

2026

MANCOSA QUALITY CONFERENCE

Book of Abstracts

Curriculum Transformation for Student Success, Innovation and
Sustainable Employability



22 - 23 July 2026



Coastlands Convention Centre,
Umhlanga



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WELCOME MESSAGE



Professor Saritha Beni

*Director: Curriculum Development and Management, and Monitoring and Evaluation,
MANCOSA*

It is with great pleasure I welcome you to the MANCOSA 2026 Quality Conference and to thank you for joining us over the next two days as we engage in meaningful dialogue on the future of higher education.

This conference brings together an exceptional community of academics, researchers, higher education leaders, quality assurance practitioners, policy makers, students, professional bodies, and industry partners, united by a shared commitment to advancing excellence, innovation, and transformation within higher education.

The contemporary higher education landscape continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. Institutions are increasingly challenged to respond to technological advancement, changing labour market expectations, evolving policy environments, and the growing imperative to produce graduates who are adaptable, socially responsible, and equipped to contribute meaningfully to sustainable development. In this context, curriculum transformation is no longer simply an academic exercise it is a strategic imperative that underpins student success, institutional relevance, graduate employability, and national development.

The theme of this year's conference, "Curriculum Transformation for Student Success, Innovation and Sustainable Employability," reflects MANCOSA's commitment to advancing curricula that are transformative, contextually relevant, evidence-informed, and responsive to both local and global challenges. It recognises that curriculum transformation must extend beyond curriculum design to encompass innovative teaching and learning, meaningful assessment, quality assurance, community engagement, research translation, digital capability, and strong partnerships with industry and society.

Throughout the conference, delegates will have the opportunity to engage with distinguished keynote speakers, respected scholars, policy leaders, quality assurance specialists, and industry experts who will share their expertise, research, and practical experiences across a range of contemporary higher education topics.

We are particularly honoured to welcome our keynote speakers, Dr Naledi Pandor, Dr Rose Masha, and Professor Francois Strydom together with our special guest panellist, Dr Shaheeda Essack. Their collective expertise and leadership will undoubtedly enrich our discussions and challenge us to think differently about the future of higher education.

Our sincere appreciation also extends to our exhibitors, whose participation enriches the conference experience. As leading academic publishers and knowledge partners, they contribute significantly to the advancement of scholarship, research, and lifelong learning by providing access to the latest academic publications, digital resources, and educational innovations. Their presence reflects the important partnership between higher education institutions and the scholarly publishing community in supporting curriculum transformation, fostering academic excellence, and preparing graduates for an increasingly dynamic and knowledge-driven world. We encourage delegates to engage with our exhibitors and take advantage of the valuable resources and expertise they have to offer throughout the conference.

In addition to our keynote sessions, the conference will showcase a diverse programme of peer-reviewed paper presentations, panel discussions and scholarly conversations organised around three interconnected conference themes:

- Curriculum Transformation, Contextual Knowledge Systems and Student Success
- Curriculum Transformation through Implementation, Applied Learning and Student-Centred Design
- Curriculum Transformation for Innovation and Sustainable Employability

These thematic streams provide opportunities to explore innovative research, evidence-informed practices, and collaborative approaches that strengthen curriculum relevance, student success, graduate capability, and sustainable employability. They also reinforce the important role that higher education plays in informing policy, responding to societal needs, and shaping the future workforce.

While the exchange of knowledge remains central to this conference, equally important are the opportunities to build lasting professional relationships, establish collaborative partnerships, and learn from the diverse experiences represented within this community. It is through these conversations that new ideas emerge, innovative practices are shared, and collective solutions are developed to address the complex challenges facing higher education.

I encourage every delegate to participate actively in the discussions, engage with presenters, exchange ideas with colleagues, and take full advantage of the opportunities for networking and collaboration throughout the conference. Your knowledge, perspectives, and experiences are invaluable, and your contribution will enrich the collective learning of all who are gathered here.

On behalf of MANCOSA, I extend my sincere appreciation to our keynote speakers, presenters, delegates, organising committee, reviewers, sponsors, partners, and all those who have contributed to making this conference possible. Your commitment to advancing quality, scholarship, and innovation in higher education is deeply appreciated.

I trust that you will find the conference intellectually stimulating, professionally rewarding, and personally inspiring. May the discussions over the next two days encourage new thinking, strengthen partnerships, and reaffirm our shared commitment to transforming higher education in ways that advance student success, innovation, and sustainable employability. I wish you an engaging, productive, and memorable conference.

Professor Saritha Beni

**Director: Curriculum Development and Management, and Monitoring and Evaluation,
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MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER



Professor Zaheer Hamid

Chief Academic Officer: MANCOSA

This year's conference theme, **curriculum transformation for student success, innovation and sustainable employment** positions higher education as an interconnected ecosystem in which curriculum, research, teaching and community engagement collectively enable meaningful student outcomes and sustained societal impact. It challenges us to move beyond traditional conceptions of quality assurance and engage in a deeper conversation about the true purpose of higher education in Africa. At a time when technological disruption, artificial intelligence, demographic change and growing social inequality are reshaping our societies, quality can no longer be understood solely through the lenses of compliance, accreditation and institutional accountability. While these remain indispensable foundations of public trust, they are no longer sufficient to define educational excellence in an increasingly complex and interconnected world.

The conference invites us to reflect on a fundamental question: **What does quality education ultimately exist to achieve?**

For MANCOSA, quality has always been intrinsically linked to opportunity. Since our establishment, our commitment has been to provide accessible, accredited and affordable higher education that expands human capability and contributes meaningfully to individual, community and national development. Quality therefore extends beyond institutional performance indicators. It is reflected in the lives transformed, the barriers dismantled, the knowledge created, and the opportunities unlocked for students who, through education, become agents of change within their families, professions and communities.

South Africa has developed one of the most respected higher education systems on the African continent, supported by robust quality assurance and regulatory frameworks that safeguard academic standards and institutional integrity. Yet our national and continental realities compel us to continually ask whether our collective understanding of quality remains sufficiently responsive to the challenges of our time.

As higher education evolves through digital transformation, lifelong learning, interdisciplinary scholarship and new models of teaching and assessment, so too must our approaches to assuring and advancing quality.

More importantly, quality must increasingly be understood as a **social transformation imperative**. Higher education has the responsibility not only to produce graduates, but to reduce inequality, strengthen democratic participation, stimulate innovation, promote ethical leadership and contribute to sustainable economic and social development. In the African context, where the world's youngest population represents both extraordinary promise and significant responsibility, quality education becomes one of the most powerful instruments for shaping a more equitable and prosperous future.

This conference provides an important platform to explore how institutions, regulators, researchers and industry can collectively reimagine quality as an enabler of innovation while preserving the academic integrity and public confidence upon which higher education depends. It is an opportunity to examine how quality frameworks can encourage creativity, responsiveness and institutional agility without compromising rigorous standards.

Over the course of our deliberations, I encourage every delegate to engage courageously with the ideas presented, to challenge established assumptions and to consider how quality assurance can evolve from being primarily a mechanism of compliance into a catalyst for educational excellence, societal impact and transformative change.

Ultimately, the quality of higher education will be judged not only by what our institutions produce, but by the difference they make in the lives of people and in the future of our continent. It is through this shared commitment that we can ensure higher education continues to serve as one of Africa's most powerful drivers of social transformation.

Professor Zaheer Hamid
Chief Academic Officer
MANCOSA

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



Dr Naledi Pandor

Chairperson: Nelson Mandela Foundation

Born on 7 December 1953, Dr Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor is South Africa's former Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (2019–2024). She was a member of the ministerial team that initiated South Africa's genocide case against Israel at the International Court of Justice. On 1 October 2024, Dr Pandor was appointed Chair of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, becoming only the third person to hold this position since the organisation was established by Nelson Mandela in 1999.

Dr Pandor entered Parliament in 1994 and has since built an extensive record of service in public office. She served as Deputy Chief Whip of the ANC in the National Assembly (1995–1998), Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (1998), and Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (1999–2004).

Her expertise in education policy and planning led to her appointment as Minister of Education in 2004. She went on to serve continuously in the national cabinet, holding the following portfolios:

- Minister of Education (2004–2009)
- Minister of Science and Technology (2009–2012)
- Minister of Home Affairs (2012–2014)
- Minister of Science and Technology (2014–2018)
- Minister of Higher Education and Training (2018–2019)
- Minister of International Relations and Cooperation (2019–2024)

Dr Pandor holds a PhD from the University of Pretoria (2019) and has received honorary doctorates from the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, Stellenbosch University, the University of Lisbon (Portugal), and University College Dublin (Ireland).

On 28 February 2025, she was also appointed Honorary Professor in Education at the University of Pretoria.

