INTRO – Hi everyone, welcome to the ADCET Podcast – supporting you – supporting students. We would like to acknowledge the aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples who are the traditional custodians of the lands on which this recording is taking place and pay our respects to the elder’s past, present and emerging. In this podcast episode, Matt Brett chats to Global Tertiary Education Expert Jamil Salmi. Make sure you check out our show notes for links to Jamils recent publications. Enjoy.

- Hi, I'm Matt Brett, and you're listening to another edition of a series of podcast conversations hosted by ADCET, the Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training, and the NCSEHE, the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. I'm on the advisory group for ADCET, I'm an adjunct fellow with the National Centre, and amongst other things, I am Director of Academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University, and a PhD candidate at the University of Melbourne.

I'm delighted today to be speaking with internationally renowned expert on higher education, Professor Jamil Salmi about equity in a global higher education context. Jamil has provided policy advice to governments and university leads across over 100 countries, he's consulted with and for World Bank, the OECD, and the European Commission, and AusAid. Professor Jamil Salmi, welcome to this humble ADCET podcast.

Jamil - Thank you very much for your kind invitation, Matt.

- I'm not sure where you're joining us from today Jamil, you could be almost anywhere in the world, given you've worked in pretty much every corner of it. Just where are you joining us from today?

- Today, I'm in Columbia, South America. My wife is from Columbia, and we moved back to Columbia when I left the World Bank, when I took early retirement in 2012. But for me to be in one place for more than a week or a month is highly unusual. As you know, I travel a lot internationally, but with the lockdown, we've been locked down since mid-March, and I must say it's at least the first time in 34 years that I'm not travelling constantly, and I think I like it. Even when we're able to travel again, I might reconsider the hectic, crazy life that I had.

Just to give you an example, in February, before the pandemic, I was in Australia, and Indonesia, and then in Vietnam, and then in Sudan, and then Nigeria in just one month.

- That's quite the frequent flier miles that you're racking up there Jamil. Hopefully, at home, have you got access to a tennis court, are you able to get in a few games of tennis, or are you pretty much locked into the four walls like we are here in Melbourne?

- Actually, I'm very lucky, because we have a country house and I do have a tennis court. So, yes, I alternate work and tennis, and walks in the gardens, and I do things I haven't had time to do before like watching movies and reading novels. I cannot complain.

Matt: - Yeah, that's certainly a different experience for many people around the world in a post-COVID-19 context. It's been quite the career journey for you, Jamil, from an education economist in Morocco. I'd like to kick things off with maybe a bit of discussion around your Moroccan heritage. Your work spans English, Spanish, French, and I expect you're probably fluent in other languages as well, maybe Arabic and Berber. To what extent has your Moroccan heritage influenced your interest in equity in higher education?

Jamil: - Well, I think that definitely growing up in Morocco and developing countries has shaped my thinking and interests, and determined how my career would look like, although there have been some elements of serendipity. But living in a former colony, in a poor country in Northern Africa, that gave me a first hand knowledge and experience with development issues. Looking around me, seeing that I was living in a very unequal society, some very high, very rich people building huge mansions as if they were going to live forever, and then many, many poor people living in slums or difficult conditions.

After I did my first degree, which was in business administration, I studied France. My dad was so obsessed with me going to Harvard Business School. But I wasn't really interested, so we compromised. I think he got me curious to go to the U.S., but instead of Harvard, I went to the University of Pittsburgh where I did a programme in Public International Affairs. Also when I was there, I cross-enrolled in the School of Education, and that's where my passion for education, combined with the development, started. Yeah, that's how it all started.

Matt: - I can hardly imagine what it must be like, in an internationally comparatively privileged setting of Australia, which still has inequality, but maybe not to the same extent of Northern Africa and Morocco. Some of your early works described the challenges and social biases involved in education in multilingual Moroccan context, how important has that work been for your subsequent comparative analysis of global higher education systems?

Jamil- I think studying the education situation and the language influence in my native country really opened my eyes to how inequality started way earlier. You know about Bruce Chapman, from your country, who is a friend of mine, and I'm an admirer of his work. I remember him at a conference saying half-jokingly that the best way to prepare yourself for life is to choose your parents carefully. It's true that our family background has a big impact, especially in a poor country.

So, in Morocco, it starts with language. We are a multi-language society, where you have about 60% of the population is of Berber origin. It's an ethnic and cultural group with their own language, and then we have the Arab speaking part. Officially, Arabic is our national language, but the Arabic we study at school is a literary Arabic, very distinct from the Moroccan Arabic we speak at home. Just to give you an idea, it's as if people in Italy would, at school, use Latin, but speak Italian at home. So. in terms of language, you have this linguistic distance between the spoken language and the language of study at school.

