democratic processes and ignoring risks for economically disadvantaged communities. Feldman further critiqued the unequal power sharing in governance. Sayed and Soudien (2021) echoed this, arguing that it transfers state responsibility for failing schools to private actors, and fails to improve learner outcomes. Herbert (2023) situated collaboration schools within global market reforms driven by crisis discourses that justify deficit pedagogies and private sector roles while ignoring historical inequalities. She highlighted how the Democratic Alliance used the African National Congress's failure to build schools, poor results, and union influence as crisis justification for market solutions, thereby facilitating increased public-private partnerships.

Johns & Sayed (2023, p. 93) found continuing professional development programmes in PPEPs "restrictive and limited," thereby diminishing teacher agency. Although the donors claim to double per-learner subsidies, they receive millions for their services. Despite these critiques, collaboration schools grew from five in 2016 to 11 in 2020 (Western Cape Government, n.d.). Sayed & van Niekerk (2017) argued that political ideologies shape education policy, with the Democratic Alliance promoting non-state actors as central to managing underperforming public schools, though still regulated by the state. The 2018 amendment to the Western Cape Provincial School Education Act formally introduced collaboration schools, creating new public school categories, and giving private partners at least 50% voting rights on school governing bodies (Western Cape Provincial Parliament, 2018). This challenges the post-apartheid school governance model, as set out in the South African Schools Act of 1996 which grants stakeholders majority control in the affairs of the school (Woolman & Fleisch, 2009).

What further exacerbates the problem is that the government's policy of supporting the private school sector and semi-private fee-paying public schools, has allowed "the middle class to secure control of the historically white school sector, facilitating a new deracialised middle class who have "opted out" of the public system of schooling" (Sayed, 2016). Not only does this amendment give school operating partners influence over school policies such as the hiring of teachers, discipline and language, but it also enables this new form of public schooling to be upscaled to support up to 15% of the province's public schools (Gamedze, 2019). Marketed as "innovations," these shifts offload state responsibility for failing schools to private actors. The implications for public schooling in economically disadvantaged communities are that collaboration schools perpetuate a bifurcated education system.

Towards more equitable and context-sensitive partnerships

The literature shows us that marketisation has reorganised schooling not just in South Africa, but globally (Ball, 2012; Plank & Sykes, 2003). This has been done through what Vally (2020 called the pursuit of a global ideological agenda rationalised on the ostensible (& often real) failure of governments to supply good quality public education to the majority of its citizenry. Riding the

wave of government failure, crisis discourses have advantaged private sector entities. The economic dimensions of the global neoliberal policy approach that is now shaping education reform worldwide reveal that the education industry is a lucrative 1.57 trillion US dollar market and is rapidly growing (Randles, 2019). In South Africa, the private sector offering of education is a multifaceted and rapidly increasing industry. A Northstar quarterly report on private schooling suggested growth expectations of 4.6%, of which Curro Holdings had about 10% of the market, Advtech 5%, and Spark 2%, with the rest made up of other independent schools (Randles, 2019).

School failures are often used to justify market-driven interventions, framed as innovations to promote accountability and efficiency, but these solutions can reinforce authoritarian, apartheid-like educational regimes (Vally, 2020). This also enables a logic that mirrors apartheid-era disciplinary regimes demanding more order, discipline, and compliance (Vally, 2020). These so-called innovations deepen inequality in an already bifurcated society and undermine the democratic governance model set out in the South African Schools Act of 1996—rights won at great cost.

Ball (2012), Verger (2012), and Verger et al. (2016) argued that the global education industry is eroding democratic governance, producing systems “ beholden more to shareholders than stakeholders,” all converging around a neoliberal vision of best practice (Ball, 2012; Hook, 2018, p. 300). Rather than redressing inequalities, these reforms reinforce and reconfigure them to benefit the economic elite (Hunter, 2019; Picower & Mayorga, 2015; Randles, 2019). While there can be no denial of the value of partnerships (in terms of infrastructure and resource provision) between government and private donors if they benefit marginalised communities, there is also a great deal of cynicism about the private sector’s involvement in public schools.

Supporters of PPEPs mainly come from international networks and new private actors (corporates, think tanks, consultants, venture capitalists) seeking expansion (Srivastava, 2014). Proponents like the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation call PPEPs “innovations” improving outcomes, quality, and equity (Herbert, 2023, p. 77). Others, like Harrison (2017), CEO of DG Murray Trust and funder of the Western Cape Collaboration Schools Pilot, justify PPEPs by claiming that the South African education system is so dire and destructive that new approaches are needed. Some academics agree (Sayed & Soudien, 2021). Similarly, people like James Tooley (2000), who called privatisation “the poor’s best chance” advocate low-cost private schools. Tooley’s partnership with Pearson via Ghana’s Omega Schools shows rapid growth in the profitability of low-cost private schools (Wilby, 2013).

Public school partnerships promote collaboration for a better education system for all but lack solid evidence. They cite NSC results for Grade 12 only, but systemic results for lower grades remain outstanding (Harrison, 2017). Davies & Hentsche (2006) saw PPEPs as multi-sector shifts while Khalid et al. (2016) argued they improve infrastructure and teacher quality. Proponents often label critics of PPEPs as “anti-improvement” or “anti-innovation.”

Opponents of PPEPs argue that they compromise democratic governance, with systems favouring shareholders over local stakeholders (Ball, 2012; Verger, 2012). Policy borrowing fuels a global

education industry undermining democratic governance, privileging shareholders over local stakeholders (Hook, 2018; Verger et al., 2016). Jessop (2002) saw PPEPs as encroaching on public schools' resources, while Saltman (2007) linked them to conservative drives to dismantle public education. Critics note a neglect of social justice and gender equality (Fennell, 2014), weak empirical evidence of learner results improvement (Baum, 2018, p. 1), erosion of social citizenship (de Kock et al., 2018b, p. 7), and poor participation. Gamedze & Ruiters (2024) warned PPEPs could reinforce inequality through power imbalances. Their market focus worsens segregation and inequity (Verger et al., 2020), often seen as privatisation threatening education as a public good.

Herbert (2023) argued that crisis discourses legitimise market reforms and deficit pedagogies, ignoring historical socioeconomic factors. This facilitates technocratic metrics, consultancies, and partnerships. Klees (2017, in Sayed & Soudien, 2021) found that PPEPs raise public costs without improving outcomes. Collaboration schools rely mostly on public funds while private donors add subsidies and earn fees, shifting state duties to private actors (Sayed & Soudien, 2021). Motala & Vally (2010) warned that such reforms, detached from social complexities, undermine educational equity and could replace democratic schooling with authoritarian systems. Narrow improvement models ignoring social realities fail equity, especially when local needs are sidelined. Outsourcing schooling, teacher employment, and governance risks replacing democratic education with authoritarian control disguised as reform. Verger et al. (2016) cautioned that more money and private management don't guarantee quality and may worsen equity.

