
Internationalization of Higher Education, Africa



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Definition

Internationalization is “*the process of integrating the international, intercultural or global dimension in the purpose, function and delivery of post secondary education*” Knight (2008: p x–xi), a definition of internationalization that is widely accepted.

Internationalization finds expression through travel abroad by students, faculty engaged in collaborative research and publishing, signing of memoranda of understanding between foreign institutions, when satellite campuses or franchise private providers are established across borders, and when countries work towards a common frame of reference such as harmonizing credentials, or attract foreign faculty to their campus (Knight and Teferrari 2008). Internationalization can take place either at home and consists of incorporating intercultural and international dimensions into the curriculum, teaching,

research, and extracurricular activities. It assists students develop international and intercultural skills without ever leaving their country. Inversely, internationalization can take place abroad when students or staff travel abroad to access education, research opportunities, and collaborations (Hénard et al. 2012).

The International Roots of African Higher Education

Higher education systems in Africa have been impacted upon by the rapidly globalizing environment and the resulting growth of internationalization. While internationalization is portrayed in literature as a recent phenomenon, in Africa it has been part of the system since the colonial times. There is however some evidence that some higher education institutions existed in Africa before the advent of colonialism and renowned for having hosted international students. Institutions such as Karawiyynn in Fez in Morocco dating back to 859 and Al-Azhar in Cairo Egypt in 970 (AD) are among the oldest operating universities in the world (Arab Information Centre 1966: 282 cited in Assie-Lumumba, 2006). The modern pioneer universities in Africa were appendages of other European higher education institutions. This was the case with University of Ibadan, the first university in Nigeria established in 1948; the University of Gold Coast in Ghana; and the

University of Dar es Salaam, among others which were set up as colleges of University of London. Other universities were set up as deliberate initiatives of the colonialists. For example, the University of Cape Town, in South Africa, was founded in 1829 that grew substantially after 1880 as a result of the growth of the mining industry in the region. As a consequence of this history, African countries, which had the same colonial power, developed systems and structures that mirror that of the colonial empire. African universities have therefore faced internationalization from this position of weaknesses that emanate from a confluence of historical, economic, educational, financial context (Teferra 2008). The legacy still endures in African higher education and keeps influencing many modern day internationalization activities. Students and staff mobility from Africa has largely been influenced by this legacy as most African students and staff tend to go to institutions and countries with links with former colonial empires. In this regard, students from Anglophone countries mostly study in the United Kingdom, those from Francophone mainly go to France, while those from lusophone countries mainly go to Portugal and in so doing entrenching a pattern of South-North mobility of students.

Higher Education and Development of Postcolonial Africa: The International Factor

Just after the independence of most African countries in the early 1960s, Africa's higher education was flourishing. This had an immense contribution in the development of human resource capacity in the economies of the new nations. This growth was however undermined and reversed by the World Bank policies in the 1970s which encouraged investment in primary education at the expense of spending in higher education. Not only was there loss of quality standards in infrastructure and resource provision for libraries and laboratories, there was also a loss of talent as academics left African universities due to a decline in academic standards in these institutions and political persecution. These developments

have contributed to a situation where at the end of the twentieth century, and in the context of the emergence and rise of globalization which launched an information age and knowledge economy, African higher education was found to be wanting in its ability to compete globally in terms of skills levels and contribution to research and knowledge production, among the others.

Internationalization of African Higher Education in Twenty-First Century

Since the dawn of the **twenty-first** century, African higher education has undergone unprecedented transformation in terms of expansion and diversity of institutions and academic programs, rapid growth in enrolments and enhancements of institutional governance. Due to the inevitability of internationalization, African universities have begun to acknowledge that it can no longer be treated as a by-word, but should increasingly be a central part of university activities. The main motivations for embracing internationalization are research collaborations and outputs, knowledge exchange and production, academic mobility through staff and student exchange, and strengthening of curricula which also contribute to enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning.

Staff and student mobility is no longer inter-continental but also intra-Africa, and in that way promotes regionalization. A study by Campus France (2016) shows that "African students account for more than one in ten students worldwide studying abroad – a mobility rate twice as high as the global average – with about a fifth from North Africa, and more than a half from countries where French is spoken. Half choose Europe as their study destination" (Marshall 2016). The same study reports that the sub-Saharan Africa student mobility rate of 3.5% is twice as high as the world average. The reasons students chose to study abroad include adventure into an open world and the desire to work abroad as a result of lack of opportunities at home. Regionalization is another form in which student mobility and forms of internationalization find

expression. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) region features prominently as a region that has the most mobile students and is second after Europe (Chien and Felly 2012). In 2009, some 89,000 SADC students studied outside their home countries and the number accounted for 5.8% of tertiary enrolment (i.e., outbound mobility ratio⁵) in the region. The ratio is three times higher than the world average (2.0%) (Chien and Felly 2012). This high ratio in mobility is benefitting from 1997 SADC *Protocol on Education and Training* which specifically recommended that higher education institutions in its member states reserve at least 5% of their admissions for students from other SADC countries (SADC 1997). Standardization of entrance requirements, harmonization of academic years, ease of credit transfer, provision of in-state tuition and fee rates to students from other SADC countries, the establishment of joint academic program, and the easing of immigration formalities are some of the mechanisms that the organization recommended to facilitate the mobility of students (and of academic staff). Similarly, the East African Community (EAC) especially through the efforts of the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) has been working towards harmonization of the education systems of the partner states, establishment of a quality assurance and credit transfer system, a student and staff mobility program, and implementation of a policy of uniform fees for students from the member states wishing to study in a member state.

When needs are not met locally, students who can afford to travel look elsewhere for higher education, including crossing the borders. Opportunities for African students and scholars to travel abroad for study purposes or to further their career have resulted in the creation of African academic diaspora which according to Zeleza (2016) provides a critical resource can be used to address

increasing shortages of lecturing and research staff in African Universities. They have complex transnational trajectories for having been educated and having worked in different countries in Africa, Western Europe, and North America – and have extensive networks that can be tapped to globalize African universities (Zeleza:2016). Their involvement in the teaching and research activities in African universities can bring about some of internationalization at home that can assist to bridge the skills and knowledge gap between these institutions and their global counterparts.

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