Already, for Arabic-speaking Moroccans, going to school is a big, disruptive moment because you have to learn... I wouldn't say a foreign language, but a different language from a linguistic point of view. Now, Berber kids speak Berber at home, and then when they go to school, they may or may not speak Moroccan Arabic as a kid. Then they go to school, they will have to learn classical Arabic, and they will learn to speak Moroccan Arabic. And then in Year 3, they start to learn French because as a former French colony, we still use French the same way as other African countries use English, like Kenya or Uganda would use English. It's a very messy situation.

Of course, children from the elite will have more support at home, their parents would be educated so they would also speak French, so for them it's much easier. That's really opened my eyes to the kind of dynamics and fractures that would influence the ability of children to do well in school or not do well. Many, unfortunately, are failed and abandoned before finishing primary school or through high school, and of course only a small minority will get to higher education.

I learned about the importance of context, about the importance of culture, and when I joined the World Bank and had the opportunity to work in many countries, on many continents, I always tried to remember what it was like to have a complex environment.

Matt: - I'll pick up on that issue of cultural context in latter questions, Jamil. But keeping on the Moroccan theme, Morocco’s tertiary education participation, measured by its GTER, the Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio, has trebled over the last decade from about 13% to 36%. So, it's certainly developing really fast as a country, and in the Australian context, we've got politicians that have been banging on for decades about the prospect of high speed rail, but Morocco's got that now. So, developing really fast in all sorts of ways.

That leads to a bit of a chicken and egg question, in terms of education and the economy. Has economic development enabled Morocco to invest more in higher education, or has more investment in higher education been the catalyst for more economic development?

Jamil: - That's a great question, Matt. Actually, it's interesting, your remark, you mentioned the high speed rail. I would say, yes, that's a great achievement, but I would say that we have, to use the same words, I would say that we have a low speed education system at all levels. From a quantitative point of view, it's true that enrolment has grown, and it's part of the pressure of the demography. Morocco is... we have a very high … rate, and so the primary system and then the secondary have expanded. As a result, you have lots of high school graduates wanting to study at university level. And because we inherited the French system, which is an open system, anybody who graduates from high school is entitled to a place in higher education.

Under the pressure, government has expanded, has invested in universities, I think we have to recognise that as great achievement. But I'm afraid that because resources have not been forthcoming for education, the quality has not matched the quantitative expansion. If we come back to the earlier discussion about inequalities, what happens is that your average citizen, or the children of your average citizen, will go to the free public university, but children of the elite will study in Europe, usually in France or in Belgium, and increasingly in UK or in US or Canada. So, I think that we still have a really unequal system that needs further investment.

I've been thinking about this issue of the egg and chicken and what comes first, and I think that it really goes hand in hand. If we look at experience of South Korea, one of the most successful countries in terms of education development, if I'm not mistaken, I think South Korea has the highest enrolment rate at the tertiary level among all OECD countries. What they've done is that they invested heavily in primary education as they started to develop their economy, and then gradually invested more in secondary education, and then in tertiary education. That, of course, gave them highly skilled people who could further participate in productivity increase and innovative investment in the economy.

So, I think if I were to have a short answer to your question, I would say that both go together, really, they feed into each other. You need resources to invest in quality education, and you need educated people to fuel the economy and social development, also, more generally.

Matt: - To generalise that a little bit Jamil, is it maybe fair to say that the platform for the transition to a more advanced economy is investing in schools, that's where inequality, perhaps, starts to begin, and if you can get that right then you'll have a good platform to be able to grow tertiary education and start to develop the kind of high skills necessary for an advanced economy?

Jamil: - Yes and no. Yes, but at the same time, you need a favourable economic environment, and you need a meritocratic system, and you need opportunities for well-educated people. If I may share a personal observation that really struck me, Morocco has a quite well developed elite, people who studied at university level, studied at Europe, et cetera. My first experience with Asia was in 1976, I did a tourism trip in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, in 1976. I was struck to see that these countries were still, perhaps not Singapore, but certainly Thailand and Malaysia, not well developed. I didn't feel like that their higher education system was really as advanced as ours in Morocco.

