

INTERNATIONAL HIGHER EDUCATION

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Editorial: Authoritarian Threats to Higher Education Require a Response

Philip G. Altbach and Gerardo Blanco

Universities everywhere are in crisis. Fiscal difficulties, the challenges of artificial intelligence, declines (or unanticipated spikes) in enrollment, and the problems of recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic are among these crises. There is a new set of serious challenges that, with some exceptions, university leaders worldwide have been largely silent about. Our argument is that this new set of challenges requires the attention and courage of university leaders. Of course, speaking out comes with, in some places and circumstances, considerable risk—losing one’s job or perhaps worse.

Examples, unfortunately, abound. In the United States, populist right-wing Florida governor Ron DeSantis is literally reshaping the public higher education system in the country’s third largest state by appointing politically connected presidents, firing boards of trustees, and signing legislation that blocked courses and programs that cover systemic racism and privilege. None of the presidents of Florida’s 40 public colleges and universities have spoken out against these actions. Similarly, almost all of the rectors of Russia’s universities signed a letter of support for the Ukraine war—none protested. In that case, opposition would have meant immediate loss of job and perhaps much worse.

For the past decade, Hungary’s universities have been stripped of autonomy and academic freedom by Victor Orbán, and in Turkey, 15 universities have been shut down for alleged ties to a failed coup against Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. In India, prime minister Modi’s government has curbed academic freedom and appointed leaders who are supportive of his populist-nationalist agenda. In 2021, the state government in Puebla, Mexico, ruled by the left-leaning MORENA party, the same as the country’s president, seized a private university called the Universidad de las Américas. Many Mexican public universities have also seen their budgets slashed by state and federal governments. The Jesuit-run Central American University (UCA) in Nicaragua was considered one of the top universities in Central America but had been critical of the authoritarian government of president Daniel Ortega. Ortega accused the university of being a “center of terrorism,” and the government confiscated its property, buildings, and bank accounts. Since 2018, over 26 universities have been closed in Nicaragua in a similar manner.

Academic leadership concerning these existential threats is crucial, but how to exercise such leadership is much more complicated. As these and many other examples illustrate, attacks against universities are not exclusive of any ideological or political doctrine. Conservative and populist regimes on both the left and the right have targeted universities, accusing them of elitism, terrorism, or indoctrination. Thus far, reactions have been measured and oriented to appeasing these regimes to avoid further escalation. While the potential for personal and institutional reprisals is real, academic leaders need to account for the risk of silence or inaction. Academic leaders will need courage and coordination, and will need to act in solidarity with other institutions—or they will risk their universities becoming the next victim when it might be too late to take action.

Abstract

The 2023 Nobel cohort in the sciences shows little change from recent years, skewed towards Western university-affiliated researchers, dominated by the United States. This year's prizewinners have partially internationalized career trajectories, and all have had affiliations external to the traditional university. The case of Katalin Karikó emphasizes how ongoing challenges in the university environment, particularly gender bias, threaten such groundbreaking academic research, and may push imaginative scientists to find more welcoming homes outside the university.

Eight of the nine prizewinners are affiliated with Western universities—six in the United States.

The 2023 Nobels: What They Mean for Higher Education

Philip G. Altbach and Tessa DeLaquil

What are the big takeaways from the 2023 Nobels in the sciences? There are several clear lessons with relevance to higher education. While the world has been awaiting the rise especially of Asia to the heights of global science, there is no sign of this diversification in the 2023 Nobels. Eight of the nine prizewinners are affiliated with Western universities—six in the United States. The ninth, Alexei Ekimov, joint winner of the chemistry prize, is chief scientist at a private company in New York. The prizewinners, as in years past, were educated in a variety of Western countries—though it seems to be a bumper year for Eastern Europe with two educated in Hungary, and one educated in the former Soviet Union. A majority have worked at institutions in a variety of countries over the course of their careers (including Austria, Canada, France, Germany, Hungary, the Netherlands, Russia, South Korea, Sweden, and the United States)—thus showing again that science remains international and internationalized, though skewed towards a typical subset of wealthy, Western countries.

And unusually (though perhaps unsurprisingly), one of this year's winners, Katalin Karikó's career shows the explicit impact of sexism and the challenges of working on non-mainstream ideas in the pursuit of Nobel-worthy research.

Science Remains Partially International

While the 2023 Nobelists are mostly located in the United States, their scientific and academic careers, similar to trends in recent years, have been remarkably international. They were born in five different countries—three in the United States, two in France, two in Hungary, one in Tunisia, and one in the former Soviet Union. The group received their bachelor degrees in four different countries, and doctorates in five.

As might be expected, this distinguished cohort has held academic and scientific positions in at least 10 countries and has been quite mobile over their careers. France has hosted four of the nine at academic institutions over the course of their educational and professional journeys, and Germany has hosted five of the nine either within academic or corporate positions, at universities, research institutes, and a biotechnology company. However, the United States remains the country with the most present affiliations, and features in the career trajectories of eight of the nine winners as we discuss further below.

The Continuing Domination of the West, and Especially of the United States

All but two of the 2023 Nobelists work in the United States, with one having joint US and Hungarian affiliation (since 2021), while only three were born in the United States, and four received their doctorates in the United States. The non-Western world appears to be absent from the careers of most of this year's Nobelists—with no mentions of affiliations, postdocs, visiting professorships or other relationships with institutions elsewhere—with one exception of a guest professorship in South Korea.

The 2023 class has a variety of affiliations and experience in continental Europe, with Germany, Sweden, and Hungary featuring in the present affiliations of three, and with many having had experience elsewhere in Europe, France and Germany being popular destinations, but, perhaps unexpectedly, the United Kingdom entirely absent.

The American domination of the Nobel world is not new although it is particularly pronounced this year. This is not surprising. The United States accounts for 28 percent of the world's research and development expenditures (China is second at 22 percent, though unrepresented in this year's Nobels). Academic salaries for top research professors at

highly ranked institutions in the United States may be among the highest in the world, particularly in STEM fields, and the country's top universities can provide both the resources and the autonomy necessary for the best research of this kind. Whether science and universities from the United States will retain dominance is questionable. The internal pressures on academic life in the United States combined with the impressive development of research capacity elsewhere may lead to a more equal global scientific community in the future. But for the moment, the United States and the West remain at the top of global science as represented by the capture of Nobels and Nobel winners.

The Strange Case of Katalin Karikó

Dr. Karikó, joint winner of the physiology/medicine award, has received much comment in the media. Born and educated in Hungary, she has spent most of her career in the United States, but has also held appointments in three countries at a variety of institutions, and has most recently been senior vice president at BioNTech, a biotech company in Germany.

The debate stems from her time at the University of Pennsylvania, where she worked from 1989 to 2001, at positions ranging from scientific assistant professor, to senior head of research, to adjunct associate professor. During that period, she was demoted from a tenure-track position in 1995, refused the possibility of reinstatement to the tenure track, and eventually ushered into retirement in 2013. Meanwhile, her close collaborator and fellow prizewinner, Dr. Drew Weissman, whom she met in 1997, remains at the University of Pennsylvania as professor of medicine, as well as codirector of the immunology core of the Penn Center for AIDS Research, and director of vaccine research in the Infectious Diseases Division.

Some have pointed out that Karikó was working on risky or unconventional scientific themes, and that the usual funding agencies and senior academics were unable to see the promise in her work until recently, when she and her colleague Weissman have been the recipients of multiple prizes. The fact that she received her doctorate from Szeged University in Hungary and not a prestigious institution in a major country may not have helped. Others have pointed to this as a clear-cut case of gender discrimination, as her research was unacknowledged by the University of Pennsylvania, though the institution unabashedly claimed her Nobel win on social media. The fact that her career was significantly more difficult than most Nobel winners suggests that the scientific community should at the very least examine how it evaluates innovative but exploratory scientific ideas and reserve funding and support for such groundbreaking basic research. And, of course, gender bias, still prevalent in academe and elsewhere, must be eliminated.

Basic Science is Not Just in Traditional Academe

All of this year's winners have spent some time in nonacademic settings. Of the three chemistry prizewinners, two have spent time at Bell Labs, though currently holding academic affiliations, while the third, Alexei Ekimov, is at Nanocrystals Technology—all within the United States context. Karikó moved to BioNTech in Germany to continue her research unsupported by academia. A number have spent time at research institutes, some nationally funded and others independently supported as nonprofits: the Max Born and Max Planck Institutes and the Institute of Labor Economics in Germany; the Center for Molecular Fingerprinting Research and the Biological Research Center at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences; the Foundation for Fundamental Research on Matter (FOM) in the Netherlands; Vavilov State Optical Institute in the former Soviet Union; and the Brookhaven and Lawrence Livermore National Laboratories and the National Institutes of Health in the United States.

Conclusion

Nobel prizes are of course given for scientific accomplishments often achieved decades ago, although the various award committees stress the contemporary relevance of the work done. Nobel prizes seek to link basic research to applied and practical results—ideas and innovations that may take decades to percolate to fruition. But they remind us that basic research is fundamental to science and to both understanding and practical results. Furthermore, the Nobels show that the institutional environment is

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of fundamental importance. Funding, awarded on a meritocratic (and hopefully imaginative) basis is central. Although, the case of Karikó points to the realities of discrimination within the institutionalized research system (as the Nobel-winning research of Claudia Goldin underscores), and the alternative pathways that unsupported scientists seek to pursue research of this caliber. Universities or other scientific institutions that respect academic freedom, encourage independent work and collegiality, have adequate funding, and that have autonomy in their academic governance are necessary homes for the best science and scholarship. If academia fails to be the home for this kind of research, researchers may be drawn to those who will provide a home outside of the university. ▲

In Praise of Incremental Innovation in Higher Education

Carlos Iván Moreno

A few months ago, at an international conference, a fellow panelist—and president of a small and innovative university—claimed that “innovation is not enough for universities anymore, they have to be disruptive to survive.” Increasingly, international conferences on higher education are dominated by the hype of disruption. Sounds good. But is it really plausible? What is wrong with traditional, incremental innovation?

Over the past decades, innovation has become a mantra in higher education. It has been recited for years by scholars and organizations alike, stressing that, if absent, universities will fail to meet the demands for quality and equity. Innovation and quality are intertwined concepts, and especially in the postpandemic age, universities around the globe are confronted with the necessity to change and adapt. It is unarguable that innovation of pedagogical approaches, modes of delivery, and flexibility are essential to counter the effects of the dramatic transformation driven by the forces of globalization, technological advancements, and changing student needs and expectations.

In a Brave New World, Is Incremental Innovation Not Good Enough?

The pressure for universities to adapt and change has intensified as they have to educate students with diverse aims and needs. In addition to the challenges that have forced universities to innovate in the past, new forces arise and whose effect upon higher education promises to be profound. One of these forces is the increasing popularity of e-learning providers, short courses and microcredentials (competency-based certification that demonstrate mastery in a particular area), as they provide learners and potential employees with a wealth of knowledge in a specific field, and in a shorter period of time, compared to traditional and formal higher education programs.

For example, from 2011 to 2021, the number of students enrolled in massive open online courses (MOOC) globally grew from 300,000 to 220 million. In Mexico, there are currently 5.7 million learners enrolled in an online course at Coursera; this is more than the formal enrollment in higher education, which reached five million. This evidence suggests the tremendous market value that e-learning has gained, but more importantly, the need for traditional models of delivering higher education to evolve in order to provide more flexible learning experiences.

The impact of automation on the future of jobs adds to the forces that place great pressure upon universities. It is estimated that 30 percent to 60 percent of the professional

Abstract

Disruption seems to be the new name of the game in higher education. As everything has to be “disruptive” in order to be valuable, we risk losing sight of the importance of traditional incremental innovation, especially in macrouniversities. There is no doubt that higher education institutions around the globe have to continually change and adapt but is it really possible, or even desirable, for all institutions to adopt a disruptive approach?

activities can be automated, and that 65 percent of the population currently age 12 or less will perform tasks that do not even exist yet. Universities, especially in Latin America, will have to create new undergraduate and graduate programs to provide students with the opportunity to thrive in the coming future. Curricular innovation will have to include programs related, among other things, to generative artificial intelligence, the internet of things, cybersecurity, city sciences or biotechnology.

Furthermore, addressing the evolving educational landscape will require a pedagogical transformation of traditional lectures. As noted in a 2021 survey administered by the Inter-American Development Bank, higher education institutions in the region know that “hybrid” and online learning will be critical to the future. According to this study, up to 80 percent of faculty members agreed that the adoption of a hybrid learning model in higher education is irreversible. Students think the same way: only 29 percent think that their educational program should be delivered only or mostly in-person. Moreover, innovation in higher education needs to reflect an interdisciplinary approach and the practical application of what is learnt in the classroom to solve social problems.

I argue that these and other *external* disruptive forces should be addressed in existing universities by traditional and incremental innovation approaches, not by a narrative of *internal* organizational disruption.

Innovate, Do Not Disrupt

If in the past universities lived under the mantra of innovation, they now seem to live under the tyranny of disruption. To address some of the aforementioned challenges, traditional universities need to continue innovating, incrementally and carefully, not falling prey to the disruptive fad. For the sake of clarity and the correct use of language, let us remember that innovation refers “to something new or to a change made to an existing product, idea, or field” (Merriam-Webster), while *disruptive* means “causing trouble and therefore stopping something from continuing as usual” or “tending to damage the orderly control of a situation” (Cambridge Dictionary).