In her article, entitled "Public-Private Partnerships: The Trojan Horse of Neoliberal Development," Faranak Miraftab (2004, p. 89) asserted:

Private sector firms approach local governments and their impoverished communities with the message of power-sharing, but once the process is in motion, the interests of the community are often overwhelmed by those of the most powerful member of the partnership private sector firm.

Miraftab used the metaphor of the Trojan horse to suggest that, while these partnerships are often presented as collaborative efforts aimed at enhancing public services, they may covertly advance neoliberal agendas that prioritise market-driven interests over public welfare. Thus, the metaphor implies that PPEPs, under the guise of mutual benefit, can introduce privatisation and market mechanisms into public schools, potentially undermining equitable access to these schools. Applied to education provision in economically disadvantaged school communities, Miraftab's (2004) analysis suggests that PPEPs might lead to reduced public accountability and the marginalisation of vulnerable communities given that private entities may prioritise profit over the educational needs of disadvantaged learners. Instead of addressing education inequalities, PPEPs could exacerbate existing inequalities in economically disadvantaged school communities by making quality education less accessible to those who are already marginalised.

Comparatively, the literature reflects an increasing involvement of different forms of PPEPs in schools in the Global North and Global South. While some research reflects its benefits (Baum,

2018; Helmy et al., 2020), others have raised questions about cost-effectiveness, equity, and accountability (Verger & Moschetti, 2017).

Stephen Ball (2009) is a key scholar explaining privatisation's impact on public education, and argued that hidden privatisation is advancing under the guise of modernisation reforms. He sees this as expanding business opportunities for the private sector, including new outsourcing forms, as more education functions are divested and privatised. Drawing on Fullan (2007), Ball noted these solutions adopt business change management language and methods. What's sold, he says, "are the necessities of change, a new managerialist language and a kind of self-belief and self-efficacy that represents new organisational ecologies and identities" (Ball, 2009, p. 86). For Ball (2009, p. 85), PPEPs are "new vendors of education services seeking profit opportunities as justifications for interventions or remedies in weak or underperforming schools." Following him, PPEPs function as turnaround products marketed to schools struggling to meet national targets or with management issues.

The comparative literature indicates that while PPEPs present potential benefits for under-resourced school communities, they remain contentious due to several critical concerns. These include the promotion of capitalist ideologies, the absence of robust empirical evidence demonstrating significant improvements in learner outcomes, and the transfer of decision-making authority from public institutions to private entities. Additionally, PPEPs are often associated with endangering teachers' employment, the erosion of the democratic governance of education, and the strategic use of crisis narratives to legitimise their expansion. This, in turn, positions PPEPs as mechanisms for market penetration and power consolidation under the pretext of offering a sustainable alternative, ultimately functioning as a Trojan horse for advancing global capitalist interests.

Conclusion

Politically and economically, PPEPs reveal the Trojan horse of a global education industry undermining democratic governance (Ball, 2012; Verger, 2012; Verger et al., 2016), deepening a bifurcated system, and worsening inequality. Despite inconclusive evidence of school improvement, PPEPs in the Western Cape continue to be promoted as viable alternatives. The 2018 Western Cape Provincial Schools Education Amendment Act, passed amid public outcry, ensures that all future public schools there will adopt the PPEP collaboration model, disregarding equitable, context-specific partnerships with economically disadvantaged communities and cementing PPEPs in the province (Sayed & Soudien, 2021).

Sociologically, PPEP collaborations mirror broader societal structures, including power dynamics, socioeconomic disparities, and stakeholder interests. The debate over private sector roles in schools pits left-wing movements, trade unions, and NGOs against the state and philanthropy, who claim they are safeguarding children's rights, not privatising education. In the Western Cape, the Democratic Alliance government and its donor partners (DG Murray Trust) blame poor school performance on human factors like governance and teacher motivation, while Debra Shepherd

(2011), emphasised that social contexts outweigh school effects on student outcomes. Framing the problem as “underperforming schools” obscures systemic causes. Such one-sided framing, said Jasanoff (2018), derail the solutions to similar flaws. Fixing schools alone, without addressing the systems they belong to, will have limited impact (Isaacs, 2018).

To address challenges in economically disadvantaged school communities, solutions must be context-specific and considerate of historic, social, and economic inequalities. External partners must understand local historic, social, cultural, and economic inequalities shaping education access and prioritise equity and sensitivity to these contexts. Nugent (2020) insisted PPEPs require strong checks and balances to ensure private partners do not exploit resources or risk failing marginalised communities. Patrinos (2023) advised empowering parents and learners, promoting diverse institutions, and avoiding decontextualised global models for teaching and management. Instead of assuming more money will fix poor outcomes, partners should listen to communities, and conduct rigorous impact evaluations to determine what works, how, and for whom.

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Notes on the author

Jerome Joorst is a researcher in Education Policy and Rural Education in the Department of Education Policy Studies, Stellenbosch University

Address for correspondence

jpjoorst@sun.ac.za

The dark side of transformation in higher education in South Africa

Bernadette Johnson

University of the Witwatersrand

Mondli Hlatshwayo

University of Johannesburg

Abstract

Scholars and state authorities have extensively documented the positive aspects of transformation through government speeches, policies, and the annual reports of universities. Significant progress has been made by universities in this regard. For example, University of the Western Cape, formerly a historically Black university, now ranks among the top universities in South Africa. The government has also invested in infrastructure, particularly in historically Black universities, leading to substantial changes in the equity profile of staff, students, and leadership within the sector over the past three decades. However, this article focuses on the other side, what we perceive as the darker side of change. We argue that certain practices among vice-chancellors, the increased workload of young, Black academics, the ongoing oppression of Black women within academia, universities struggling to meet the needs of a growing student body, and the emergence of tenderpreneurs operating within university spaces exemplify the dark side of transformation. We discuss these practices in relation to five key thematic sections: governance and leadership failures, corruption and tender systems, academic precarity, gender inequality, and access and funding. Our recommendation is a call to progressive forces to build safeguarding systems against corruption, which enable a deepening of transformation in diversity, equity, access, and inclusion. The future of higher education in the shifting global forces cannot be imagined without the people whom we serve.

Keywords: transformation, dark side, higher education, South Africa

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Introduction

The Haitian Revolution, spearheaded by the revolutionary Toussaint Louverture, emerged from a series of conflicts and wars between French and British colonisers and slave owners between 1791 and 1804. The Haitian slaves finally achieved freedom from France in 1804, becoming the first republic to be formed by slaves. This historic milestone epitomised a triumph in the unyielding struggle for transformation and emancipation from the harrowing realities of slavery and its dehumanising labour practices. Stemming from diverse corners of Western Africa, Black slaves endured the brutal toll of overwork, widespread illnesses, hunger, and fatal injuries as routine occurrences. Their aspiration for liberation and emancipation aimed to usher in an era of progress and prosperity (James, 1989). However, subsequent revelations uncovered inherent contradictions within the transformative process, precipitating significant setbacks and undermining the essence of transformative practices. The educated elite, primarily hailing from the upper echelons and trained abroad, emerged as the primary beneficiaries of the revolution, marginalising the aspirations of the common populace. Compounding these challenges, Haiti continues to grapple with staggering poverty, remaining among the most impoverished nations in both the Latin America and Caribbean (LAC) region and globally.