But then I went back in 1991, by that time I was with the World Bank, and visiting Malaysia again, I was so impressed by the progress within about 20 years, and realising that I hadn't seen the same progress back in Morocco. Even though we had some well qualified people, the economic and social system was not so favourable, and Morocco, up until now, is still a feudal society, and meritocracy's not really as powerful as it is, I believe, in many south East-Asian countries. So, having the right environment to take advantage and give opportunities to well-qualified people is also an important dimension.

Matt: - You mentioned the World Bank there Jamil, and the World Bank, as I understand it, that's part of its role is to cultivate and foster economic development across the world. I think in, maybe, your time with the World Bank, its interest in higher education maybe grew. Is that your personal legacy, or were you maybe just riding a wave of interest in education from the World Bank across time?

Jamil: - When I joined the World Bank, education was high on the agenda, but there was a bias in favour of basic education. Back then, the thinking was that poor countries, developing countries should focus first on basic education, and university education was seen as a luxury. My take is that we needed to have a more balanced approach. I was very lucky because in 1990, I was offered to lead the team that was about to write the first strategic paper on higher education on behalf of the World Bank. Believe me, it was not easy to break the old pattern, and this old bias against higher education. I don't like to talk about my work in such positive terms, but I do believe that with my team and my colleagues, we were successful in pushing a little bit and changing the agenda, and offering a more balanced view and approach.

And I think they are very logical arguments. Even if you were to focus on basic education, we have to accept that you cannot have a great primary and high school system unless you have good teachers. Good teachers are trained at the tertiary level. So, you have this interaction, this feedback mechanism, and also if you don't have well-trained high school graduates, you will not have a very good university system. So, what we really push is this notion that you have to develop education as a whole, as an entire system, from early childhood to university and even beyond, because now we have to think in terms of lifelong learning in a rapidly changing society and economy.

Matt:- You've picked up on a few things there, Jamil, that are threads in your work on world class universities. But I wonder if you can elaborate that a little more, because I think that work really does neatly distil the challenges in developing world class universities. Can you share with listeners what some of the findings of that work were?

Jamil: - Sure. I think the world of higher education changed to a large extent in 2003 when the Shanghai ranking came out for the first time. I think that's when people and universities and governments started to think about world-class. And I was lucky again, an element of serendipity, to be asked to do some work first on the rankings, and then on what it meant to be a world class university or world class higher education system.

I wrote a book in 2009 on the challenge of establishing world class universities, where I developed a very simple framework where I identified three sets of factors that, together, make a world class university, I believe. These are concentration of talent, the people that are your students and academics at universities, abundant resources, world class universities are usually well endowed and well budgeted, and appropriate governance, so the leadership, you have a vision, you have flexibility in management, you have institutional autonomy, academic freedom. And it's the combination of all three that make, I believe, a world class university.

- So, you could have institutions that have good people, that have lots of money, but poor governance. I can think, for example, of University of Sao Paolo in Brazil. Brazil is an economic giant, it's the top public university in Brazil, if not in Latin America, and yet they have a very traditional European governance model, and as a result, I think they are not pulling their weight. I guess, Brazilians are more interested in football than in education, I always tease them in that manner. So, these are the three factors, talent, resources and governance, that should be aligned to make world class university.

Matt: - There's a hell of a lot of complexity there, neatly distilled and a very easy to remember framework that all these things do need to come together and be interconnected in the right way. You said that the inspiration for this, in some ways, was the impact of the academic ranking of world universities, and the top tier of that ranking is dominated by American and English universities. Harvard and Oxford, Stanford and Cambridge, neither of which are renowned for their accessibility or their equity profile. To what extent does equity feature within that framework of resources, talent and governance?

Jamil- Well, indeed, it doesn't figure much, and that's one of the big concerns about the rankings, but also about the way these universities select their students. In fact, they are very selective. When you think they are among the most selective institutions in the world and as a result, because primary and secondary education still have lots of disparities. We have, usually, on average, more students from the middle class or the elite groups in society that make it into these universities. You mentioned the UK where, definitely, Oxford and Cambridge have been criticised for having very, very small proportion of students from low economic groups, of students of colour. So, we see these disparities in society amplified at the level of universities.

Same thing in the U.S., where the so-called Ivy League universities have a proportion of Pell grants beneficiaries... Pell grants are the federal scholarships for low income students. So, I think it's really a big failure of world class universities to be so selective, and as a result, to lack diversity. Even though in theory, on paper, they claim to be needs-free or needs-blind, meaning that any successful students will not be deterred or will not be penalised for lack of resources. So, Harvard and Stanford will have scholarships or loans to help needy students.