Regardless of universities’ mission, size, or their institutional model, demographic, social and technological forces exert a great deal of pressure upon universities to change and “to improve products and ideas,” to innovate. However, universities should be very careful when attempting to “damage the orderly control of a situation” by being disruptive. As much as we praise change, we also need to value universities’ stability. There is one harsh—and obvious—truth: without organizational stability a university cannot innovate, let alone be disruptive.

Context and size matter. Institutions like the National Autonomous University of Mexico, with a student population of 373,000 and 42,000 faculty members, or the University of Guadalajara with 329,000 students and around 18,000 faculty members, and many other macrouniversities in Latin America find themselves at a complex balance between stability and change. They could not be disruptive without destabilizing their internal governance. Instead, macrouniversities have to innovate incrementally, promoting a series of small—preferably structural—improvements and nondisruptive changes in their teaching methodologies, educational delivery models, and organizational structures.

Unlike disruptive innovations, which create entirely new paradigms often introduced by new players, incremental innovation builds upon existing foundations, enhancing its efficiency and effectiveness, while maintaining stability. There is no doubt that continuing innovation is key to the long-term relevance of universities, but to claim that “success” relies solely upon their capacity to be disruptive is misleading. Incremental innovation is not only beneficial, but may be the only path for change at established universities.

Be Suspicious

University executives and “management gurus” alike should embrace incremental innovation, especially when steering institutions in the right direction. As scholars of higher education, we should be suspicious of those for whom the only way to improve universities is to disrupt them. Let us not forget that, while MOOC providers are in the business of *training*, universities are in the business of *comprehensive education*, and have been so for a millennium already.

If in the past universities lived under the mantra of innovation, they now seem to live under the tyranny of disruption.

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I agree with Lawrence Summers, president emeritus of Harvard University, who warned of the calls for rapid change in higher education, since “not all that universities do needs to change,” nor does it have to be fast adapting to the newest productivity fad. To improve higher education, it is important to demystify the narrative of disruption.

Rethinking International Flows of Aid to Higher Education

Lee Rensimer and Tristan McCowan

Abstract

Higher education has resurfaced as a key pillar for delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and tackling global challenges; however, international support to higher education systems and students in low- and lower middle-income countries remains misunderstood and poorly documented. With a marked increase in unreported funding from emerging donors, self-serving “aid,” and SDG-linked research funding vehicles, we argue it is time to rethink what counts as international aid to higher education.

Given the importance of higher education and the relatively large body of scholarship on aid to basic education, research on, and consequently our knowledge of aid to higher education, is surprisingly limited.

Recent decades have witnessed the rising significance of higher education in fulfilling the SDGs and addressing persisting global challenges. Unlike basic education, universities have broad institutional functions: teaching and learning, basic research, innovation and community engagement, in addition to provision of other services such as hospitals, professional training and consultancy, delivering a range of public and private goods which directly or indirectly contribute to the SDGs. However, higher education systems in most low- and lower middle-income countries are persistently underfunded, especially in light of structural adjustment agreements, and struggle to retain their PhDs, impeding fulfillment of higher education’s rich array of functions. While the importance of higher education can be seen in the evolving discourse of key multilateral agencies over the past two decades, funding for higher education coming from these agencies and bilateral donors has decreased as a proportion of total official development assistance (ODA) since 2002, despite the steady increase in aid to higher education in absolute terms. The majority of this aid is also directed to countries with well-developed higher education systems rather than those with the most precarious infrastructure, and widely targets individuals through international scholarships and training over institutions and systems.

Given the importance of higher education and the relatively large body of scholarship on aid to basic education, research on, and consequently our knowledge of aid to higher education, is surprisingly limited. Scarce literature on international aid to higher education offers analyses of specific programs, critical commentaries on the roles of international organizations, and some evaluations of aid effectiveness and impact. Last year saw the release of a flagship publication by UNESCO’s International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, which attempted to take stock of global flows of aid to higher education. It identified important trends and confirmed those of previous studies: i.e., that aid to higher education is fragmented, oriented towards middle-income countries and, for many donors, heavily concentrated in international scholarships to individuals. For us, however, the crux of the matter is rather the data themselves used to produce most studies on aid: the OECD’s Creditor Reporting System. These data, as we argue in a [recent paper](#), form only a small part of the aid picture, and worse, present a potentially misleading one. Part of the problem with OECD data is its internal validity, as donor agencies self-report their aid activities in often inconsistent ways. The bigger issue—and where a rethinking of what counts as aid to higher education is most needed—are the multiple changes in the aid landscape over recent decades.

New Donor Actors

Part of this changing landscape is the emergence of new donor actors engaging in international support to higher education, including private philanthropic foundations and recently industrialized countries. Private development finance to higher education is steadily rising, led by Mastercard, Open Societies, Carnegie, and Conrad Hilton Foundations, among others. Philanthropic flows from these actors concentrate on increasing access and quality in higher education in low- and lower middle-income countries through domestic scholarships, financial support, and program enhancement activities. Bilateral aid from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) and other emerging economies is also on the rise, marking their shift from aid recipients to donors. In some cases, countries remain both with respect to higher education aid. Similar to the aid coming from the Arabian Gulf states and other countries outside of the OECD, their support for higher education is primarily international scholarships and maintenance grants to study in the donor country. The geopolitics of these flows are evident in their strategic choices of recipient partners, as has long been the case with traditional donors.

What distinguishes these flows from those of traditional donors is their visibility and form. While bilateral donors within the OECD are required to report their aid activities following a transparency framework, new donors may opt in (in the geopolitical interest of transparency and cooperation) but have no obligation to do so. Philanthropic foundations, similarly, do so where there is capacity, making contributions from only the largest private organizations visible and enumerable to the OECD. With both groups of donor actors steadily increasing their support to higher education, the gap between the OECD dataset and reality grows, critically impairing the singular and most heavily used source of data on international aid. Further complicating the matter is the dataset's somewhat rigid and outdated classifications of aid which are incompatible with some of the nuances of South-South cooperation and East-South foreign investment. Some flows from new donors, including complex loan packages from China to Africa or transnational higher education initiatives between Brazil and the Lusophone South, defy traditional classification. Most of these flows do not appear in OECD data, and must therefore be pieced together through investigative documentary research (by organizations like [AidData.org](https://aiddata.org)), producing at best a patchy mosaic of financial flows loosely conforming to our understanding of "aid."

New Forms of Aid

Inversely, however, the transparency of activity reported to the OECD by traditional donors does not necessarily equate with substantive support. The majority of higher education aid from many of the largest OECD donors, including Germany, France, Japan, Austria and the United Kingdom, goes to their own international scholarship schemes which effectively funds their own universities and economies. Higher education research funding is also increasingly packaged as aid and counted against national ODA commitments, using complex vehicles like the United Kingdom's Global Challenges Research Fund and Newton Fund to foster partnerships between British and international universities and researchers. Like scholarships, much of this funding is self-serving, staying onshore and fueling domestic research with aid money.

While donors classify scholarships as aid to higher education, ODA-funded research is typically classified variously by its targeted sectors. Nevertheless, this form of research funding commonly involves, trains or enhances academics and universities in the Global South, operating as an indirect form of aid to higher education. As these vast sums are not reflected in conventional indicators of higher education aid, we argue that this aid *through* higher education is equally important to understand the bigger picture of flows of aid to higher education.

Such developments prompt necessary and critical questions of what counts as aid and who exactly is being aided. In the wider practices of international aid, these are certainly not new critiques. What they do enable, however, is fertile ground for rethinking how we classify and quantify aid to higher education, taking into consideration its impact on the capacities of higher education systems and academics. How this is realized in practice is an altogether different challenge, but preceding it is the necessary taking stock of the available data and its critical omissions. ▲

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A Publisher, a Citation Index, and an Unequal Global Research Economy

David Mills

Abstract

The roots of today's unequal global science communication system trace back to the aftermath of World War II. US government funding for basic research generated a flood of scientific papers, opening up opportunities for commercial publishers. New information management tools were created, including the first scientific citation index. Commercial publishing infrastructures became a foundation for the globalization of higher education and research. A more equitable future depends on a different model of ownership and control.

Today most science communication is mediated by the data and publishing infrastructures owned by commercial publishers and data analytics companies.

Today most science communication is mediated by the data and publishing infrastructures owned by commercial publishers and data analytics companies. Why is this a problem for the world's universities? Because government and research funding pays for journal subscriptions, data services, and author processing charges, and these costs continue to increase. To understand the role that universities have played in shaping this system, one has to return to the entrepreneurial ambitions of Robert Maxwell and Eugene Garfield. Both set up companies in the early 1950s that reshaped academic publishing and the global circulation of scientific knowledge. Despite being bitter business rivals, their fortunes were intertwined.

The end of World War II saw a massive increase in government funding for research. Maxwell, a wartime refugee from Czechoslovakia, fought for the British Army, and then was employed as a military intelligence officer in Berlin. Making the most of his business savvy, he helped the German publishing house Springer relaunch, shipping a consignment of journals to Britain under cover. In 1951, he bought the UK distribution rights for six science journals and two textbook series, marking the launch of Pergamon Press. Within a decade, Pergamon was distributing 59 scientific journals and rapidly expanding. Seeking out high-profile scientists and gaining their trust, Maxwell helped them launch prestigious journals in emerging scientific fields. Doubling the company in size every few years, Maxwell realized just how profitable scientific publishing could be, and that there were seemingly no limits to the possibilities for expansion. While some were skeptical about the commercialization of publishing, Maxwell's academic editors made the most of the editorial freedom and technical efficiency Pergamon promised, speeding up publication cycles, attracting ever more submissions and subscriptions. They were wooed with generous editorial fees, extravagant parties, and travel allowances. In return, these editors remained loyal to Maxwell, and helped ensure his return to Pergamon five years after he lost control in a takeover battle. While Maxwell's reputation was later trounced by his fraudulent use of the Mirror newspaper pension funds, Pergamon forever rewrote the rules of scientific publishing, making it a globally profitable business.

What Difference Does an Index Make?

This rapid expansion of scientific knowledge production, partly driven by the commercial ambitions of Pergamon and Elsevier, created a new problem: managing the concomitant increase in information flow. Eugene Garfield, self-styled "information scientist," came up with influential solutions. His first solution was called *Current Contents*, a subscription service based on photocopying and collating journal contents' pages, helping people keep up with the latest research in their field. Its commercial success led him to establish his "Institute for Scientific Information" (ISI). With the help of United States Air Force funding, in 1963 he launched the first Science Citation Index (SCI), a database of all the citations from 560 of what he defined as the most important "core" scientific journals. 70 percent of these journals were published in the United States or United Kingdom, and nearly all the rest were from Europe. It was a US-centric view of global science publishing, dominated by the commercial publishers and their subscription income. Only 7 percent of the indexed journals were published in Germany, despite its prewar scientific dominance. No African journals were indexed, and only two from China. The index grew rapidly. By 1968 it covered 2000 journals, a number that doubled

again by 1979, but the academic geography of a Euro-American publishing economy remained hard-wired into the index.

The index began to define “reputable” academic knowledge. Inclusion mattered, and commercial publishers were best placed to meet the technical thresholds and pay the requisite subscription fees. Like Maxwell, Garfield was skillful at public relations and marketing, promoting sales of SCI and other ISI services across the world, including in the Soviet Union. Attempts to question the index’s coverage, such as statistical evidence of SCI’s discrimination against “Third-World” journals, led to strong ripostes by Garfield.

As Robert Merton predicted, the index’s measures became targets. Universities, academics and publishers began to use the index to compete. Citation data allowed users to rank researchers on their citations and journals on their “impact factor.” Garfield had created the tools for academic game-playing and institutional performativity.

For many years the index was subsidized by income from *Current Contents*. One obituarist described Garfield, who died in 2017, as “visionary” rather than “book-keeper.” With digitization its full commercial potential was realized. The first global university rankings in the early 2000s used SCI citation data to assess academics. Increasingly journal meta-data (such as citations) are a key source of revenue for companies such as Elsevier, which set up a rival index (Scopus) in 2004. In 2011, Thompson sold Garfield’s original business for USD 3.5 billion to Clarivate.

What Does the Future Hold?

70 years since Maxwell founded Pergamon, academic journal publishing has been transformed into a profitable global industry. Increasingly, data analytics are more profitable than journal publishing. Today, scholarly reputation and status is measured by journal rankings, “impact factors” and “h-indexes.” The power of the citation indexes has been amplified by digitization and financial investment, inevitably prioritizing Euro-American academic networks and commercial interests.

Despite calls to decolonize open access and promote what independent publishers call bibliodiversity, the two commercial citation indexes cast a long shadow across academic publishing in the Global South. Non-Anglophone and regional journals are rendered invisible by exclusion from these citation indexes, reinforcing the stratification of academic geographies, and undermining long-established regional knowledge ecosystems. Unindexed journals face constant questions about their legitimacy across most of the non-Anglophone world.

European advocates of “diamond” open access envision a more equitable global research system built on community-owned publishing infrastructures and technical standards. Yet a “diamond” open access publishing model that is free to author and reader needs significant investment and in-kind support. If this vision is to travel beyond well-resourced European universities, governments and higher education systems across the globe will need to fund the necessary research infrastructures. There is a lot to do to unmake the world created by Maxwell and Garfield. ▲

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Abstract

After *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard* (2023), people are likely to think race is scrubbed from college admissions processes. This interpretation is a misunderstanding of the new legal reality in the United States. We offer two sources of hope outlining the path forward for educational leaders, parents, and students.

