The Internalization of Higher Education: Examining the Issues from Africa’s Perspective

Keynote Paper Delivered
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Opening Statement…

1. Mr. Chairman, I have been asked by our continental body, the Association on African Universities (AAU) to speak on the topic Internationalization of Higher Education: Examining the Issues from Africa’s Perspective. First of all I want to extend my sincere thanks to the AAU for the honour to be the Guest Speaker on such an important topic on the occasion of the 2015 Africa University Day. Mr. Chairman although being an advocate of the use of technology in higher education, I have decided this time round to take a break from technology to instead give a talk – the old fashion way rather than making a PowerPoint presentation. To be honest with you, it has been a long time since I gave a talk without a PowerPoint – and I am determined not to parade my limitations without technology on my side… So here we go.

2. Let me start with what I will be telling you this afternoon on the topic. In my talk I will: (i) attempt to define and scope what the literature is saying about the subject matter of “International Higher Education (or IHE for short)” (ii) speculate on the goals and deliberate on the question of: “Why HEIs internationalize or what to internationalized? (iii) examine IHE within the African Context and explore some of the implications and the challenges and (iv) explore how Africa HEIs can benefit from internationalization of higher education. I will also spend some time on examining the subject matter of the predicted Africa’s demographic dividend and its implications to IHE within the context of Higher Education in Africa (HEA). I will end my talk with some concluding remarks and take-away thoughts.

Defining and Scoping Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE)

3. The question we need start with is: Is there a reasonable consensus on the definition of what is internationalization of higher education?. I am afraid, the answer is ..not really!! For example, according to one view: “the term internationalization is being used more and more in the literature to discuss the international dimension of higher education ..and it means different things to different people; … it appears in the literature in a variety of ways and ..there is a great deal of confusion about what it means’. (Knight,2006) whose definition is widely quoted in the literature: defined it as a process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service elements of an institution. For some writers and commentators, it means a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and faculty; international linkages, partnerships, and projects; new international academic programs and research initiatives. For others it means delivering education to other countries using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques and such new types of arrangements as branch campuses or franchises. And to some, it means including an international, intercultural, and/or global dimension in the curriculum and teaching learning process. Still others see international development projects or, alternatively, the increasing emphasis on trade in higher education as internationalization of higher education.

4. Mr. Chairman, the lack of a consensus definition on what is IHE notwithstanding, others tried to scope the issue within a historical perspective, and pointed out in the literature that: during the 1960s, the most
commonly used terms were “international cooperation,” “international relations,” and “international education.” According to (Marginson & Sawir, 2005), during the first decade of the 21st century, less emphasis has been given to development activities and more to academic mobility which includes students, research, programs, and providers moving across borders. They pointed out that also characterizing this stage has been a greater orientation toward commercial and market-driven activities. A third defining characteristic, they pointed out has been substantial growth in international academic networks and partnerships based on mutual benefits and collaboration.

5. Still on the historical development of IHE, it is argued that: the international dimension is a key factor, shaping and challenging the higher education sector all over the world and that since the 1990s, it has become a formidable force for change, perhaps the central feature of the higher education sector. Landmarks of this changing horizon were identified in the literature to include among others:

- The development of new international networks and consortia
- The growing numbers of students, professors, and researchers participating in academic mobility schemes
- More emphasis on developing international/intercultural and global competencies
- Stronger interest in international themes and collaborative research
- A growing number of cross-border delivery of academic programs
- The impetus given to recruiting foreign students
- The rise in the number of joint or double degrees
- The expansion in partnerships, franchises, offshore satellite campuses
- New regional and national-level government policies and programs supporting academic mobility and other internationalization initiatives.
- The advances in educational delivery and collaborative technologies and systems to support teaching, learning and research and unlimited access to educational resources within and across national borders

6. These debates on internationalization notwithstanding, it has also been pointed out that there is also the confusion in the literature about the relationship of internationalization to globalization. In other words is internationalization the same as globalization? Some in fact, argued that in today’s changing world, the idea of internationalization of higher education especially in developing countries has been deduced from globalization of the education process.

