Introduction

We are delighted to present this Special Issue (SI) entitled *Adult and Higher Education in Changing Global Contexts: Innovative Theory and Practices from Asian Countries and Beyond* to the esteemed readers of the *Journal of Higher Education, Skills, and Work-Based Learning* (*HESWBL*). The inspiration behind this issue stems from over two decades of research and scholarship presented at the Asian Adult Education Conference (AAE) (https://asianadulteducation.weebly.com/) originally known as the Asian Diaspora Adult Education Pre-Conference that has been organized in conjunction with the Adult Education Research Conference (AERC). AAE's mission has been to provide an academic forum for research and scholarship exchange, and mutual collaborations among scholars, researchers, educators, practitioners and policymakers in adult and higher education from the East, West and Rest. Since 2003, AAE has grown into the leading pre-conference at AERC, actively promoting research and co-constructing academic scholarship in the adult and higher education field.

In the global context, knowledge production is an active process that involves interconnectedness, collaboration and engagement with the world. This first-of-its-kind SI delves into innovative research, practical strategies, and key challenges in adult and higher education and work-based learning in Asian countries and beyond. This SI highlights scholarly works by Asian and Asian diaspora scholars on adult and higher education and workforce-based learning in the Asian context, exemplifies an effort on research conducted by Asian Adult Education community scholars and global partners, shares theories, models, and practices of adult and continuing and higher education from different Asian cultural traditions and educational systems, and features contributions from scholars, practitioners and emerging researchers with diverse cultural and disciplinary backgrounds. This SI aligns with the journal's focus on higher education, skills and work-based learning, and embraces the UN's Sustainable Development Goals from a diverse, inclusive, interdisciplinary perspective for sustainable educational development through intellectual dialog.

This SI consists of topics concerning adult and continuing education, higher education, skills, work-based learning, workplace training, emergent technologies, promoting lifelong learning and career development changes in the changing global contexts. The manuscripts, through a public call for papers submitted to the Scholar One system, have undergone a rigorous double-blind peer review process. Eleven research articles are featured in this special issue and are arranged based on the main focuses of this journal: adult and higher education, skills and work-based learning.

Adult and higher education

In the rapidly changing world, adult and higher education has been used to help upskill and reskill for social and economic development. This is particularly true in Asian countries and beyond, where technological advancements and economic changes have created a demand for a skilled and adaptable workforce. As a result, adult and higher education has become an essential component of each country's learning ecosystem. In this SI, six articles are included to showcase how issues related to different aspects of adult and higher education development are addressed at student, faculty, institutional, national and international levels in China, India, US, New Zealand. These authors provide new perspectives through local context matching their higher education reform and institutional development, teaching and

learning, and university branding, providing opportunities for individuals and institutions to acquire new knowledge, skills and competencies in Asian countries.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has gained great attention worldwide since OpenAI released ChatGPT in 2022 and is also influencing adult and higher education. Without a holistic view of what AI can offer, educators are gaining mixed feelings about AI's educational applications. To fill this gap, Haijun Kang's article titled *Artificial intelligence and its influence in adult learning in China* placed AI development in a specific socio-cultural context and explored the status of AI's influence on the landscape of adult and higher education in China. He addressed the following fundamental questions: How do we understand AI, and its educational value evolved? How have AI's educational applications challenged traditional adult learning practices? He pointed out that AL has demonstrated the potential to help with personalized learning and to promote cooperative learning. He also indicated that AI has demonstrated the ability to transform learning resource distribution, thus enhancing education equity.

India has one of the largest higher education systems and continuously transforms to cope with the world's largest student population and global competition. In this larger context, student holistic development has become a focus for its reform. In the article entitled *A new validated model of leadership development in higher education: an empirical assessment using universal attributes of spiritual intelligence*, Mita Mehta and Chetan Prabhu address one of the necessary enhancements in higher education students' leadership development, and that is spiritual intelligence. Through an empirical assessment using data collected from 810 students, the authors find eight new spiritual intelligence attributes that can significantly impact higher education students' leadership development. This article validates a model for student leadership development in higher education that can be integrated into students' academic life and help enhance their theoretical learning and practice application as new leaders for tomorrow's world.