To believe applicants' race can no longer be a part of college admissions processes is a misconstrual of the new legal reality in the United States.

The Use of Race in US Admissions is Not Over, Unless We Let It

Raquel Muñiz and Andrés Castro Samayoa

People in and outside of the United States are likely to think race has now been scrubbed from admissions processes at colleges and universities. University presidents, newspaper headlines, and political pundits alike framed the ruling that admissions policies at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina violate the principles of the Fourteenth Amendment as the (unsurprising) death of affirmative action policies at the hands of a conservative-leaning United States Supreme Court.

Historical and National Context

To believe applicants' race can no longer be a part of college admissions processes is a misconstrual of the new legal reality in the United States. Further, it is a misunderstanding of the practice of race-conscious admissions policies, originally a deliberate remedy addressing decades of racial discrimination. The use of race in college admissions sprung into United States higher education by the promise of the United States Supreme Court's precedent in their 1954 landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The case asserted that racially segregated schools were inherently unequal and violated the equal protection clause of the United States Constitution's Fourteenth Amendment.

Purposeful efforts to racially integrate schools were eroded through subsequent cases that stripped the original intent and spirit of *Brown v. Board of Education*, relegating the use of race in college admissions to a narrow window—used only to advance broad notions of diversity, requiring institutions to strive for “race-neutral” approaches, and leaving white women as the greatest beneficiaries of affirmative action policies. Despite the erosion, scholars have found that the intentional use of race in admissions is the most effective method to advance racial diversity in college admissions, and that other efforts, such as lotteries or substituting the use of race with socioeconomic status, are not as effective.

However, conservative activists rejoicing in the recent United States Supreme Court ruling rely upon the public's superficial understanding of race-conscious admissions specifically—and affirmative action policies more broadly—to spread the misinformed idea that using race in admissions is now wholly unconstitutional. This approach also instigates a dangerous ripple effect across a range of educational activities beyond selective college admissions, which started shortly after the issuance of the court's decision, such as Missouri's attorney general's guidance to the state's public institutions to “immediately cease their practice of using race-based standards to make decisions about things like admission, scholarships, programs and employment.”

Proclamations that “affirmative action is over” in the United States betrays the reality that there are, in fact, paths forward to ensure students' racial identities are erased neither from colleges' admissions processes nor institutions' broader efforts to achieve racial equality and diversity in the United States.

We offer two sources of hope that sketch the path forward for educational leaders, parents, and students to better understand the new terms of engagement set forth by the court's decision.

The Court's Opinion is Narrow

An expansive, and warranted, interpretation of the court's ruling is that the decision itself is narrow in scope. From the onset, the court frames the problem before it as one solely concerning admissions by relying extensively on the use of the word *applicant*

throughout its opinion and repeatedly discussing the court's view that *college admissions* are zero-sum. The majority opinion is focused on this narrow problem throughout and deviates only to inform this very issue regarding admissions.

This leaves open the door for higher education institutions to be less directly affected by this ruling regarding other race-conscious policies in higher education. Efforts such as targeted recruitment programs to increase the racial diversity in institutions' applicant pools and other programmatic interventions supporting students of color while in college remain unaffected. However, these other efforts will require institutions to allocate and expend substantial resources.

Race Can Still Be Considered in Admissions

The court explicitly notes that "nothing prohibits universities from an applicant's discussion of how race affected the applicant's life, so long as that discussion is concretely tied to a quality of character or unique ability that the particular applicant can contribute to the university." That is, institutions of higher education may still consider race in admissions in narrow situations, when race is discussed as part of other "color-blind" factors that are (paradoxically) shaped by an applicant's race. As the court notes, this might include an applicant describing how racial discrimination led them to develop courage and determination or how an applicant's culture or heritage led the applicant to develop leadership skills. In other words, institutions can still consider race so long as such consideration is tied to some "color-blind" trait (albeit informed by it). What the court prohibits is the overt use of race.

Chilling Ripple Effects

There are, however, downstream effects to the ruling that counteract efforts to advance racial diversity in the new legal landscape. Misinformation about the ruling and its scope has begun to abound and can lead to confusion about what the law allows and prohibits. More broadly, research has shown that laws can have a chilling effect such that educational leaders who perceive a hostile legal environment will self-censor to avoid a lawsuit or reprisal, even when the law permits them to act in equity-affirming ways.

Moreover, it is important to contextualize the ruling within a broader sociopolitical context. Educational rights in the United States and around the world continue to be politicized and rolled back via the courts and legislation. Hostile conservative movements will continue to seek further regressive measures and undo progress for racially marginalized students. Higher education policies that consider race will likely face backlash.

Concluding Thoughts

While the United States Supreme Court continues down a dangerous path that facilitates future dismantling of rights for people who have been historically oppressed, true to form—and representative of the contemporary conservative movement—Chief Justice Roberts and his majority opinion co-opt civil rights language once used to advance the rights of Black people and other historically oppressed communities to undo these very rights. The court's majority opinion erroneously enshrines "color-blindness" into the understanding of equal protection law. These interpretations will continue to loom over issues of equality under the law in future cases.

There is nothing to celebrate about a misguided ruling that, as Justice Sonia Sotomayor stated in her dissent, "is grounded in the illusion that racial inequality was a problem of a different generation." The rigorous empirical evidence cited across the dissenting opinions from the three liberal justices of the court unequivocally affirm that racial inequality continues to plague the nation. Yet, our collective understanding of the options available to respond to the curtailment of progress is vital, lest we wish to succumb to the allure of despondence as we continue down the long road towards racial justice. ▀

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Abstract

France focuses on students' socioeconomic backgrounds to ensure equal opportunity. While the system remains unequal and results in social reproduction, there is a national consensus that efforts must be exerted to broaden access and improve the success of marginalized students.

France: Equal Opportunity Vs. Selectivity

Andrée Sursock

The centralized access procedure to higher education in France was reformed in 2018. Parcoursup replaced a process which was criticized for assigning students to higher education institutions randomly. Since Parcoursup offers more information to help students make choices than the previous system, there was hope that it would be more easily accepted. As soon as it was launched, however, it was criticized for organizing a disguised selection process, and studies have tracked its negative impact on marginalized populations.

Equal Opportunity vs. Meritocracy

There is a strong consensus in France about providing equal opportunity (*égalité des chances*) and therefore open access to higher education. Nevertheless, this consensus sits uneasily with the concept of “republican merit,” which is enshrined in the ranked competitive exams (*concours*) that Napoléon introduced for the *grandes écoles*, and which result in social reproduction.

This has produced a two-track system: open access to higher education for all *baccalauréat* (secondary education diploma) holders, albeit with some important exceptions such as selective access to an increasing number of university study programs, the *grandes écoles* and segments of a growing private sector.

The social consensus on equality is also at odds with individual strategies. Many French families favor selectivity, although they define it differently depending on their level of education and their socioeconomic status. Selectivity for the children of the bourgeoisie, the school teachers, and academic staff (all of whom understand how to navigate the arcane secondary school and higher education systems) means aiming primarily for the *grandes écoles* and secondarily for the selective university tracks. Selectivity for marginalized and less educated families means aiming for the perceived security of the private sector, which brands itself as providing a more supportive and intimate environment than the large universities.

How Have Students from Marginalized Backgrounds Fared with Parcoursup?

In France, equity issues are defined narrowly as determined by socioeconomic backgrounds. It is illegal to consider ethnicity, race, or religion, and there is little formal support for underrepresented groups in secondary schools, apart from students with disabilities. The system tries to correct inequality by funneling more resources to schools in marginalized areas, without focusing on supporting special categories of students, again except for those with disabilities.

Funding is not a discriminating issue. The cost of public education is generally low, and need-based scholarships are widely available. The number of students experiencing financial difficulties is low compared to other European countries, less than 19 percent, according to Eurostudent VII 2018–2021, although that number is reported to have risen since the COVID-19-induced inflation.

Despite its cultural and political tradition of equality and solidarity, France is ranked as one of the most unequal countries among OECD members. Eurostudent notes that most students have parents with tertiary education and, worryingly, that the share of those with parents without tertiary education is declining.

Inequality is reflected in both unequal access and success. Women and students whose parents did not attend tertiary education tend to express low self-confidence, which influences how they choose study programs. This leads to gender and social imbalance, particularly in the *grandes écoles*. It is recognized that the *grandes écoles* must extend

Funding is not a discriminating issue. The cost of public education is generally low, and need-based scholarships are widely available.

equitable access to students from marginalized groups. They do so through a variety of mechanisms, such as preparing selected students in schools located in poor neighborhoods to apply to such institutions or having a different admission track for those students. However, the number of students affected by such initiatives remains small.

Historically, a significant proportion of students who enter the open-access tracks of universities fail to complete their first year. This concerns mostly holders of the vocational *baccalauréat* diplomas, which draws a significant number of students from marginalized backgrounds. This track is not meant to lead to university-level studies but does not bar students from registering.

Parcoursup: A Contested Centralized Clearing System

Parcoursup uses an algorithm which was criticized for mainstreaming an opaque selection process in a context where any holder of the *baccalauréat* was supposed to be accepted to any university. Tempers flared. A movement to shutdown universities spread in early 2018 after hooded vigilantes assaulted a group of 50 students protesting Parcoursup. Fortunately, the summer came, and things quieted down.

Nevertheless, Parcoursup is still an object of controversy. Although there has been a genuine effort to explain the selection process and to make the system more transparent, the public debate has shifted from the selectivity of the process to the anxiety that it generates and whether all families and students are equally equipped to deal with its complexity.

Parcoursup: A Complex Process

There is no question that the process is complex and that students are left to manage it on their own if their family is unable to help. This is an issue since most French students go through Parcoursup when they are 17 years old. A recent study noted that those from marginalized backgrounds are comparatively more likely to be on their own and to have had little access to independent information beforehand.

Without advice and support, the application process can be very onerous. In 2023, Parcoursup included a whopping list of 21,000 undergraduate study programs. It is possible to apply to up to 20 study programs, and applicants must complete a separate file for each of them.

The process, however, seeks to balance selectivity with equity. The final selection is done by each higher education institution. In universities, students are selected by the faculty responsible for a given program, who are asked to admit a specific proportion of students with need-based scholarships.

Stress and Perception of Fairness

Parcoursup is under the media's continuous scrutiny. The number of students who have received an offer and those who are still waiting are tracked every spring, and the numerous articles about Parcoursup feed the perception that, despite the improvements implemented since its launch, the procedure is still not entirely satisfactory.

Many students find the process stressful and somewhat unfair. This perception is more likely to be expressed by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Perception of fairness is linked to the choices students make. They are advised to mix safe and stretched choices. The best students (often from the more privileged backgrounds) are more likely to be helped by their parents and to make fewer and safer choices. Therefore, they are less likely to find the process stressful or unfair.

Despite these issues, Parcoursup engineered a small revolution: universities are now able to select in the same way as the *grandes écoles* have been able to do all along. The continuous scrutiny of Parcoursup and consensus around providing *égalité des chances*, however, ensure that equal opportunity—even if not yet a reality—continues to be at the forefront of public debate. ▲

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Abstract

Race has been a key feature of admissions in South African universities over the last 30 years. The admission policies coined around affirmative action have received conflicting criticisms in the academic literature. Some scholars argue that affirmative action policy promotes mainly the interests of Black students, challenges university autonomy, compromises quality, and recreates a new form of racial discrimination. Some of the views see admission of “Black” as compromising quality and lowering standards. This paper analyzes the different perspectives around race-based admission policies in South African universities and the outcomes of their implementation. It argues for a nuanced approach to admission policies beyond race, and advocates for other features of disadvantage to be considered beyond race.

Those who support race-based admission policies invoke the constitution, which mandates the necessity of radical action in the context of “deeply rooted informal racial discrimination.”

The Complexities of Race-Based Admissions in South African Universities

Chika Sehooole, Kolawole Samuel Adeyemo and Rakgadi Phatlane

Race has over the years been a key feature of admissions in South African universities. Under apartheid, universities used race-based admission policies to exclude the majority of Black students from access to higher education in general, and from well-resourced historically white universities in particular. Drawing from the constitution, which advocates for “fair discrimination,” or affirmative action, universities in the postapartheid era developed inclusive race-based policies aimed at redressing these inequities. The government set targets for the number of Black students for universities to admit, which, by doing so, deracialize and diversify their student demographics. The implementation of these policies has not been without challenges. There were those who argued that race-based policies led to the lowering of standards and advocated for merit-based admission policies. On the other hand, some argued that unless race-based quotas and targets were set, universities would remain unchanged and untransformed. This article provides an analysis of these opposing perspectives.

The Case for Race-Based Admission Policies

Those who support race-based admission policies invoke the constitution, which mandates the necessity of radical action in the context of “deeply rooted informal racial discrimination.” When South Africa attained freedom in 1994, it inherited a highly fragmented, inequitable and racially-divided higher education system with a participation rate (i.e., total number of enrolled students divided by total population in the 18–24 age cohort) of 17 percent. The inequities of the system found expression in higher education participation rates by racial group: only 9 percent of students were Black, despite Black South Africans constituting 80 percent of the country’s population. Colored students represented 13 percent, and Indian students represented 40 percent of all students, while the majority of the students—70 percent—were white (despite them constituting just 10 percent of the country). The new dispensation decided that the only way to redress these inequities was to use race-based admission for those who met the academic requirements to enter university. In many historically white universities, admission targets for each racial group in some programs of study were set in order to provide access and improve participation in programs which other racial groups were previously excluded from. Such an approach was viewed by the opponents of race-based admission policies as unfair. They argued that it would lead to the decline of quality and standards.