But the problem is that it's the pipeline that they will not get there, the proportion will be very small. So, indeed, that's a big issue, and there are very few exceptions. One of them is maybe... I'd like to mention Arizona State University, where Michael Crow back 15 years ago has been on a mission to upgrade his university, make it more research intensive, without losing its open access feature. I think his achievements demonstrate that it can be done, that you can have an equity bias, or favourable beyond affirmative action, to encourage a higher percentage of students from low income families or minorities to access and be successful.

Matt: - Universities around the world, and particularly in Australia, have latched onto these rankings, whether it be the ARWU, the QS, the Ling. Touched on some of the downsides of these kind of rankings, and you've written that if these rankings are a disease, there might be some cures in response to that. Can you maybe elaborate on some of the work that you've done in that space?

Jamil: - Yes, I think, for me, the rankings have been a blessing and a curse. A blessing in the sense that it has, not only for me, but for institutions and for countries, for politicians, it has been an opportunity to reflect more on the performance of universities. But unfortunately, these rankings are very flawed from a methodological point of view. They focus mainly on research outputs, and much less on the quality of education, on the interaction between universities and their local environment, how much they contribute to their communities, et cetera. So, there are many missing dimensions.

In fact, I recently finished a book chapter, it's for a book that's going to be celebrating the 20 years of the Shanghai ranking, and I was looking at the missing dimensions. For example, ethics. If you have your university, remember after the 2008 economic crisis, people in the U.S. were complaining that business schools were training people who have no morals, who would be at the margin or the limit between doing legal things or doing things that were outside the law. So, this notion that universities should also form the people as citizens with positive values is very important.

Then, after ethics, we have social engagement. In these days of fake news and Brexit, not to mention the person in the White House today, commitment to truth and scientific evidence is very important. It's a core element of the mission of a university, and none of these dimensions are taken into consideration by the rankings. And of course, equity is a very important dimension. In fact, I was very glad to see, I think it was last week, a statement about a study done together by University of Melbourne and, I think, King's College in the UK, and a certain institution whose name escapes me right now. They were looking at social engagement as an important dimension, and proposing ways of measuring the contribution of universities in that respect.

So, coming back to the rankings, I think we have to be very careful in their use. Unfortunately, there seems to be an obsession, and you mentioned the word ‘disease’ that I use in the title of one of my articles, and the cure was benchmarking. Because when you compare your university with other universities in a benchmarking mode, you don't have indicators or methodologies imposed by people in Shanghai or in London, but you decide yourself which institution you want to compare yourself with, and on what criteria. I'm a great supporter of benchmarking as a more useful way, a more effective way of comparing institution’s university systems, national systems.

Matt: - I'm just going to maybe bring that back to the framework of resources, talent and governance. Is part of the problem here how we recognise talent, and what we count as a valid measure of talent within our education systems?

Jamil: - Yes. If we talk about Harvard as being the greatest university in the world, I sometimes challenge this perception, because when you think about it, Harvard being very selective, they're able to get the best incoming students from the pool of students all over the world. And because they are very rich and very prestigious, they can attract top professors. So, I ask myself, "What is the added value?" And of course, I've done professional development training at Harvard, and I know it's a great institution. But I do believe that there are institutions that are much less prestigious, maybe have less resources, and yet they are doing a great job because they are adding more to train students who are less well prepared.

I think, for example, of the community colleges in Canada or in the U.S. which, I think, make a much more important contribution to the development of society than the elite universities. Because the students who come are not the cream of the cream, they are very often students of immigrant origin, or students who didn't do so well in high school, and yet the community colleges do a good job at bringing them to a level and preparing them for a profession. So, this notion of added value, I think, is much more important, if we accept that any human being has the same value as anybody else, then we should put more resources to compensate for the disparities in terms of preparation, in terms of motivation, when they leave high school to go into higher education.

Matt: - A lot of these rankings are concerned with who's the best university in the world. Another way of thinking about things is what is the oldest university in the world. Morocco's University of al-Qarawiyyin, I'm not sure if I've enunciated that correctly, was established in 1859, making it, I think, the oldest institution of continuous learning instruction in the world. Has this also been captivated by these rankings? In the Moroccan system, are we seeing aspirations for the world class list as defined by the academic ranking of world universities?

Jamil: - Matt, I'm so impressed about the research you've done for this conversation. Yes indeed, often at conferences in Europe, my European colleagues boast or they debate about who has the oldest university. Is it Oxford, is it Sorbonne in France, is it Bolognia in Italy, and I will tell them, "You forget about Karaouine in Morocco." So, yes, we have the oldest university, but unfortunately, for the reasons I mentioned earlier, in terms of, you know, we've put the emphasis on quantitative expansion and not enough on quality. So, I think that, unfortunately, Morocco is far from having what we would qualify as a world class university.

