

**African Center for Career Enhancement & Skills Support  
ACCESS**

**CALL FOR PAPERS  
CONFERENCE AND SUMMER SCHOOL  
TUNISIA, 2024**

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***"Graduate Unemployment in Africa: Towards  
a Shift in Paradigm"***

**October 01 to October 05 2024**

**Conference (Hammamet-Tunisia): 01-02 October 2024**

**Summer School (Hammamet-Tunisia): 03-05 October 2024**



**Application deadline**

**March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024 @ 23:59 pm GMT+1**

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Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst  
German Academic Exchange Service

## Call for papers for the ACCESS Conference and Summer School Tunisia, 2024

### About ACCESS

The African Centre for Career Enhancement & Skills Support (ACCESS) is a consortium of six African universities from Benin, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Tunisia, working with the University of Leipzig, Germany, to study the labour market stagnation in Africa in the face of the rising level of education among its citizens. Initially, the program has implemented a research program on graduate unemployment in African countries. In the framework of this project, we are also developing and implementing new teaching models to enhance the employability of African students. The consortium also seeks to increase opportunities for African students in the global job market by connecting them with companies that can tap into their expertise. Building on existing collaborations between the University of Leipzig and its African partner universities, ACCESS aims to create a practice-oriented platform for African higher education institutions (HEIs), development cooperation partners, business associations and agencies in the South.

### Background of the ACCESS Tunisia conference and summer school

As part of ACCESS' activities for 2024, a 5-day conference and summer school will be held from **October 1<sup>st</sup> to October 5<sup>th</sup>, 2024**, in Hammamet, Tunisia. It will explore issues around the theme "*Graduate unemployment in Africa: Towards a shift in paradigm*".

The conference will first address the importance of looking back to theoretical sources, particularly economic ones, to refocus and update the relationship between improving people's levels of education and training, especially at university level, and economic growth and development. It will then go on to analyze the challenges related to academic training, students' choice of subjects, the overall quality of higher education, and the corresponding high rates of unemployment among university graduates in African countries. Indeed such increasing rates of graduate unemployment have created problems of a political and social nature. In the case of Tunisia, it has led to social movements that became increasingly radical, culminating in the country's political system being called into question in January 2011. Taking these issues into consideration, the conference will look at ways to revisit and contextualize the concept of employability in Africa.

**The summer school activities** proposed by ACCESS will focus on **capacity building** for lecturers, doctoral students and university staff. The aim is, first and foremost, pedagogical and didactic, since it seeks to enhance classroom practices through learning that is rooted in the socio-economic environment. University networking will also be a key focus. In addition, the **partnership between universities, HEIs, public and especially private companies will be promoted**. Both, teachers and students will benefit from professional experiences that can provide opportunities for exchanging and capitalizing on knowledge and expertise. The summer school workshops will promote innovative teaching techniques, ToT coaching, and HEIs management strategies. Participants will be given an opportunity to interact and actively participate in the construction of innovative methodologies related to strategic planning, Service-Learning approaches, and their implementation in Tunisian universities and HEIs.

Beyond this substantive activity, the summer school will welcome Tunisian business leaders, managers and politicians, who will discuss and testify to the virtues of win-win cooperation between the University and its economic, social, political and cultural ecosystem.

Participants will also have the opportunity to meet other participants from Tunisia, Ghana, Benin, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda and Germany. The aim is to exchange different experiences and to build African and European networks.

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## Argumentation

### 1- Revisiting the theoretical dimension of education's impact on economic growth

Economists regard spending on education at all levels as an investment. The countries that achieved industrial revolutions in the 20th and early 21st centuries devoted a significant share of their GDP to education. In 2023, they devoted just over 5% of their public spending to education. Developing countries devoted an average of 4.7% in 2022. Some of them have invested in this sector massively: in Tunisia, public spending on education represents 7.3% of GDP (2016); Morocco and Kenya are not far behind, with 6.7% and 5.1% respectively (2020). The central question that economists have been asking for a long time is: do such investments contribute to wealth creation and improve people's well-being?