Her leadership and international standing have been recognised through numerous honours, including:

- Grand Cross of Merit – Germany’s highest federal award, presented by Ambassador Walter Lindner, who described her as “a symbol of the new South Africa: modern, innovative, dedicated to scientific progress, and an outstanding female leader.”
- Grand Cross of the Order of Rio Branco – Brazil’s highest grade of the Order, conferred by President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.
- Grand Star of the Order of Jerusalem – awarded by the President of the State of Palestine.
- Officier de l’Ordre National de la Légion d’Honneur – conferred by the French President and presented by Ambassador Christophe Farnaud.

Dr Pandor is married to Mr Sharif Pandor. They are proud parents of four children and grandparents of eight.



Prof. Francois Strydom

Senior Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning

Prof. Francois Strydom is currently the Senior Director of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) at the University of the Free State. He has dedicated his career to promoting quality, equity and student success in higher education through evidence-based innovation. He has been the project leader of the South African Surveys of Student Engagement (SASSE) since 2007. The SASSE project, has been used by 20 public higher education institutions across Southern Africa. He has led grants from international and national donors such as the Kresge Foundation, the Michael and Susan Dell Foundation, the Department of Higher Education, Universities South Africa and the Council on Higher Education. His professional and research interests include student engagement, success and equity, capacity development, quality learning and teaching and evidence-based change in higher education and employability.



Dr Rose Masha

Director: Accreditation at the Council on Higher Education

Dr Rose Masha is the Director of Accreditation at the Council on Higher Education (CHE), a regulator responsible for quality assurance in South African higher education. She leads the national programme accreditation portfolio that oversees the evaluation of programmes across diverse institutional contexts.

She is currently also serving as Acting Executive Director: Corporate Services at the CHE, where she provides executive oversight of the ICT and Human Resources subprogrammes. In this role, she contributes to strengthening organisational governance, digital systems capability, and institutional effectiveness.

Dr Masha holds a Master's degree in Hypermedia for Language Learning and a PhD in Education with a focus on ICT. She was awarded the prestigious Sasol Inzalo Foundation Fellowship Award for STEM programmes to pursue doctoral research focused on the digitisation of language education and technology-enhanced pedagogy.

Her scholarly publications and conference presentations include work on student access, retention and success, throughput, academic literacy development, digital transformation and higher education institutional system automation and governance. With over 20 years of experience in higher education, she has held leadership roles as lecturer, postdoctoral supervisor, Executive management of a Teaching and Learning Centre and Deputy Registrar: Academic Administration.

Her professional interests lie at the intersection of programme design, epistemic inclusion, digital transformation, regulatory governance, and positioning quality assurance as a strategic mechanism for transformation, institutional sustainability and public accountability.

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ABSTRACTS

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A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW OF INTEGRATING INDUSTRY-DRIVEN PRACTICAL TRAINING IN ACADEMIC CURRICULA TO ENHANCE SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABILITY IN THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) has transformed the global workforce, emphasising skills in automation, AI, and data analytics. Traditional academic curricula often lag industry needs, leading to graduate unemployment and skill mismatches. This study evaluates the integration of industry-driven practical training into academic programs to foster sustainable employability, defined as long-term career adaptability and resilience in dynamic job markets.

The primary aim is to assess how embedding real-world, industry-led training in higher education curricula enhances students' employability outcomes in the 4IR era. Secondary objectives include identifying barriers to integration and proposing strategies for academia-industry collaboration.

A systematic literature review was conducted following the PRISMA guidelines. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords like "industry-driven training," "academic curricula," "employability," and "4IR." Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles from 2015-2025, yielding 1,248 initial records. Exclusion criteria omitted papers and articles that did not address the research theme. After screening for relevance and quality, studies were analysed qualitatively, with thematic synthesis to extract patterns on training efficacy.

Results indicate that industry-integrated training significantly improves employability, with 78% of studies reporting enhanced technical skills, problem-solving, and adaptability. Key benefits include reduced unemployment rates (up to 25% lower) and better alignment with 4IR demands, such as digital literacy. However, challenges such as resource constraints and curricular rigidity were prevalent in 60% of cases.

Institutions should prioritise partnerships with industries for co-designed curricula, incorporating apprenticeships and simulations. Policymakers are urged to incentivise such integrations through funding and accreditation reforms.

This research extends human capital theory by highlighting the role of experiential learning in sustainable employability, bridging gaps in 4IR skill frameworks.

Practical Implications: For educators, it offers blueprints for curriculum redesign; for industries, it promotes talent pipelines; and for students, it ensures market-ready competencies, fostering economic sustainability.

Keywords: Industry-driven training, Academic curricula, Employability, 4IR



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TRANSFORMING THE CURRICULUM FOR ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABILITY: A CASE STUDY FROM A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

This study explores the imperative for curriculum transformation to foster innovation and ensure sustainable employability among graduates. It aims to identify curriculum innovations that enhance students' entrepreneurial competencies and long-term employability in a rapidly evolving economic landscape. Focusing on a business school in South Africa, the research investigates how embedding entrepreneurship education across disciplines can bridge the gap between academic knowledge and the dynamic demands of the labour market.

This research adopts a qualitative case study approach, involving in-depth analysis of curriculum redesign initiatives at one South African university. Data collection methods include document analysis and semi-structured interviews with curriculum developers, programme coordinators, and final-year students. Thematic analysis was utilised to identify patterns related to pedagogical shifts, industry engagement, and graduate attributes necessary for the 21st-century economy.

The findings reveal that traditional, siloed curricula are insufficient for preparing students for a volatile economic landscape. Successful curriculum transformation requires a tripartite approach: (1) the integration of experiential learning and innovation challenges that mimic real-world problem-solving; (2) the development of transversal skills such as adaptability, critical thinking, and digital literacy alongside technical expertise; and (3) strategic partnerships with industry to ensure content relevance and provide practical exposure. The study highlights effective practices for integrating sustainability and employability into entrepreneurship education in the South African higher education context.

This research contributes to the discourse on higher education reform by providing a practical framework for transforming curricula to cultivate an entrepreneurial mindset. It argues that sustainable employability is not merely about job acquisition upon graduation, but about equipping students with the innovative capacity to create opportunities and adapt throughout their careers. The study offers actionable insights for higher education institutions seeking to align their academic offerings with the Sustainable Development Goals related to decent work and economic growth.

Keywords: Curriculum transformation, sustainable employability, innovation, entrepreneurship education, higher education, graduate attributes, employability skills.



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STUDENT ACCEPTANCE AND USE OF MOODLE AT A SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY

Teaching and learning in higher education institutions have been transformed due to the integration of technology, shaping institutions to adopt Learning Management Systems (LMS). The University of Johannesburg migrated from Blackboard LMS to Moodle LMS in 2024. This study investigates factors influencing students' acceptance and use of Moodle LMS at a South African University, guided by the Unified Theory of Acceptance and Use of Technology (UTAUT-3) framework (Farooq et al., 2017). The model was selected for its ability to account for both individual and institutional factors shaping technology adoption within curriculum implementation and student-centred learning contexts.

A quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational non-experimental study was employed, with data collected through an anonymous survey administered to first-year and postgraduate students across all faculties ($n = 301$). The instrument's reliability and validity were confirmed using established statistical measures, and data were analysed using Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) via SmartPLS4 (Hair et al., 2017; Hair et al., 2019).

The findings indicate that students' acceptance of Moodle is influenced by perceived usefulness, ease of use, and facilitating conditions, highlighting the importance of accessible, purpose-driven digital learning environments and strong institutional support. Furthermore, meaningful engagement with the LMS is closely linked to how lecturers design and implement course content, highlighting the role of pedagogical practices in enabling student-centred learning. The results also show that effective LMS integration supports applied learning through interactive activities, continuous assessment, and flexible access to resources.

These findings position LMS adoption as a key enabler of curriculum transformation rather than merely a technical intervention. The study offers contextually grounded insights from South Africa's higher education sector, where varying levels of digital access and support shape student engagement. By linking technology acceptance to pedagogical implementation, the study contributes to ongoing efforts to enhance student engagement and success through intentional, student-centred use of LMS platforms in diverse and resource-constrained environments. Future research can build on exploring moderating variables such as age, gender, and study level that influence technology adoption and use.

Keywords: Curriculum transformation, Moodle Learning Management System (LMS), Student-centred learning, Technology acceptance



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CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ADDITIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS THAT ARE BASED ON RESEARCH AND PRACTICAL APPLIED KNOWLEDGE.