In fact, in the Middle East, in the North Africa and Middle East region, I think that it's only the Gulf countries that really have these aspirations, and you can see competition between Abu Dhabi, and Dubai, and Saudi Arabia and Qatar trying to have world class universities. But I cannot say that, I wish I could, but not yet, Morocco is still far from that.

But I think, in a way, we should not be too obsessed with this notion of being first in the rankings. As I mentioned earlier, I've advocated doing more benchmarking. The first way of benchmarking is to benchmark with yourself. You benchmark with yourself where you were five years ago, and where you are today, and where you want to be five years from now, and you can see whether you have achieved progress or not.

And you may be aware also, a more useful way of looking at it is to look at national systems. I prefer to talk about world class systems rather than world class universities. It's as if we were looking at the tallest building in the country. Let's say we go to Malaysia and we look at the Petronas Towers, and then we would assume that this is very representative of the average housing of people in Malaysia. You would agree with me that it doesn't make sense.

So, I prefer to look at systems, and I'm sure, since you are a PhD student candidate at the University of Melbourne, you are aware of the Universitas 21 Consortium ranking of national systems that they've been doing for the past eight years. If I'm not mistaken, I think that was a much more interesting exercise, where they had the multiplicity of educators and trying to compare national systems. When you do that, it's not necessarily the country that have the best universities that come first. I'm a great admirer, for example, of the Netherlands, because I think that's the only country in the world where all the universities are in the top 150 in the Shanghai ranking. And to be fair, I think that Australia has done great progress over the past 10, 15 years in terms of raising the performance of many of its universities.

In fact, I have developed a small index which measures the number of top 100 universities per country. When we compare the situation of Australia back in 2003 when the first Shanghai ranking came out and today, in fact, I think in two days we're going to have the 2020, but if we look at the 2019, it's very impressive how Australia and a few other countries have progressed, including China and Singapore. So, I want to leave you with this notion that it's better to look at national performance rather than the performance of individual universities.

Matt: - That Universitas 21 ranking, I agree, is a great piece of work by Ross Williams, in particular, from University of Melbourne. When you look under the hood, or you look at the detail of that ranking, it highlights that, again, equity doesn't feature strongly. There are equity measures in there, I think, particularly around gender, so it's a great international system comparator, but it doesn't necessarily get to the heart of equity in some ways.

Your more recent work, as I understand, has done a more thorough analysis of equity policies of higher education systems. Can you maybe share with listeners how that work came about, and some of its key findings?

Jamil: - Yes. Thanks, Matt, for this question. Human rights have always been part of my pre-occupations, in fact, I wrote a book on human rights in the early 1990's, which I was afraid to mention at the World Bank because at that time, it was not on the agenda. But gradually, it has become — I have tried to adjust my work on human rights to education, which was my profession, and that's what really has triggered my interest in equity issues.

As an anecdote I can share, at the World Bank we used to have bilateral countries contributing resources through trust funds to help us with our analytical work, including AusEds when it still existed. In these cases, we had a trust fund from the Netherlands, but they were sharing this bias in favour of basic education, and they were not funding higher education. I challenged them, and they challenged me back and said, "Well, why don't you propose a topic that would be of interest to us." I said, “I would like to do some work on equity in higher education,” and they said, “Yes.” So, they gave me resources and that's how I started to dig in that topic.

I developed a framework before leaving the World Bank, and then when I took early retirement, I carried on this work. I was lucky that I was approached by the WAHED group, by Graeme Atherton from the UK, and by the … Foundation asking me to do a background paper for the first World Access to Higher Education Day, that's what WAHED stands for. So, I did a first study on determinants of equity and effective policy, and trying to identify the range of policies that countries and institutions implement to pursue their equity agenda.

- That was followed by… the following year I did some work, I took a number of case studies to look at what works. So, I looked at South Africa, I looked at Austria for Europe, I looked at Columbia in South America, I looked at Vietnam in East Asia, and I looked at, also, Australia. This year, for next WAHED, I'm looking at the equity impact of COVID-19, linked to what's happening to universities.

Matt: That's a fantastic publication, I encourage listeners to click on the links and read that report. Just want to get a sense, Jamil, as to where does disability fit within these national system policies on equity? Is it a common thread across the world, or some systems referencing it, but not others, as an equity priority group?