The Case for Merit-Based Admission Policies to Preserve Quality and Autonomy

Arguments for merit-based admission policies with particular focus on quality, university autonomy, and noninterference in the business of universities surfaced. In other words, universities have moral obligations to admit only qualified students irrespective of race. Some of the top historically white universities have experienced pressure to either continue or discontinue race-based admission policies. These universities attract the best students in the country because of their reputation, and should thus drop race as a criterion in favor of academic performance. There is a view that the only way to transform these universities is to remove barriers of race created by apartheid. On the contrary, there is also fear that some universities will not transform unless the race card is played. The conflicting arguments put universities’ autonomy and internal policies regarding quality and admission into question. While some universities claim to have transformed, for some of them there is no evidence that racial admission policy is effective.

The Case to Abolish Race-Based Admission Policies in Favor of Economic and Disadvantage Status

The University of Cape Town's Commission of Inquiry recommended a revised admission policy using alternative markers of disadvantage. This should include a combination of academic performance and disadvantage weightings such as school attended, parents' and grandparents' levels of education, et cetera, but not race.

This view seems to have marked a shift in the debate around admissions, which moved beyond race. Race as a category for defining redress has increasingly become unhelpful with the growth of the Black middle class since 1994. This group earns good salaries and can afford to send their children to good schools and can, therefore, no longer be regarded as candidates for redress policies.

This view also finds expression in the eligibility criteria for government-sponsored Student Financial Aid Scheme, where—in addition to academic criteria—not race but financial criterion is used, targeting students who come from households with income up to 350,000 South African rand per year (approximately USD 1,842). Those who come from households that receive government social security grants automatically qualify for funding.

Access Versus Success

The question is whether race-based admission policies have translated into the success of the beneficiaries of these policies. The statistics show a bleak picture demonstrating that access does not always translate to success. Studies conducted over the past two decades show that under one-third of students complete their programs in regulated time, while only one in three students graduate within four years. Research also shows a drop-out rate of 52 percent, which undermines the access gains of post-apartheid South Africa. South Africa's graduation rate of 15 percent is among the lowest in the world. Financial reasons, students' poor entry level, poor academic support, and pressure to provide families with financial support are some of the reasons for dropping out of universities.

The Need to Transform Admission Policies

There is a concern that race-based admission policies need to change. The recent changes in the country's student population (Black Africans constituted 79.5 percent out of the country's 1.068 million students in 2021) represent a good development, but in the long run might exclude other population groups. Literature suggests that affirmative action policy devalues the ability of excellent Black students to fairly compete. Seemingly, the majority of them experienced cognitive dissonance after gaining access to universities based on their race. The "disadvantaged" groups feel empowered and would like to compete without the race factor. This position comes strongly in matters where Black students excel, and their performance is not judged on merit but is attributed to affirmative action. There are concerns that affirmative action is unfairly treating disadvantaged white students and gives advantaged wealthy Black students preference even after they benefited from economic opportunities of the past 30 years. In this regard, there is a need to develop policies that look beyond race as a criterion for admission.

Conclusion

The discussion highlights the need for a balanced approach to admission policies in universities depending on the country. In South Africa, race continues to impact admissions to universities, however, it might be balanced with other factors of disadvantage in order to have a nuanced approach to the development and application of admission policies in universities. The use of race-based admission policies for future imperatives of redress, quality and sustainability in higher education remains contested. ▲

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Abstract

In India, the affirmative action policy is commonly known as the reservation policy, which applies to legislature, education, and employment. The reservation policy attempts to mitigate the adverse impact of the historical deprivation faced by India's socially and economically backward classes. Although it helped some of the marginalized groups to improve their economic conditions by ensuring equal opportunities in higher education, it might fall short in terms of their impact on social integration.

Affirmative Action in Indian Higher Education

Emon Nandi and Binay K. Pathak

Recently, on the 19th of September 2023, India passed a historical bill that reserves 33 percent of seats in the parliament for women. This kind of affirmative action policy is commonly known in India as *reservation policy*. Apart from legislatures, it also applies to education and employment. Reservation policy attempts to mitigate the adverse impact of deprivation and oppression faced by the socially backward classes in India. The policy mostly covers the officially recognized marginalized groups, i.e., scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), other backward castes (OBCs), and economically weaker sections (EWS). Currently, 27 percent of seats are reserved for OBCs, 15 percent for SCs, 7.5 percent for STs, 10 percent for EWS, and 4 percent for persons with benchmark disabilities. In India, reservation policy has been at the center of debates in sociopolitical and judicial circles since its introduction. Here, we discuss emerging issues around reservation policy, focusing on the higher education sector.

Impact of Reservation Policy in Higher Education

Due to limited places in elite public higher education institutions, reservation policy in higher education has always been a contentious issue. The debates have taken more critical turns with the introduction of reservation for OBCs in higher education in 2006.

Thanks to the reservation policy, the representation of students from disadvantaged communities in Indian higher education has improved over time. According to the 2020–2021 All-India Survey of Higher Education, the gross enrollment ratios (GER) for SC and ST communities have increased by 28 percent and 47 percent respectively compared to 2014–2015. The overall increase in OBC student enrolment is 31.67 percent.

In the case of higher education faculty, the situation is highly skewed in favor of privileged groups. The percentage of SC teachers is only 9 percent, while it is only 2.5 percent for the ST community. The representation of OBC teachers is relatively high in Indian universities (around 32 percent). At the administration level, there is a severe underrepresentation of vice-chancellors and registrars from marginalized communities. As of August 2022, out of 45 vice-chancellors in the central universities, only two belonged to socially backward classes.

Emerging Issues

Let us explore the main emerging issues one by one.

Public vs. Private Institutions

In India, public-funded higher education institutions must abide by the reservation policy. There is no obligation for private unaided institutions to follow the reservation guidelines. However, with the rising number of private higher education institutions receiving no government financial support, a large majority of students enrolled there do not fall under the purview of this reservation. There were a few attempts from the policymakers to extend the scope of the reservation policy in the private unaided higher education institutions, but they failed. Reportedly, a group of leading private higher education institutions have resisted the move. They felt that regulatory restrictions would pose challenges to financial sustainability for them. Instead of asking the private unaided higher education institutions to implement the reservation policy, the group argued in favor of offering scholarships and fellowships to those who need them. The recent move to invite international branch campuses to India may add fuel to this regulatory challenge.

Lack of Social Integration in the Higher Education Institutes

During the last few years, increasing numbers of student deaths and dropouts in premier institutions have raised serious questions about the limitations of reservation policy in higher education institutions. In 2014–2021, out of 122 students who died by suicide in India's premiere institutions, 24 were from ST communities, 41 from OBC, and three from ST communities. This points out the lack of integration of marginalized sections into the larger body of students in higher education institutions. The University Grants Commission issued guidelines for establishing equal opportunity centers in higher education institutions to effectively implement reservation policy. Even then, it failed to create a safe space for the socially deprived students in these institutions. Lack of sensitivity among the unreserved groups in Indian institutions is one of the primary reasons for this dismal situation.

Diversity Within the Beneficiary Groups

Although access of marginalized groups to higher education has improved over the years, there are still widespread disparities across genders, regions, and streams of study among reserved students. The demographic proportion of OBCs seems to overshadow the representation of the SC and ST communities in higher education institutions in India. However, the situation is more complex because of the interplay between social and economic backwardness. The economically better-off part of the OBCs (known as the "creamy layer") has been excluded from reservation policy. But the SC and ST communities do not have such exclusions. There is a demand for introducing subquotas under the SC quota to prevent overrepresentation of influential SC communities in higher education. The government is currently reviewing the proposal.

Federalism and Politicization

In India, apart from the federal government, provincial governments also have the right to grant reservations to certain unprivileged groups based on their respective demographic conditions. The reservation for EWS is left to provincial governments to decide on. Even after the supreme court's judgment on a cap of 50 percent on caste-based reservation, certain ethnic groups often demand reservation under the educational and socially backward classes (ESBC) quota. This leads to social unrest in various provinces in India. However, when the pool of reserved seats exceeds the pool of open or unreserved seats in educational institutions, it inadvertently creates tension in society and disrupts social harmony. This defeats the very purpose of reservations in Indian society.

The reservation policy plays a crucial role in electoral politics in India.

Concluding Remarks

The reservation policy has been successful in infusing a sense of inclusion among marginalized groups in Indian higher education, though it might fall short in terms of its impact on social integration. The reservation policy plays a crucial role in electoral politics in India. Hence, revising and restructuring the reservation policy with the aim of ensuring effectiveness is an extremely sensitive topic for policymakers. However, there is a need for an evidence-based objective analysis before deciding to continue the existing policy in its current form. There is an increasing demand for conducting a caste-based census across India, which would provide the base for further revisions in the reservation policy. In addition, it is essential to focus on integrating and creating a safe democratic space inside higher educational institutions to make the policy more effective. Alongside social stigma, obsession with meritocracy is another reason that contributes to the juxtaposition of the "reserved" versus "deserving" in higher education. The reservation policy undoubtedly helped a section of the marginalized groups improve their economic conditions, but they still face a lot of discrimination from the upper strata of Indian society. ▲

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Abstract

Brazilian public universities have been predominantly elitist throughout their existence. The law on quotas, implemented in 2012 and currently under review, was one of the initiatives that challenged the system. This article provides an overview of the initial steps and current developments in affirmative actions in Brazilian higher education, pointing to some of the main challenges and potential outcomes of democratizing higher education in a country with significant social asymmetries.

Affirmative Actions in Brazilian Higher Education

Fernanda Leal

It was only in the 2000s that Brazilian public universities started implementing affirmative action policies as a means to democratize higher education and give more equal conditions to socially marginalized groups. Law 12.711 from 2012 was a milestone in this regard. This law prescribed new admission rules, defining that 50 percent of all available undergraduate places should be reserved for students who completed their secondary education in the public system, distributed among families with an income equal to or less than 1.5 minimum wages per capita; and Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. In 2016, people with disabilities who fit the low-income socioeconomic profile were also included.

This and other related affirmative action policies have played critical roles in forcing the Brazilian public higher education system to adapt its structure and even reasons for being. From 2012 to 2021, more than one million higher education students were covered by the law on quotas. And since 2014, 60 percent of undergraduate students in public HEIs come from public schools and 70 percent come from families with income of up to 1.5 minimum wages per capita. Regarding racial composition, in 2019, Black and Brown students represented around 50 percent of the student population.

As a result of a political context that is more open to the demands of minorities, and the active pressures of social movements, in 2023, the law on quotas was amended to include “quilombolas,” remnants of communities of escaped enslaved people, and to reduce candidates’ maximum per capita family income. The new version of the law also prescribes new parameters for the inclusion of Black, Brown, Indigenous and disabled people in graduate programs, and introduces annual monitoring cycles.

This update seeks to mitigate some flaws identified in the 10 years of the law’s existence and promises to further democratize Brazilian public higher education. Yet, several related issues remain unaddressed and challenge the purposes of historical reparation, social justice, and respect to diversity, which form the rationale behind affirmative actions.

Challenges and Potential Outcomes

The literature is controversial about the effects of affirmative action policies, which is amplified by the insufficiency of results monitoring. Let us address some of the related challenges.

Public Funding

Brazilian public HEIs are financed by society and this fact itself has always been an object of intense debate. One of the historical criticisms on this matter refers to the historically restricted access for certain social groups. The idea that everyone pays and only a few enjoy, especially in a country with significant social asymmetries, has always been controversial.

Because of affirmative actions, the general profile of the student population has changed over the past years, now better representing Brazilian society as it is. Even though this could be a reason to overcome this understanding, the gratuity of Brazilian public higher education remains largely questioned, now with even stronger pressures from the global market and greater criticism from the conservative elites. In this regard, it is important to remember that Brazilian public universities were significantly delegitimized under the Bolsonaro government, leading to “a chronology of tragedies,” as pointed out by myself and Marcelo Knobel in a [2021 IHE article](#).

Because of affirmative actions, the general profile of the student population has changed over the past years, now better representing Brazilian society as it is.

Student Retention

One of the most challenging aspects when admitting vulnerable students to public HEIs is the (lack of) capacity to retain them. Black students tend to have a high dropout rate due to discontinuation of governmental support programs aimed at keeping them in, in addition to facing experiences of racism and exclusion.

Regarding financial support, most renowned universities are still located in the capitals, where scholarships provided to vulnerable students are often insufficient for their survival. Only in 2023, after 10 years, scholarships were adjusted. The need to work has been identified as one of the reasons for a general loss of interest in staying at the university. For example, the number of applications to the Enem examination—the main gateway to federal universities—was the second lowest in 2022 since 2005, with 3.4 million applicants compared to 8.7 million in 2014.

Regarding academic performance, students admitted under affirmative action programs often face difficulties resulting from a weak educational background, demanding significant institutional investments in monitoring and assistance. In essence, affirmative actions do not guarantee that all students will reach a good level of academic quality.

Finally, there is a lack of institutional preparedness to deal with historically marginalized groups. Reports of segregation between quota and non-quota students suggest the need for investment in raising awareness among the entire academic community.

Inclusion and Controversies Around It

Even though affirmative action policies have diversified the undergraduate student body, the same cannot be said of graduate researchers or faculty members, as there are still substantial inequalities in terms of gender, race, and geographical origin.