The introduction of applied knowledge obtained as a result of research into modern innovative approaches and practical knowledge gained in practice into educational programs is an important area of training new specialists. For the practical implementation of such approaches, Additional education programs can be successfully used. These programs can be held, for example, during one academic year, and provide additional knowledge to the main training programs, in which these knowledge are not provided. Additional education programs are developed and implemented with the mandatory participation of representatives of production and business companies, which allows to use their experience of practical work and knowledge on the needs of job markets and new specialties.

Such transformations of curricula can be the basis for the development and improvement of state, institutional and sectoral policies, especially at the level of regional, urban and municipal territories. The convenience of using such programs is as follows: The programs can focus on a specific area of new knowledge, such as innovation in manufacturing, business, sustainable urban management, new technologies, the introduction of digital technologies, etc. The programs are tailored to the real needs of companies, administrative structures of cities, municipal territories, regions, or ministries. The programs can be implemented in the form of targeted projects with the participation of customer representatives and internships based on them. The programs do not limit the number of participants in the training group. Groups can include both students from general university programs and representatives of the real economy and management sector, creating an additional synergistic effect. The program can use the latest legislative and regulatory documents more quickly and efficiently, both at the national and international levels. The program can be implemented at the international level.

The St. Petersburg State University of Economics is currently planning such a program. The program will focus on the prospects for the implementation of hybrid energy (alternative, solar, wind, nuclear, and traditional energy generation), the use of new types of energy resources (LNG, hydrogen, methanol, etc.) at the regional level in Russia and in the countries of the Global South.

In addition to the St. Petersburg State University Professors, the program will involve representatives of real businesses from Russia's leading Energy, Transportation, Logistics and Law firms, as well as representatives of the St. Petersburg Administration. Such programs can be interesting for both Russia and African countries, and they can be implemented together.

Additional education program: "Management of sustainable development of municipal and regional territories based on hybrid energy and innovative energy resources"

Municipal and regional administrations make decisions under conditions of simultaneous impact of energy, transport and logistics, environmental, technological and socio-economic factors. Separate consideration of these areas leads to fragmented solutions, an increase in budgetary and infrastructure risks, and a decrease in the sustainability of territories. The key condition for sustainable development is the modernization of regional energy. Municipalities and regions need to ensure reliable supply, energy accessibility for citizens and businesses, reduced infrastructure costs, the use of local resources, and technological readiness for new energy markets.

Alternative energy sources, distributed generation, storage systems, and hybrid energy systems are particularly important for remote, northern, mountainous, island, rural, and recreational areas. Their development helps to reduce dependence on long-distance fuel imports, enhance the resilience of critical infrastructure, and create new investment and production specializations. The program considers solar and wind energy, LNG, hydrogen, methanol, biomethane, synthetic fuels, and other innovative energy resources as tools for diversifying energy supply and transportation. Their implementation should be based not on a declarative adherence to technological trends, but on an assessment of the resource base, demand, technological maturity, total life cycle cost, environmental effects, safety, and infrastructure availability.

The proposed program provides students with a systematic management picture of the territory and practical tools for developing coordinated solutions in the fields of energy, transport, urban and municipal infrastructure, environmental management, digitalization, investment development, and inter-municipal cooperation. The concept retains the original idea of training motivated management leaders through inter-university cooperation. The main target audience includes students, representatives of energy companies, and employees of municipal and regional authorities responsible for strategic planning, economics, infrastructure, housing and communal services, energy, transport, ecology, investments, digital transformation, and territorial development.

The program is applied in nature. The result of training is a model project for the sustainable development of a specific municipality or region, including an energy balance, scenarios for modernising energy generation and networks, an assessment of alternative sources and innovative energy carriers, an economic model, and a roadmap for implementation.

The Program's Goal

Training management teams capable of developing and implementing comprehensive solutions for sustainable development of municipal and regional territories based on the modernisation of energy infrastructure, the development of hybrid and alternative energy, the reasonable use of LNG, hydrogen, methanol and other innovative resources, as well as the coordination of economic efficiency, transport accessibility, environmental safety and digital management.

Main objectives:

- To form a systematic understanding of the interconnections between the territory's economy, energy, transport, ecology, and social infrastructure;
- To master the tools of strategic, program-targeted, and project management;
- To teach how to create a territorial fuel and energy balance, predict demand, and identify areas of energy vulnerability;
- To develop the ability to choose the optimal combination of grid, distributed, alternative, and backup generation;
- Provide practical knowledge about the production chains of solar, wind, and other types of alternative energy, storage, transportation, and use of LNG, hydrogen, methanol, biomethane, synthetic fuels, and energy storage systems;
- To teach how to compare technologies in terms of their full life cycle cost, technological maturity, localisation, reliability, safety, and environmental impact;
- To ensure that students are familiar with the methods of preparing investment projects, public-private partnerships, energy service contracts, and inter-municipal cooperation;
- To develop skills in working with territorial data, digital platforms, geoinformation systems, and analytical panels;
- To ensure that students are familiar with the best Russian and international practices, taking into account the legal, climatic, resource, and institutional characteristics of a particular territory;
- To establish sustainable interregional and international professional connections.

Main categories of participants: Main categories of participants:

- Heads and specialists of local government bodies;
- Employees of executive authorities of the constituent entities of the Russian Federation;
- Participants of the personnel reserve of municipal and regional services;
- Specialists of committees and departments of economy, strategic planning, investments, housing and communal services, fuel and energy complex, industry, transport, ecology, nature management, tourism and digital development;
- Heads of municipal institutions and enterprises involved in the implementation of infrastructure projects;

- Under a separate quota - specialists of energy, transport and utility companies included in cross-sectoral project teams.
- Students planning their future specialisation in the above-mentioned sectors

Final project

The team of students develops a project of integrated development of a specific territory. Each project must contain an energy section: the initial fuel and energy balance, demand forecast, a map of constraints and at least two scenarios of modernisation. One of the scenarios should consider alternative generation, a hybrid system, LNG, hydrogen, methanol, biomethane, accumulators or a combination of these solutions. The topics may include the modernisation of public infrastructure, energy supply for remote settlements, low-carbon transportation, an industrial or tourism cluster, waste-to-energy recycling, the creation of fueling infrastructure, or a digital energy management platform.

- Diagnosis of the initial state, fuel and energy balance, and stakeholder map;
- Description of the problem, resource potential, infrastructure constraints, and risks;
- Forecast of demand and at least two technological scenarios;
- Justification of the choice of generation, storage, and energy carriers;
- Technical and infrastructure model, including fuel logistics and network connections;
- Assessment of technological maturity, safety, and staffing;
- Economic and budgetary assessment, total life cycle cost, and sources of financing.
- Environmental and social effects throughout the life cycle;
- Legal, tariff, and organisational framework;
- Digital model of indicators and monitoring;
- Pilot phase, scaling conditions, roadmap, and milestones.



Coster Ruzengwe

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RETHINKING TOURISM HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH THROUGH MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

South Africa's tourism sector is widely recognised as a primary driver for economic growth, employment creation, and inclusive development. However, persistent post-apartheid structural inequalities continue to shape access to education and meaningful participation within the industry. Factors such as historical disadvantage, financial constraints, uneven schooling, and the digital divide frequently limit entry into traditional higher education pathways for many prospective learners. As the industry undergoes rapid transformation driven by global sustainability imperatives and technological advancements, there is an urgent need for more flexible and responsive educational models. This study investigates the emerging integration of Micro-credentials (MC) and Open Educational Resources (OER) within tourism higher education (THE) in the Global South, exploring their potential to widen access for disadvantaged individuals seeking inclusive learning pathways.

Guided by Nancy Fraser's theory of social justice, the research applies the dimensions of redistribution (economic access), recognition (cultural and linguistic inclusion), and representation (voice and participation) to evaluate THE as an arena where structural inequities may be challenged. Within this framework, MC and OER are viewed as mechanisms for advancing equitable and participatory learning. This study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders in tourism higher education to generate in-depth insights.

Findings indicate that MC and OER support flexible hybrid delivery models and promote open pedagogical practices that align with evolving industry demands. By enabling incremental learning and curriculum localisation, these innovations reduce financial barriers and enhance employability, entrepreneurial potential, and social inclusion. Nevertheless, challenges such as uneven digital access and variable employer recognition remain. To realise their transformative potential, the study recommends strategic institutional alignment, robust industry partnerships, and investment in digital infrastructure. Further research is required to assess long-term employability outcomes and the sustainable integration of these models into national qualification levels.