According to the World Bank (2023, p. 1), “In 2021, Haiti had a [gross national income] per capita of US\$1,420, the lowest in the LAC region, which averaged US\$15,092. On the UN’s Human Development Index, Haiti ranked 163 out of 191 countries in 2021.” The bondage of what was meant to be a politically liberated Haiti to imperialist forces like France and the United States of America, along with national debt and pervasive corruption, stand as significant contributors to Haiti’s underdevelopment. These factors serve as indicators of the dark side of transformation for the people of Haiti. The outcomes of revolutions often do not align with their noble ideals, and certain segments of society tend to benefit from the gains of the revolutions, resulting in the emergence of the negative aspects of the revolution/transformation. The fact that middle classes in Haiti and even South Africa utilise the legitimate transformative demands of the masses to justify their involvement in the struggle, while subsequently turning against the masses and behaving as oppressors once some of the goals are achieved, may contribute to the paradoxes of the transformative revolution.

In this article, we use the term “transformation” to refer to the challenges and efforts aimed at promoting social and economic justice for all marginalised groups in public higher/university education in South Africa. Transformation entails the advancement of the socioeconomic status of individuals who have been oppressed by colonialism and apartheid. In the 1990s and 2000s, there was a significant push for the transformation of universities. This was a crucial part of the anti-apartheid struggle to unite a racially divided, unequal, and disjointed university system. Formulating policies to bring about transformation became a central focus after democracy in 1994. Keet and Swartz (2015) provided an extensive list of policies that were formulated in the 1990s and 2000s. These include the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and

Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions (Department of Education, 2008), as well as the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (Department of Higher Education and Training [DHET], 2013). Numerous African National Congress (ANC) education policy commissions were established to prepare for the ANC's governance, such as the National Education Policy Initiative and the National Commission on Higher Education. These commissions were led by Education Policy Units established at University of the Western Cape, University of Durban Westville, and University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), which coordinated and led preparatory work. These policy changes have led to some progress, notably seen in the rise of Black and women leaders within public universities, alongside the increased enrolment of Black students and women in education.

However, transformation has not been without its drawbacks and contradictions. This should not deter us from the transformation project. It is our responsibility to shed light on the other side, the tragic side, so that corrective actions can be taken to eliminate systemic injustices. In this article, we discuss and debate what we consider to be indicators of the negative aspects of the change. Having analysed several sources such as newspaper articles, reports, and data, we draw on inductive reasoning to identify a set of thematic areas that have been prominent in transformative practices and have in contradictory, yet synthesising, ways co-existed in our reality. While we tend to defend transformation by focusing on progress, we do not reflect enough on the harm, damage of the dark side of transformation as experienced by people. Drawing on inductive reasoning, we have developed a thematic organising frame within which to discuss indicators of what is happening in our reality of higher education transformation during the past 30 years. The thematic sections in which we discuss these are governance and leadership failures, corruption and tender systems, academic precarity, gender inequality, and access and funding.

Governance and leadership failures

South Africa's universities are products of colonialism and apartheid. Following 1948, the state employed universities as instruments to propagate ideological backing for "separate development," installing white, National Party-affiliated men in positions of authority, frequently as vice-chancellors (VCs) at Afrikaans-speaking universities and institutions created to segregate Black students. Governance and leadership failures post 1994 have remained a persistent challenge despite the change in profile of councils and leadership.

Self-serving and blind-sided VCs

There is no doubt that governance within universities has been a persistent challenge. Jansen (2023) stated that since the official end of apartheid in 1994, there have been over 25 instances of government intervention aimed at remedying deficiencies. These interventions often involve appointing acting principals/administrators in response to failures by university principals to effectively administer and lead. The appointment of Black principals to lead universities has been one of the pillars of transforming racial demographics. However, this change has not always yielded positive outcomes. This is not to say that Black principals are inherently bad managers. For

example, Sakhela Buhlungu, the principal of Fort Hare, is leading a campaign to fight corruption and fraud at the university, despite assassinations of his protectors and colleagues (Burgess, 2023; Dangazele, 2023).

However, the shadow of the dark side of transformation looms large over Vaal University of Technology (VUT). Established in 2004, VUT traces its roots back to 1966 when it was known as the College of Advanced Technical Education, later evolving into Vaal Triangle Technikon in 1974. As a historically white Afrikaner institution, it underwent transformation to accommodate a more diverse student body. Dubbed the “Jesus of the Vaal,” Aubery Mokadi, who served as the VC, faced dismissal after being found guilty on 161 counts of corruption, fraud, and nepotism. The commission responsible for his expulsion from VUT made striking comments, stating he, “seems to feel the need to liken himself to Christ . . . [and alleged that supporters] stripped garments from their backs and laid them on the ground for me to walk on.” Mokadi had previously been suspended on similar charges in 1997 but was reinstated before facing dismissal once again in 2006 (quoted in Sosibo, 2006, para. 4). In 2012, the university was put under administration due to the inability of Irene Motlana, the VC at the time, to provide effective leadership. Subsequently, Motlana was found guilty of misconduct. Eight years later, in 2020, an independent assessor’s report on developments at VUT revealed Gordon Zide, then VC, was failing to provide adequate leadership. Zide retired in December 2019, having served only two years of his 5-year contracted term. Ihron Rensburg, previously VC of University of Johannesburg, assumed the role of administrator at VUT in 2020 (Staff Reporter, 2020). Dan Kgwadi took over as VC in 2022 but was suspended in 2023 amid allegations of poor performance and unfortunately passed away the same year (Naidu, 2023). The frequent turnover of VCs reflects an underlying institutional instability.

University of South Africa (UNISA) also seems to be grappling with issues surrounding its VC leadership. An independent assessor, appointed by the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Blade Nzimande, made damning findings against the university’s VC, Puleng LenkaBula, who took office in 2021. Following the release of the assessor’s report, the National Education, Health and Allied Workers’ Union called for her immediate resignation. Themba Mosia, the independent assessor, exposed widespread violations of procurement rules and procedures designed to protect the university’s finances. It was discovered that under LenkaBula’s leadership, the university was disregarding supply chain rules. Some of the concerns included the VC’s demand for expensive furniture despite the financial struggles of students and support staff. The assessor’s report revealed that the VC violated the tender process by spending over R3 million on renovations and upgrades to her residence, even though only R1 million had been approved. Salaries of staff in the VC’s office were increased and they were also given back-dated pay to 2007 without any written justification from the VC. The report concluded that UNISA should be placed under the administrative control of the Minister of Higher Education and Training (Mosia, 2023). A recent report by an independent assessor on UNISA’s affairs recommended placing the institution under administration and relieving the senior management and council of their duties (Dlamini, 2023).