This question has preoccupied economists since Adam Smith. Two schools of thought have distinguished themselves in this regard: from Smith to Marx, Schumpeter and later Romer who believed that education has a positive impact on growth. More recently, others such as Pritchett, Gurgand and Altinok, believe that the external benefits of education on a country's economy are debatable, or perhaps even non-existent. They believe that while they have an undeniable impact on human development - reducing illiteracy, for example - they have no real contribution to economic growth. For the classics, Smith and Marx distinguished between wage earners who have only their labor power to sell, and those who invent and use machines. The latter discuss an idea related to the general level of knowledge, which has become a vital force for the production system and for the vitality of society. On the other hand, Marshall considers knowledge to be "our most powerful engine of production" (qtd. in Amable and Askenazy, 2005). Later, the work of Schumpeter (1935) on the role of innovation, Arrow (1962), who analyzed the link between knowledge, production and learning, and Becker (1962, 1964) on human capital, demonstrated that education and training play a crucial role in a country's economic growth. Endogenous growth models, Harrod-Domar's and Solow's in particular, have highlighted human capital as a determining factor in growth. Romer, in his models of growth (1986) and R&D (1990), confirm this central idea. Human capital is responsible for the accumulation of knowledge. This accumulation is ensured by public investment. Romer put the State at the heart of the creation and maintenance of the R&D sector, which is highly beneficial for growth, and does so with such a large and, above all, highly qualified workforce.

Opposing theses developed at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup>, assuming limits to the impact of education and knowledge on growth. They focus on two aspects: 1. the quality of the education provided and 2. the efficiency of public spending in this area. For Gurgand, investing in education is not enough to achieve real growth. Pritchett (2001) goes further, and believes that such spending can even have a negative impact, especially when the education provided is of poor quality. For Altinok (2007), another limitation stems from the hypothesis of Romer's endogenous growth school (1992), which stipulates that education has an identical effect on all individuals; this is debatable, given the problems of measuring this effect at the individual level and the complexity of education systems, which are highly contextualized and very much situated from one country to another. As a result, it is virtually impossible to identify the sources of educational quality, except in case studies. On the other hand, **the limitations are easy to identify**: 1. unemployment among graduates at the end of their higher education 2. The difficulties they face when looking for their first jobs and 3. Brain-drain as a phenomenon that reflects graduates' frustration with the local job market. Prioritizing the quality of education over quantity necessitates separating it from student achievement and school enrolment rates, training an elite of higher education graduates and brain drain, the increasing the number of graduates and massive unemployment of these same graduates, overall training and employability, etc.

As a result, **the quality of education** - especially at university level, if of course quality is assured at primary and secondary levels - has become a major challenge for many developing countries in recent years. In the future, it would seem desirable for training provision to take account of the skills of future graduates, so that they can make an effective contribution to growth. At a time when the budgetary constraints of several developing countries are becoming more severe as a result of the 2008 financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, and following the overthrow of certain regimes, the orientation of education policies is becoming crucial. The example of Tunisia shows that government efforts in education can backfire. These reservations about the quantitative dimension do not mean that spending on human development should be questioned, but in a context of a decline in public spending among several developing countries, it is advisable to review its composition and analyze its results. These limitations are likely to be seen in developing and emerging countries, which suffer from structural problems such as illiteracy (25% of the Tunisian population in 2014), poor quality of education, and students' choice of higher education and training courses, graduate unemployment and employability difficulties, and the increasing level of brain drain.

## 2- Higher education, the choice of subject areas, and graduate unemployment

In many African countries, higher education is not compulsory. Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, for example, have the lowest Gross Enrolment Rates (GER) recorded, in 2017: 14%, 32% and 37% (over 80% in the USA, 95% in the Republic of Korea). China, with an estimated rate of 23% (up from 6% in 1999), shows that this is not a major obstacle to economic growth. The majority of African students choose the field of Letters, Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences. In Tunisia for example, the breakdown by specialty or field gives: 27% come from Economics-Management-Commerce streams, 26% from Exact, Natural and Technical Sciences streams (excluding ICT), 24% from Humanities-Arts streams, 11% from ICT streams, 7% from Law streams and 5% from Agronomy, Health and similar streams. The performance of university education systems in these countries can be assessed by two indicators: 1. student performance compared between countries, and 2. graduate unemployment. From the quantitative dimension relating to education, we thus move to a more qualitative dimension.