Keywords: *Micro-credentials; Open Educational Resources (OER); Tourism Higher Education; Social Justice; Inclusive Access*



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Building Future-Ready Graduates: Examining the Impact of Digital and Financial Literacy on Graduate Capabilities in South African Higher Education

Higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to produce graduates who can navigate digitally mediated economies and complex financial systems. In South Africa, persistent graduate unemployment, and skills mismatches undermine the effectiveness of higher education in producing future-ready graduates. Existing research provides limited empirical insight into how combined digital and financial literacy contribute to the development of graduate capabilities. The aim of this study is to examine the impact of digital literacy and financial literacy on graduate capabilities among South African graduates. The study is grounded in Human Capital Theory and the Capability Approach which address different but interconnected dimensions of graduate development. Human Capital Theory explains how investments in skill acquisition enhance productivity and economic returns, while the Capability Approach emphasizes the expansion of real freedoms and opportunities that enable individuals to achieve valued outcomes. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured survey instrument measuring digital literacy (technical competence, information evaluation, digital problem-solving), financial literacy (financial knowledge, budgeting behaviour, decision-making confidence), and graduate capabilities (adaptability, critical thinking, career self-efficacy, and workplace readiness). Ethical approval and informed consents were obtained for this study. Data collected electronically from 129 South African graduates were analyzed using descriptive statistics and reliability testing, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis to validate the measurement model. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was then applied to test direct and mediated relationships among the constructs. In addition, inferential analyses were conducted to compare graduates with and without formal digital and financial literacy training. Independent samples tests and multi-group SEM were used to assess differences in construct levels and structural path strengths. The study contains reports on the direct effect of digital literacy on financial literacy, the influence of both literacies on graduate capabilities, and the mediating role of financial literacy. Its comparative analysis shows how formal training strengthens capability development pathways. This study provides empirical evidence to inform higher education policy and curriculum reform, demonstrating that the systematic integration of digital and financial literacy as core curricular components can strengthen graduate capability development and promote long-term socio-economic mobility.

Keywords: Capability Approach; curriculum transformation; digital literacy; financial literacy; graduate capabilities; Human Capital Theory; South African higher education



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Institutional Approaches for Doctoral Education: A Comparative Document Analysis of Public and Private Institutions

Doctoral education plays a crucial role in strengthening knowledge and influencing student success within higher education institutions. Public and private institutions both offer doctoral programmes, but differences in their missions, policies and structures influence how these programmes are organised. There is a need for further understanding of how institutional structures and approaches shape doctoral programme development, enhance supervision and support students in public and private institutions. Despite the growing emphasis on doctoral education globally, there remains limited empirical understanding of how institutional policies translate into practice across different types of institutions. Variations in funding models, governance and strategic priorities may affect the resources available for doctoral training and student mentorship. Additionally, there is a gap in knowledge regarding how institutional programme structures influences doctoral students' engagement, research productivity and overall success.

This preliminary study examines how doctoral programmes are structured within public and private institutions through a comparative document analysis. Using publicly available institutional documents such as doctoral handbooks, national reports, programme structure, supervision guidelines and policy frameworks, the study analyses how institutions formally derive the organisation of doctoral studies. The analysis focuses on institutional approaches on how programmes are presented in terms of structure, research expectations, supervision arrangements and student support mechanisms that contribute to doctoral student success. The study will also focus on how doctoral programme structures reflect broader efforts towards how programme design supports evolving knowledge. The comparative analysis allows for the identification of patterns and differences in how doctoral education is framed across institutional types, including the ways in which research training, supervision responsibilities and student progression are structured.

These institutional approaches provide insight into how these institutions position doctoral education in relation to knowledge production, research capacity development and student success. It offers a foundation for examining how public and private institutions shape doctoral education that may inform programme planning, policy development and institutional decision-making in the higher education sector.

Keywords: Doctoral Education, Doctoral Student Success, Higher Education, Institutional Approaches, Public Institutions and Private Institutions



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COMMUNITY-ENGAGED MATHEMATICS EDUCATION: BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE IN UNDER-RESOURCED SCHOOLS.

Persistent inequalities in South African schooling continue to manifest in stark disparities in mathematics achievement, particularly in under-resourced rural and township schools. Teacher education programmes are therefore increasingly challenged to prepare pre-service teachers who can navigate complex classroom realities while responding to the socio-economic contexts of learners. This paper explores community-engaged mathematics education as a transformative pedagogical approach that bridges theoretical knowledge acquired in universities with practical teaching experiences in under-resourced school environments.

Grounded in sociocultural learning theory and critical pedagogy, the study examines how structured community engagement initiatives within mathematics teacher education programmes can strengthen pre-service teachers' pedagogical content knowledge, contextual awareness, and professional identity formation. The research adopts a qualitative case study design involving final-year Bachelor of Education students participating in community-based mathematics interventions in township schools. Data are collected through reflective journals, lesson observations, and semi-structured interviews with pre-service teachers and mentor educators.

The paper argues that embedding community-engaged mathematics education within teacher preparation programmes can function as a catalyst for curriculum transformation, enabling future teachers to develop socially responsive pedagogical practices. Within the South African higher education policy landscape—particularly the Department of Higher Education and Training's White Paper for Post-School Education and Training and the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications—the study highlights the potential of community-based learning to strengthen work-integrated learning and promote equitable mathematics education outcomes. The findings contribute to ongoing debates on socially responsive teacher education and the role of universities in addressing systemic educational inequality.

Keywords: Community-engaged mathematics education, Teacher education, Pre-service teachers, Curriculum transformation, Work-integrated learning



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ENHANCING GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY THROUGH INNOVATIVE CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION: STUDENT PERSPECTIVES IN MANAGEMENT PROGRAMMES.

Higher education institutions are under increasing pressure to transform their curricula in response to rapid technological advancements, evolving labour-market requirements, and the need for sustainable socio-economic development. Curriculum transformation is essential to ensure that graduates possess both theoretical knowledge and the practical and technological competencies required in contemporary workplaces. Grounded in Gary Becker's Human Capital Theory, this study views education and skills development as critical investments that enhance individual productivity, employability and economic value. Accordingly, the study examines the effects of curriculum transformation on promoting innovation and sustainable employability across different sectors.

This study investigates the integration of digital competencies, sustainability, and industry-relevant skills within management academic programmes. It highlights the incorporation of digital literacy, technological awareness and data-driven decision-making skills that meet the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Additionally, the research explores the extent to which higher education curricula embed sustainability and ethical governance to prepare graduates for emerging societal and environmental challenges. A quantitative research approach will be employed to investigate students' perceptions regarding the impact of curriculum transformation on innovation and employability outcomes. Data will be gathered using structured questionnaires distributed to students enrolled in business-related programmes. The survey will assess variables including digital skills development, curriculum relevance to industry, exposure to innovative teaching methods, and students' perceived readiness for employment. The resulting data will be analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods to identify patterns and relationships between curriculum design and graduate employability outcomes.

The study further highlights the importance of collaboration between higher education institutions and industry stakeholders in ensuring that academic programmes remain responsive to labour market needs. Integrating work-integrated learning, practical case studies, and experiential learning opportunities can enhance students' readiness to transition into professional environments. The findings of the study are expected to provide insights into how curriculum transformation can enhance innovation, strengthen graduate competencies, and promote sustainable employability. Ultimately, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on curriculum responsiveness within higher education and offers recommendations for designing future-oriented programmes that equip graduates with the skills required to succeed in a rapidly evolving global economy.

Keywords: Curriculum transformation, Graduate employability, Human Capital Theory, Digital competencies, Sustainable employability



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DIGITAL SKILLS AS A PREDICTOR OF GRADUATE EMPLOYABILITY

The rapid expansion of digital technologies, automation, and artificial intelligence has reshaped labour market expectations, making digital skills a key component of graduate employability. Grounded in Human Capital Theory and Signalling Theory, this study conceptualises digital competencies as both productivity-enhancing capabilities and labour-market signals that influence employment outcomes. However, uncertainty remains regarding the extent to which graduates possess labour-market-relevant digital skills and which specific digital competencies most strongly predict employability outcomes. Existing research often treats digital competence as a generic graduate attribute and frequently privileges employer perspectives or policy frameworks, with limited integrated evidence comparing graduate self-assessments with employer evaluations of digital skills in early-career contexts.

This study investigates digital skills as a predictor of graduate employability using a mixed-methods design that draws on data from graduates and employers. An explanatory sequential approach is employed. In Phase 1, a structured survey is administered to recent graduates ($n = 385$) and employing organisations ($n = 5$) to measure multidimensional digital skills (technical, digital communication, data literacy, digital problem-solving, and adaptability) and employability outcomes (employment status, job relevance to qualification, and perceived employability). Reliability and validity are ensured through pilot testing, Cronbach's alpha, and construct validation procedures. Quantitative data are analysed using regression and group-comparison techniques to assess the predictive strength of digital skill dimensions and to identify areas of alignment or mismatch between graduate and employer assessments. In Phase 2, semi-structured interviews are conducted with a purposive sub-sample of graduates ($n=10$) and employers ($n=5$) to explain key quantitative patterns, explore contextual interpretations of "employability-ready" digital skills, and identify workplace expectations shaping early career performance. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Durban University of Technology (DUT) Institutional Research Ethics Committee (IREC) (ethical clearance number IREC 028/25), and informed consent will be secured from all participants.