However, the Pretoria High Court ordered Nzimande to withdraw his notice of intent to place UNISA under administration. The judge declared Nzimande's notice to be in breach and ordered him to immediately cease all efforts to publicise and enact the notice immediately, as well as refrain from making any decisions regarding its execution. The Minister was further instructed by the court not to proceed with his plans to place UNISA under administration until the court challenges regarding the report written by Mosia were resolved (Ndlovu, 2023).

Many VCs as foot soldiers of austerity

The Reconstruction and Development Programme, a development strategy for a democratic South Africa that was adopted by the ANC, was abandoned in 1996 in favour of the Growth, Employment, and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy. The fact that the latter policy was never discussed and debated by the structures of the ANC and its allies caused a rift within organisations striving for social and economic transformation in South Africa. Although the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund did not impose GEAR on South Africa, the policy was seen as a significant attempt to appease these two institutions and international markets (Bond, 2006).

Eventually, the massification of university education, along with insufficient increase in university budgets to accommodate Black students, gave rise to crisis (Habib, 2019). The reduction in state subsidies, coupled with the increase in student numbers, led university leadership to implement internal austerity measures through restructuring. In response to dwindling state subsidies and an expanding student body, university VCs, following the government's lead, resorted to austerity measures that ultimately harmed the very individuals who were meant to benefit from change. Not all VCs approached their leadership roles in this manner. Saleem Badat stands out as an exceptional example of a VC who went against the tide by refusing to outsource the university's lowest-paid service workers at Rhodes University (RU). He correctly argued that in a small town like Grahamstown, the impoverished community relied on the university for employment. Instead of dismissing workers, he believed that the community should unite and become stronger. Furthermore, he personally donated a percentage of his salary to student bursaries. This approach sharply contrasts with that of many VCs from around 20 years ago, who chose to outsource cleaning and security staff due to the associated university costs. At that time, RU also refrained from implementing 5-year executive contracts, opting to retain permanent positions for executives, thereby ensuring continuity in its strategies in contrast to the average 3-year turnover in leadership and short-term planning prevalent in the sector at that time. Thus, RU's restructuring programme differed from those of other universities in its avoidance of outsourcing and worker layoffs. Despite this delicate balance, the consequences of this form of restructuring largely resemble outsourcing practices, resulting in disadvantages for the cleaners (Ntlokwana, 2016; RU, 2019).

Black students from working-class and rural communities, Black workers, and women emerge as the primary victims of austerity measures carried out by government and university leadership. What has been missing from the struggles against outsourcing, fee increases, and financial exclusion is the full recognition that these problems cannot be fully addressed solely by the VCs of

government-funded universities. It is imperative that the struggles and anger of the students and workers are directed towards the state, which continues to reduce the public purse. Conversely, VCs have not been able to use their power to mobilise university stakeholders to publicly campaign for increased public universities. Their timidity in this regard bears consequences, leading students and workers to perceive them as complicit in the funding crisis or as the face of austerity on campus. They are the architects of measures aimed at reducing support staff, implementing outsourcing, raising fees, and excluding students. In essence, whether consciously or inadvertently, they become ensnared in a structural trap, unwittingly becoming foot soldiers of austerity.

In 2016, Universities South Africa (USAf), representing the collective voice of South African VCs, advocated for a shift towards private funding for public university education, a stance influenced by post-apartheid ideologies. This perspective shaped initiatives like the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS; Johnson & Hlatshwayo, 2023). However, this statement overlooked crucial information; many working-class and impoverished people cannot afford to finance their university education.

Mamphela Ramphele, a political activist, frequently collaborated with the late Steve Biko, leader of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), during the 1970s in South Africa. Ramphele led community programmes and held the position of president within the South African Students Organisation, a student political body affiliated with the BCM. Due to her political activism, Ramphele faced persistent harassment from both the police and the apartheid administration (McKenna, 2022). Subsequently, Ramphele made history in 1997 by becoming the first Black woman and the first Black person to hold the position of VC at University of Cape Town (UCT).

Ramphele assumed her role at UCT amidst the implementation of GEAR, in 1996. Following her appointment, Ramphele oversaw extensive outsourcing of support functions, primarily performed by Black women and Black people at UCT, under the pretext that these services were non-essential/non-core. This resulted in reduced pay for outsourced employees, many of whom were single mothers responsible for managing their households and caring for their children. The outsourcing initiative was aligned with the GEAR strategy, which, along with the World Bank's approach, often entailed measures detrimental to economically disadvantaged individuals, particularly working-class people and women. Consequently, it is understandable that Ramphele, having been involved in such initiatives, transitioned to a managerial position at the World Bank in 2000. This move positioned her as an advocate for the austerity policies championed by the institution (Grossman, 2006). Bardill (2008) examined the effects of outsourcing in the context of UCT, concluding that, among other effects, the added weight of outsourcing disproportionately fell upon Black working women, many of whom were single parents burdened by the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and class endured during apartheid. Much like Margaret Thatcher, former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Ramphele's implementation of austerity measures dealt severe blows to Black working-class women.

We must clarify that outsourcing at the universities was not only implemented by Mamphela, but was also carried out at Wits by Colin Bundy, a former white-left academic who served as the university's VC from 1997 to 2001 (Dumba, 2014). It seems that it is always easy for the VCs, regardless of their progressive history and ethnicity, to target the most vulnerable sections. Of course, vulnerability has its own contradiction given that it has been demonstrated that these women cleaners were able to join forces with the students and the academics to effectively oppose outsourcing in 2015 and 2016 (Hlatshwayo, 2020).

Melagapuru Makgoba became the first Black deputy VC at Wits in 1995, but left after criticising the university for being "Eurocentric." Afterward, he held various professional and research positions until he became the first VC of University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN), which was formed by merging the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville. During Makgoba's leadership, there was a notable increase in the suppression of activists who were challenging austerity measures, as well as in the lack of freedom of speech and academic freedom at UKZN (McKune, 2010).

Corruption and tender systems

"Qualifications" for politicians

In June 2023, concerns about the misuse of the progressive recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes led to a convocation at University of Fort Hare (UFH) requesting an independent investigation into allegations of academic fraud related to admissions and the awarding of degrees. Eastern Cape premier Oscar Mabuyane has been accused of maladministration and impropriety in the awarding of degrees and has been attempting to avoid these charges. The respondents in this case include President Ramaphosa, the Special Investigating Unit, and UFH (Radebe, 2023). This follows criminal charges that have been laid against Edwin Ijeoma who, according to media reports, is accused of obtaining admission to a doctoral programme at University of Pretoria with a fake Master of Business Administration (Dayimani, 2023a). It is alleged that he improperly admitted and registered Mabuyane for a master's degree by exploiting RPL, which allows individuals with a strong portfolio of evidence to be admitted to universities without meeting the usual academic requirements (Dayimani, 2023a).