Additionally, if the academic model and knowledge production remain largely hegemonic, it is likely that a simple democratization of access will not provoke the required structural change. Universities need to take the opportunity of including socially marginalized groups to question their own role in the perpetuation of colonialism and dialogue with society in less hierarchical ways.

Internationalization

Critical studies on internationalization of Brazilian higher education characterize the process of internationalization as colonized and colonizing, more competitive than co-operative, and neither suited for nor directed toward the needs of the Global South. Universities strive for higher levels of international recognition and regard internationalization from the perspective of individualized competitive advantage.

Internationalization remains elitist in nature, and most internationalization opportunities are only available for a very small portion of the student body. Scholarships for international academic mobility often impose criteria that are not easily achieved by those coming from a weak educational background.

Recently there seems to be some recognition of the importance of less hegemonic internationalization strategies. This includes the announced *Caminhos Amefricanos* program that seeks to strengthen an antiracist education internationally, and the relaunch of the *Abdias Nascimento* program that seeks to provide minorities with opportunities in research excellence centers in Brazil and abroad.

Potential Outcomes

Individual and collective outcomes of affirmative action policies in Brazilian higher education cannot be neglected as such policies have challenged the general profile of historically elitist institutions. Yet, there is still a long journey ahead to create necessary conditions for the educational success of underrepresented students. Effective postadmission support, preparation of the university community, fight against racism, dialogue with society, and constant monitoring of results are some of the critical requirements for a true social justice dialogue. In the long term, the greatest potential of affirmative action might lie in the active participation of those subject to racism and discrimination in the rewriting of their history and in promotion of antiracist/decolonized education.

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Abstract

Twelve years ago IHE published the essay “The End of Internationalization.” It critiqued the focus on its commercialization and made a plea to rethink and redefine the way we look at the internationalization of higher education. This essay looks back and notices that things have not changed substantially and places the debate in the current context of multiple crises. It advocates the need for an active personalized internationalization with emphasis on our own social responsibility.

Can We Still Stop the End of Internationalization?

Paulina Latorre, Uwe Brandenburg and Hans de Wit

In 2011, two of us, Uwe Brandenburg and Hans de Wit, published an essay in *International Higher Education* with the provocative title “The End of Internationalization.” We argued that internationalization of higher education had moved from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core, but that while gaining moral weight, its content seemed to have deteriorated. We observed an increasing commercialization under the flag of internationalization, and in our view this attitude has exacerbated the devaluation of internationalization and the inflation of defensive measures. In our view, “gradually, the ‘why and wherefore’ had been taken over by the way internationalization has become the main objective: more exchange, more degree mobility, and more recruitment.” We pleaded that we have to understand internationalization and globalization in their pure meanings—not as goals in themselves but rather as means to an end—and to throw off the veil of ignorance and ask ourselves: Why do we do certain things, and how do they help in achieving the goal of quality of education and research in a globalized knowledge society? We stated that we have to regard mobility and other activities as what they really are: activities or instruments—and therefore by definition not goals in themselves. And we concluded that “the most important in any case is to rethink and redefine the way we look at the internationalization of higher education in the present time.”

12 Years later, Is There an Afterlife?

The essay felt like a wakeup call which resonated broadly at that time, but where do we stand now, 12 years further, and has the end of internationalization come closer or have we changed the tide? On the occasion of the EAIE Conference in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, in September 2023, we organized a session together with our Chilean co-author Paulina Latorre with the title “10 Years after the End of Internationalization, Is There an Afterlife?” to discuss these questions. Looking back 12 years, the picture is not positive. For many, internationalization is a process that is just copied from northern institutions and does not make real sense to their contextual realities or resonate with their institutional priorities. Education abroad in all its forms is still more driving the agenda than internationalization at home. Increasing focus on international rankings is the rule and favor some over others. The divide between the North and the South and between those universities classified as top world-class universities and the “others” persists. Internationalization has become more synonymous to competition and marketization than to its traditional values (cooperation, exchange and service to society). Inequality and exclusiveness have increased nationally and internationally, in part due to elitist approaches to internationalization. Recognition of the importance of addressing all aspects of education in an integrated way in university policy and strategy progress is only slowly and unevenly increasing.

Although there are counteractions to this dark picture in the form of internationalization of the curriculum at home, virtual exchange and COIL, internationalization for society, and movements of decolonization and for action on climate change in international education (CANIE), the move toward a more socially responsible internationalization is at the institutional level more rhetoric than active, and often limited to some good intentions and isolated practices. The 2015 definition of internationalization, with an emphasis on equity, inclusion and meaningful contribution to society, as well as labels such as ethical, humanistic, and responsible internationalization, illustrates the feeling among international educators that a radical shift from competition and marketization is needed, and we see good intentions and initiatives, for instance during the

EAIE Conference in Rotterdam in 2023. At the same time, the observation in the 2011 article about the commercial dimensions of its exhibit and those of sister organizations like NAFSA Association of International Educators is still valid. Are we really practicing what we preach (in other words, is internationalization as we perceive it still alive)—or is it indeed coming to an end?

Multiple Crises Asking for Action

This question is even more urgent now than 12 years ago. We are not facing one crisis (neoliberal marketization) but multiple crises at the same time: COVID-19 and the threat of new pandemics, anti-international movements of nationalism, attacks on democracy, racism, digitalization and artificial intelligence (AI), geopolitical tensions, increased inequality and exclusion, and climate change, to name just a few. They ask for more than nice words and declarations. They ask for an internationalization which focuses on action by university leaders, international educators, teachers, scholars, and students to make internationalization socially responsible and respectful of diversity in all forms. If we do not do so, the end of internationalization is closer than ever, particularly in the Global North where, after the pandemic, the return to the old normal of marketization seems prevalent, while in the Global South there is more awareness of the negative consequences of such an approach and where they feel the consequences of exclusion and inequality most. “The Global South is coming” was said with pride by the participants from Latin America in the EAIE session.

The question now is: Why did nothing really change and what needs to happen so that we finally see internationalization taking the responsibility that is required? In our view, while internationalization 1.0 was defined by more or less unstructured mobilities of a few with mainly personal gains (up to the early 1990s), since then internationalization 2.0 has been mainly concerned with institutional internationalization. On one hand, this institutionalization of internationalization led to good movements such as the structured Erasmus program, comprehensive internationalization, sustainable campus projects and SDG universities. However, it also meant that responsibility and accountability was on the institution, not the individual, and as we have seen institutions in general are extremely slow when it comes to change and social responsibility. This allowed us, individuals, to separate ourselves from the crises, the consequences, and the responsibilities, claiming that it is the institution which is responsible and needs to change and exculpating us as individuals when needlessly traveling to conferences by airplane or not getting involved in the refugee crises or in Russia's war on Ukraine. Accountability in internationalization has been at best institutional but never personal.

The End—or the Beginning of a New Era?

Therefore, at the EAIE conference, we dared to declare the end of dependence on institutional internationalization and advocated for the need for an active personalized internationalization with emphasis on our own social responsibility and inclusion.

This means: we all need to identify the goal/crisis that matters for us most personally—we cannot solve everything, so we need to prioritize. This may mean focusing on climate change, inclusion, the North–South gap, or any other major issue. We then need to shape internationalization in our work in a way that can help address the issue and feel personally responsible.

In this way, the end of one internationalization may well define the beginning of a new internationalization. ▲

We are not facing one crisis (neoliberal marketization) but multiple crises at the same time.

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Global Student Mobility at a Crossroads: Why Data Matters

Mirka Martel

Abstract

The profile of globally mobile students has shifted over the last 20 years, and discourse on international higher education today and in the future must take this into account. This article provides insights into trends of student host destinations, the push and pull factors that drive students to study abroad, and the valuable role of comparable host data to identify patterns over time.

The profile of globally mobile students has shifted over the last 20 years, and discourse on international higher education today and in the future must take this into account. What remains constant is the value of data and global mobility trends over time, helping us study the challenges and opportunities host destinations face. Since 2001, *Project Atlas* has focused on comparable data of top hosts of international students, including the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. By analyzing trends in international student mobility, countries' capacities to host students at their colleges and universities, and the effects of external shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic on international higher education, *Project Atlas* provides the necessary context to compare and contrast mobility flows.

What Is the Destination of Choice?

In 2001, there were 2.1 million globally mobile students, according to the OECD report *Education at a Glance*. The total has expanded to over six million in 20 years, with relatively stalled growth in the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic were uneven and affected some countries, including Australia, New Zealand, and China, more adversely than others. Rebounds of international student numbers in 2022 and 2023, particularly in the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada, as reported in *Project Atlas*, indicate that the global total may again accelerate. However, what remains unseen is whether we will return to a global growth rate of 5 percent per year, as experienced before the COVID-19 pandemic.

The composition of top hosts of international students has shifted as well. The United States and the United Kingdom remain the leading hosts of international students. In 2001, the United States and the United Kingdom made up 28 percent and 11 percent of all globally mobile students, respectively. In 2023, this number decreased to 17 percent for the United States and remained stable at 11 percent for the United Kingdom, according to *Project Atlas*. Competition from other Anglophone hosts has increased, including Canada, which holds 10 percent of the global pie. Add this to the traditional European hosts Germany and France, and the top five hosts make up 50 percent of all globally mobile students.

The capacity to host more international students remains a question for some destinations. In 2015, *Project Atlas* reported that at least five of the top 10 host destinations were countries where international students already made up 10-20 percent of the total college population. As the number of globally mobile students has grown, even more international students have entered these tertiary markets. In 2022, Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom all had international students make up over 20 percent of their total higher education. The United States is an outlier here, as international students comprise just 6 percent of the country's total college population.

Considerations for Prospective International Students

When prospective students decide where to study, multiple factors drive their decisions. For emerging student markets like Nigeria, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, a primary factor is the booming tertiary-age population and the low capacity of the local university systems to accommodate needs. While these students look beyond their borders, further support is critical to ensure they successfully apply to, pursue, and complete their studies overseas. We have already seen an increase in students from India choosing to study in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. But we have also noted that Indian students are studying predominately for graduate degrees, waiting to study

abroad for a shorter period and only after finishing their undergraduate degree. This is quite different from the significant increases the United States experienced in the last decade with Chinese students, for example, as these students were more likely to pursue undergraduate degrees. Students' choices on when to study and whether to go for a short- or a long-term study affect pipelines for host destinations.

Challenges abound regarding other “push factors,” including the realities of conflicts and geopolitics. One of the fastest-growing mobile populations consists of students from conflict-affected areas like Afghanistan, Ukraine, Russia, and other countries, who are looking to continue their higher education elsewhere. Mental health support for these students is essential, as are options for students to continue studying if they cannot return home. Finally, health and safety continue to play a role, as the ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic and travel restrictions still impact student mobility in Asia, particularly in China.

For host destinations, “pull factors” have been well studied. The quality of the higher education system seems to drive students to certain countries, predominantly the United States and the United Kingdom. But it is also important to note that the cost of higher education, economic incentives such as international scholarships or fellowships, and opportunities for students to stay beyond their degree have increased in priority. If the marketplace of host destinations is growing, so are the considerations for students, and they go well beyond the degree itself.

Deconstructing Data for Purpose

The work of *Project Atlas* is not finished. In 2001, the commitment of the research initiative was to focus on how data is collected and opportunities for alignment, comparison, and discussion of trends. These principles continue to resonate.

The definition of who counts as an “international student” or a “foreign student” differs significantly across host countries. While some countries include only students on country-issued student visas, others include all foreign-born students, including those with residency. Furthermore, there is also the measure of how a student's global academic journey is counted. While some countries only count students who pursue a full academic degree in their country, others include students who take courses toward a degree, even nondegree pursuits. And, of course, there is the role of global online learning and whether countries are able to capture students studying at their institutions in-person and online. *Project Atlas* analyses give nuance to the comparisons made. Calculations regarding international students and higher education capacity allow for side-by-side comparisons considering local data collection and realities.

Project Atlas partners also take the time to discuss their data and the trends they are seeing, domestically and globally. Since multiple factors influence each year's data, the ability to discuss domestic and international policies, trends in higher education, and other considerations brings more insights to the data. *Project Atlas* partners learn from each other and improve practices regarding data collection. For example, the introduction of online learning has spurred the discussion of how many students are enrolled in online classes. Some partners have collected such data for years, while others lack the means. Through discussions, partners share approaches.

In the past three years, the rapid accessibility of data has also been critical. *Project Atlas* released and presented data during the COVID-19 pandemic before regularly scheduled releases by the OECD and UNESCO. The urgency of sharing international student data periodically and from a trusted source was vital. Knowing that the picture of global student mobility continues to change, it is imperative to continue this focus on data to inform local and international discussions. As we know, looking at data from the past may help us grapple with the future. ▲

The definition of who counts as an “international student” or a “foreign student” differs significantly across host countries.

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Abstract

Theories of change underpinning skills interventions of donors and development agencies contain tangled webs of assumptions: interventions in relation to youth unemployment often focus on vocational education and training, which is seen as undervalued relative to university education and yet closer to labor markets. However, it is *also* seen as the problem child of education and training systems. The solution is the problem—and a plethora of interventions are designed in this muddle.

What Problem Should Skills Solve?

Stephanie Allais and Carmel Marock

Rising youth unemployment and underemployment concurrent with the massification of higher education has intensified century-old debates about the relationship between education programs, curriculum, and the everyday world, including the world of work. Symptoms of this are the rise of debates about “employability” in relation to university curricula, attempts to vocationalize school curricula, and policy focus on vocational education and training, often with the aim to deflect potential university enrollments. The expansion of university qualifications is frequently seen as leading to wasteful expenditure for states and individuals, and sometimes as counterproductive in terms of the skills and expertise needed by employers and societies. There is also a strong concern internationally that university-educated youth remain unemployed—and are increasingly some of the largest proportions of unemployed people in poor countries.