The study advances existing scholarship by offering a comparative, multi-stakeholder perspective on digital skills and employability, moving beyond generic conceptualisations toward a multidimensional and empirically validated framework. The findings are expected to inform curriculum design, strengthen work-integrated learning, and support the development of targeted interventions to enhance digitally responsive graduate capabilities in a rapidly evolving labour market.

Keywords: Graduate employability, Digital skills, Digital competencies, Labour market alignment



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TRUST, TECHNOLOGY, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION ASSESSMENTS: THE ROLES OF STUDENTS, HUMAN INVIGILATORS, AND TECHNOLOGICAL OVERSIGHT IN QUALITY ASSURANCE.

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, higher education (HE) experienced a rapid shift to remote learning and online examinations, driving institutions toward technology-supported invigilation. While this ensured continuity and accessibility, it also introduced new opportunities for misconduct, raising concerns about trust, fairness, credibility, and integrity in assessments. Existing studies highlight plagiarism, impersonation, and collusion as persistent challenges to both human and technology-based invigilation systems. Yet there remains a gap in understanding how students, invigilators, and educational technologies, including AI, collectively contribute to quality assurance in HE assessment. To address this gap, this research examines how trust, technology, and human oversight intersect in upholding the integrity and quality of academic assessments."

This study employs a systematic literature review, online questionnaires, interviews with practicing academics, assessment administrators and students, focus groups, and observation of invigilated assessments. Data are analysed thematically to capture the conditions and practices that underpin credible assessment events. Preliminary findings indicate emerging patterns around trust, privacy, fairness, and transparency in both human and technology-mediated monitoring. Building on these insights, the paper proposes a conceptual framework that clarifies the distributed responsibilities of students, invigilators, and technology in strengthening integrity and quality control in higher education assessments.

Keywords: Assessment integrity; Online invigilation; Higher Education; Trust; Technology



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COLLECTIVE SAVING AS SOCIAL INNOVATION: STUDENT STOKVELS AND ALTERNATIVE FINANCIAL PRACTICES IN SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES.

Amid rising living costs, persistent student debt, and limited institutional financial support, many South African university students increasingly rely on informal economic practices to navigate everyday financial pressures. This paper examines student stokvels as a form of social and financial innovation within higher education, challenging technology-centred understandings of innovation that dominate contemporary institutional and policy discourse.

The study adopts a qualitative case study approach, drawing on reflexive observation and document analysis of a student-led stokvel initiative at a South African university. Using a decolonial political economy framework, the paper situates student stokvels within longer African traditions of mutual aid, solidarity economies, and collective financial organisation. The findings suggest that student stokvels function as innovative mechanisms of financial resilience, enabling students to collectively manage economic risk while fostering social cohesion, financial discipline, and shared accountability. At the same time, the study highlights institutional tensions arising from regulatory ambiguity and the marginal positioning of informal financial practices within university governance frameworks.

The paper contributes to debates on quality and transformation in higher education by reframing student-led informal economies as legitimate sites of knowledge production and social innovation. It argues that universities should broaden their understanding of innovation beyond technological solutions to include context-responsive, African-centred practices that enhance student resilience, participation, and success in higher education.

Keywords: Student Stokvels; Informal Economy; Social Innovation; Higher Education; Decolonial Economics; South Africa



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QUALITY EDUCATION AS A DRIVER OF SOCIETAL TRANSFORMATION

The discussion will focus on the following key areas:

- Higher Education institutions as agents for societal transformation
- The balance between regulatory oversight, institutional quality assurance, autonomy, and innovation
- The role of graduate attributes in supporting student and graduate success
- Curriculum transformation and quality management in strengthening institutions to produce graduates who are responsive to changing societal, economic, and industry needs
- The role of quality management in addressing broader societal challenges such as inequality, unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion in South Africa



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EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN FINANCE EDUCATION AND ITS IMPACT ON STUDENT CAREER READINESS

Finding success in a competitive job market requires that graduates in the finance world not only have theoretical knowledge but also practical experience. Historically, finance degrees have been acquired primarily through lectures, leaving it very difficult for students to take any of the knowledge they've learned from the classroom to the 'real work' environment. Research has shown that students who learn through 'hands-on' experience are 70 percent more likely to remember the material they learned compared to those that attended classes with lecture-only format. This growing body of evidence has prompted universities around the globe to improve their finance degree programs through implementation of 'experiential learning' opportunities like internships, simulations or mock case studies, and even actual live projects; visiting companies related to the field; holding workshops with business professionals; and many other methods of providing students with real-world experience related to finance.

The research evaluates how experiential learning is contributing to students becoming ready for their careers in the finance industry and finding a job. The study utilized primary data collected from N=85 undergraduate and postgraduate management students studying finance from a number of institutions in India via a pre-tested structured questionnaire. The global surveys of employers show that almost 80% of employers prefer graduates who have had experience through an internship or project-based exposure, and that students who had an internship are 15 to 25% more likely than those without one to receive job offers from an employer. In line with this finding, the results of this study show that 75% (approximately) of students indicated that they experienced increased confidence and improved career readiness as a result of their experiential learning experience. Additionally, the research shows significant increases in analytical skills (79.6%), communication/teamwork capability (85.3%), problem-solving ability (78.3%), and financial industry knowledge (75.9%) with internships being the most significant experiential learning method employed by many respondents.

The study was voluntary and anonymous in nature, as well as having been conducted according to common ethical principles within the academic research community. This research will be beneficial in providing empirical support from an evidence-based perspective for the use of experiential learning techniques in developing new ways to improve the employability of finance students through a curriculum transformation process.

Keywords: Experiential Learning, Finance Education, Career Readiness, Practical Skills, Sustainable Employability



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Embedding AI Awareness into Curriculum Transformation: A Conceptual Framework for Advancing Future-Ready Graduate Capabilities in Higher Education

Artificial intelligence is rapidly reshaping how people work, communicate, and make decisions, and these shifts are fundamentally altering the knowledge and capabilities required of graduates. Although universities have begun integrating AI-enabled tools into teaching and learning, many curriculum reforms remain incremental and technology-driven rather than conceptually grounded. As a result, they often fail to respond to the deeper socio-technical changes transforming workplaces and society, creating a widening gap between employer expectations and graduate preparedness. This paper argues that AI awareness should be understood not merely as the ability to use digital tools, but as a comprehensive meta-competence. AI awareness includes understanding how AI systems produce outputs, recognising their limitations, identifying potential bias, engaging ethically with data, and working in effective partnership with AI rather than relying on it uncritically. Within a capability-based approach to education, AI awareness becomes a structuring lens that shapes curriculum design and supports the formation of adaptable, critically engaged, and ethically responsible graduates. Drawing on the Capability Approach, Graduate Attribute Theory, and Transformative Learning, the paper proposes a multidimensional conceptual framework for meaningful curriculum transformation. The framework integrates three interconnected components: (1) the broader social and technological forces influencing sustainable employability; (2) the core dimensions of AI awareness, including critical evaluation and ethical reasoning; and (3) future-ready graduate capabilities such as adaptability, interdisciplinary problem-solving, innovation, and responsible decision-making. Embedding these elements across learning outcomes, pedagogical strategies, and assessment practices shifts curriculum design from content delivery toward the intentional cultivation of enduring capabilities. The paper offers an original contribution by positioning AI awareness as the mediating construct that links socio-technical change to curriculum transformation, an approach not yet sufficiently theorised in higher-education literature. This provides a fresh conceptual pathway for integrating AI literacy, ethics, and capability formation in a unified model. The implications extend to curriculum redesign, assessment reform, academic staff development, and institutional quality assurance processes, ultimately strengthening student success in complex, AI-driven environments.

Keywords: AI Awareness, Capability-Based Education, Curriculum Transformation, Graduate Attributes, Sustainable Employability



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FACTORS IMPACTING CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) are operating in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. Curriculum transformation is essential to ensure responsiveness to the ever-changing landscape, but can be a complex process, given the diverse stakeholders and nature of HEIs. The aim of the study was thus to examine the factors impacting curriculum transformation in Higher Education. This study forms part of a larger research project – DECART (Designing Higher Education Curricula for Agility, Resilience and Transformation), an international co-operation partnership initiative, funded under the European Commission's ERASMUS+ programme. The study drew on the qualitative research approach. Data were collected from DECART project members, and academics and programme leaders in the partner HEIs. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. The findings shed light into the need for curriculum transformation, challenges relating to achieving curriculum transformation, and strategies to facilitate curriculum transformation in HEIs. This research can be of value for programme leaders and various stakeholders in HEIs who are navigating the VUCA that we are witnessing in Higher Education.