Given that these degrees were awarded as a result of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between UFH and the former Premier of the Eastern Cape, Noxolo Kiviet, with the purpose of enabling politicians from the Eastern Cape to pursue studies at the university. The investigation has involved Derrick Swartz, who currently serves as an advisor to both the Eastern Cape Premier and Minister Nzimande. It was Swartz who initiated the MoU between UFH and the Eastern Cape government (Dayimani, 2023b).

Council capture

Section 27 of the Higher Education Act, No. 101 of 1997, which governs public higher education institutions, outlines the role and responsibilities of university councils in line with the Act, the

laws of the country, and the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1997). These councils are part of the transformative agenda aimed at including those who were oppressed by colonialism, apartheid, and racism in the governance of universities. Even before the dawn of democracy in 1994, efforts were made to ensure that trade unions, students, Black academics, and other groups had a say in the governance of universities. Proposals put forward by the student movement involved enhancing democracy and setting up inclusive transformation forums, democratic budgeting processes, and involvement in the selection of university principals (Johnson, 2000).

Councils were initially a promising concept. However, they have been seized by corrupt politicians who exploit them to further their own interests in primitive accumulation. This is like how government departments, agencies, and state corporations often prioritise the agendas of politicians and those involved in tenders. In some cases, members of the Student Representative Council (SRC) and trade unions affiliated with political parties exert influence over the allocation of major tenders and receive kickbacks. In 2022, Nzimande placed the Mangosuthu University of Technology under administration due to governance and administration issues. However, the university council, responsible for ensuring accountability and clean governance, failed to implement Nzimande's instructions as corrective measures (Dlamini, 2023). As a way forward, Jansen (2023) suggested that the university should decrease the number of council members appointed by the government because they often introduce party politics into councils, which can result in political parties controlling the councils. A similar argument can be made for council representatives from the private sector, who struggle to comprehend the nature of stakeholders, power dynamics within the university, and the crucial role of the Senate in relation to the Council, the VC, and the Chair of the University Council.

Tenderpreneurs and Black economic empowerment

Under apartheid, laws were promulgated to restrict Black businesses to such an extent that they could only trade in Black areas, thereby limiting their access to broader markets. Southall (2006) argued that Black Economic Empowerment, Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment, affirmative action, and anti-poverty strategies are necessary interventions to address the legacy of apartheid and ongoing racialised income gap in South Africa. Given the historical developments in South Africa, Black businesses in areas where universities are located should be encouraged to provide quality services to university constituencies. However, what is emerging is what the South African Communist Party has characterised as “tenderpreneurs” who, through political connections with politicians, are focused on looting state and university resources under the guise of business. These Black “entrepreneurs” are primarily interested in obtaining state and university tenders through violence, intimidation, and bribery—leading to inflated prices, failure to deliver services, and compromise on quality. They then pocket the money from state institutions for personal gain, which may include purchasing houses and expensive cars (Piper & Charman, 2018).

At the heart of assassinations targeting those opposed to corruption and resource looting at universities are the tenderpreneurs who have direct connections with university staff. Dangazele

(2023) reported that a senior manager at UFH, responsible for combating corruption, was allegedly involved in the murder of two staff members engaged in anti-corruption efforts at the university. To be more specific, Isaac Plaatjies was arrested for killing the university's fleet manager, Petrus Roets, and Mboneli Vesele, the bodyguard of VC Sakhela Buhlungu, a staunch anti-corruption advocate at UFH. The police were taken aback by Plaatjies's arrest, given his extensive cooperation with investigators. He was also investigating the attempted assassination of VC Buhlungu and the murders of the two university employees. During his investigation, he uncovered a corruption network at the university, leading to the arrest of Edwin Ijeoma, allegedly the mastermind behind the fraudulent awarding of diplomas to politicians and public officials, including Lubabalo Mabuyane, premier of the Eastern Cape.

Among those arrested for the UFH murders is Sicelo Mbulawa, a former SRC member and businessman who also provides services at UFH (South African Police Services, 2023). In 2016, Mbulawa, a tenderpreneur, founded Mbulawa Legends South Africa, and allegedly used the assistance of UFH administrator Eleanor Feni to manipulate the university's procurement system and obtain multiple contracts from the institution. It was claimed that Feni actively participated in the bidding process, manipulating the cover quoting technique to help Mbulawa win bids, and rigging bids to ensure that Mbulawa's company was awarded the contracts (Haripersad, 2023).

Academic precarity

The dark side of the professoriate

Therefore, achieving a proper representation of Black people, particularly Black women, in the South African academic community is one of the key objectives of transformation. It is undeniable that numerous Black professors have greatly benefited from the training and support aimed at expediting transformation and fostering excellence, thereby equipping them with the necessary skills and qualifications to be appointed as professors. However, a negative aspect of the transformation process within academia has been the endeavour to lower standards and expedite the appointments of Black academics under the guise of transformation.

This is not to argue that academia and professorship during apartheid did not have a dark side. For example, there are many stories of white academics who allocated positions and professorships among themselves without any rigorous appointment processes. During those days, an honours degree qualified one to be a lecturer. We are not arguing that holding an honours degree means that one cannot be a brilliant lecturer. For example, the late Johnny Clegg, who was an anthropologist and a musician, held an honours degree and taught anthropology at Wits (Wits, 2019). The point here is that transformation takes place when having a doctoral degree becomes a major requirement for career progression at universities. As Mnguni (2019, para. 4) said: "Gone are the days when one could be a dean without a PhD and, simply by virtue of promotion to the position, you would become a 'professor.'"

The report of the Ministerial Task Team (MTT) on the recruitment, retention, and progression of

Black South African academics in South African universities (DHET, 2019) unveiled a notable absence of women in professorial roles. In 2017, of the 4,514 professors in permanent positions, only 35,4% were women. Furthermore, the report underscored the disproportionate representation of white men in professorial positions (DHET, 2019). The MTT pointed out the underrepresentation of African South Africans and Coloured people in the professoriate. The report further indicated that in 2017, “African South African professors only make up 14.6% [658] of the professoriate” (DHET, 2019, p. 10).

The report by Mosia (2023) on UNISA, sheds light on a crisis surrounding professorships at the institution. An informant cited in the report stated:

I know. UNISA became strongly unionised about eight years ago, and there is the Black Forum pushing the agenda of Blackness—I was a founder of it way back when it was needed for transformation, but it must now come to an end because there are Blacks in all the positions in the university. We are now dealing with professors who cannot write, teach, research—they cannot do the work of a professor. (in Mosia, 2023, p. 282)

The report also indicated that:

They [unions and Black Forum] lowered the requirements for promotion, and now we have loads of people who cannot function at the professorial level. You can also not require them to be orientated now, because you will mess them up. *The intervention that was intended to transform the institution has come back to bite us in the back, big time* [emphasis added]. (Mosia, 2023, p. 282)

Being a professor automatically gives someone prestige, stature, respect, and additional income and benefits, signifying years of dedicated work in research, teaching, and student supervision. Mosia (2023) proposed a model that combines transformation with excellence, suggesting that Black academics must demonstrate their ability to perform at the level expected to earn such appointments. However, this issue becomes nuanced when considering the working conditions faced by younger Black academics in universities.