Jamil: - Well, as part of the framework that I developed, I tried to identify equity groups and see how countries themselves defined equity groups. Basically, we have four big categories. One is low income students, the second is gender and gender-related groups, then you have minorities which could be Indigenous people, it could be a language minority, depending on the specific context of the country, and the last, but not least would come people with disabilities. But as you know better than me, my sense is that, unfortunately, interest, even though it has grown, I think people refer usually to that group as the invisible minority, because they don't make the headlines, but nevertheless, it is very important.

I remember vividly an experience, I was visiting a high school in Argentina, and I realised that they had three students in wheelchairs. It was a … school, and all the science labs were on the second floor, but they had only stairs, no elevators. Also, the exam room was on the second floor. So, I asked them, "What about students who cannot walk up the stairs?" There was this embarrassed silence and then one of them said, "Oh, we carry them." First of all, I wasn't sure whether it was true, and second, I figured out I wouldn't be very comfortable if I was a student in a wheelchair, to be... I want to be independent, and be able, and I think as I go around and work with universities, again, it depends on you have some countries including Australia, and other countries that are very advanced. They have an office dedicated to students with special needs, but there are many, many countries, many situations where it's not on the radar screen.

I was looking at some statistics for France, I believe, recently, and I think that only 8% of universities, for example, had this provision for access for students with wheelchairs as one example. But also, there is this… this misconception and fear. I want to share another, which I think is a beautiful anecdote, I've been working with a university in Columbia. It's a private university, but it really has a public vocation. They want to provide quality education to students from low income families and living in marginal areas, in poor areas in Columbia. As I was visiting one of the campus, I met two students who were special needs students. But as a pair, they were fantastic, because one of them was a lady in a wheelchair, the other one was a blind student. But they were working together, the blind student was pushing the wheelchair to help his colleague, and she was guiding him with her eyes. I thought, together, there was no more disability in the way they were helping each other, and I think that it really made me think about many of the prejudices we have about students with disability.

Matt: - Thanks, Jamil, that's a wonderful anecdote. We've had the Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability since 2006, and I think pretty much every country in the world has signed up to that. It does open the question as to whether that prejudice that you spoke of is part of the reason why disability is often the invisible minority group, and what we can do to maybe shift away from those deep-seeded prejudices that are present in many parts of the world.

Jamil: - I think that, in a way, one of the reasons I believe is that they are not such as vocal as low income students or when it comes to gender, or some of the ethnic minorities, or really just minorities in the country. So, there is a tendency to ignore them, or sometimes it's ignorance, sometimes it's prejudice, as we discussed, and I think that's very unfortunate.

- I think what is missing, it's good to have a national convention, but when there is a long distance to reach each individual institution, and I think that part of the efforts to have equity strategies trickle down to your institutions. Again, in Australia, you lead the way in having many university, I think, it's all universities have equity strategy per se, and once you start thinking about equity in an organised way, the first step is to define what are your target groups. That's where, hopefully, if you are schematic about it, you will include students with special needs, and then try to think through what are these special needs, how can they be addressed, how can they be supported appropriately to make sure that their education experience will be as successful as any other student.

Matt: - In your analysis of national systems in equity, Australia's performed very well in your analysis, and you've singled that out as a bit of a benchmark for other systems to emulate. What is it about Australia and its equity policies that you found was so distinctive internationally?

Matt:- I think that what I saw in Australia, again, was alignment. I think this notion of alignment is important. Alignment between having a national vision and policy at the government level, and then putting your resources where your mouth is in terms putting your budget, giving resources. I'm sure those of you who work in this field will complain, and rightly so, that you don't have enough resources, but at least you have resources, few countries have that.

And then, efforts to measure results, to assess what works. You have networks, you have a national centre, or two centres, university based, that are dedicated to the study of equity in higher education. You have meetings and platforms to compare experiences, share results, monitor what's happening, what's working well and what's not working well, and try to learn from that. So, in that sense, you will see that there are very few countries in the world that have this kind of alignment. That's why I'm a great admirer of some of the good things that are happening in Australia in that respect.

Matt: - I think, your point before, that at least we have resources, is a great reminder that compared to other parts of the world, we are doing okay. But it does open the question in terms of those that are interested in equity and disability/inclusion in higher ed, do we just put our feet up and say we're doing well internationally, or is there still more to be done? Is this an endless struggle that every system needs to keep fighting towards to make sure that human rights are upheld, and people have got the opportunities to be the best that they can?

