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Enhancing Africa's Renewal through Internationalisation of Higher Education: A Review of Management Strategies and Issues

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Abstract

Internationalisation of higher education is a world-wide phenomenon and a contemporary process that aims to contribute to human, social, cultural and economic development of communities and nations. Seen in this light, international education is full of opportunities and potential benefits for individuals, higher education institutions and society at large. The past 25 years have seen the international dimension of higher education becoming more central on the agenda of international organisations and national governments, institutions of higher education, student organisations and accreditation agencies thus internationalisation has moved from being a reactive to a proactive strategic issue. The aim of this paper is to explore the role of international higher education as a vehicle for Africa's current development trajectory. The article analyses the historical development of internationalisation, definitions, rationales and organisational strategies that can be employed by different nations to integrate internationalisation in the higher education systems of the African continent. The paper also examines benefits, challenges and risks of internationalisation to higher education in Africa. In conclusion, the author asserts that countries in Africa and the rest of the world should approach internationalisation in ways that are consistent with their current needs, priorities and circumstances.

Introduction

There is growing interest and debate in Africa on internationalisation of higher education during the past five years. The globalisation of the economy and society has had its impact on research and education. Consequently, higher education of late has been at the centre of social, political and economic developments. Over the past 25 years, the international dimension of higher education has become more central on the agenda of international organisations and national governments, institutions of higher education, student organisations and accreditation agencies. De Wit (2011:241) says;

> Over the last two decades, the concept of the internationalisation of higher education is (sic) moved from the fringe of institutional interest to the very core. In the late 1970s up to the mid-1980s activities that can be described as internationalisation were usually neither named that way nor carried high prestige and were rather isolated and unrelated (...) in the past two decades, moving from simple exchange of students to the big business of recruitment and from activities impacting on an incredibly small elite group to a mass phenomenon.

Internationalisation has over the years moved from a reactive to a proactive strategic issue from added value to mainstream and also has seen its focus, scope and content evolve substantially. It is important to note that there have always been many different terms used to refer to internationalisation of higher education (De Wit, 2002; Knight, 2008). Terms such as international studies, global studies, multicultural education, intercultural education, peace education, study abroad, education abroad, student exchange, cross cultural training and many others are some of the terms used as alternate terms to international education. Most of the terms used however, are either curriculum

related or mobility related and they, in most cases, address only a small part of the internationalisation process.

Defining internationalisation of education

There is a growing debate nowadays among scholars as they search for a succinct definition of internationalisation and there is also a general agreement that there is no simple or an all-encompassing definition of internationalisation of the university. This sentiment is a realisation that both the formulation and implementation of internationalisation was predominantly American based until a few years ago. As the international dimension of higher education gains more attention and recognition, people tend to use it in the way that best suits their purpose. However, even if there is no agreement on a precise definition, internationalisation needs to have parameters if it is to be assessed and to advance higher education.

Harari (1989) defines internationalisation as the whole range of processes by which (higher) education becomes less national and more internationally oriented. Dutch scholars, Arum and Van de Water (1992:91) define it as "the multiple activities, programmes and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation." Knight (1993:6) defines it as "the process of integrating the international dimension into teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education. Ebuchi (1990) says internationalisation is a process by which the teaching, research and service functions of a higher education system become internationally and cross culturally compatible. A more succinct definition is one given by Knight (1993:21) who describes internationalisation of higher education as, "the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution".

In general terms we can safely define internationalisation as the complex of processes whose combined effect, whether planned or not is to enhance the international dimension of the experience of higher education in universities and similar educational institutions (OECD, 1994). The above interpretations have clearly demonstrated that different meanings attributed to internationalisation emphasize various aspects and benefits. If we examine the collection of definitions, rather than each of them separately, it is interesting to note that there are basic principles and approaches that underline the various definitions attributed to internationalisation.

Why internationalise? Rationale

A great diversity of arguments, social, economic and educational, are deployed to support the internationalisation of higher education. Some of the arguments have their origin in the needs of society or economy and others have origins in the needs of education itself.

Internationalisation of education is usually perceived as having a positive effect on economic growth and investment in the future economy. For both the public and private, perhaps this could be the most important reason for investment in international cooperation in higher education. According to Knight and De Wit (1995), many national governments create scholarship programmes for foreign students in the hope that they will become the future decision-makers in the private and public sector of their home countries and by then will remember with gratitude the host country that gave them the opportunity to become what they are now. Such investment will, it is hoped, bear fruit in the form of favoured treatment of the former host country when large orders are placed and contracts negotiated against international competition.