The majority of African countries are faced with increasing unemployment among a growing proportion of their graduates. This problem is to be found in most societies where efforts to increase school enrolment in a context of low job creation result in the devaluation of school and university qualifications. The situation is even more dramatic for female graduates. It is reflected in a severe paradox for young graduates. The higher the level of education, the higher the unemployment rate so much so the rate for the higher level sometimes represents four times that of the illiterate level. This is what demographers call "paradoxical unemployment". In Tunisia, for example, Higher Education Graduates (HEGs) account for 41% of all unemployed people (630,000) at the end of 2019. Their unemployment rate is 2.5 times that of non-graduates. Unemployment among women graduates is 38.1% (compared with an unemployment rate of 14.9% for Tunisia as a whole), and they account for 30% of the total unemployed. Unemployment among men graduates is 15.7%, very close to the national average, and they account for 11% of the country's total unemployed. In addition, only 6.2% of those with less than sixth grade education are unemployed, representing only 8.1% of the employed population and 3% of the unemployed. At the other end of the scale, just under a third of people with a higher education diploma or a *Brevet de Technicien Supérieur* of professional training (28%), represent 18.4% of the employed population and 39.8% of the unemployed. These rates are national averages. But we know that all African countries experience regional disparities in terms of activity and unemployment, sometimes bordering on the unsustainable. National unemployment rates are higher in the most disadvantaged regions. What's more, graduate unemployment is exacerbated in these same regions. As a result, this phenomenon is becoming an extreme source of socio-political tension, sometimes major, as in the case of Tunis in 2011 and beyond. In this country, and in 2019, the proportion of unemployed of higher education graduates will average 42% in the poor interior regions and 23.2% in the relatively developed coastal regions. In some of the most socially unstable inland governorates, the number of unemployed exceeds the number of workers, in Kébili (54.8%) and Gafsa (53.6%). This rate is between 47% and 50% in: Sidi Bouzid (49.5%), Kasserine (49.3%), Gabès (48.7%), Tozeur (47.7%), Jendouba (47.5%), Tataouine (47.1%) and Bejà (47.1%). Social movements organized by unemployed graduates are more radical in these regions, and can extend as far as the capital, Tunis. Unemployed of higher education graduates come here to demonstrate their concerns and despair. The regional question and its political corollary is a by-product of this issue of graduate unemployment, which is becoming increasingly visible in the public arena in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, Senegal, Nigeria and elsewhere.

## 3- Revisiting and contextualizing the concept of employability in African countries

According to The International Labor Organization (ILO, Recommendation 195) the concept "employability" refers to transferable skills and qualifications that enhance the ability of an individual to take advantage of educational and training opportunities as they arise, to find and keep decent work, progress within the enterprise or by changing jobs, as well as adapt to changes in technology and labor market conditions". Thus, employability is one of the main outcomes of quality education and training, as an integral and coordinated part of a set of other policies. The concept employability thus implies, basic skills, "reading, writing, counting"; behavioral skills (self-confidence, reliability, integrity, motivation, initiative etc.); skills and techniques, at all levels and of all kinds (in NICTs for example) and finally, organizational skills (teamwork, autonomy, communication, problem-solving, lifelong learning in all professional settings and environments but also social and political).

But doesn't this extensive definition of employability run the risk of being perceived as a transfer of responsibility from the company to the employee, whereas many highly specific skills can only be developed in real work situations? In African countries, the major challenge is that of access to employment, and more precisely to decent work: what's the point of developing one's qualifications and skills, if there are no outlets in terms of employment?

In Tunisia, for example, the supply of higher graduate jobs is far lower than the demand. The manufacturing industries developed in this country, as in several African countries, provide few skilled jobs. Isn't employability a set of skills, experiences and attributes developed through learning at university, which is then perpetuated through working life, in business and society? In this sense, isn't employability a "product" of the education system alone? Or, is it, rather, a lifelong learning process?

Several African countries are developing initiatives to improve the employability of their students. They choose to infuse and program certain types of learning into their curricula. Some countries are opting for a mixed system, while developing activities to promote employability in extra-curricular programs. In Tunisia, for example, the 4C centers, and the *Pôles Étudiants Entrepreneurs* initiative have recently been implemented to develop soft skills and self-entrepreneurship among future graduates. Are these programs well implemented? After a period of practice, are they evaluated by both central institutions and universities and faculties? Do they have sufficient capacity and influence to attract the maximum number of teachers, researchers and students? Do they have the means to fulfill their ambitions, especially as African universities face a decline in public funding? And, ultimately, what are the priorities of African countries: should they opt for a radical improvement in the quality of their university training? Or should they focus on enhancing the employability skills of their students? Or should they do both? If so, with whom and how will these choices be made? And how can they be translated into workable, sustainable action plans?

**The topics developed in the above argumentation would be broken down into 10 main themes, which will be addressed simultaneously in the conference and the summer school**

- **Theme 1:** The impact of education on economic growth: economic growth, wealth creation and individual well-being.
- **Theme 2:** The paradigm shift in African higher education systems: from massification of university systems to quality training;
- **Theme 3** Demographic, economic, political, urban, etc. transition and characterization of paradoxical unemployment in African countries.
- **Theme 4:** academic training, university intermediation, international migration and recruitment strategies of national and international firms for higher education graduates.
- **Theme 5:** Entrepreneurship and graduate unemployment.
- **Theme 6:** Graduate unemployment and regional issues in African countries.
- **Theme 7:** Graduate unemployment and social movements, particularly after the Arab Spring.
- **Theme 8:** Matching quality training and employability in African university systems.
- **Theme 9:** Policies to promote employability in African countries.
- **Theme 10:** Emerging sectors and employability: smart cities, green and circular economy, blue economy, NTIC, AI.