Keywords: curriculum transformation, higher education, challenges, strategies



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BREAKING THE LOOP: CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION, AI LITERACY, AND THE ETHICS OF CIRCULAR KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

Universities are increasingly embedding artificial intelligence literacy, circular economy thinking, and ethical decision-making into their curricula, on the reasoning that graduates entering AI-mediated workplaces need to use these tools critically and responsibly. This paper argues that a structural problem in academic knowledge production is undermining that intention before it reaches the classroom.

The paper identifies what it calls the AI publication loop: a cycle in which academics draft with AI assistance, reviewers assess submissions with AI support, authors revise using AI in response, and the resulting texts then feed the training data and retrieval tools that shape the next round of academic writing. Human judgement remains present at each stage, but its role is increasingly supervisory rather than generative, and the cumulative effect is a body of scholarship that is authored with less sustained human deliberation than the record suggests.

This is a critical reflective paper, grounded in the author's positionality as an author, doctoral supervisor, peer reviewer, and editorial board member in South African higher education, and supported by documented institutional observation of review and supervision practice rather than a formal empirical study.

The central curriculum implication is this: institutions cannot credibly teach students to engage AI critically and ethically while the institution's own research and publishing practice runs on the same automation it is asking students to interrogate. This has direct consequences for graduate attributes tied to sustainable employability, including critical evaluation, original reasoning, and defensible judgement under AI-saturated conditions. The paper closes with five curriculum-facing interventions: revising how research methodology is taught, realigning incentive structures that reward loop-compliant output, building AI-literacy assessment around original-text engagement, embedding reflective accountability in supervision, and rethinking peer review training for postgraduate students entering the loop themselves.

Keywords: AI publication loop; curriculum transformation; AI literacy; circular knowledge production; sustainable employability; higher education ethics; South African higher education



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CO-CREATING VALUE: BUILDING MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP

This concept paper examines gaps in current university practices for establishing community partnership agreements and proposes criteria for developing mutually beneficial, sustainable collaborations. Grounded in the South African context, the paper begins by exploring the role of community trust and engagement among small businesses, non-profit organisations (NPOs), and universities. It affirms that trust-based engagement is a shared objective across sectors and a foundational requirement for meaningful collaboration.

Within the framework of university community engagement, the paper situates its analysis in relation to Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17), which emphasises multi-stakeholder partnerships as essential to inclusive, bottom-up, and sustainable development. The methodology examines prevailing institutional procedures used by universities to formalise community partnership agreements and identifies structural and procedural gaps that limit genuine collaboration with small businesses and NPOs. The paper concludes with the findings of the power dynamics that constrain business and NPOs' participatory, bottom-up approaches and examines factors that inhibit inclusive decision-making in agreement development processes. It also concludes by proposing criteria for establishing "best-fit" partnership agreements that promote equity, shared value, accountability, and long-term trust. By addressing systemic imbalances and procedural shortcomings, this concept paper contributes to advancing sustainable community engagement practices aligned with the transformative vision of SDG 17.

Keywords: Community engagement, University-community partnerships, Sustainable Development Goal 17 (SDG 17), Partnership agreements, Community trust, Co-creation



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DESIGNING TRANSFORMATIVE CURRICULA FOR STUDENT SUCCESS AND SUSTAINABLE EMPLOYABILITY

South African higher education institutions face increasing pressure to produce graduates who are not only academically qualified but also capable of navigating complex, rapidly evolving labour markets. Although higher education institutions have introduced many curriculum reform initiatives in recent years, persistent skills mismatches, high graduate unemployment rates and growing employer concerns about graduate preparedness continue. This suggests that many programmes still focus more on meeting regulatory requirements and delivering disciplinary content than on developing the practical capabilities needed in today's workplaces.

This paper argues that meaningful curriculum transformation requires a systemic shift from content coverage towards the intentional development of transferable competencies, adaptive professional identities, and work-integrated learning experiences.

Drawing on systems thinking and employability theory, the study conceptualises curriculum transformation as an interconnected process that links programme design, industry engagement, and capability development. The paper adopts a conceptual and illustrative case-based approach, drawing on curriculum design initiatives and executive education programmes implemented across public and private higher education institutions. The framework emphasises authentic industry engagement, interdisciplinary learning, digital fluency, reflective practice and assessment approaches that mirror real-world complexity. The framework is especially pertinent where transformation needs align with calls for decolonisation, fairness and global competitiveness.

Evidence informing the framework is derived from programme design experiences, executive education initiatives, and curriculum innovation projects carried out within South African higher education institutions. The paper further examines implementation challenges that often undermine curriculum transformation efforts, including regulatory constraints, institutional inertia, and gaps in staff capabilities. Through illustrative case examples from applied programme development and executive education initiatives, the study demonstrates how blended and hybrid learning approaches, supported by strategic stakeholder partnerships, can enhance student success while promoting sustainable employability outcomes.

Curriculum transformation may be repositioned as a strategic capability-building process rather than a compliance exercise. This paper contributes practical insights for universities, policy-makers, and industry partners seeking to future-proof qualifications.

The proposed framework offers a scalable model for aligning academic quality, innovation, and labour market relevance, thereby advancing the broader national agenda of inclusive economic development and graduate employability in South Africa.

Keywords: Curriculum transformation; student success; sustainable employability; higher education; capability development



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ALIGNING HIGHER EDUCATION WITH LOCAL GOVERNMENT SKILLS NEEDS

Persistent gaps between the skills produced by higher education institutions and the competency demands of local government have undermined public sector capacity and graduates' employability prospects in many contexts. This paper interrogates the role of curriculum transformation as a strategic lever for achieving sustainable employability and strengthening alignment between higher education and local government skills needs. Sustainable employability is conceptualised not merely as initial job placement, but as graduates' ability to adapt, thrive, and contribute meaningfully across evolving governance environments.

Adopting a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates curriculum mapping, policy analysis, and semi-structured interviews with academic leaders and local government practitioners to reveal systemic misalignments in curriculum content, pedagogical practices, and labour market responsiveness. Findings indicate that curricula frequently lack integration of real-world governance challenges, transversal competencies, and systematic work-integrated learning opportunities that are critical for effective performance in local public sector roles. Moreover, existing partnerships with local government tend to be ad hoc and peripheral to core curriculum design and quality assurance processes.

To address these gaps, the paper proposes a transformative curriculum framework grounded in co-creation with government stakeholders, embedded experiential learning, modular micro-credentials for targeted skills, and continuous labour market intelligence to recalibrate programmes in real time. This framework foregrounds sustainable employability by equipping graduates with both technical proficiency and adaptive competencies required in complex governance settings.

The study contributes to debates on higher education responsiveness and public sector human capital development, offering empirically grounded insights for academics, policymakers, and curriculum designers seeking to enhance the strategic alignment between curricula and local government skills ecosystems.

Keywords: competency demands; curriculum transformation; employability; mixed methods.



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GOVERNING THE ALGORITHM: DEVELOPING AI GOVERNANCE AND DATA PROTECTION COMPETENCIES THROUGH CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in higher education has transformed how knowledge is created, shared, and assessed, while raising significant concerns regarding data protection, ethical use, and compliance with South Africa's Protection of Personal Information Act 4 of 2013 (POPIA). Despite the growing use of AI technologies, higher education curricula often lack structured mechanisms to develop graduates' competencies in ethical AI use and personal information governance. Curricula not only serve as vehicles for knowledge transmission but also as governance instruments that shape responsible digital behaviour.

The study aims to explore how curriculum transformation can embed AI governance principles and POPIA-aligned competencies to equip future-ready graduates with the knowledge, skills, and ethical awareness required to operate within increasingly complex digital and regulatory environments

This study adopts a qualitative desktop literature review, guided by the Responsible AI framework, to examine scholarly literature, policy documents, legal frameworks, and case studies relating to AI governance, data protection, and curriculum transformation in higher education. Relevant sources will be critically appraised using the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) to assess their quality, credibility, and relevance. The findings are analysed thematically to identify recurring themes, existing gaps, and evidence-based practices for embedding ethical AI governance and POPIA-aligned competencies within higher education curricula.

Preliminary findings indicate that current higher education curricula often address AI literacy, ethical reasoning, and data protection compliance as discrete competencies, resulting in a fragmented approach to digital governance education. Emerging evidence suggests that a more integrated curriculum framework, which embeds AI governance principles alongside POPIA-aligned knowledge and ethical decision-making, could enhance graduate preparedness for navigating the legal, ethical, and professional complexities of AI-driven environments.

