

Call for chapter abstract submissions: The PhD Experience in Africa: Challenges, Opportunities, Futures and Transformations

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Overview

Consensus has been building for several years over the need for Africa to produce more PhDs. The 'African PhD Project' has three discernible objectives: to increase research output, to drive development and to address the continent's multiple development challenges. Other objectives include the renewal of an ageing professoriate, expand staffing for the rapidly expanding higher education field, boost research and generate the high-level skills growing economies need to thrive (MacGregor 2013b in Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015). A World Bank recommendation taken up as a goal by the African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA) suggests that African universities should produce up to 100,000 PhDs over a 10-year period to achieve these aims.

In pursuance of these goals, many doctoral support and African research excellence initiatives have emerged across Africa and the diaspora over time period. Examples include the Partnership for African Social and Governance Research, the ARUA Centers of Excellence (CoE) and the ARUA The Guild 21 Clusters for Research Excellence (CoREs) and and the Social Science Research Council African Doctoral Fellowships. Several doctoral schools have also been established, notably the [Pan-African Doctoral Academy](#) at the University of Ghana and the [African Doctoral Academy](#) based at Stellenbosch University.

The PhD journey is a transformative experience for scholars globally, but the particularities of pursuing a doctoral degree in Africa come with unique challenges, opportunities, and nuances. Some of these challenges have been documented in various studies ([Omoya, Jacob, Odeyemi and Odeyemi 2024](#); [Cloete, Mouton and Sheppard 2015](#); [Murambadoro, Mashayamombe and weNkosi 2022](#); [Scherer and Sooryamoorthy 2022](#)). However, several focus on selected universities in specific countries and regions, leaving gaps in knowledge about broader dynamics across the continent, which limits comparative knowledge. Further, the challenges facing women are underexplored. There are also insufficient studies based on the empirical experiences of African doctoral candidates. Further still, not enough is known about the impacts of the many doctoral support initiatives targeted at African doctoral scholars.

Objectives

The proposed volume aims to contribute to emerging knowledge about doctoral training in Africa drawing on the lived experiences of doctoral candidates across the continent. The editors seek to draw on scholarship and practice focused on Africa with a view to assessing

existing initiatives and informing prospective interventions to improve doctoral training in Africa, particularly within the context of ongoing debates about decolonising education globally.

This book will further explore the multifaceted nature of the PhD experience in Africa, with a focus on how it is shaped by local contexts, academic cultures, institutional structures, and broader socio-political dynamics.

We invite scholars, early-career researchers, and PhD candidates to submit abstracts for original papers that critically reflect on various aspects of the PhD experience across the African continent. This panel will explore both the individual and collective journeys of doctoral researchers, the role of universities and academic systems, as well as how African scholars engage with global research networks and knowledge production.

Themes

We welcome papers on a range of topics, including (but not limited to):

- **Institutional and Structural Dynamics:** How do African universities and research institutions support or hinder PhD students? What role does institutional leadership, supervision and teaching play in shaping the doctoral experience?
- **Academic Resources and Infrastructure:** What is the state of research funding, library access, mentorship, and infrastructure for doctoral students?
- **Language and Knowledge Production:** How do language barriers or linguistic diversity impact doctoral research and communication? How is African scholarship contributing to global academic discourse?
- **The Impact of Globalization:** What influence do international collaborations, global academic rankings, and global standards have on the doctoral experience in Africa? What collaborations exist and with what partners?
- **PhD Supervision:** How do supervisory relationships differ in African contexts? What challenges do PhD students face in terms of guidance, mentorship, and academic support?
- **Social and Cultural Dimensions:** How do social, cultural, and economic factors shape the doctoral journey for African students? What roles do gender, ethnicity, and class play in this experience? What can be done to better support marginalised groups pursuing their PhDs in Africa?
- **PhD Student Mental Health and Well-being:** What mental health challenges are prevalent among PhD students in Africa, and how do they navigate stress, isolation, and the pressures of academic life?
- **Career Pathways and Post-PhD Trajectories:** What are the career trajectories for PhD graduates in Africa? How does the experience of doing a PhD shape future academic and professional opportunities on the continent? Are current PhD models meeting the diverse career needs of candidates?
- **Innovative Approaches to Doctoral Education:** What innovative models of doctoral education and research are emerging in African institutions? How are these transforming the PhD experience?
- **PhD Models:** What are the prevailing models of doctoral study across Africa? how

have these impacted on the quality of PhDs on the continent? In what ways do these need to change to produce higher quality doctorates and better respond to the career needs of candidates?

- **Africanizing and Decolonising PhD training in Africa:** What African values are guiding the highest level of study? What are some critical issues in creating programs for the continent?
- **Experiences of PhD training in African universities:** Personal accounts of the road towards the viva including lived realities of admission, supervision, financing, work load, resources, mobility opportunities or lack thereof, publication, peer support and pressure, work-life balance, bottlenecks and bench-marks.

Submission guidelines and Timeline

- Abstracts of up to 300 words should be submitted by **30 June 2026**.
- Authors of selected abstracts will be invited to submit full draft chapters of **5,000–7,000 words**.
- All submissions must be original and not under consideration elsewhere.
- Full draft chapters must be submitted by **30 August 2026**.

How to submit

Please submit your abstract using this [form](#).

If you have any questions, please contact the editors at research@helpaglobal.org

We look forward to receiving your contributions and to making the book a valuable resource for scholars, policymakers, and academic institutions across Africa and beyond.