In many instances these debates exemplify a common paradox in educational reform: education is seen as the solution to a variety of societal problems, while at the same time positioned as the problem. The line of thought is: if education can just be changed in any number of ways, it will stop causing, or start solving, any number of problems. Nowhere is this magical thinking more common than in vocational education and training (VET), as revealed by [our research into theories of change that underpin skills interventions by donors and development agencies](#).

Youth Unemployment as the Key Problem, Vocational Education as the Solution

Interventions to address youth unemployment and underemployment are often based on the assumption that skills deficits prevent young people from accessing labor markets or income generation possibilities. The inverse assumption is that a lack of relevant skills is a major barrier to inclusive economic growth. An analysis of documents from a wide range of donors, development agencies, and development banks illustrates that the assumption of “skills mismatches” is shared by many (if not most) development partners. Interventions then focus on VET, which is described as the component of the education and training system that is seen as “closest to the labor market.” A commonly articulated idea from agencies that we interviewed is that VET *could* provide a way to get individuals into work faster than higher education. However, it is also clear to all respondents that VET systems are not actually working and are not actually getting people into work in the desired ways. The idea of VET leading to employment is frequently stated, even when the same document or the same respondent is quick to point out that VET does not currently do so.

But Vocational Education Is Also Seen as a Problem...

In short, while VET is seen as an immediate solution, it is also VET that is regarded as the “weak link” or problem in the education and training system. This leads to an endless set of attempts to “fix” a range of different aspects of VET systems that are assumed to be problematic, in the hope that fixing these will then ensure that youth have skills, and then get jobs or better income generation capacity.

What was clear across the analysis of documents and discussion with key informants is that there is very limited insight into relationships between the myriad of interventions and the extent to which they were solving or ameliorating the assumed underpinning problems, never mind whether they were contributing to solving the core problem. There is often little engagement with the complex ways in which changing one component of a skill formation system will have an impact on other components of it.

Many Interventions, Little Clear Evidence of Success

Unsurprisingly, there is little clear evidence of success, given that these interventions often aim to fix isolated perceived problems, despite talk of the need for integrating education and training into economic development strategies. Where interventions are described as looking at education in relation to the economy, such as skills anticipation, they are mainly focused on bringing change within the education and training system, as opposed to changing the economy with implied needs for different types of expertise and skills.

Lack of integration with economic development strategies appears to be aggravated by the ways in which governments and organizations are structured. Institutions in the development space, as well as the governments being assisted, have separate divisions, units, and ministries dealing with economic development interventions as well as vocational education and skills interventions. Further, organizations' work is at least partly informed by institution-building strategies and approaches.

Another factor that complicates the work of governments and development agencies in the VET space is measurement. Measurability shapes interventions by providing visible "wins," both to national governments and to the taxpayers funding development aid or the governance structures looking to make decisions about investments. Three issues emerged in our research related to this.

First, measurement itself is sometimes seen as an intervention that should lead to change. Providing comparative data such as the World Bank's Human Capital Index is presented as an intrinsic good in building education systems.

Second, short-term evaluations are used when longer term labor market impact is the issue of interest. Experimental designs test whether interventions have enabled target groups to transition into the labor market; they focus on the impact on individuals in the short term, but not on whether the environment is changing to support a more sustained and widespread impact.

Third, there is a tendency to focus on evaluation of the implementation of interventions. This means that there is a circular "theory of change": success is seen as successful implementation of policy interventions or creation of institutional change without consideration of whether the intervention has resulted in any resolution of the initial identified problem.

Conceptual Disjunctures

Underpinning much of this is a deep conceptual disjuncture. On one side is the idea of social relations, whereby skill formation is seen as relational. In this approach education and skills are part of broader economic and social relationships, institutions, and development trajectories. Taking this seriously is difficult for development work, because economic development strategies need to be foregrounded, as well as issues such as working conditions, work organization, and occupations. On the other side is the idea of the individual, or the idea of development of individuals' "skills" as an answer to accessing labor markets through improving productivity, thereby contributing to inclusive growth and thus increasing opportunities for new entrants. This kind of reasoning, and the interventions that are underpinned by it, is magical thinking. ▲

Measurement itself is sometimes seen as an intervention that should lead to change.

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Abstract

For too long vocational education and training has been perceived as either an alternative access route to higher education or a provider “of last resort.” As a result, EU countries are experiencing an increasingly polarized labor market, with visible consequences for equity, social cohesion and political participation. These developments are forcing us to address long-standing weaknesses in our postsecondary education and training system, and the way it is perceived, structured, delivered and funded.

Rethinking Vocational Education and Training Across Europe

Ellen Hazelkorn

In February 2021, the European Union set a target that at least 45 percent of 25–34-year-olds should hold a tertiary educational attainment by 2030. By 2022, almost half of EU member states had already reached this target; Ireland and Luxembourg are already over 60 percent.

Massification—in addition to Industry 4.0 and 5.0, the green and digital transformation including AI, demographic changes, reglobalization forces and geopolitical tensions—are changing the way we think about our education systems. What might have worked for systems catering for less than 20 percent of the population is no longer appropriate for upwards of 60 percent.

As participation has risen, the bachelor/master/doctorate ladder has become the universal qualification framework. Almost 60 percent of total learners study for a bachelor qualification but only 7.7 percent follow a short-cycle course. Pursuit of status and social advantage has driven demand at the expense of postsecondary vocational education and training (VET), which is often perceived as either an alternative access route to higher education or a provider “of last resort.” Even in Germany, which has a historically strong vocational sector, societal preference for higher levels of education, including higher technical education, is surging; indeed, many of those who choose vocational education eventually go on to higher education.

As a result, European Union countries are experiencing an increasingly polarized labor market. A growing gap between the highest- and lowest-skilled occupations is resulting in a hollowing out of middle-skilled jobs. Most new jobs will be in high-skilled global-facing sectors, but we ignore the fact that almost 45 percent will require medium-level skills. As part of Year of Skills 2023, the European Union reported many countries are experiencing serious and structural labor shortages in many critical sectors and occupations and across all skill levels, which is set to increase. This is having visible consequences for equity, social cohesion, and political participation.

These developments are forcing us to address long-standing weaknesses in our education and training systems and the way postsecondary education is perceived, structured, delivered and funded.

VET Varies Across Europe

The system of and attitude to VET varies considerably across the European Union because of the distinctiveness of national systems. It is usually associated with occupation-related education and training, but this diverges considerably. France, Italy, Croatia, Cyprus, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, for example, include broad occupational fields while others refer to occupation- and job-specific training. Apprenticeship is often seen as the “pure” form because it directly combines learning with particular types of work. Ireland uses the term “further education and training,” which also includes adult literacy and community education.

Some countries, such as Germany, have strong track differentiation and linkages between education and the labor market. It provides initial VET (I-VET) at the secondary/upper secondary level with students making a decision during their midteens. The binary approach is replicated at postsecondary level, with a dedicated set of institutions often referred to as universities of applied science (UaS), e.g., *Fachhochschulen* in Germany, university colleges in Scandinavia, *hogescholen* in the Netherlands or polytechnics in Finland.

In contrast, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States have much weaker track differentiation and school-to-work linkages. VET is usually a postsecondary nontertiary

pathway to employment or to higher education for students who have completed a common general secondary education. While Germany has historically managed to promote parity of esteem between vocational and academic education, sociocultural and policy factors have meant VET has a low underresourced status in many countries.

Focus on employability and productivity, along with concerns about widening participation and regional vitality, has had a transformative effect on policy and public thinking in many countries. Propositions include creating a more horizontally diverse and unified tertiary education system which, inter alia, integrates VET within the wider education system; greater collaboration and learning pathways between vocational, professional and academic; a broader curriculum, pedagogy and assessment practices, combining skills with transversal competences; parity-of-esteem with respect to the learner experience; and recognition of VET as a key player in the regional research and innovation ecosystem.

The latter is evidenced in the European Union program for smart specialization. The innovation literature and policy have overemphasized university-based knowledge creation and technological inventions ignoring the import of knowledge diffusion/exploitation and social innovation. In doing so, it has ignored the more direct and dynamic role that VET can play in generating absorptive capacity and sharing knowledge, especially related to process and service innovation.

Examples of What Is Happening

Some governments are rethinking governance arrangements. New Zealand was one, if not the first country to establish a Tertiary Education Commission in 2003. The Scottish Funding Council was established in 2005, and Wales has created the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research—an exemplar for England, which is looking at options following a possible Labor Party win after the next election. Both Ireland and Australia are currently reviewing their systems, proposing an integrated “tertiary education system...where skills training and higher education sectors operate as one but retain their separate strengths and identities.” The Netherlands and Portugal are also rethinking their systems.

The European Union underscores the necessity of raising VET to a higher level including updating curriculum, teaching and learning, etc. OECD is talking of a PISA-like test for VET. Erasmus+ 2021–2027 provides 400 million euros to fund 100 Centers of Vocational Excellence. The aim is to create transnational collaborative platforms or skills ecosystems bringing VET providers and local partners together to build capacity and contribute to regional economic and social development and innovation.

In Spain’s Basque country, establishing and maintaining the VET ecosystem is a top political priority. It brings together the Basque government education and economic development and industry directorate, economic and social partners, VET centers, as well as teachers and students. Aligned with the Basque Smart Specialization Strategy, the emphasis is on VET excellence, with an integrated approach to training, applied innovation and active entrepreneurship. The objective is to help guide Basque applied innovation, bringing together 19 centers in four hubs organized around the following priorities: advanced manufacturing, digital and connected factory; energies, and biosciences and biotechnologies.

In 2014, Ireland established a National Apprenticeship Office to oversee the expansion of apprenticeships into, inter alia, green technologies, biopharma, hospitality, international financial services, insurance, advanced manufacturing, and engineering in addition to traditional areas of construction, electronics, and automotive industry. They lead to awards up to doctoral level. The National Tertiary Office supports collaborative tertiary programs which facilitate learners beginning their studies in the local VET college and progressing to university. While such opportunities exist in the United States, formal arrangements are new in Ireland and Europe in general.

Focus on employability and productivity, along with concerns about widening participation and regional vitality, has had a transformative effect on policy and public thinking in many countries.

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Challenges Ahead

Massification has been a huge success. However, “going to uni” and the social status attached to it have reproduced elite advantages in which “academic” higher education is often seen as the only path to success. While collaborative learning pathways are a welcome means to expand participation and progress to university, there is a risk they simply underwrite this narrative. Finally, there is the tricky issue of finance. Spending per learner is highest for institutions which undertake research and development. In contrast, the quality of facilities and funding for VET and mature learners and lifelong learning opportunities tend to be limited—a regressive approach. A new funding and governance model is required if we are truly serious about building a parallel vocation-oriented system with optimized learning and development pathways equivalent to but different from higher education. ▲

Connection and Collaboration in Global Higher Education Research

Rebecca Schendel and Marcelo Knobel

Abstract

The field of higher education has reached a moment of maturity, having moved from the fringes of other scholarly communities to becoming a well-established field in its own right. However, despite collectively “knowing” more than ever about higher education, in practical terms, higher education is in crisis in much of the world. Increased collaboration is required in order to overcome the collective inability of the field to translate research findings into policy and practical impact.

Not only is more now collectively “known” about higher education, but the knowledge being created is now coming from a more diverse group of researchers, based all around the world and in a variety of institutional contexts.

Given the proliferation of academic programs and research centers focused on higher education around the world, it is easy to forget that the scholarly analysis of higher education is a relatively new endeavor. The entire history of the higher education research community has occurred in the last sixty or so years, and, for much of that time, only a small number of researchers, based on a small number of countries, formed part of that community. However, as higher education itself has expanded rapidly across the globe, so has the field, and today, there is a robust international research community, comprising both researchers who focus on local/domestic questions related to higher education and those focused more on its international dimensions. There is much promise in this development. Not only is more now collectively “known” about higher education, but the knowledge being created is now coming from a more diverse group of researchers, based all around the world and in a variety of institutional contexts. As a result, there is great potential for intellectual diversity, which—in turn—offers new insights that can be brought to bear on both new and entrenched challenges facing the sector. One could, therefore, say that the field of higher education—and, within that, the subfield of international higher education—has now reached a moment of maturity, having moved from the fringes of other scholarly communities to assume the role of a well-established field in its own right.

A Mature Field with Limited Impact

However, despite collectively “knowing” more than ever about higher education, in practical terms, higher education is in crisis in much of the world. Public perception of the value of higher education is plummeting in many contexts. In many fully massified systems, young people are increasingly questioning the importance of obtaining a university degree for their future employment prospects, while political figures with more populist platforms frequently deride higher education for being an elite institution, out of touch with the mainstream. Conservative critiques of the apparent progressivism of higher education are also increasingly common throughout the world. Those who study

higher education know that many of the critiques being levied against higher education are not supported by evidence, but their increasing prominence and importance demonstrate the collective inability of the field to translate research findings into policy and practical impact.