7. Mr. Chairman, I don’t intend to resolve this debate on what is or is not IHE and how these relate to the issue of globalization. However for us to see our way forward, please allow us to settle on the fact that: IHE in one form or another is not a new phenomenon, and that it has in recent decades grown in greater proportions and impacted in various ways on higher education systems and institutions all over the world including those in Africa. According to one view, over the last 15 years, a number of
universities especially those in the developed North have spent a great many hours on task forces, and committees charged with devising plans to "internationalize" or "globalize" their institutions…and that.. a number of these universities have put resources and efforts into considering and addressing the question: "why internationalize," or why internationalization is important.

8. According to (Knight 2008), internationalization is changing the world of higher education, and globalization is changing the world of internationalization. In her view, key drivers for this transformation are: the development of advanced communication and technological services, the dominance of the knowledge society, increased international labor mobility, more emphasis on the market economy and the trade liberalization, increased levels of private investment and decreased public support for education, and lifelong learning. She noted that: as the 21st century progresses, the international dimension of higher education is becoming increasingly important and at the same time, more and more complex.

9. Mr. Chairman, it can be argued that higher education has become part of the globalization process and as such its activities in the areas of the delivery and the provision of teaching and learning as well as research and other collaborative activities cannot be strictly viewed within the confines of a national boundary. Some are of the view that the reality of internationalization of higher education and its attendant impacts and implications is an urgent priority for higher education, especially in developing economies such as Africa. We will examine this issue of impact and implications for Africa HE later. Suffice for now to point out that:

*Internationalization of HE is a world-wide phenomenon with major players and minor players: providers and recipients: winners and losers; and it is now part and parcel of what HEIs have been doing for years and globalization and the emerging information and technological age and its offerings, have increased the tempo, intensity and the tentacles of the phenomenon which by all indications is here to stay and grow.*

**The Internationalization of Higher Education: Examining the Goals and the Reasons**

10. Mr. Chairman, to enable us to further scope the IHE phenomenon better, let us examine some of the goals and possibly the reasons why HEIs internationalize. Starting with the goals:

*Could educating "global citizens" be the primary goal of internationalizing the provision of the teaching and learning activities of a given university – implying that students must acquire some knowledge of regions and cultures other than their own, as well as the ability to negotiate diverse social and cultural settings? Could it be.. to expand the international dimension of both curriculum and research throughout the university? Could it be …to produce global citizens, remaining competitive nationally and at the same time achieving a stronger presence internationally?*
11. On the question of why internationalize…. Is it because.. universities must internationalize in order to educate their students for global citizenship, to keep pace with their peers, to better serve the national and international community, and to remain great universities? It is because...universities must internationalize in order to raise money by maintaining a competitive edge to attract more students at home and increase recruitment abroad? OR ..Is it because..universities see it as an obligation to educate students to live and work in the new international settings..?

12. Mr. Chairman, the literature identified some of the reasons why HEIs the world over engage in IHE activities as:

- Mobility and exchanges for students and faculty
- International student recruitment
- Teaching and research collaboration
- Academic standards and quality
- Research projects
- Cooperation and development assistance (by donor nations)
- Curriculum development international and intercultural understanding
- Promotion and profile of institution
- Diversify sources of faculty and students
- Regional issues and integration
- Diversify income generation

13. It is fair to say that despite these lists of IHE goals and reasons, student mobility and international student recruitment are the most visible and the most topical of all. To some, student mobility and recruitment which in their view benefits mainly HEIs in a few developed countries provides some of the evidence of the dangers and the challenges face by HEIs in the developing countries, including those of Africa. Let us look at some statistics:

14. Mr. Chairman, there has been significant growth in higher education student mobility over the last two decade resulting in the number of students studying abroad rising by almost 50 per cent from 1.64 million in 1999 to 2.45 million in 2004. In 2009, more than 3.4 million students were studying outside their home country; with UNESCO projecting this to rise to 7 million by 2020. Beneficiary institutions are mainly from the North: USA, UK, Canada and Australia and students are mainly from the South (mostly low and middle-income countries like those in Africa and South America and Asia).