State capture has been facilitated by cadre deployment, a policy adopted by the ANC in 1998. This has resulted in the appointment of people who are loyal to the party’s agenda, rather than being necessarily competent for the job (Swanepoel, 2021). The appointment of people with insufficient skills to carry out council tasks also puts councils at risk of being unable to fulfil their fiduciary obligations.

Young Black academics as a teaching caste

According to Mouton et al. (2022), there was an increase in the number of Black (South African) doctoral graduates between 2000 and 2018. The number of doctorate holders increased from 194 in 2000 to 987 in 2018. One of the factors driving this change was transformation, as doctorate holders have a significant opportunity to become academics and researchers at South African

universities. As part of this transformation, the number of Black academics participating in teaching at universities has increased. In contrast, the number of white academics decreased by 40% (22,877) between 2000 and 2018. The percentage of Black African academics, on the other hand, more than doubled to 44% (25,252). The number of academic staff members who are Coloured and Indian increased by 2% each to 6% (3,510) and 8% (4,808), respectively. The proportion of Black African academic workers increased for all other post levels as well: junior lecturers climbed from 28% (830) to 60% (2,818), senior lecturers increased from 11% (558) to 35% (2,217), and lecturers increased from 20% (2,470) to 45% (8,462) (James, 2023).

Black academics enter an environment that is exceptionally hostile and competitive, often putting them at a disadvantage and setting them up for failure. However, their increased participation is a positive step towards transformation. Despite some efforts to introduce programmes that support the development of Black academics, the current system perpetuates apartheid-like hierarchies, with Black academics and Black women being the majority in precarious working conditions. Black academics face the challenges of teaching large numbers of students, grading numerous essays, and managing large classes (James, 2023).

Despite some of the positive developments highlighted by the increase in the number of Black individuals holding doctorates, there is still a significant lack of representation of Black people in the highest positions of academia. The MTT report, commissioned by Minister Nzimande, examined the recruitment, retention, and progression of Black (African, Coloured, and Indian) South African academics. The report revealed that in 2019, over 50% of professors were white academics, while almost 50% of African academics held junior lecturer positions, and less than 20% of Africans were professors. Coloured academics had the lowest representation in the professoriate and, like Africans, they predominantly held junior lecturer roles (DHET, 2019). According to the same report, “heavy administrative and teaching workloads are the biggest barriers, especially for younger staff who carry much of the responsibility for undergraduate teaching. Lack of funding, under-preparedness for research, and a non-supportive research environment are other important barriers” (DHET, 2019, p. 32). Mouton et al. (2018) found that only 25% of lecturers and 42% of senior lecturers at South African universities can be classified as active publishing writers. The measurement used in this study was relatively low, with the criterion being a minimum of two articles published in the past 10 years. Mouton et al. (2018) identified several factors contributing to the poor research performance of lecturers and senior lecturers, including insufficient time for research, extensive administrative duties, heavy teaching responsibilities, and limited research support.

This is one of the main reasons why Black academics are underrepresented in senior positions within the academic field, specifically the professoriate. In simpler terms, the current state of affairs is intentionally structured and is not reflective of the capabilities of these Black academics. The system that perpetuates racism relegates them to junior, unfulfilling positions, while white professors and some Black professors enjoy the privilege of conducting research, writing academic papers, and attending international and local conferences. Research professors are cash

cows for South African universities, primarily due to the elements of the state subsidy formula that have created a hierarchical system. These professors produce DHET-accredited journal articles, book chapters, and books, which, in turn, result in substantial financial gains. In numerous cases, professors have research accounts dedicated to conducting research, publishing, and attending conferences, all aimed at generating additional funding for both the universities and themselves (Tongai, 2013).

In fact, it can be argued that Black academics, who are in a lower caste, are creating the conditions for white professors and some Black professors to thrive in the academic field. To make matters worse, the benefits are not shared with Black academics, who carry most of the teaching and administrative loads at universities. Another issue related to this is that the professoriate responsible for producing publications linked to state subsidies is aging, and there are very few individuals who can be promoted to professorship, highlighting the lack of sustainability in the DHET's publishing scheme.

Gender inequality: Black women, you are on your own!

While the number of Black women accessing and completing their degrees at universities has increased since 1994, they still make up a significant portion of those working under extremely precarious conditions in the patriarchal South African academy. A qualitative study conducted by Farmer (2023) revealed that Black women academics enjoy teaching students regardless of their race or religion. The study included 25 participants, ranging from 37 to 45 years old, who held senior, mid, or junior positions in academia. However, those teaching at HWUs often feel undermined by some white students who assume superiority based solely on their skin colour.

Furthermore, those teaching at HWUs are concerned that many of their students are not adequately prepared for university education, leading them to provide extra support on top of their heavy teaching loads. Black academics working in the white male-dominated culture of HWUs are accused of always complaining when they express their concerns and grievances about the racist, patriarchal culture in these institutions. This represents yet another paradox of policy changes that further disadvantages Black women. White women, like white people in general, received financial, infrastructure, and educational support from the apartheid state. However, like Black women, they are classified as the “previously disadvantaged” group, placing them in a similar position. Black women at the historically Black universities feel that young white men always receive support and funding due to their cultural connections with white professors who dominate the academy. Fear of victimisation is prevalent among participants based at HWUs, despite some of these universities being led by Black women and men.

The patriarchal nature of universities and their competitiveness penalise women, particularly Black women, for being pregnant—a natural process essential for the continuation and growth of the human population on Earth. These universities demonstrate a lack of sensitivity towards the experiences of pregnant and breastfeeding women, offering minimal to no support for their needs

(Assata, 2023). Male academics do not experience interruptions in their academic careers due to absence because of childbearing and family responsibilities. In contrast, women who enter academia later in life may have already accumulated 10 years of service by the time they reach their fifties. Conversely, men, especially white men at this age have typically supervised numerous students, published a significant number of works, and are actively engaged in pioneering research. Excellence in academia is largely dependent on time. The longer you engage in research, the greater the impact. Women often lack the resources to seek support or hire domestic help for household chores and childcare. One proposal to address this issue is to allow women academics to retire at a later age than men to accommodate their reproductive responsibilities (UCT, 2002).

Access and funding crisis: Suffer the Black students

Concerns have been raised about the declining state subsidy for universities (Habib, 2019). Even if the system's institutions vary in their reliance on state subsidies, any real reduction in these levels is likely to have disastrous effects. More significantly, any decrease in student funding will lead to a sharp shift in student demographics based on racial and class patterns from the past and present. Furthermore, there's a good chance that this change would lead to noticeably more instability (USAf, 2023).

In 2021, there were nearly 1.3 million students enrolled in public and private higher education institutions (HEIs), with public HEIs accounting for the majority (1,068,046) of enrolments (see Table 1), while private HEIs enrolled 232,915 students. The target in the National Development Plan is to achieve 1.6 million enrolments by 2030. Most students in public HEIs are enrolled through the contact mode (683,885 or 64.0%), while 384,161 or 36.0%, are enrolled through the distance learning mode (DHET, 2023). About 80% of the students enrolled in public HEIs in 2021 were African. The largest portion of students in these institutions was African women (297,812), which accounts for close to 30% of the total number of students (DHET, 2023).