Globalisation of our economy has created a demand for an international labour market. The demand for labour in the global economy is used very frequently by politicians and international educators as the reason for internationalisation of higher education. Education should be designed to promote international skills and global competency. There is also an argument that considers international educational cooperation as a form of diplomatic investment in future political relations. In the first place, the provision of scholarships to those likely to become future leaders is considered to be a way of endowing them with knowledge of the host country and sympathy with its political system, culture and values. The US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (1995) stated that exchanges and training have direct and multiplier effects that make them among the most valuable instruments of America's foreign relations. The same argument was also used in the UK to welcome foreign students and educate them on generous terms.

Internationalisation of education can be initiated for reasons of income generation because the more foreign students paying a high tuition fee, the higher the economic return and the less the national government needs to invest in higher education. In 1979, the UK government adopted a full-fee policy (i.e. the requirement that students pay a tuition fee equivalent to the 'real cost' of their education) with regard to students from outside the European Community. As a consequence, the internationalisation of higher education in the UK has been understood in that manner. Callan (1993:9) says,

> The full-cost fees policy was resisted at first but later became, ironically a financial lifeline to institutions in the face of progressive restraints of public expenditure through the 1980s.

Lambert (1988:12) corroborates this argument saying, "...the US has come to realise that...the import of foreign students is a major asset on our international

balance sheet." In the newly democratised and independent African nations and countries in Asia, the academic infrastructure is not yet adequate to absorb national demand for higher education and research. In some countries like Norway for instance, the government deliberately stimulates study abroad instead of creating new facilities.

Alongside these economic and political rationales, there are arguments which have a more cultural and educational character. A study by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) showed that the primary reason for internationalising universities was to increase the international and intercultural knowledge and skills of students and to promote research which addresses cultural interdependence (Knight, 1995). It is also frequently argued that international academic exchange is more important for the individual's personal development. American universities for example, focus on individual development as an important argument for internationalisation. It is sometimes loosely referred to as 'academic tourism'.

From an academic perspective, an international approach to higher education attempts to avoid parochialism in scholarship and research. Internationalisation efforts are intended to enable the university/college community to have the ability to understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations and to prepare staff and students to function in an international and intercultural context. Closely related to the above is the argument that internationalisation of education can strengthen the core structures and activities of an institution and may enable initiatives to be taken that would not otherwise be possible on the basis of local resources and expertise. Since the pursuit of knowledge in the modern world requires vast resources which are not all available in any one university, international

cooperation between higher education institutions in many cases then becomes a necessity. The above are the main rationales and incentives used in the debate on internationalisation of higher education. These social, economic, political and educational arguments are often used by the different stakeholders independently or in combination to justify internationalisation of higher education.

Global trends on internationalisation of higher education

In 2012, at least four million students went abroad to study up from two million who were abroad in 2000. Traditional student destination countries such as United States of America remain today strong magnets for students seeking a high quality education. In 2012 for example, the USA hosted 18% of the world's total number of international students, UK (11%); France (7%); Australia (6%) and Germany (5%). This however was a drop in all the top five countries which saw their international enrolment figures decline from 55% in 2000 to 47% in 2012. This is so because there are now regional hubs which not only attract a share of the global population of international students but are becoming favoured destinations for students within regions. Lower travel costs and cultural familiarity are part of the appeal. There was an increase in sub-Saharan Africa from 18% to 28% with South Africa attracting 22% of international students in sub-Saharan Africa in 2012. In percentage terms, the top 10 destination countries are as follows;

- United States (18% of total mobile students)
- United Kingdom (11%)
- France (7%)
- Australia (6%)
- Germany (5%)
- Russia (4%)

- Japan (4%)
- Canada (3%)
- China (2%)
- Italy (2%)

It is again interesting to note that 67% of the total number of international students are found in North America and Europe. In absolute terms, the largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea thus Asians alone account for 52% of all students studying abroad worldwide. The table below are an illustration of the growth of international students from 1975-2009:

Table 1

Growth of Internationalisation of Higher Education (1975-2009)