In the article entitled *AsianCrit lens on Chinese international student multi-dimensional transitions and experiences in the US*, Minghui Hou explores Chinese international students' learning experience on their American host campuses. China has become the top country in the world for sending its students to US higher education institutions. Due to the divergence of classroom teaching and learning influenced by different educational philosophies, cultural traditions and social systems, Chinese international students experience varied barriers and challenges while adjusting and transitioning their education in a completely new country. Furthermore, the COVID-19-led US–China political tensions enabled a double pandemic towards Chinese and Chinese Americans. Due to these and other social and political factors, Chinese international students have also suffered from discrimination and racism of varied forms. Applying a qualitative method through the lenses of multi-dimensional transitions theory and Asian critical theory, Hu explored Chinese international students' learning experience, mainly focusing on racial dynamics in their varied transitions. This study spotlights Chinese international students making sense of their experience at the intersection of international students' identity, geopolitical tensions and racial dynamics. This study illustrates the attention required for policymaking and promotes administrative efforts to understand better and support international students' success in the US.

Joshua Sarpong's article entitled *Performance funding and the academic profession: A New Zealand case study* draws readers' attention to an emerging but much-needed topic for upper higher education institutions administrations, and that is how neoliberalism in higher

education is influencing the academic profession. In the context of New Zealand, based on the interview of 21 academics from two universities and document analysis of the two universities' strategic plans, policies, guidelines, union reports as well as media reports, the author contends that neoliberal practices could lead to occupational stress that generate pressure to publish, increases teaching workload and casualization of the academic job, especially among emerging academics. Through this research, the author urges the top administration of higher education institutions to carefully examine the intensified competition resulting from funding allocation procedures to develop a more collaborative and collegial higher education system where academics perform at an exceptional level not because they have to but because they want to.

In the article entitled *Studies of China's international aid to education: A systematic review of literature*, Xiaoying Jiang and John Holst examine how educational aid has affected higher education institutions. Over the years, developed nations have generously provided educational aid to developing countries, enabling them to make significant educational strides. This aid has traditionally come from the Global North, with Western donors being the primary source of international education aid; however, with the world becoming increasingly interconnected, we are witnessing a shift in these trends. Through a systematic literature review, this study highlights China's educational aid practices, examines policy discourse and students' learning experiences in China, and discusses educational aid management. The paper offers valuable insights into the impact of international education aid on higher education development.

Kritika KHanna, Jagwinder Pandher and Sarbjit Bedi, in their article entitled *Building students' attachment strength with higher education institutes using intangible resources: Role of institutional branding*, zoom into the importance of institutional branding by examining different aspects of brand management for the purpose of maintaining and enhancing attachment strength of students enrolled in higher education institutions in India. Their research indicates that higher education institutions need to improve service quality, brand identity and brand meaning in order to improve the attachment strength of students.

Skills

As technology continues to evolve and plays an increasingly important role in the learning process that shapes future workforces, technology and skills, digital literacy becomes crucial for learning in higher education institutions. Individuals, faculty and institutions must possess technology skills and digital competencies necessary to adopt digital tools and technologies effectively. Historically, Asian countries' education has been far behind other developed countries in the area of applying technology in education. Stimulated by globalization, technology evaluation and the rise of a knowledge-based global system, higher education in many Asian countries has undergone significant changes and reforms. We include four research papers in this SI to showcase how technology has been used to benefit higher education in Malaysia and India.

Yon Rosli Daud and Mohd Rushidi Mohd Amin, in their article entitled *Integrative conceptual framework of student loyalty, service quality, E-service quality, and university image in open and distance learning*, share that one major technology innovation in higher education is the establishment of the Open University Malaysia (OUM) in 2001. They take a look at the main factors that drive what they refer to as student loyalty of OUM distance learners. They believe an integrative conceptual framework of student loyalty is needed to improve ODL students' learning satisfaction and to make them more employable upon

graduation. The main constructs of this framework could include service quality, e-service quality, and university image.