15. For now, the USA remains the most popular country for international students, followed by the UK, Germany, France and Australia, with half of all international students pursuing degrees in these five countries. However, the USA and UK’s traditional market share is declining, with Australia and Canada increasing in popularity alongside intra-regional mobility (those who choose to study abroad within their
home region). The USA is the world’s largest magnet for international study, accounting for 26% of students studying abroad, followed by the UK with 9.6%. The USA earned US$14 billion of the total of US$28 billion in education exports in 2005. With federal and state support for higher education reducing by the year, universities and colleges in the US are intensifying their marketing and recruitment efforts targeted at international students to generate revenue to meet budgetary shortfalls in funding.

16. A survey of US universities published in the Chronicle of Higher Education predicted that over the next decade, the number of high-school graduates will decrease and this changing demographics is feeding into enrollment concerns in a number of US universities. The report pointed out that with the traditional base of students so unpredictable from year to year, US colleges are increasingly turning to more stable sources of students, particularly international students—with more colleges are searching overseas for students who tend to pay full freight. The report, noted that international students are becoming a source of a new recruitment market for more American colleges than ever before. The US, remains the world’s top destination for international students, according to the Institute of International Education. Admissions officers at seven out of 10 research universities surveyed say that international recruiting is just as important as or more important than domestic recruiting at their institutions.

17. Also a point is being made to the effect that in many OECD countries, the transition from elite to mass participation in higher education is virtually complete. As the size of the 18 to 25 year-old age group declines, some of these countries are facing a decrease in domestic enrolments and attracting foreign students is increasingly seen as a way to compensate. In fact, a British Council report indicated that demographic changes and increasing demand will mean that the percentage of international students from Nigeria to the UK is likely to overtake the percentage from India by 2024.

18. Referring to the issue of the global imbalance in the international student mobility figures, and its impact on Africa, (Goolam Mohamedbhai, 2003) pointed out that 5% of total students enrolled in Africa study outside their country, making Africa having the highest mobility rate in the world. African students, he pointed out represent 10% of total students in mobility in the world and that in 2010, close to 400,000 students left Africa to study abroad while insignificant number of students from outside Africa study in Africa. In his view Africa is a clear loser in student mobility and this he noted has implications on brain drain. He quoted the 2009 IAU Global Survey, that noted that African HEIs identified brain drain as the first of 3 most significant risks of internationalization for the region.

19. A related issue to student mobility as an aspect of IHE is the fast-growing forms of internationalization relating transnational education sometimes delivered through off-shore campuses, franchises, joint programmes delivery arrangements etc. The last few years saw many universities from mainly North American and Europe establishing franchises and off-shore campuses all over the world.
20. Over the past decade a number of these universities have opened branch campuses overseas bringing the total to nearly 220 campuses worldwide in 2014. A number of these institutions as part of their internationalization programs targeted at student recruitment are opening branch campuses in other countries, mostly in developing countries where demand is high and costs are low. It is argued that offshore activities and international partnerships are poised to play a leading role as universities come more closely to resemble higher education analogues of multinational corporations. In fact, Australia recorded one of the best successes in the past two decades in this area to the effect that higher education exports are Australia’s third largest export industry after only iron ore and coal—valued at a high of $18 billion in 2009.

**IHE within the African Context: Exploring Some of the Implications and the Challenges**

21. Mr. Chairman, on the student mobility issue, it is worth pointing out that as student mobility slowly changes, political and demographic changes continue to shape government policies towards international students. In Asia, for example, according to the Report: *Trends in Higher Education 2015*, ASEAN states are working to encourage domestic students to study in Asia rather than heading to western universities through a number of regional initiatives involving 59 universities across seven countries targeted at regionalization to fight back the IHE moves from HEIs in the West. Unlike in the case of Africa, Asian universities, the Report argued, have in effect developed their own regional strategies to compete effectively. For instance, Asian countries have become more popular destinations for study abroad and international exchanges. As some argued, they are challenging the dominance of the West in respect to attracting and recruiting foreign students from their region and as such there is a gradual geographic shift of power from the West to Asia. It is fair to say that while HEIs in Asia are making some progress with some of them even targeting their recruitment efforts at African countries while at the same time reducing the share of the West in the international student market of their region, Africa HEIs are still minor and hesitant players on the international students mobilization scene.