Jamil: - I think it's good to set a rate, good achievement, because we tend to be always negative and complain we don't have enough resources, enough attention, et cetera. But I think I agree with you, you still have to be very vigilant, it's not time to be complacent. The struggle goes on, and we need to make sure that we're meeting our objectives, and that we reach the last two person, or one person that needs to be reached. These usually are the hardest to, so the efforts cannot stop.

And then, look at what's happening this year. Times change and unexpectedly, we have something that had never, never, ever happened. Entire university systems shutting down in terms of on campus education, and moving to online learning. What used to be a hobby for a few professors becomes mainstream. So, we have to ask ourselves, what does it mean for our equity target groups in general, and in particular for people with disability? What resources were available to meet their needs, what have they experienced? One thing that we're noticing, that social distance and isolation is big, so emotional distress is a big pre-occupation for many institutions. How is it affecting people with special needs? I think that shows us that more than ever, that we have to be vigilant and keep focusing on these issues. Because the manifestations may take new forms as life goes on.

Matt: - You mentioned before, Jamil, that we need to see education as an interconnected system from childhood all the way through to university, and just today, results have come out in the UK for their A levels and school performance. It underscores how hard it would be for pretty much every system in the world whose schooling has been affected by COVID-19 to filter out who has done well, who has potential, who has the talent, who has got the verification to move through to university. For us in Australia, that'll be towards the end of the year, given our school year is a calendar year. But it's certainly a massive disruption not just to education, but to economies as well.

And Clark Kerr, former president at the University of California once said that we will need higher education more, but we will be able to afford it less. Do you think that the economic impact of COVID-19 will be as much an educational one as a real challenge in being able to resource education in the best possible way?

Jamil: - Indeed, I think COVID-19 is already having, and will have a tremendous impact on higher educational systems. The past five months, I've been monitoring the situation, that's one of the main issues I'm working on these days. While I think it's too early to have a definite answer, I think we can see already some trends, and resources will definitely be a challenge. I recently participated in a debate with all the provincial vice ministers of higher education in Canada, and we were just talking about the same issues. My take, I was telling them that the more public provision you have, and the more public funding, you will hopefully be in a better situation. I know in Australia, the concern is that you have less resources, and correct me if I'm wrong, but I think that's part of the problem is that your system is structurally highly dependent on international students. If they're not able to come, or if they are reluctant to enrol because it's going to be online, you may lose lots of resources.

On the other hand, you have a structural feature that's very positive and I always talk about in other contexts, to tell countries that they should also have that feature. I'm referring to your... formerly it was called HECS system, I believe now it's different, your income-contingent loan system. Because it protects graduates in case of big economic crisis as we're experiencing now, and other countries, the U.S. and Canada, had to declare a moratorium on student loan repayment because of economic hardship, unemployment that will prevent many graduates from fulfilling their student loan payment obligations. So, I think the end result will be mixed. You have some features of vulnerability in your funding system, but some features are of strength.

Another dimension is when we look at the educational aspects. I think that's one of the mistakes that I see in many cases, that we are focusing on the dynamics of virtual education, or the technology part, how do you move from on campus, presential education to virtual education. We're thinking about what's the best technology to support that, what are the digital resources that I can offer my students. But I think, really, the crux of the matter is about the nature of the interaction between instructors and students.

- I hope that one of the benefits of this crisis will be a greater focus on education innovations, on how to make the experience more active and interactive, because it's not about just recording your lecture as you did it before and then putting it online and expecting the students to get the same amount of learning. It's really about the interaction between the instructor and the students, and among the students themselves. So, what kind of education experience can you offer, I think that will be a very important dimension to look at as we emerge gradually from this crisis.

Matt: - Time will tell, and I look forward to reading some of your work and some of your analysis on the impact of COVID-19 and I think there's a lot of online teaching going on at the moment that's maybe not as interactive as it could be. Time will tell what the long term impact of that will be.

I want to pivot a little bit. You delivered a keynote address at the TEQSA Conference in Melbourne last year and, in my opinion, that's one of the best keynotes I've ever seen. It was towards the end of the day, the audience was a little bit tired, exhausted, but you had the audience hanging on every word. I've read over pieces or interviews with you where you've taken pride in being an effective communicator. Has that always come naturally to you, or is that something you've really had to work at and refine across time?