Barriers to Impact

There are myriad reasons for this lack of alignment between research output and impact. Most importantly, higher education researchers face multiple priorities, which limit their ability to devote time to the translation of research into policy and practice. Those with academic contracts must prioritize publication in peer-reviewed journals over more impactful practices, such as assuming advisory roles or publishing in the mainstream media. Those interested in the analysis of higher education from other academic disciplines have additional publication pressure, as they must publish in their home field as well as publishing in the higher education literature. Many also have significant teaching and service responsibilities, which are crucial to the practice of higher education but also limit the time that can be dedicated to more public-facing roles.

Incentive structures also work against the development of new perspectives within the field, which significantly limits the potential inherent in the field's expansion around the world. The existing concepts and theories used in higher education research must evolve and change as the sector changes and as they are applied and tested within a broad range of contexts, and—when necessary—new theories and concepts should be developed to take their place. However, this does not often happen, largely because incentive structures do not generally prioritize conceptual work. Those individuals most likely to offer new perspectives on entrenched concepts and theories—namely, those based in the Global South, where the study of higher education is relatively new—are also the least likely to have the time or the resources to engage in more time-intensive scholarship, including the development of new theory, given the extensive teaching and service expectations that tend to fall on faculty in rapidly massifying systems.

There are also significant barriers that reduce the visibility of newer perspectives that are generated. Those who work in any language other than English struggle to reach an international audience, given that all major journals in the field publish in English. Technology also often plays a detrimental role, despite its democratic promise. The algorithms built into search engines funnel researchers towards the most cited sources, while those fueling social media platforms create academic echo chambers, which make it even more difficult for policy makers and practitioners to identify and engage with work being produced outside their preexisting networks. Artificial intelligence is likely to further exacerbate this myopia in research and further limit the range of perspectives available to policy makers, given that large language models work off databases of previously published information.

The Need for Collaboration

The contemporary backlash against higher education could be a needed clarion call for the international higher education research community. There is great potential in the fact that more is known about higher education—including both its potential benefits and its significant failures—than at any other moment in history. However, the opportunity is squandered if that knowledge is largely invisible beyond the confines of academic echo chambers. What is lacking is connection—between contexts, between individual researchers, between data sets, and between ways of knowing and understanding—and translation, between languages but also from academic discourse into accessible prose. The challenge is that the spaces which could be used to foster connection and collaboration—namely, conferences, academic journals and research centers—also often serve to perpetuate many of the challenges already outlined, rather than leveraging their positions of power to address them.

Research centers and associations that organize convening spaces for the field, therefore, have an important role to play in addressing the current impasse, as they could do much more to bring individual bodies of knowledge about higher education together, and to create links between the higher education research community and those working in policy and practice. Academic journals, publishers, and other “producers” of

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This article was inspired by conversations during the closing session of the inaugural CIHE Biennial Conference (June 2023).

Abstract

This article argues that there are currently gaps existing between higher education research and reality. Such a segregation indicates a kind of misalignment and disjuncture between the two realms, and calls for reimagining and transforming the field of higher education research.

knowledge could also do much more to privilege intellectual diversity and to prioritize the open dissemination of knowledge. Responsibility also lies with the institutions that govern academic workload, as more could be done to encourage researchers to prioritize the fostering of connections, both within and beyond the field. At the same time, practitioners and policy makers could do more to actively engage with new strands of research, including from other geographic contexts. Although all of these things are extremely challenging to implement, especially for less established institutions and less globally powerful contexts, they are not impossible, and the potential payoff is great. Indeed, unless such substantial efforts are attempted, the most likely scenario is that the promise inherent in the now fully mature global higher education field will not be met, and the crises facing the sector will continue, to our collective detriment. ▲

Higher Education Research and Reality: They Need to Be Better Aligned

Qiang Zha

There are currently gaps between higher education research and reality, and in this article, we will try to understand how the field of higher education research could be transformed drawing upon two fundamental observations.

The Field Is Short of Visionary Imagination

This sentiment is primarily based on two observations. One is that the field witnesses little visionary research with imagination, i.e., the type of research that would orient or reorient the direction of higher education as an essential realm and institutional entities operationalizing this realm. Put explicitly, there are now significant higher education practices that are in the lead of any research agenda. For example, we now see a few exciting experiments with transforming the traditional patterns of organizing and delivering university education, spearheaded by such institutions or initiatives as Minerva University, Singularity University, London Interdisciplinary School, Olin College of Engineering, and Stanford 2025 (a project exploring the future of Stanford University initiated by a group within the university but outside the formal field of educational research). They all aim to prepare the students with the essential competencies for the future life and society, and enable the students to leverage knowledge to reinforce resilience, overcome uncertainty, and solve complex problems with multiple disciplinary approaches.

Arguably, such institutions and initiatives (though still small in number or size) concern the future patterns of higher education, and preparation of students for working in enterprises not yet created and on problems not yet identified. In the end, the university is about imaginative acquisition of knowledge and ultimately turning the power of imagination into a form of human resource (as Whitehead envisioned).

Notably, those institutions/initiatives emerge against a backdrop in which universities are experiencing skepticism, even in the most advanced systems like that of the United States. A recent survey administered by the *Wall Street Journal* and the University of Chicago found that 56 percent of Americans lost faith in university education, up from 40 percent in 2013. Such skepticism is strongest among people aged 18-34 (the most relevant age group to university education), and among people with university degrees.

Not surprisingly, the PBS news recently reported that the number of higher education students in the United States dropped from 20 million to about 15 million between 2015 and 2023. Certainly, such skepticism is observed in other countries, too, and this new “normal” portends a demand for profound changes in higher education in the years to come. While those aforementioned institutions and initiatives are leading the way for such changes, they do not commonly appear on the radar of specialist higher education researchers, let alone being guided by the research outputs.

Research of imaginative nature requires the guidance of innovative and progressive theories, yet the field of higher education research has never enjoyed a reputation for inducing original theories. So far, most theories applied in this field are borrowed from areas including organizational studies, management studies, sociology, political science, philosophy, history, literature, psychology, and even the sciences. The commonly adopted theoretical frameworks, such as (neo)institutionalism, structuralism, functionalism, path-dependency theory, post-/neocolonialism, postmodernism, pluralism, critical theories (to name a few) all come from those areas. When we study a phenomenon existing in the real world for a while, it is common to relate it to something else in another area, and thus borrow well-established theories from that area. Nevertheless, when we try to imagine something beyond the reality in a field, it would be stimulating and authentic to start from the primordial grand theories in the field, which literally approximates the first principles thinking, i.e., what Aristotle defined as “the first basis from which a thing is known.”

The Field Is Deficient in Terms of Capturing Real Practices

The second observation is that higher education research appears to experience an increasing inability to capture the real practices as well, which is arguably caused by a discrepancy between the holistic tendency/nature of higher education practices and the long-existing fragmentation in this field. Bruce Macfarlane uses the metaphor of a “higher education research archipelago” to shed light on the crude split between policy-based and teaching/learning-oriented researchers in this field (whereby researchers and studies are clustered and isolated on the “islands” of “teaching and learning,” “policy studies,” “institutional research,” “students experience,” “finance and administration,” “professional development,” etc.). He also applies the analogy of a “sea of disjuncture” to illuminate how a new generation of specialist higher education researchers have alienated this field from such foundational disciplines as sociology, psychology, philosophy, history, etc. We should not forget that from those foundational disciplines many great minds came to this field, such as Pierre Bourdieu, Burton Clark, Ray Land, Martin Trow (sociology), Alexander Astin, John Biggs, David Boud, Stanley Hall, Wilbert McKeachie, Robert Pace (psychology), Robert Berdahl, Roger Geiger, Guy Neave, Sheldon Rothblatt (history), Clark Kerr, Lionel Robbins (economics), Jürgen Habermas (philosophy), Tony Becher (anthropology), Derek Bok (law), Ernest Boyer (science/audiology), to cite only a few.

More importantly, we must understand that higher education practices are moving towards a more integrated and holistic reality, where the quality and outcomes of higher education are more and more ensured via holistic approaches. In contrast, in the research realm, institutional researchers typically do not connect their data analysis to improving the student experience, policy researchers are commonly unaware of human cognitive development, and teaching and learning specialists often have little influence on academic professional development.

Given this situation, the fragmentation in higher education research has evolved into a gap between the research and the reality, which naturally leads to trouble when trying to capture complex issues like the growing skepticism and distrust in higher education, as revealed by the aforementioned poll, let alone helping resolve them. In this regard, a widespread story has been circulated about a former president of a major university in China publicly stating that he would not consult higher education specialists when running into issues and would turn to scholars in some foundational disciplines instead. Now, with the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), higher education researchers will soon find a professional crisis coming to their doorway, as AI could do a far better job with

The weakness in theoretical originality and innovation has resulted in a bottleneck for the field of higher education research when it comes to reimagining the future of higher education.

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fragmented research, in which literature, information and data are normally confined in clear-cut and limited territories.

Concluding Remarks

In sum, the weakness in theoretical originality and innovation has resulted in a bottleneck for the field of higher education research when it comes to reimagining the future of higher education. The status quo of fragmented and isolated research in this field has resulted in inadequately capturing the reality of higher education practices that increasingly require holistic effort and approaches. This causes the field to fall behind and be unable to reorient its practices. Down the road, this field should, first and foremost, recognize its originality defects, and then imagine the way out through innovation. For example, since this field has a low threshold in terms of professional training and preparation, it should not seek the identity of a specialist discipline but rather open up its borders, and endeavor to establish interdisciplinarity as its identity and perhaps even its motto. Scholars and practitioners of various academic and social backgrounds should be invited and encouraged to synthesize their perspectives, opinions and experiences. All this can help ensure this research field is realigned with the higher education world, now featuring an increasingly holistic approach to knowledge organization and dissemination. ▲

Bleak but Not Hopeless: Higher Education in Lebanon in Times of Multiple Crises

Benjamin Schmäling

Abstract

The economic and political situation in Lebanon has been worsening since 2019, with wide-ranging repercussions on the society in general, as well as on the higher education system. Despite this, Lebanese universities have shown remarkable resilience, engaging in partnerships and programs that support their own institutional survival and developing initiatives to address economic challenges. Such resilience, however, should not be taken for granted and requires active support to be maintained.

Lebanon is going through “the most devastating, multipronged crisis in its modern history” (World Bank, November 2022). As of summer 2023, the Lebanese pound had lost 98 percent of its value, drastically diminishing the purchasing power of the population. The unemployment rate has increased dramatically, reaching almost 50 percent among young people aged between 15 and 24. With roots in the post-civil war economic policies of the 1990s, the crisis reached a tipping point in October 2019 with the introduction of a tax on messenger services that led to nationwide protests against the ruling class. Since then, the situation has worsened due to subsequent shocks, including the COVID-19 pandemic, a global economic downturn, and the Beirut port blast in August 2020. Moreover, an ongoing political stalemate, with a vacant presidency since October 2022 and a caretaker government with limited power, is preventing economic recovery. The cumulative impact of these crises on Lebanese society is multifaceted and devastating, with an estimated 90 percent of the population currently living below the poverty line. The higher education and research sector has been severely affected as well, with students facing enormous access and affordability issues, research going unfunded, and a massive loss of wages. Institutions struggle to maintain daily operations and witness reduced teaching quality as a result of unprecedented brain drain.

Currency Depreciation Affects Staff, Students, and Institutions Alike

Academic and administrative staff at all universities in Lebanon have suffered substantial losses in their salaries due to a massive currency depreciation. While internationally-backed institutions such as the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University have, until now, managed to pay up to 30 percent of salaries in US dollars and the remainder in Lebanese pounds, salaries at financially weaker universities have plummeted. At the Lebanese University, the country's only public university, salaries are exclusively paid in Lebanese pounds, and the cutbacks have been most dramatic. As such, staff at various institutions compare their work with volunteering, with reports of massive delays in payments, and bargaining for unpaid additional work. As a result, up to 50 percent of the original staff have left their institutions to work abroad. The consequences for the quality of teaching and the research output are significant, and affect the country's struggling economy even more, as it is heavily relying on innovation and the development of human capital.

To counter declining budgets, private universities have increased their tuition fees, mostly requiring payment in a blended rate of US dollars and Lebanese pounds. With students and their families already in a state of economic stress, such increases have made it unaffordable for many of them to continue or even start studies. The overwhelming majority of students are forced to work alongside their studies. Even at the Lebanese University, where tuition fees are raised in Lebanese pounds and hence range between a seemingly affordable equivalent of USD 15 to 60 per year, many students have been forced to quit. The costs for transportation, internet, hardware, study materials, and even stationary pose additional accessibility challenges for students, not to mention the psychological stress and feelings of insecurity and hopelessness associated with the prolonged economic and political crisis.

To counter declining budgets, private universities have increased their tuition fees, mostly requiring payment in a blended rate of US dollars and Lebanese pounds.

Lebanese Universities Perform Well and Try to Tackle Challenges

Despite all hardships, several Lebanese universities still seem to perform quite well in global rankings such as QS or *Times Higher Education* World University Rankings. In QS World 2024, for example, eight out of 30 Lebanese universities figure among the top 1,000 institutions worldwide, among them the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese University, Saint Joseph University, Holy Spirit University, Lebanese American University, and Beirut Arab University. Many institutions continue to be involved in international exchange and partnership programs, which allow them to stay connected and might offer opportunities to attract financial or material support for teaching and research.

In addition, academic institutions have demonstrated their ability to cope with the multiple crises that have unfolded in recent years and to respond to the economic challenges that the country faces. For example, several Lebanese universities have set up or expanded innovation centers to support entrepreneurial initiatives. Through trainings, bootcamps, competitions, and grants students are encouraged to implement their business ideas and to market their products and services. Such initiatives aim to slow brain drain and contribute to job creation inside the country. Other institutions have partnered with international enterprises such as the telecom giant Nokia or the French shipping company CMA CGM to provide scholarships, job opportunities, and support for start-ups.