22. Also although a number of the off-shore campuses and franchises established by Western HEIs are mainly targeted at affluent and emerging Asia countries where the dollar purchasing power of individuals are comparable to those of the home countries of these HEIs, some of these efforts are targeted at Africa. For example, University of Lancaster has a branch campus in Accra, with few other North American, European and some Australian and to some extend some Asian universities are venturing into the African market targeting and setting up branch and offshore campuses in some of the middle income African countries like: Nigeria, Botswana, Mauritius, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, South Africa among others. Many of these campuses have been explicitly designed to attract international students who might not be in a position to travel to Europe, USA or Asia for their education—a move that has been timed to fit with the projected expansion in the number of students entering higher education in Africa.
23. Mr. Chairman, a number of HE stakeholders in Africa as should be expected are raising concerns about the implications of the student mobility and recruitment aspects of IHE as they relates to HEA. Some commentators see these aspects of the IHE within the African context as a neo-colonial, imperialist agenda of the West, with the South in particular Africa being at the receiving end of what they are describing as a raw deal. According to this view, HEA and its internationalization are still primarily driven by external forces from the West, even though those forces are shifting towards Asia. Dependence on external forces, some argued is hindering the internationalization of Africa own higher education, specifically in the areas of international student recruitment even at the regional level. According to (Goolam Mohamedbhai, 2003) writing on the Effect of Internationalization on African HE, in the 21st century, internationalization of HE is being driven by globalization and is led mainly by universities in the North, having as objectives, to: attract maximum number of foreign students to generate income, going beyond national boundaries if necessary, consider HE as a commodity, governed by market forces, recruit best faculty from anywhere, attract research funds, excel in research, be globally ranked and become world class. He contended that, the driving forces behind internationalization are now competitiveness and commercialization, not collaboration.

24. A point is also being made to the effect that while African HEIs hardly recruit international students from outside the continent, the majority of them are not even able to engage in intra-regional recruitment of international students within the African region, although some sub-regional efforts in West Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa are emerging and to some extent promising.

25. Some referred to the evidence of the 2005 Global Survey Report on the Internationalization of Higher Education that found that 81% of the surveyed universities in Africa indicated the importance and existence of risks related to internationalization, compared with only 58% of those in North America. These findings some argued may be a sign that African higher education institutions are vulnerable to the threats of commercialization and low-quality cross-border providers than their counterparts in North America. They pointed to the fact that: just like the ASEAN countries taking regional steps to counter the negative impacts of IHE from the West, there is a need to set up national and sub-regional programmes and initiatives to support internationalization of higher education, and establish coherence and co-ordination between national and institutional-level rationales and actors in Africa.

26. On the issue of regionalization efforts as part of the internationalization strategies that HEA must pursue, (Goolam Mohamedbhai, 2003) is of the view that the current internationalization approach used by mainly HEIs in the North is not appropriate for African HEIs at the present stage of their development. Referring to the IAU Global Survey, to make his point, he noted that the African HEIs surveyed identified Africa as the top priority region for internationalization activities, indicating their preference for regionalization and that no other region of the world identified Africa as one of its 3 geographic priorities for international collaboration. He contended that, regionalization – a sub-set of internationalization – must therefore be the preferred approach for African HEIs.
28. In the *Accra Declaration on GATS and the Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa*, High Education Stakeholders in Africa caution against moves aimed at the reduction of higher education, under the GATS regime, to a tradable commodity subject primarily to international trade rules and negotiations, and the loss of authority of national governments to regulate higher education according to national needs and priorities. The concern is that given the existing deep inequalities in internationalization of higher education with Africa being at the losing end, this move within the GATS will make it impossible for African higher education to compete internationally and as such will open the flood gates for HE services provided by the more resourced and endowed competitors from the West and to some extent from Asia.