Jamil: - Oh, it's been very hard for me, Matt. Believe it or not, I'm a very shy person, and speaking in public, and also I went through the French school and the French under-graduate, and in that tradition … was not part of the education experience unlike … school systems. So, when I was working with World Bank and I was called upon to make presentations, I was suffering. But I got lucky, I think one day somebody mentioned a club called Toastmasters, and I'm sure it exists also in Australia, and that really changed my life. I learned to have confidence in myself, to enjoy speaking in public, I learned to tell stories and to try to make it interesting to the public and to... I've always been struck how educators are often the worst communicators. We assume that if you have good content, delivery doesn't matter, doesn't make a difference, and I think that's a big mistake. Of course, you shouldn't say anything stupid, but the way you present, I think, is very important.

So, I worked hard at learning to make it interesting, with pictures, images and stories, and you are very kind to say the presentation last year in Melbourne was well done. Thank you, Matt.

Matt: - I think that address is up on the TEQSA website, so I'll include a link to that to the show notes as well. Was that Toastmasters experience and that life changing moment before or after your intervention to shift the bias at the World Bank from schooling to higher education and the whole of education?

Jamil:- It was after. I remember when, as we started to develop the new strategy, we did some consultations with stakeholders all over the world. I remember, we went to a meeting in Malaysia, and my then-boss, at the end of the meeting, told me, "You know, Jamil, I see that you're learning, you're becoming very knowledgeable about higher education, that's very good, but please do speak out." It's also, I think it's very Anglo-Saxon that people speak and are not shy and, in my culture, you speak only if you are invited to speak. So I learned the hard way. It was at the World Bank, and I had to push myself to be more assertive and to share what my thoughts and... but as I said, Toastmasters was a really great help.

Matt:- That's a resounding endorsement for anyone out there that's a bit shy and a bit uncomfortable with public speaking. I do want to just probe just a little bit more on this because that intervention to get higher education in the frame of the World Bank's priorities and issues, and your work in equity currently, there's a question around how might listeners that are really interested in a progressive cause of delivering a more equitable, more inclusive education system, how can they exert more influence? I just wonder if you can share any observations or reflections from your own career as to what has enabled you to have that kind of impact.

Jamil: - I think, it's not about... just because we're talking about equity, it's not charity work, it's not about calling upon others to have pity on people who are victims. They actually are not victims, they are victims of systems that are highly unequal. So, I think, to study systematically, to have data analysis, statistics, strong evidence. But then, never forget the human side of it. So, having, also, the human stories. They strike you, they stay with you.

I remember visiting Tvet School, again, it was, I think, in Columbia. There were programs to train chefs for cooking, to open restaurants. There was a group of deaf girls, and so I asked them what provisions are there to help you. They explained to me that there was a sign language instructor next to the main instructor. But then they told us that the Tvet School has limited resources, so out of, let's say, six hours of teaching and training, they would get sign language only for two hours. I thought that was highly unfair, and I raised it in my conversation with the head of the institution afterward. But that encounter stayed with me, because... and always remember that we're talking about people, and their needs and their aspirations, their potential and wasted talent. I think wasted talent is the worst. It's totally unfair from a social justice viewpoint, and it's totally inefficient because we are losing, wasting resources.

It's combining these, evidence, human stories, experience on what worked, what doesn't work. So, not having prejudice, not having... being flexible. So, if you thought one way of doing it works, and you realise it doesn't work, then you have to accept then to be humble, and move on to something that works better. So, evaluating impact, learning lessons. And keep at it, because you cannot transform the world in one day, it's a long term process and we have to keep working on it.

Matt: - Fantastic, Jamil, that's a fantastic point to leave this on. I just want to say thanks so much for your time, thanks so much for sharing your knowledge of global higher education and equity in higher education. I've lost count of the number of countries that you've mentioned today that you've been in, or been exposed to, or have knowledge of. It's just been an absolute treat and privilege. But I'll maybe leave the last word for you, and just ask if you have any final comments for listeners of this ADCET podcast today? Thank you, Jamil.

Jamil:- I think it's just, be passionate about your work, about the mission, about your contribution. You may not change the world, but you may change one institution, or one part of the institution, and in doing that, you make a big difference for maybe five people, or maybe 50, or maybe 500. That's very important.

My wife keeps asking me when will I actually retire. I'm retired from the World Bank, I'm 68 years old, and I still love my work and I want to continue as long as I have the opportunity to share my experiences. And as you mentioned, Matt, I've had the privilege of working in many countries, I think more than 100, and for me, it's really also about learning, keeping learning. I remember a screensaver I used to have on one of my early computers, which said, "Learning never ends," and I think that the best way to push the equity agenda is to keep learning and keep applying the lessons that you learn as you go. And really, have an open mind about what works, what doesn't work, and just be persistent about it.

OUTRO:

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