Table 1

Number of students enrolled in public HEIs by population groups, gender, and attendance mode (contact or distance) in 2021 (DHET, 2023, p. 12)

Population Group	Contact			Distance			Total			
	Female	Male	Unsp	Female	Male	Unsp	Female	Male	Unsp	
African	297,812	233,630	79	226,525	91,198	2	524,337	324,828	81	849,246
Coloured	24,897	15,741	21	13,483	5,170	1	38,380	20,911	22	59,313
Indian/Asian	13,783	11,119	7	9,697	4,305	0	23,480	15,424	7	38,911
White	42,222	35,073	65	20,806	10,816	0	63,028	45,889	65	108,982
Unspecified	4,818	4,604	14	1,384	772	2	6,202	5,376	16	11,594
Total	383,532	300,167	186	271,895	112,261	5	655,427	412,428	191	1,068,046

* Unsp means unspecified.

Essop (2020, p. 32), who authored a study that examined the changes in the higher education system between 2005 and 2017, argued:

The introduction of free higher education has removed the burden of funding as a contributing factor to the high drop-out and failure rates, at least for poor and working-class students. However, the real barrier is the under-preparedness of students for higher education. This disproportionately impacts African and Coloured students because of the poor quality of schooling in rural and urban Black township schools.

The lack of preparation for higher education in South Africa is primarily attributed to the poor quality of pre-school, basic education, and high school education. Even if students can gain admission to a university, the support provided by both the state and the university for under-prepared students is severely lacking. The significant reduction in state subsidies and the increase in accessibility have further exacerbated the crisis in university education.

In 2023, the NSFAS provided funding for over 1 million students. The scheme covers tuition and allowances (NSFAS, 2023). However, the scheme encountered difficulties when 31,000 students lost their funding due to allegations of defrauding the system (Moloi, 2023). The accommodation crisis for university students is a major source of concern. Poor and working-class students often have to search for expensive and substandard private accommodation because the university residences are fully occupied. This demonstrates that the system is struggling to handle the large number of students (Mzileni, 2018).

Although access to university education has seen improvements, significant structural hurdles persist. These challenges include accommodation, fees, transportation, food, and a deficiency in academic support. In 2017, South Africa grappled with the highest student dropout rates in the world, with approximately 85% of students being unable to complete their degrees (Weiss, 2017).

Discussion

Acknowledging the transformation of higher education over the past 30 years of democracy, which has welcomed Black people and women historically oppressed by colonialism and confronted with restricted access to higher education, this article highlights emerging trends from efforts to reshape the system. These trends reveal negative aspects that necessitate attention from all stakeholders within the higher education sector. In so doing, our argument while situated within a South African context, raises questions that resonate far beyond—including the tensions between equity and excellence, the co-optation of liberation projects by managerial logics, and the fragile balance between access and quality in higher education systems under strain. This gives the work broader significance for global debates on the future of the university under neoliberal conditions.

Radical reforms need to expose the negative aspects so that corrective measures, such as holding the university leadership, government, students, and unions accountable, can be agreed upon and implemented by all stakeholders. The higher education policy landscape is filled with excellent

progressive policies and yet we know that without implementation, policy is symbolic. We intentionally steer away from making grand policy gestures because university stakeholders must rely on themselves in the short term. We must rely on progressive forces and organisations on the ground to challenge these practices, expose such processes, and consolidate their collective efforts from below. Time to rely on the top and big policy changes that will inform on-the-ground change remains insufficient. Power remains in the hands of our people to challenge, fight, expose corruption, and build systems that safeguard our people from the looting of public resources and enables positive change, historical redress, equity, and inclusion.

We call for all progressive, anti-corrupt citizens, scholars and university leaders and managers to take far greater care when appointing university leadership and members of council. We call for stakeholders to be far more alert to the appointment and performance of council members. We call for national forces who fight against bad leadership and corruption to unite to share information and build anti-corruption systems. And we call for active implementation of policies that bring about deeper transformative institutional changes in governance, funding, precarious Black and women academics, and the future development of the university. Without movement from below, a re-imagination is unlikely to emerge.

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Notes on the authors

Bernadette J. Johnson is Director of the Transformation and Employment Equity Office at University of Witwatersrand and an Associate of the Wits School of Education.

Mondli Hlatshwayo is an associate professor (Worker Education and Labour Studies) at University of Johannesburg.

Address for correspondence

bernadette.johnson@wits.ac.za

Book review

Qili Zhou
Hong Kong University

***Corporal Punishment in Preschool and at Home in Tanzania* by Ruben Sungwa, Liz Jackson, and Joyce Kahembe**

2022, Springer. ISBN: 9789811915710

The book *Corporal Punishment in Preschool and at Home in Tanzania* (Springer) was authored by Ruben Sungwa, Liz Jackson, and Joyce Kahembe in 2022. Inspired by the widespread corporal punishment (CP) against children in Tanzania and around the world, the book discovers the diverse attitudes, invisible factors (e.g. cultural traditions, teacher qualification) and visible factors (e.g. laws, policies, implementations) behind this issue. I would like to discuss what I liked and what I wished about the book.

Firstly, I liked how the authors linked Tanzania's situation to the African continent and other continents such as Asia and North America. On Page 3, they describe how CP is deemed normal and acceptable in many places outside Tanzania, partly due to the German and British colonists, who spread the practice across the world. This gives readers the view that CP is a result of many cross-cultural elements such as global (mis)understanding of CP's benefits. Therefore, it is hard to look at CP as something that only some less developed countries practise—it is common across the world. On Page 4, the authors note that CP is still practised in Tanzania despite having ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991.

Secondly, I was very thankful for how the authors delved deep into how, within the same faith traditions, people could have different approaches or interpretations. On Pages 28–29, they explain that while CP is justified by some religious theories, it is also against other aspects or theories within the same religious texts or world religions in general. For example, “rod” actually means “shepherding,” which is non-violent and harmless. Therefore, interpretation of the scripture is key to application of that scripture. Unfortunately, religion has often been misapplied in the case of CP and other punitive actions.

Thirdly, I appreciate how the authors repeatedly pointed out the discrepancy between regulations and practices in reality. On Page 42, they mention that despite amendments to the Corporal

Punishment Regulations in Tanzania in 2000, in practice, teachers still use more than the legal maximum number of strokes (of a cane). Indeed, the President championed CP due to his own experience of benefiting from caning (p. 46), which adds to the power of CP, rather than to its prevention. On Page 63, the confession by a mother further explained why it is hard to stop CP in practice. She attributed the reason for CP to the fact that she herself lacked parenting experience. Page 66 further explains that women find it difficult to report their victimisation due to a fear of retribution from their husband, therefore, such fear can also spread to child victims. Finally, on Page 69, parents simply reported a lack of awareness regarding relevant laws against CP.