1975	1980	1990	1995	2000	2005	2009	2012
0.8m	1.1m	1.3	1.7m	2.1m	3.0m	3.7m	4.0m
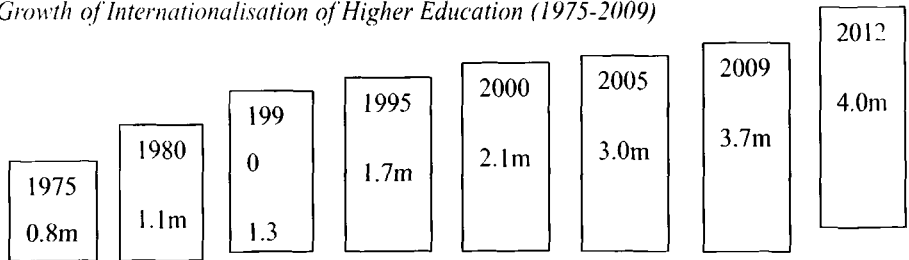
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2012.

The United States saw a significant drop as a preferred destination of foreign students between 2000 and 2012 falling from 23% of global market to 18%. Coming down to Africa, Zimbabwe for example has got the following students studying abroad;

10 938 ------------------South Africa

1 125---------------------United States

1 059--------------------United Kingdom
657---------------------Australia
381---------------------Malaysia
240---------------------Canada
110---------------------Germany
65----------------------Netherlands
57----------------------Russia
53----------------------India
Below 50----------------rest of the world

The total number of students studying abroad is 27 994 compared to only 352 the total number of international students studying in the country. South Africa, Zimbabwe's neighbouring country on the other hand presents a sharp contrast to the situation in Zimbabwe. The total number of South Africans who are studying abroad is 6 378 compared to 42 180 international students studying in the different South African Universities. Of these, 10 938 are from Zimbabwe which has only managed to attract not more than five students from each one of these countries, America, Britain, Cuba, Japan to mention just a few.

Management strategies for effective internationalisation of education
Internationalisation needs to be entrenched into culture, policy, planning and organisation processes of the institution so that it is not marginalised or treated as a passing fad. We therefore need permanent organisational commitment and structure to underpin international education programmes and activities. If internationalisation activities are fragmented and isolated on campus, there is an increased chance that their impact and benefit will be weakened. Internationalisation should be central to the mission of the university.

The support of senior administrators is crucial to successful internationalisation. Commitment could be through written policies or intangible commitment revealed through the interest shown by the Vice Chancellor and Senior managers. It is therefore critical to establish an international office or position with experienced personnel to provide advisory coordination and communication support. The international office should create partnerships with other universities and private sector to create adequate funding and support for the success of internationalisation.

In order to develop a culture which supports internationalisation, it is important to find concrete and symbolic ways to value and reward staff members who are involved in internationalisation work. This relates to promotion and tenure policies that deal with staff in the international office. There is also need to create a cross-university committee with representation from each faculty and all major administrative units to make better use of resources and promote collaborations in the university. To ensure that the international efforts are institutionalised, rather than marginalised, it (internationalisation) must be integrated into the university annual plans and budgets.

A key strategy to the development of organisational strategies and models is to consider the internationalisation process as a continuous cycle and not a linear or static process. Knight (1994) proposed a cycle with six phases which an institution would move through at its own pace as shown below:
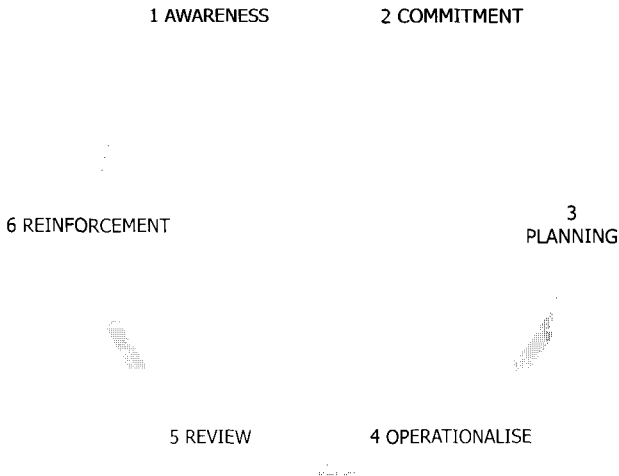
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        1 AWARENESS              2 COMMITMENT




    6 REINFORCEMENT                          3
                                          PLANNING




              5 REVIEW          4 OPERATIONALISE
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Figure 1. Internationalisation Cycle (Adapted from Knight and De Wit, 1995:26)

