

## AFRICA DAY: KEYNOTE ADDRESS PUBLICATIONS

### 2024 Africa Day Celebration: Keynote Address Reflections

Kwadwo Adusei-Asante, PhD  
School of Arts and Humanities, Edith Cowan University, Western Australia  
Email: [K.adusei@ecu.edu.au](mailto:K.adusei@ecu.edu.au)

#### Acknowledgements

On 25 May 2024, I had the privilege of delivering the keynote address at the 2024 Africa Day event in Perth, Western Australia. The event took place at the Curtin University Indoor Stadium and was organised by the Organisation of African Communities Western Australia (OACWA). I respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners of the land where I stood and delivered the keynote address—the Nyoongar people, their elders, past, present and emerging—for their continued care of the land. I am also thankful to the Executive President of the OACWA, Dr Casty Nyaga Hughes and the entire organising team of the event for inviting me. I am thankful to Associate Professor David Mickler, Director at the Centre for Australia-Africa Relations, for hosting the event. I wish to duly acknowledge the members of parliament, ministers of state, local council mayors, local councillors, various dignitaries, community leaders, African business entrepreneurs and people from various African communities in Perth who attended the event. The OACWA has informed me that about 1200 people attended the event. I am grateful to academics who research African communities in Australia and present positive narratives of Africans, particularly Dr Tebeje Molla Mekonnen, whose work I have extensively cited.



#### The topic

I was asked to speak for less than 20 minutes on **advocating for and building culturally appropriate education systems that can foster inclusive, lifelong, quality and relevant learning for Africans in Western Australia**. Owing to the brevity of time, a lengthy discursive unpacking of the topic was not feasible. Thus, I situated my speech within the context of formal education: the structured education system running from primary—and, in some contexts, from nursery (Pre-primary)—school to university, including specialised programmes for vocational, technical and professional training on the premises of the school, institution or in an online mode.<sup>1</sup> As part of the keynote address, I presented facts about the state of education and other relevant issues among African youth in Australia in the last decade or so. Following this, I provided a diagnosis of the issues and offered some suggestions for the way forward. At the request of the OACWA and other interested parties, I have summarised the facts I presented in point form following.

<sup>1</sup>European Youth Foundation (n.d.). *Definitions*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-youth-foundation/definitions>.

## The facts

1. As of 2021, the total population of Africans living in Australia was 447,524, representing 1.76% of the total population of Australia and 6.35% of the total overseas population.<sup>2</sup>
2. Data on the progression of African students in Australian high schools and post-secondary destinations are limited.
3. African students in Australian high schools are over-represented in the vocational education and training (VET)/general pathway. Only a few take up the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) pathway, which gives them direct entry into universities in Australia.<sup>3</sup>
4. Refugee-background African Australians are over-represented in VET courses. In the 2016 Census, people born in the eight main countries of origin of African refugees accounted for less than 0.3% of the total population of Australia. However, the group represented about 1.3% of the total enrolment in funded VET programs and courses in the previous five years (2015–2019).<sup>4</sup>
5. Between 2015 and 2019, there were more than 91,000 refugee-background African Australians enrolled in VET courses, and 20,000 completed VET courses over that same period.<sup>5</sup>
6. African students in Australian high schools enrolled in the ATAR pathway struggle to complete their studies and are underrepresented in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) subjects. Most of them drop out without a degree.<sup>6</sup>
7. In the university sector, close to 11,000 African refugee youth enrolled for undergraduate degrees between 2001 and 2017. However, fewer than 2,000 (approximately 18%) of them successfully completed their courses over the same period.<sup>7</sup>
8. Black African youth face explicit racism in educational institutions and public spaces.<sup>8</sup>
9. In 2020, only one in ten (10%) of refugee-background African youth (aged 18–30 years) transitioned to higher education within the first five years of their arrival. The group was behind the general population in terms of undergraduate course completion. This number has not changed in the past 25 years.<sup>9</sup>
10. Africans constitute almost 50% of students who fail their units in some Western Australian universities.<sup>10</sup>
11. In 2019, the unemployment rate of people from countries of origin of African refugees was as high as 22.4%. This was over three times higher than the national average (6.9%).<sup>11</sup>

<sup>2</sup> ABS, 2024, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/australias-population-country-birth/latest-release>. Hussain, J. (2023). Getting to know you: African Community in Australia. *Multiconnexions*. <https://multiconnexions.com.au/getting-to-know-you-african-community-in-australia>.

<sup>3</sup>Molla, T. (2020a, 21 September). Young African migrants are pushed into uni, but more find success and happiness in vocational training. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/young-african-migrants-are-pushed-into-uni-but-more-find-success-and-happiness-in-vocational-training-145026>.

<sup>4</sup>Molla, 2020a.

<sup>5</sup>Molla, 2020a.

<sup>6</sup>Molla, 2020a

<sup>7</sup>Molla, 2020a.