This study positions curriculum transformation as a governance instrument through which higher education institutions shape ethical AI use and enforce POPIA-aligned digital behaviour, thereby contributing to the development of legally aware and future-ready graduates in South Africa's evolving digital economy

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, Curriculum Transformation, POPIA, AI Governance, Higher Education, and Graduate Attributes



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MULTIMODAL PRODUCT LIFE CYCLES IN A BANI WORLD: INSIGHTS FROM MICHAEL JACKSON

In today's BANI (Brittle, Anxious, Non-linear, and Incomprehensible) landscape, traditional career and product models become rapidly obsolete. Consequently, educational methodologies must evolve to teach "Adaptive Longevity." The life and career of Michael Jackson offer a unique longitudinal case for examining global brand management amid such disruptive forces. Traditional Product Life Cycle (PLC) theory predicts an inevitable "decline" phase, which many organisations fail to navigate, particularly in anxious and incomprehensible markets, leading to premature brand death. Modern pedagogy must therefore explore how brands can achieve "Permanent Growth" or "Extended Maturity" despite systemic volatility.

This study presents a qualitative case study of Michael Jackson's professional evolution from 1979 to 2009. Using the four stages of the PLC, it maps his strategic pivots, including the integration of cinematography, fashion, and humanitarianism. Jackson's approach combined a central focus on musical excellence with aggressive "flanking" innovations through emerging visual technologies. He successfully overcame the decline stage through what the study terms Multimodal Encirclement. This involves music as the core product, complemented by short films (e.g., Thriller, Smooth Criminal) and his iconic persona as lateral innovations that simultaneously engaged visual and fashion markets. By engaging consumers across multiple sensory touchpoints, Jackson stabilised his position in the maturity phase even as traditional music industry structures became brittle. The study argues that innovative teaching in a BANI world should move beyond linear skill-building to fostering supportive skills. Jackson's model demonstrates that survival in a non-linear environment requires strengthening the core product while strategically innovating at the periphery to remain relevant and essential.

Keywords: Michael Jackson; BANI; Lateral Innovations; Extended Maturity; Adaptive Longevity



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AN EPISTEMIC AFRICANISATION OF DOCTORAL EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: CONCEPTUAL GAPS AND PAN-EPISTEMIC PEDAGOGICS

Doctoral education in South Africa lacks Africanisation. This paper interrogates how doctoral education remains underdeveloped within contemporary Africanisation discourses and the conceptual positioning of pan-epistemic pedagogics. Ubuntu, Afrocentricity, knowledge democratisation, and the dismantling of epistemic silos together show that doctoral education is frequently treated implicitly rather than explicitly. Doctoral curriculum and supervisory designs seldom operationalise Africa's plural epistemologies, multilingual participation, or ecologies of knowledge. This Africanisation discourse analysis identifies four core conceptual gaps about doctoral education: (1) the absence of doctoral-specific design principles for pan-epistemic practice; (2) limited integration of ubuntu-informed relationality into doctoral pedagogy and assessment; (3) insufficient mechanisms to democratise knowledge across linguistic and cultural groupings; and (4) a persistent siloed framing that reproduces hegemonic binaries. This paper, therefore, concludes with implications for doctoral curriculum, supervision, assessment, and research governance, arguing for a generative, integrative, and multilingual doctoral pedagogy capable of advancing African epistemic liberation while engaging global knowledge commons. Doctoral education has a gap between criticism and implementation, despite the Africanisation discourse's compelling normative horizon for South African higher education. Doctoral programs at private higher education institutions such as MANCOSA can serve as epistemic translation and global interlocution laboratories by emphasising pan-epistemic pedagogy, Ubuntu-informed relationality, and knowledge democratisation. To achieve African epistemic liberation in the settings where future scholars are formed, it is imperative to move from principles to design and evaluation. This paper contributes to forward-thinking approaches to doctoral curriculum and supervisory designs in South Africa that enhance quality and shape future-ready doctoral education for Africa.

Keywords: Africanisation; Afrocentricity; doctoral education; epistemic silos; knowledge democratisation; pan-epistemic pedagogics; ubuntu



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A FRAMEWORK TO MANAGE WORK-FROM-HOME AT SOUTH AFRICAN PRIVATE HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The primary purpose of this study was to establish a framework to manage work-from-home (WFH) within private higher education institutions in South Africa. This study identifies key considerations for a framework that enables higher education in South Africa to overcome the challenges faced during the COVID-19 pandemic related to remote work (WFH). Due to WFH's increasing importance and prevalence as a viable work arrangement globally, developing a framework is a key consideration for continuing service delivery in private higher education concerning teaching, learning and assessment.

The study used a quantitative approach with a cross-sectional research design. No sample was drawn. The total population of a private higher education institution was used in this study. All 133 academic personnel working in the private higher education institution were surveyed. A response rate of 79% was obtained, and the study used both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques for analysis.

The analysis identified four key antecedents comprising factors. All four antecedents and all the factors were considered in developing a framework to manage the WFH of private higher education in South Africa. The analysis included mean scores, reliability coefficients, and goodness-of-fit model indices. One model fits well, the other is acceptable, and the third shows a poor fit. The framework suggests that a more holistic approach is needed to lead and manage WFH employees. The findings also indicate that managers and leaders struggled to manage WFH employees effectively.

It is recommended that private higher education adopt the developed framework to overcome WFH's challenges and appropriately implement WFH to reap its actual benefits. The study suggests that each antecedent be considered in the rollout of WFH arrangements in private higher education.

Keywords: Work-from-home; leadership; engagement; commitment; model; employee



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TRAPPED IN A WEB OF LEARNING: CONSTRUCTIVE ALIGNMENT, SIMULATION-BASED PEDAGOGY, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE ATTRIBUTES IN SUPPLY CHAIN MANAGEMENT EDUCATION.

The persistent gap between the competencies that supply chain management (SCM) graduates possess at the point of qualification and those that employers require in practice represents one of the most consistently documented challenges in contemporary higher education. Whilst simulation-based learning has attracted growing scholarly attention as a mechanism for bridging this gap, the field lacks a coherent theoretical framework through which the design, evaluation, and improvement of simulation interventions can be systematically understood. This systematic literature review addresses that gap by positioning Biggs, Tang, and Kennedy's (2022) constructive alignment theory as the primary organising framework for synthesising peer-reviewed sources published between 2022 and 2026 on simulation based pedagogy in SCM education.

Situated within an interpretivist philosophical paradigm, the review employed thematic synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008) in addition, study follows a qualitative approach. There are three overarching analytical themes that were constructed. First, constructive alignment emerges as the organising architecture of effective simulation design, the most educationally productive simulations are those in which intended learning outcomes, teaching and learning activities, and assessment tasks form a coherent, mutually reinforcing system what Biggs et al. (2022) describe as a web of consistency from which students cannot escape without learning. Second, soft skill graduate attributes including communication, collaborative decision making, adaptive problem solving, and time management are most reliably developed when they are specified as explicitly aligned learning outcomes rather than assumed as incidental simulation by-products. Third, facilitation competence, structured debriefing, and authentic assessment alignment are identified as the decisive implementation variables that determine whether simulation engagement produces deep or merely surface learning.

The review carries direct implications for curriculum designers, module facilitators, and quality assurance practitioners in formally accredited undergraduate SCM programmes, with particular relevance to South African private higher education institutions operating under National Qualifications Framework mandates. The findings challenge institutions to reconceptualise simulation activities not as enrichment additions to existing curricula but as constructively aligned pedagogical events that demand the same rigour of outcome specification, activity design, and assessment alignment as any other core learning intervention.

Keywords: constructive alignment, simulation-based pedagogy, supply chain management education, graduate attributes, soft skills, thematic synthesis, interpretivism, higher education



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FINANCIAL LITERACY AND CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION FOR STUDENT SUCCESS: A CASE STUDY OF FIRST YEAR NSFAS-FUNDED STUDENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) plays a pivotal role in expanding access to higher education in South Africa, serving as a vital support system for students from low-income families. Despite its importance, NSFAS currently seems to lack mechanisms to track how students spend their cash allowances, operating on the principle that students should be treated as independent adults with financial autonomy. For many first-year NSFAS recipients, this represents their first experience managing substantial sums of money, requiring them to make financial decisions on their own. In a country where financial literacy remains underdeveloped, students from disadvantaged backgrounds need practical tools to manage their finances effectively and confidently. This study aims to advance financial literacy from its current perception as a wellbeing initiative or extracurricular activity to a structured and integrated element of the academic environment, addressing the gap between extensive research on student spending practices and the limited exploration of their financial awareness. Therefore, the objectives of the study are 1) to address the gap in research by exploring students' financial literacy awareness. 2) to design a framework using the graduate attributes theory to integrate financial literacy into an orientation program for new students, embedding financial literacy more systematically into the academic environment. The population of the study will be NSFAS-funded first-year students enrolled in the School of Accounting at North-West University. A qualitative approach will be employed, with data collected through an open-ended questionnaire and analysed using thematic analysis. Ethical clearance will be obtained through the North-West University's ethics committee. The findings are expected to provide insights into the extent and nature of financial literacy awareness among these students.