Participants interested in contributing to the conference and summer school are invited to submit, in an initial phase, abstracts and workshop projects. In a second phase, they are asked to send the organizers texts on topics related to the conference and summer school theme: **"Graduate unemployment in Africa: Towards a shift in paradigm"**.

Accepted applicants to the conference will automatically participate in the various Summer School workshop activities.

## Recommendations

### 1. The Conference

Abstracts should not exceed 500 words and should follow the specified format:

- Formatting must be done in MS Word, 12 point Times New Roman font, 2.5 cm margins all around, justified margins and double spacing.
- The abstract should be submitted by e-mail as an attachment to [conferenceaccesstunisia@gmail.com](mailto:conferenceaccesstunisia@gmail.com) with a copy to [accesstunisie2020@gmail.com](mailto:accesstunisie2020@gmail.com) & [tizaoui.hamadi@yahoo.fr](mailto:tizaoui.hamadi@yahoo.fr). The email subject should indicate: ACCESS TUNISIA - CONFERENCE 2024. **Only abstracts received by e-mail will be considered.**
- All contact details (including phone number, e-mail address and postal address) must be provided so that potential participants can be easily contacted.
- **Deadline for submission of applications: March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024**

### 2. Summer School Workshops

The conference will be followed by workshop activities. The topics will be specified and communicated at a later date and will be related to the themes mentioned above.

## Language of the conference & summer school

Arabic, French, and English

## Who can apply for the Summer School?

This conference and summer school is open to all those involved in research, teaching and innovation in the field of employability of African graduates:

1. Teachers-researchers,
2. Doctoral researchers and students,
4. A good command of the English language is preferable.

## How to apply?

Participants interested in attending the conference must complete the registration form and submit it by Friday, March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024.

## Registration link

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdcySPmGq9ybXRHsQP0EV733T-GSCrYp\\_n4DDg1n88p7uXovg/viewform?usp=sf\\_link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdcySPmGq9ybXRHsQP0EV733T-GSCrYp_n4DDg1n88p7uXovg/viewform?usp=sf_link)

## Registration fees

- For the conference
  - Free for ACCESS consortium participants
  - 300 TND for Tunisians outside ACCESS
  - 300 € for foreigners, outside ACCESS
- For the workshops: free of charge (Conference registration will be proof of admission to the workshops).

## Date and place

The ACCESS-Tunisia conference and summer school will be held from **October 01<sup>st</sup> to October 05, 2024** in Hammamet, Tunisia.

## Contact

<a href="mailto:conferenceaccesstunisia@gmail.com">conferenceaccesstunisia@gmail.com</a>	<a href="mailto:accesstunisie2020@gmail.com">accesstunisie2020@gmail.com</a>	Site : <a href="http://www.access-center.org">www.access-center.org</a>
Prof. Dr. Hamadi TIZAOUI Board member d'ACCESS et son représentant Académique en Tunisie Mail : <a href="mailto:tizaoui.hamadi@yahoo.fr">tizaoui.hamadi@yahoo.fr</a> Tel : +216 58 486 475	Dr. Maroua CHERIF Coordinatrice d'ACCESS-Tunisie Mail : <a href="mailto:cherifmarwa_sco@live.fr">cherifmarwa_sco@live.fr</a> Tel : +216 99 714 196	Mme. Ghofrane BOUNOUH Coordinatrice d'ACCESS- Tunisie Mail : <a href="mailto:bounouh92@gmail.com">bounouh92@gmail.com</a> Tel : +216 24 253 531

### Important Dates

Please take into consideration the following dates

Activity	Date
Conference announcement/Call for abstracts	February 05, 2024
Abstract submission deadline	March 31, 2024
Notification of abstract acceptance	April 30, 2024
Submission of full paper	June 30, 2024
Registration deadline	July 15, 2024
Arrival	September 30, 2024
Conference	October 01-02, 2024
Summer school workshops	October 03-05, 2024
Departure	October 05, 2024

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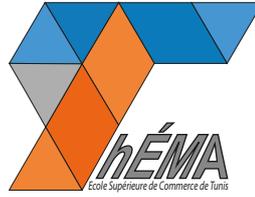


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