<sup>8</sup>Molla, T. (2019). Educational aspirations and experiences of refugee-background African youth in Australia: A case study. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 25(8), 877–895. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1588924>.

<sup>9</sup>Molla, T. (2020b). African refugee youth in Australia: Higher education participation. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 41(2), 481–495. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1849035>.

<sup>10</sup>Gately, N. J., Ellis, S., Britton, K., & Fleming, T. (2017). Understanding and overcoming barriers: Learning experiences of undergraduate Sudanese students at an Australian university. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 6(2), 121–132. <https://doi.org/10.5430/ijhe.v6n2p121>.

<sup>11</sup>Molla, T. (2019, 28 August). Trauma, racism and unrealistic expectations mean African refugees are less likely to get into Australian unis. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/trauma-racism-and-unrealistic-expectations->

12. In 2021, young Africans accounted for almost 20% of the total population in youth justice in the State of Victoria, although Africans accounted for only 1.5% of the state's population.<sup>12</sup>
13. Most publications on the educational achievements of Africans are negative, 'refugee-laden' and largely 'Sudanised'.<sup>13</sup>
14. The accomplishments of high-achieving African students are not celebrated.<sup>14</sup>

## Moving forward

In Figure 1, I have loosely attempted to categorise suggestions to improve and sustain high academic attainment among African students.

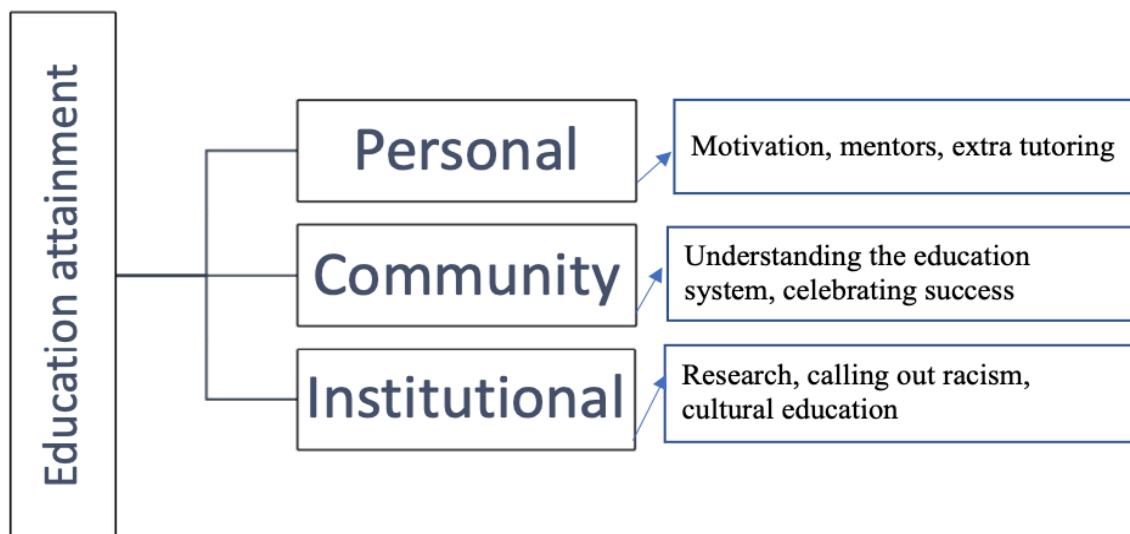


Figure 1: Towards high academic attainment of African students in Australia

## Suggestions

- The OACWA and relevant organisations must continue to advocate for data on African students at all educational levels to be made available to the public.
- The OACWA and relevant organisations must continue their advocacy for culturally appropriate education to address pervasive inequities that exist in Australia's education system that hinder African students.
- Education institutions need to activate and validate African students' prior knowledge and contextualise learning for them.
- The OACWA and relevant organisations must continue to promote cultural awareness within the school system through staff training.
- An African centre in Western Australia needs to be established to provide cultural education and community engagement including support for families.

[mean-african-refugees-are-less-likely-to-get-into-australian-unis-121885](#). See also El-Gack, N., & Yak, G. (2016). A degree doesn't count for South Sudanese job seekers. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/a-degree-doesnt-count-for-south-sudanese-job-seekers-64667>.

<sup>12</sup>Shepherd, S. (2021, 25 March). Too many young African-Australians are in jail. Some blame police, but the data tells a more complex story. *The Conversation*. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-03-25/racial-profiling-concerns-african-australian-youth-imprisonment/13252594>.

<sup>13</sup>Molla, 2020b.

<sup>14</sup>Adusei-Asante, K. (2018). The impact of targeted educational programmes on academic outcomes for African students in Western Australia. *Coolabah*, 24 & 25(2018), 274–291. <https://doi.org/10.1344/co201824&25274-291>.

Citation: Adusei-Asante, K. (2024). 2024 Africa Day Keynote Address. Organisation of African Communities, Western Australia.