Keywords: Financial Literacy, Curriculum Transformation, NSFAS, Student Success, Higher Education



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AI-ENABLED LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION: STUDENT USAGE PATTERNS, AI LITERACY, AND ETHICAL AWARENESS.

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into higher education is reshaping teaching, learning, and assessment practices. As AI-powered tools become increasingly accessible, higher education institutions must ensure that graduates possess the digital literacy and ethical awareness required to navigate AI-enabled environments responsibly.

This study employed a secondary data analysis approach, analysing existing survey data collected from higher education stakeholders regarding the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in teaching and learning at a private higher education institution. The dataset consisted of responses from approximately 820 students across undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, capturing information on AI awareness, usage patterns, perceived benefits, ethical considerations and training needs. The survey included both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, enabling the examination of student's levels of AI engagement, confidence in using AI tools and perceptions regarding institutional policies on AI use in academic work.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency distributions and percentage analysis to identify key trends in AI adoption and usage among students. In addition, interpretive analysis was applied to examine patterns in student's perceptions of AI literacy, ethical awareness, and the role of AI in supporting academic learning. This approach enabled the study to identify emerging themes related to digital literacy, responsible AI use and student readiness for AI-enabled learning environments. The methodological approach provides insights into how AI is currently being used by students and highlights areas where curriculum development and institutional policy may need to evolve to support effective and ethical AI integration in higher education.

The findings reveal that undergraduate students constitute the majority of respondents (approximately 74%), indicating that AI engagement is particularly prominent among bachelor's degree learners. Most students access their learning platforms using both smartphones and laptops (64%), highlighting the importance of mobile-compatible digital learning environments. In terms of AI usage, the data shows that over half of the students (56.8%) use AI tools a few times per semester, while smaller proportions report weekly (10.2%) or daily (8.5%) use, suggesting that AI is becoming integrated into learning practices but is not yet used consistently by all students.

Students primarily use AI tools for concept clarification (75.6%), followed by summarising readings (34.5%), exam preparation (25.1%), and drafting or editing assignments (18.8%). These patterns indicate that AI is predominantly employed as a learning support tool rather than a direct content-generation mechanism. However, the study also highlights important challenges related to academic integrity and AI governance. Notably, 52.3% of students reported uncertainty about whether their use of AI was permitted in academic work, reflecting a need for ethical awareness and governance of AI usage.

Perceptions of AI literacy show moderate confidence among students. While many respondents agree that they can use AI tools to support learning (weighted average 3.65 on a five-point scale), fewer students report confidence in evaluating the accuracy of AI-generated information (3.38). Encouragingly, students expressed strong interest in structured AI training, particularly in ethical AI use (63.7%) and using AI to understand complex concepts (60.3%).

The findings suggest that AI is increasingly embedded within student learning practices but that AI literacy, ethical awareness and institutional guidance remain critical areas for development. The study highlights the importance of integrating formal AI literacy programmes, ethical usage frameworks, and digital skills training into higher education curricula to ensure that students can engage with AI tools responsibly, effectively, and critically.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Higher Education, AI Literacy, Digital Literacy, Ethical AI Use, Student Engagement, AI Adoption, Educational Technology.



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MOTIVATION AS A MEDIATOR OF INSTITUTIONAL PREDICTORS OF ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE.

Despite substantial institutional investment in student support, private business schools in Southern Africa continue to experience persistent challenges in academic performance and retention. This study addresses this “resource–outcome” paradox by developing and testing a theory-driven model grounded in Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory, with particular emphasis on the mediating role of motivation in linking institutional and psychological factors to academic performance.

A quantitative design was employed, using structured Likert-scale data collected from academic staff across two private business schools, to provide informed institutional perspectives on student performance dynamics. Two complementary datasets (academic performance and institutional performance) were integrated and analysed using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM).

The results confirm that motivation plays a central mediating role in academic performance ($\beta = 0.619$, $p < 0.01$). Workload ($\beta = 0.462$, $p < 0.01$) and self-esteem ($\beta = 0.220$, $p < 0.01$) both positively influence motivation, suggesting that appropriately structured academic demands and positive student self-perceptions enhance engagement. Notably, the findings indicate that workload functions as a motivating factor when perceived as meaningful and manageable, rather than as a constraint. In contrast, extracurricular activities show no significant effect on motivation ($\beta = 0.002$, $p > 0.05$), challenging conventional assumptions about their role in student development within this context.

The study contributes to theory by refining the application of bioecological systems theory, demonstrating the dominance of proximal psychological processes over distal institutional provisions in shaping academic outcomes. Practically, the findings suggest that institutions should prioritise the alignment and quality of academic workload and foster student self-efficacy, rather than relying primarily on supplementary support structures.

Keywords: Academic performance; Motivation; Institutional factors; Self-esteem; Workload; PLS-SEM



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AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENT AS A CATALYST FOR CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION IN MATHEMATICS TEACHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA.

The accelerating pace of digital transformation and the emergence of the Fifth Industrial Revolution (5IR) have intensified debates regarding the relevance of traditional assessment practices in higher education. Within teacher education, assessment plays a critical role not only in measuring learning outcomes but also in shaping pedagogical practices and professional competencies. In South Africa, mathematics teacher education faces dual imperatives: addressing persistent learner underperformance in school mathematics while preparing future teachers capable of navigating increasingly complex, technology-mediated learning environments. Despite these demands, assessment practices within many teacher preparation programmes remain heavily reliant on traditional summative examinations that prioritise procedural knowledge over applied problem-solving, reflective practice, and contextualised pedagogical competence.

This paper critically examines the potential of authentic assessment to act as a catalyst for curriculum transformation in mathematics teacher education. Anchored within national policy frameworks, including the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013), the National Development Plan 2030, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Quality Code (2022), and the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ, 2015; revised 2021), the study adopts a mixed-method research design. Quantitative analysis of assessment performance data from pre-service mathematics teachers is triangulated with qualitative curriculum mapping, assessment artefact analysis and questionnaire analysis with teacher educators.

In response, the paper proposes a Human-Centred Authentic Assessment Transformation Framework that integrates constructive alignment, capability theory, and 5IR principles to support the design of practice-based, digitally mediated, and student-centred assessment. The study argues that authentic assessment can serve as a powerful lever for curriculum renewal by strengthening experiential learning, professional identity formation, and the preparation of future-ready mathematics teachers in South Africa.

Keywords: Authentic assessment, Curriculum transformation, Mathematics teacher, Pre-service teachers, Human-Centred Authentic Assessment Transformation Framework



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HUMAN-CENTRED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND PUBLIC LEADERSHIP: CURRICULUM TRANSFORMATION FOR ETHICAL, INCLUSIVE, AND SUSTAINABLE GRADUATE CAPABILITIES.

The accelerating integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into higher education and public leadership presents both transformative opportunities and ethical challenges for curriculum design and graduate preparedness. This paper will explore the potential of human-centred AI to inform curriculum transformation aimed at cultivating ethical, inclusive, and sustainable graduate capabilities. Human-centred AI, guided by socio-technical and constructivist principles, focuses on designing AI systems that augment human intelligence, prioritise moral reasoning, and support inclusive, context-sensitive learning experiences. Drawing on current literature, AI is increasingly recognised as a tool to enhance digital literacy, critical thinking, interdisciplinary collaboration, and ethical engagement, while also presenting challenges around accountability, inclusion, and the preservation of human values.

Six participants will be purposively selected to provide diverse perspectives across sectors, including AI in education, ethical leadership, public policy, cybersecurity, marketing and technology, municipal governance, and architecture and the environment. Using qualitative thematic analysis, the study will examine how AI can enhance learning, build human talent, improve access to knowledge, and support societal and public value creation. These perspectives will be triangulated with current scholarship to strengthen rigor and relevance.

Grounded in a constructivist research philosophy, the study will emphasise the co-construction of knowledge through dialogue, lived experiences, and contextually situated perspectives. By focusing on human-centred approaches to AI, the research aims to position technology as an enabler of human intelligence rather than a substitute, fostering curriculum innovation, ethical governance, and future-ready graduate capabilities. The study will also consider strategies to develop competencies aligned with societal needs, employment readiness, and ethical engagement, while remaining sensitive to African and Indigenous knowledge systems. This research will contribute to the emerging field of human-centred AI in higher education, offering novel insights into curriculum transformation and ethical integration in African contexts.



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