What I wished to read more of in this book is first of all, the stories of survivors. I wanted to know how they overcame their traumas or processed their pain. It would be helpful for the readers to learn that too. Secondly, given that the authors talked about intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic motivation on Page 69, it would be interesting to expand on that theme. For example, has there been any research done on the topic? What are the discussions and results? If intrinsic motivation is really what is needed to stop CP, to what extent can Tanzanian parents and teachers help implement that?

Notes on the author

Qili Zhou is a research assistant in the School of Social Work and Social Administration of Hong Kong University, Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, China.

Address for correspondence

rzhou2174@gmail.com

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Guidelines to contributors

Peer review process

- All manuscripts are blind reviewed by three external reviewers.
- All manuscripts must follow the Author Guidelines for publication in SARE as set out on the website ([Author Guidelines](#)).
- All must be edited and conform to a high quality of composition and rigour, including language, APA style, and grammar.
- A letter from a professional proofreader must be submitted along with the manuscript.
- A separate document containing author details must accompany submitted work to facilitate the blind review. The reviewers only receive the manuscript and not the author page.

Journal focus

SARE welcomes manuscripts that are highly readable and captivating, providing critical insight and discussion of education in the Southern Africa region from a variety of disciplinary perspectives.

Given that SARE covers the Southern Africa region with a keen focus on comparative education, education policy, and sociology and history of education, there are a few criteria that should be met if authors seek to publish their work in the journal. The following are guidelines we provide to all reviewers of the submitted manuscripts:

- Does the article have a regional or South African context dimension?
- Does the article have a comparative or historical dimension? Although this is not compulsory, it is preferred.
- Does the article have a global comparative dimension in the area of comparative, and history of, education? Again, not compulsory but preferred.
- Is the submission original and its contribution novel for the SARE audience/readership?
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- Resubmit for Review: The article cannot be accepted in its current form because major revisions are needed. In this case, the resubmitted article will either be returned (once revised) to the original reviewer, or subjected to a completely new review.

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Acting Editor-in-Chief is Charl C. Wolhuter (NWU), assisted by an editorial collective comprising of:

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- SARE has no institutional location, and is managed by email. Manuscripts can be submitted for consideration to sare@saches.co.za.
- Article Processing Fees (APC) is R3,500 per published article. Authors will be invoiced on acceptance of the article.

Author guidelines

Author Guidelines Southern African Review of Education (SARE) is the journal of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES). It was previously published together with Education with Production (EWP), the journal of the Foundation for Education with Production. SARE will appear at least once a year. Contributors are welcome to submit articles on educational issues with specific reference to educational policy, comparative education, sociology of education, history of education, and education with production. Beginning with Volume 5 in 1999, articles submitted will be anonymously refereed. Articles are accepted on the understanding that they have not been published or submitted for publication elsewhere. Articles or review essays should be between 5,000 and 7,000 words (inclusive of references) and may include maps, figures, and tables. Reports on research, book reviews, and critical comments should be limited to 2,000 words. Contributions should be submitted electronically. All pages should be numbered. Authors should not use programs like EndNotes to generate lists of references automatically because these do not transfer for typesetting purposes. The manuscript should be submitted bearing the title of the paper and an abstract of 200–300 words together with 4–6 keywords on a separate page. Maps, figures, tables, and illustrations should be supplied on separate pages and not included as part of the text. Their approximate position in the text should be indicated. Maps, figures, and illustrations should also be provided as separate electronic files (jpg) with a resolution of at least 300 dpi. The title of the contribution and the names and addresses of authors should be provided on a separate page. The address of the author who will handle correspondence should be clearly indicated. Telephone and email addresses for the authors should be submitted as well. Authors should supply brief biographical material for the “Notes on the author.” In a covering letter, the authors must state that the contribution has not been published, is not being published or considered for publication elsewhere, and will not be submitted for publication unless rejected by the editorial board of SARE or withdrawn by the authors.

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Calls for papers

Special Edition: Call for papers SARE Volume 30 Number 2

SARE call for papers on History of Education in Southern Africa

Guest editors

Charl Wolhuter

Call for papers

The *Southern Africa Review of Education* seeks original empirically grounded or theoretical manuscripts on the theme, *Rural Education*

A statement of the problem

Since the founding of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (SACHES) 33 years ago, in 1991, and the founding of its journal in the Southern African Review of Education almost thirty years ago, equal education opportunities have been front and centre. While the trinity of inequality, that is socio-economic descent (class), gender and race/ethnicity have received much attention, one other dimension of inequality, namely rural-urban inequality has been neglected. While the education system of China is customarily in Comparative Education take as the textbook example of urban-rural inequality in education, urban-rural disparities in education is universal. In the Southern African region too urban-rural inequalities in education, as well as the contextual ecologies of rural areas and the implications thereof for education, have not come to its right in the Comparative Education research agenda. Therefore, manuscripts for this Special Issue are invited. While manuscripts focusing on Southern Africa would be very welcome, so would manuscripts be dealing with theoretical-conceptual issues, as well as manuscripts focusing on rural-urban disparities in other parts of the world, especially Africa and other parts of the Global South.

For enquiries and submission of manuscripts, please write to Professor C.C. Wolhuter: Charl.Wolhuter@nwu.ac.za

Journal description

The Southern African Review of Education (SARE), incorporating Education with Production (EWP), is a peer-reviewed journal serving as a forum for critical discussions of education in the Southern African region from various disciplinary perspectives, for the dissemination of contemporary research, and for reflections on education. It has a broad, cross-disciplinary audience of scholars, researchers, and practitioners in the field of education. (<https://www.saches.co.za/sarejournal/>)

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Timeline

Deadline for full paper submissions	31 August 2025
Articles returned from peer-reviewers	30 September 2025
Authors to submit final paper with changes	31 October 2025
Anticipated publication date	December 2025

**SACHES**

Annual Conference 2025

Third Call for Abstracts

Date

Friday, 15 to Sunday, 17 August 2025

Theme

***Adapting to Digital Transformations in Higher Education:
Distress or/and Progress?***

Venue

***Ohana Umhlali at Umhlali Country Club
Balito, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa***

Keynote Speaker

Prof Aslam Fataar

Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Prof Reuben Dlamini

University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa

**Deadline for Abstract Submissions:
Sunday 6 July 2025**

The landscape of higher education is evolving at an unprecedented rate, driven by the rapid advancement of digital technologies. This transformation presents both opportunities and challenges for educators, researchers, students, and institutions. As we navigate this digital revolution, it is crucial to understand and unpack the complexities that come with that. It is essential to explore whether and to what extent the digital adaptation serves as, transforms us, empowers us, overwhelms us, challenges us, divides us, connects us and/or all of the above.

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SACHES Membership Form

SACHES**Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society**

Jo-Anne Koch

E-mail: joanne.adams@saches.co.za

Tel: +27 84 929 0170

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