Notes:

1. Awareness - of need, purpose and benefits of internationalisation for students and staff.

2. Commitment - by senior administration, Council, faculties, staff and students.

3. Planning - to identify needs, resources, purpose and objectives, positives, priorities and strategies.

4. Operationalize - academic activities and services.

5. Review - i.e. assess, review and enhance quality and impact of activities and progress of strategy.

6. Reinforcement - develop incentives, recognition and rewards for faculty, staff and student participation.

We need a supportive culture for the successful integration of

internationalisation in the university. The process of internationalisation as shown above is cyclic not linear. Reinforcement and reward lead to renewed awareness and commitment. A renewed and broader base of commitment leads to further planning process. This usually stimulates changes to existing programmes or policies and the development and implementation of new activities and services. A continuous support and review system improves quality and involves incentives, recognition and rewards.

Opportunities, challenges and risks for Africa

The renewed interest in Africa's higher education by development partners, research organisations could be utilised positively to contribute towards the enhancement of the low research capacity and academic productivity in Africa. The researcher-to-researcher contacts, links and collaborations will over time add significantly to the research output and knowledge production on the continent (Otieno, 2009). Furthermore, internationalisation can present possibilities for revenue generation, enhancing institutional competitiveness and developing strategic alliances that would enable African universities to feature and contribute to global knowledge society while at the same time to respond effectively to Africa's developmental challenges.

A number of challenges face the African higher education sector as it grapples with the requirements of internationalisation (Bloom et al., 2005; Teferra, 2008; Otieno, 2009). Many African universities have weak and inadequate institutional structures and capacities for internationalisation plus inadequate financial support for international education. There is also perceived low quality of academic programmes in African universities and weak regulatory frameworks that become major hindrances to internationalisation. Furthermore, Africa's research output is very low and marginal and this is well

demonstrated by the fact that research output from Africa accounts for a meagre 1% of the world's total (Bloom et al., 2005; Teferra, 2008). Closely related to that is the fact that government funding to the higher education sector in almost all African countries is low and cannot enable the higher education sector to adequately take advantage of the global opportunities.

While internationalisation on African continent presents opportunities, it also comes with attendant risks for different regions, nations and institutions. The highest risk of internationalisation to Africa's higher education is the perennial issue of brain drain. The growing mobility of professional staff and students from Africa to industrialised economies is becoming a big problem since most of them do not return to the continent. Internationalisation in essence contributes to further marginalise Africa in global knowledge production as it depletes the already scanty capacity existent on the continent (Altbatch, 2002; Mahomedbhai, 2003; Salmi, 2003; Teferra, 2009). The other identified risks are the increase of foreign "degree mills", loss of cultural identity and homogenisation of curriculum and quality issues.

Recommendations

- Provide continuous and inclusive support to international students, designed to facilitate social and academic success of students.
- International students should feel at home on campus.
- The University International office should provide students with information and assistance with housing, language and cultural issues.
- Special induction programmes should be provided for students coming from abroad, especially where there are language barriers.
- All university staff need to be exposed to diverse profiles of students and to receive professional development on how to tackle linguistic

and cultural differences effectively.

- Institutions with long standing and recognised practices in enrolling international students should be a source of inspiration for less internationalised institutions.
- Involve stakeholders in designing of your institution's internationalisation strategy.

The aim of this paper was therefore simply to give clarity to the process of internationalisation of higher education in Africa, its historical development, rationale and organisational strategies that could be used to embrace internationalisation in universities. However, the study of internationalisation of higher education is still rather fragmented, primarily based on American experiences and there is a danger of embracing neo-colonialism, racism and mono-culturalism in Africa if the concept is not properly understood. The paper is therefore a modest contribution to the further acceptance of internationalisation not as hype but as a structural and integral part of higher education strategies in Africa.

Conclusion

Internationalisation opens many possibilities for higher education institutions and if managed well can yield a range of benefits for the institution and its broader community. However, it is important to bear in mind that there is no single recipe for internationalisation hence each institution will need to choose its own best way forward. In summary therefore, there are only two major strategies to be considered in the internationalisation process:

(i)   Development of academic programmes, activities and services which support and encourage students and staff participation.

(ii)   Developing organisational strategies which will help to integrate internationalisation into university's administrative processes and structures.

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