Several universities are planning to establish branches in the region and benefit from their institution's and the country's educational reputation in an effort to tap into new markets and broaden their revenue base. Under the label "AUB Mediterraneo," the American University of Beirut has established a twin campus in the Cypriot city of Paphos, offering seven bachelor and master programs starting in fall 2023. A similar endeavor is undertaken by the University of Balamand with a focus on medical programs in partnership with the University of Lancashire Cyprus. The Lebanese American University plans to establish a branch campus—including a medical school and a hospital—in Baghdad, Iraq.

Notwithstanding the manifold constraints, Lebanese universities show remarkable resilience. In some cases, this might be due to strong international backing, including endowments in their countries of affiliation, such as the United States or France. But also, their decades-long experience with political and economic turmoil, their institutional autonomy and hence flexibility in adopting tailor-made solutions, as well as a

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widespread spirit of inventiveness and innovation among management, staff and students help tackle the challenges.

Various Actors Launch Reform and Action Plans

In addition to these individual initiatives, the Lebanese ministry of education and higher education has launched a five-year plan aiming to reform the Lebanese higher education sector by strengthening key areas such as governance, quality assurance, and civic engagement. However, local experts have criticized the very generic nature of the plan, its lack of reference to the current crises, and poor involvement of practitioners in the drafting process. Hence, there is little hope that the plan will meaningfully contribute to tackling the enormous challenges that the higher education sector is facing. Other policy initiatives are striving to address these gaps, most notably HOPES-LEB, a project funded by the European Union. Compiled through participatory workshops and conferences, the initiative produced a comprehensive series of recommendations for universities, implementing organizations, the Lebanese government, and the international community on key areas such as funding, student support, teaching practices, and capacity-building.

It is obvious that the overall situation in Lebanon as well as within the higher education sector is still bleak. Structural challenges, such as limited political and state commitment, lack of effective education policy development, and inequalities in financing and access, remain. However, the resilience of the academic tradition in Lebanon, the strong reputation of its universities, excellent performance in international rankings and continuous creation of new initiatives prove that not all hope is lost. It is probably not a coincidence that the national emblem of Lebanon is the Phoenix, a symbol of rebirth and immortality. Assuming their traditional role as change agents, Lebanese universities act as key players in this renewal, and deserve the necessary national and international support. ▲

Japan's Challenges in Addressing Demographic Decline

Akiyoshi Yonezawa

Abstract

Facing an ongoing demographic decline, Japan's higher education is now trying to develop new ecosystems for science, technology, innovation, and human resource development. The higher education system should engage with a wide range of stakeholders and be open in global, national and local dimensions with a long-term vision. Such a transformation in a dialogue between higher education and society is a major challenge, although the country does not have much time left before further decline.

In July 2023, the Japanese government projected further demographic decline and presented the potential impact on the youth population and enrollment in higher education through 2050. These projections highlight three main features. First, the demographic decline is accelerating, largely due to the further decline in the fertility rate in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Second, detailed estimates were published for all 47 prefectures, although their estimation neglected the likely concentration of student enrollment in the Tokyo metropolitan area. Finally, the projections included the expected number of international students in their scenarios, which was a first, while the estimated proportion of international students was set at a relatively modest 3 to 8 percent.

The declining youth population poses a significant threat to higher education in East Asia, where almost every society (South Korea, China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, in addition to Japan) faces a low birth rate. Historically, East Asian economies have maintained their competitiveness through highly motivated students and workers in hierarchical higher education systems that have typically concentrated resources in a select group of elite research universities. However, the decline in the youth population, driven by

the need for high educational investment per child, could lead to a weakening of the student selection function at elite and semi-elite universities, the downsizing or closure of programs and universities due to oversupply, and a reduced talent pool in the labor market. This trend is particularly worrisome for Japan, where long-term aging has already caused significant socioeconomic damage. In 2022, two people aged 15–65 had to support one person over 65, and the ratio will worsen to 3:2 by 2045.

In July 2023, the Japanese government projected further demographic decline and presented the potential impact on the youth population and enrollment in higher education through 2050.

Underperformance of Academic Excellence Initiatives

I recently conducted a comprehensive analysis of Japan's higher education policy over the past three decades, focusing on the underperformance of academic excellence initiatives. Official government reports highlight steady progress in internationalization and management reforms in education, research, and social services at leading universities. Nevertheless, the government's 2013 initiatives aimed at promoting world-class universities as symbols of the nation's commitment to science, technology, and innovation have fallen short of their goal of placing 10 Japanese universities among the world's top 100 by 2023. According to the Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), by 2022, only two Japanese universities reached the top 100, down from five in 2003 and three in 2013. The five factors identified for this shortfall include:

- Insufficient university reform efforts and deepening bureaucratic micromanagement.
- Underfunding of higher education due to budget constraints and stagnant tuition fees.
- An aging society and shrinking domestic talent pool, exacerbated by inadequate efforts to increase female and international student enrollment.
- Slow internationalization of higher education and society due to language and cultural barriers.
- Underdeveloped reward systems for skills and knowledge in the national labor market.

All these factors are interrelated. For example, slow internationalization is influenced by bureaucracy, underfunding, aging, and an underdeveloped reward system. At the same time, a declining youth population and a shortage of human resources mean less competition in higher education and job opportunities for domestic students. An aging society tends to be more conservative and reluctant to change. There is a high risk of a vicious cycle leading to the decline of or catastrophe in Japan's higher education system and society as a whole, especially in rural areas. Recent policy discussion on demographic change in higher education demonstrates a shared sense of crisis among stakeholders in higher education, government, and industry.

Two Ecosystems to Change the Future

The government is now trying to develop two ecosystems to help Japanese society adapt to the global knowledge economy: a knowledge ecosystem that aims to generate knowledge values through science, technology, and innovation, and a human resource development ecosystem that aims to cultivate highly skilled knowledge workers capable of integrating into globalized talent pools and activate national economy. The idea of an ecosystem is introduced for the development of a sustainable virtuous cycle by involving various types of stakeholders, such as governments, industry, universities, and academics at global, national, and local levels.

In the case of Japan, the idea of a knowledge ecosystem has been widely accepted in the last 10 years, in line with the national science, technology, and innovation policy, paying attention to the research function of top universities and their collaboration with industry. More recently, the government has begun to emphasize the need for multi-stakeholder involvement in human resource development. Globalization and population decline have increased the diversification and divide among the youth and their families. Now the Japanese government and society realize the need for active coordination among a wide range of stakeholders when it comes to education and human resource development. Again, higher education is a key component for realizing the virtuous cycle of this ecosystem for human resource development.

To build a knowledge ecosystem, the government has launched a national fund based on a bond of about USD 70 billion, much larger than a series of fragmented academic excellence initiatives over the past 20 years. The plan is to use this fund to support a very limited number of top universities—possibly two or three—over 25 years. These

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universities are expected to develop their own endowments and achieve financial autonomy. The government is also supporting a wide range of research activities to maintain and develop the national infrastructure for science, technology, and innovation.

For the human resources development ecosystem, the government now aims to increase the number of international students from 300,000 in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic) to 400,000 by 2033, and the number of Japanese students studying abroad from 222,000 to 500,000 over the same period. In addition, the government is actively supporting the expansion of STEM-related programs such as information science and green technology, especially to enroll more female students.

Building these two ecosystems and achieving these policy goals will undoubtedly be a significant challenge. The connection between the government and universities needs to shift from a principal-agent relationship characterized by short-cycle performance assessment under new public management to a multistakeholder engagement with long-term dialogues for mutual development in both higher education and society in general. There is a need to change the attitudes of a wide range of stakeholders towards building more internationally open, global citizenship-oriented intercultural communities in both higher education and society in general. This is a long way to go, but this country does not have time under the severe, long-term pressures of demographic decline. ▲

Higher Education in East Asia: Challenges for the Present and the Future

Hugo Horta

Abstract

The expansion of higher education systems in East Asia is largely coming to an end, and post-mass education is becoming a reality. This transition involves a set of challenges that will require education policies, universities, and other relevant agents to adapt to new circumstances in an environment shaped by demographic and techno-economic shifts. Research will also need to become more collaborative, international, and multidisciplinary to meet the complex and uncertain challenges of the twenty-first century.

Like most developed countries, higher education systems in East Asia are becoming postmassified. This new stage implies new challenges, transformations, and adaptation to a new reality that policymakers and universities must be ready to tackle. In this context, East Asia faces three main challenges.

Before delving into these three challenges, it is important to point out that, like in other regions of the world, the challenges associated with massification, such as those related to equity and access, assessment, and quality of education, remain mostly unresolved in East Asia.

Consolidate Higher Education Systems Owing to Demographic Shifts

The period of expansion of the higher education sector in East Asia is coming to an end. Universities in the region may seek to mitigate declining domestic student enrollment by attracting international students. However, the attractiveness of other destinations, the cost of living in the region, and tuition fees may make it difficult for East Asian universities to attract many international students. This challenge is not only linked to East Asian universities but also to a change in the paradigm of welcoming students who would eventually enter the workforce in host countries. The current “assimilationist” perspective may need to change to an open perspective that would allow host countries to take advantage of the new ideas and creative potential of these skilled migrants. East Asian universities may also seek to create programs for nontraditional students that meet the demand for lifelong learning. This strategy, however, is likely to have a relatively small effect for several reasons. First, the duration of courses for nontraditional students and

their salary level tend to be lower than those of traditional students. Second, in aging societies, people are likely to be concerned about saving money to secure their retirement; therefore, they are more likely to allocate their savings to pensions than to education. Third, household debt in East Asian countries is high, and economic conditions are unfavorable (possible financial or economic crises on the horizon). Thus, nontraditional students are unlikely to use their disposable income or wealth to invest in education.

Most students in East Asian countries are enrolled in private universities, which face the highest risk of closure. Private universities rely heavily on tuition fees for their financial viability. They are also overwhelmingly teaching-oriented and less reputable than public universities. Private universities are likely to be closed or merged in the face of declining enrollment to make them financially sustainable. Public universities should be safer because they are funded by governments and have mandates that make them economically and socially strategic, even if they are not necessarily financially viable. Nevertheless, this is unlikely to prevent some of them from merging, as government debt in the region is also high, and public budgets will require tighter control over spending. This means both private and public universities will face job cuts, leading to expected unemployment of academics, with some of them having few job opportunities in the sector (age constraints), while new PhDs will face difficulties in finding a job in academia.

The period of expansion of the higher education sector in East Asia is coming to an end.

Prepare Higher Education Systems for Techno-economic Shifts

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, artificial intelligence, and associated mass automation will necessitate a reexamination of existing educational offerings. No one knows the outcomes of these technological shifts and advancements, but future workers are expected to work multiple jobs over their lifetime. Studying engineering to become an engineer is a thing of the past because after studying engineering, a student may become a manager, a teacher, or hold a position unrelated to engineering. Students will need adaptable skill sets that must cross disciplinary boundaries. As a result, the focus of learning should be on learning to learn, unlearn and relearn. Students should be able to adapt to new challenges rather than focus too much on learning specialized technical knowledge (which may quickly become obsolete). Universities should consider teaching their students transversal technical knowledge and the ability to adapt to multifaceted work demands and diverse challenges. Increased use of multidisciplinary project-based learning and experiential learning is essential. Therefore, courses may also need to be run by more than one school or department. This change must be promoted and implemented throughout the education system. Yet, universities should be the first to prepare for these changes, as should accreditation and evaluation agencies, because technological uncertainties demand constant rethinking and flexibility, not only from academics but from all stakeholders. This will require a broad effort, which can only be achieved by promoting the need for greater institutional and programmatic diversity, as well as autonomy between and within universities.

To ensure that universities can adapt to technological shifts, they also need to engage in more reforms. Universities should promote and invest in their strengths, rather than disperse their limited resources trying to do everything and risk ultimately failing to achieve meaningful outcomes. This would involve easing the constant tensions between research, teaching, and service, and would mean changing the incentives and career progression schemes currently followed by academics. The career of research-oriented academics initially recruited for their research potential/profile should be assessed against activities associated with research quality and postgraduate training. Teaching-oriented academics recruited for their pedagogical and teaching abilities/potential should first be assessed on the basis of the innovative curricula they develop, close monitoring of student learning, and research on teaching and pedagogy. All academics should be able to progress from assistant professor to professor, but may be assessed differently based on their core strengths and work related to the role for which they are hired.

Internationalize Intensively and Sustainably

The number of international publications authored by scholars affiliated with East Asian universities has increased, but their visibility and impact are limited. This warrants continued investment in scientific and academic research. Public investment in academic research in the region is still low compared with other advanced economies and needs to be at least sustained. This also justifies the need for greater internationalization of academic staff in the region (not only by promoting international mobility but also by attracting more international academics, postdoctoral researchers, and doctoral students to East Asian universities). It is also necessary to consider a shift from quantity to quality in the production of research output. The focus on production is primarily the result of incentives that emphasize publication quantity rather than quality, which needs to change. Conducting research to meet quotas for global university rankings should be replaced by a focus on meaningful research for the betterment of society. Such a shift toward quality may imply the need for more balanced investments in fields other than STEM, particularly in the social sciences and humanities, which are at the heart of innovation efforts and breakthroughs in the twenty-first century. ▲

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