



Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies (AMCHES)
Call for Papers
Conference
“Negotiating changes in the process of transition from school to higher education in Africa”.
04-06 June 2024

CALL FOR PAPERS

The Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies (AMCHES) at the University of Johannesburg is pleased to announce a call for papers for a conference centred around the theme, “Negotiating Changes in the Transition Process from School to Higher Education in Africa.” This event is scheduled to be held in Johannesburg, South Africa, from June 04 to 06, 2024. Accepted papers will be invited for presentation at the conference. AMCHES will cover travel costs and accommodation for participants with accepted papers attending the conference.

Thematic Overview and Objectives of the Book

The conference theme centres around the intricate challenges associated with the transition from secondary school to higher education, specifically focusing on the academic performance of students in Africa. The journey from secondary school to tertiary education poses a substantial challenge for African students, highlighting a multitude of hurdles that hinder a seamless transition. These challenges encompass various dimensions such as socioeconomic factors, cultural disparities, and psychological intricacies, all of which collectively contribute to a notable decline in academic achievements during the initial one to two years of their higher education journey. Regrettably, the success rate among recently enrolled South African higher education students remains dishearteningly low. Despite the urgency and gravity of these challenges, a surprising gap exists in scholarly discourse aimed at investigating, comprehending, and ultimately mitigating the complexities tied to the transition from secondary school to university. This absence of thorough academic dialogue underscores the pressing need for comprehensive discussions and research initiatives that delve into the heart of this matter. By fostering a more profound understanding of the transition challenges, we can pave the way for effective strategies and interventions that offer support, guidance, and solutions to empower South African students as they embark on their higher education endeavours.

Various research from across a range of national and international contexts makes it increasingly evident that a student's transition to higher education is a complex process that has a direct impact on student success (see Hultberg et al. 2008; Krause & Coates, 2008; Kyndt et al., 2017; Murtagh, 2012). A smooth transition into higher education can set the foundation for students' academic success at universities. However, many students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, find this transition difficult. Students have different capacities and resilience to navigate through change and cope with the dynamics of a campus environment. The complexities of transition from schools to universities require a genuine academic interrogation to address some of the challenges of low participation, high attrition, and low retention rates. The transition from school to university is widely recognised as a significant leap to independence and personal and academic autonomy for most students. The challenges of transition and resilience, especially at the early stage of university enrolment, discourage many students from pursuing their studies in academic institutions. This leads to low participation, high attrition, and low retention rates in many African higher education systems. For instance, studies conducted by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in South Africa have found that 50% of black students who access university study drop out, and the majority of dropouts occur in the first year of study (Thompson, Pawson & Evans, 2021). The CHE report, published in 2013, argued that students performed poorly at university because schools did not adequately prepare



them. Nevertheless, the challenges of poor performance of students go beyond academic preparedness; instead, they include other socioeconomic aspects.

Factors including financial constraints, family and work-related commitments, poor academic preparation, complex campus social life terrains, ill-informed choice of disciplines, the pressure of being a first-generation student, and inadequate academic support are some of the significant factors reported in several research as causes for high student dropout rate in higher education (Young et al., 2020). The poor academic results of students hinder their progress, especially in undergraduate programs and result in higher dropout rates during the first year of study. There are multifaceted challenges that students need to negotiate in the process of transition from school to a university, including coping with the knowledge gap (academic preparedness), economic burden (financial constraints), socio-cultural issues (managing independence and personal autonomy) and psycho-behavioural discipline (mental health issue). Student retention – particularly corresponding dropout and graduation rates – have thus become a critical issue in most African countries. Apart from academic challenges, transferring from the controlled environment offered in school and the family home to accepting personal responsibility for academic, financial and social aspects of life is challenging. Thus, the various factors that feed the challenges of transition and solutions must be thoroughly interrogated. The proposed conference will be both an academic and policy platform to have a genuine dialogue among researchers, schoolteachers, union leaders and policymakers on the above theme.

The conference will be a consultative forum to establish international and regional collaborations and networking that will lead to joint research and publications in the future. Its primary objective is to cultivate a comprehensive pan-African forum for critical dialogues, explicitly addressing the intricate challenges associated with the shift from secondary to tertiary education within the African context. Central to this endeavour are pivotal questions: What precisely are the challenges linked to transitioning from secondary to higher education? How does the experience of first-year students reflect on their academic achievement? How do students navigate change and develop resilience to cope with complex higher education environments? What would schools' role be in preparing students for the transition to a higher education space? How do students and teacher associations contribute towards alleviating the challenges of low participation, high attrition, and low retention rates? These and many other issues will shape the discussions at the conference.

The primary objective of this conference is to convene key stakeholders invested in this issue, including scholars from African universities, student organisations, teacher associations, and representatives from university leadership. The primary purpose is to provide a platform for presenting and discussing research papers addressing the intricate challenges associated with transitioning from schools to higher education spaces within the South African higher education system. The most outstanding papers from this conference will undergo a comprehensive peer-review process for potential inclusion in an edited volume. This volume will be published by Brill's book series "African Higher Education: Developments and Perspectives" under the auspices of the Ali Mazrui Centre for Higher Education Studies (AMCHES) at the University of Johannesburg.

Papers that address the following issues (but are not limited to) are welcome.

- The challenges linked to transitioning from secondary to higher education in South Africa.
- Reflections on first-year students' experience and its impact on academic achievement in South Africa.
- Navigating change: student development and resilience in complex higher education environments.
- The role of schools in preparing students for transition to higher education.
- The contribution of student and teacher associations in alleviating challenges of low participation, high attrition, and low retention rates
- Comparative perspectives on challenges and mitigating mechanisms of transition.

Submission procedure



Researchers are invited to submit an abstract of 300 to 500 words, clearly outlining the topic, objectives, method, and contribution of their proposed paper, on or before **February 28, 2024**. Authors will be notified about the status of their abstract by **March 10, 2024**, and will receive manuscript guidelines. Full papers must be submitted by **May 01, 2024**. All submitted papers will undergo a double-blind peer review process.

Accepted papers will be invited for presentation at a conference scheduled for June 4-6, 2024. AMCHES will cover travel costs and accommodation for participants with accepted papers attending the conference.

Please send your abstract to **Prof. Emmet Tadesse Woldegiorgis** at emnetw@uj.ac.za

Publisher

This book is scheduled to be published by Brill Publisher as a book series, 'African Higher Education: Developments and Perspectives' see <https://brill.com/view/serial/AFHE>.

*Note: The AMCHES will cover the editorial expenses for all accepted papers.

Important Dates

February 28, 2024: Abstract Submission Deadline

March 10, 2024: Notification of Acceptance

May 01, 2024: Full chapters Submission

Conference in Johannesburg: 4-6 June 2024

Enquiries

Prof Emmet Tadesse Woldegiorgis at emnetw@uj.ac.za.