Teik Aun Wong, Wei Chieh Cheah and Brian Dorai, in their article entitled *Emergency remote teaching (ERT) during the Covid-19 pandemic: A case study of experiences and challenges of lecturers*, interviewed lecturers from higher education institutions in the State of Penang in Malaysia and asked them their ODL teaching experiences during the COVID global pandemic. They discovered the following areas that ODL administration should consider when counting on technology to continue teaching and learning during social crises (e.g., global pandemic outbreak and natural disasters): Institutional support, mental health, varying teaching and learning challenges by disciplines, teaching and learning experiences, digital competencies, technology skills, etc.

In the article entitled *Important factors in measuring learners' satisfaction and continuance intention in Open and Distance Learning (ODL) Institutions*, Saiful Masrani, Mohd Rushidi Mohd Amin, Vinesh Sivakumaran and Shishi Piaralal also use OUM as a case study to draw readers' attention to learners' satisfaction and students' retention at ODL institutions. Applying the expectation and confirmation model (ECM), they take a unique look at what factors contribute to learner satisfaction through the different dimensions of justice, namely, distributive justice, procedural justice, and interpersonal and informational justice.

Rojalin Patri, Dhanya M and Sanju Kaladharan, in their article entitled *Fuzzy logic approach to assess the effectiveness of online course delivery in management education: A case of B-School from India*, conducted a case study at a business school in Southern India to assess the effectiveness of delivering management education online. Using fuzzy logic analysis, they found out that the effectiveness of online course delivery in the case of B-school was to be "Fair." To enhance the effectiveness of online course delivery in the future, they made several suggestions by addressing technical, infrastructural, instructor and student behavioral components. One such suggestion includes integrating more interactive learning activities into online course delivery to help draw students' interest and their sense of belongingness, which is in consistent with current literature on effective online learning design.

Work-based learning
As our society ages and the global economy grows more competitive, it has become crucial to train younger generations to enter workforce successfully. Workforce development, job satisfaction and continued on-the-job training through self-directed learning are all crucial factors that contribute to individual learning and organizational success. To achieve this, it is essential to fully comprehend what motivates and satisfies the new millennial workforce and provide them with learning opportunities that can help enhance their skills, knowledge and competencies, all of which would help upgrade their job performance and satisfaction. Designing and implementing education and training programs that incorporate adult learning theories is important to effectively facilitating workplace learning, motivation and learning effectiveness. The paper included in this SI provided insights into the design and implementation of effective adult education programs in the workforce environment in the context of India.

Hasnan Baber, V. Deepa, Hamzah Elrehail, Marc Poulin, and Faizan Mir, in their article entitled *Self-directed learning motivational drivers of working professionals: Confirmatory factor models*, look at what may drive working professionals to pursue self-directed learning (SDL) at workplace in India. Applying structural equation modeling and confirmatory factor

analysis, they surveyed around 315 working professionals who were either senior professionals leading changes in their organizations or appointed as human resource leaders in their respective organizations. Their findings indicate that job expectations and positive reinforcement positively influence the intrinsic motivation of an individual to pursue SDL. In contrast, negative consequences negatively affected motivation to pursue SDL at work.

Summary

Scholars, practitioners and emerging researchers from the East, West and Rest have contributed to this SI. Under a double-blind peer review process, we have included eleven research articles to highlight research studies and practical strategies reflecting current research findings, challenges and issues related to adult continuing and higher education in Asian countries and beyond. We sought contributions from diverse sources, including our AAE community and global partnerships.

This SI has contributed to the *HESWBL*'s main themes by promoting a more comprehensive approach to adult and continuing education, higher education, and social mobility. We hope this SI will inspire continued research, exchange and collaboration which may include but are not limited to (1) A more holistic approach to adult and continuing education and higher education; (2) A more inclusive approach to social and workforce mobility; (3) A more strategic tripartite partnership among the East, West and Rest; (4) A vast increase in the use of technology for lifelong learning and education; (5) Broader innovative definitions and purposes of lifelong learning and education for work from Asian views and (6) Newer approaches from non-Western perspectives to what is to be part of the educational internationalization.

Finally, we sincerely thank the Editor-in-Chief, the publisher, Emerald Publishing, the reviewers, and most importantly, you, the *HESWBL* readers, for your support and interest in our research endeavors.