29. In fact, Mr. Chairman, it could also be argued that the main gate-keeper preventing the more aggressive HEIs from other parts of the world from invading the African higher education space to set up off-shore and branch campuses is the low dollar purchasing power of Africa’s potential HE applicants compared to those of their counterparts in Asia and some South American countries. The very fact that the majority of the HEIs from the advanced nations are for now targeting Asia not Africa as their first port of call to set up these campuses is because Asia is relatively richer and students there are more capable of paying the required dollar–rated school fees than their counterparts in Africa. It could be recalled that in the 1980s, over 35 US colleges and universities rushed to set up off-shore campuses in Japan hoping to take advantage of the growing Japanese economy and academic market only for all except two to close down due to recognition issues, coupled with the economic downturn.

*Can Africa Benefit from Internationalization of Higher Education?*

30. It is being pointed out by some that: if the identified challenges and risks associated with the current regime of IHE are appropriately managed, specific initiatives to internationalize Africa’s higher education system can offer a number of opportunities. Mr. Chairman, despite some of the documented potential and actual negative impacts of some of the aspects of IHE on HEA, there is no doubt that African countries can benefit from some of the other aspects of IHE provided they play their cards right. For example, while taking steps to put in place initiatives to mitigate some of these negative impacts of international student recruitment and branch campuses activities by the more endowed and rich HEIs of the West, African HEIs can in addition position themselves to take advantage of the research capacity development and industrial R&D initiatives that some of the institutions of the advanced countries are promoting as part of their IHE portfolio of activities and initiatives.

31. Apart from internationalization having the potential to also contribute to improving the level of regional and international interaction, and to the development of human resource capacity in African HEIs, other areas that they can benefit from as part of their own internationalization initiatives through partnership and collaboration on a regional and international level include area such as: promoting quality education and learning; teaching and research collaboration; academic standards and quality;
curriculum development and graduate employability initiatives; learning and teaching resources development and mobilization; promoting international and intercultural understanding; faculty and students exchange programme; and HEA regionalization issues and initiatives.

32. As pointed out by others, given that a number of universities in Africa face poor quality teaching and low research output, internationalization, can contribute to improving the quality of teaching and research in these universities. Some argued that since one of the reasons why a number of the Africans going abroad to seek further education is due to what they perceived as better quality education abroad compared to what they can get in African universities, improving the quality of teaching, learning and research work in HEIs in Africa through internationalization could potentially contribute to reversing this trend.

**What about the Demographic Dividend and its Implications to IHE within the Context of HEA**

33. First coined by Bloom et al (2006), the demographic dividend (DD) refers to the potential economic growth, which can be experienced as a result of changes in the age structure of a population. Africa’s population structure in the years to come is projected to make it ideally positioned to reap the benefits of a demographic dividend.

34. Particularly in reference to SSA countries, based on the predicted increase in the share of their Working Age Population (WAP) (ages of 15–64), at a time when most advanced economies will be facing aging populations and a declining share of their WAPs, Africa will be ideally positioned to create the opportunity for a DD and develop an environment conducive to reaping the economic benefits. The magnitude of these demographic developments will have major implications both for SSA and for the global economy, as labor could flow from SSA to other regions and capital could flow from other regions to SSA. According to an IMF report: ‘In the next 20 years, most of the world's jobseekers will be in Africa. SSA will become the main source of new entrants into the global labor force, by 2035, the number of Africans joining the WAP will exceed that from the rest of the world combined.

35. Reaping the fruits of the demographic dividend will require the needed workforce to fuel Africa’s development. Africa’s population compare to the rest of the world will have a large school-going age population including large proportion of university-going age population. Enhanced education outcomes will particularly be important to improve the employability of the WAPs in these countries through skill development and improvements in access to educational opportunities and avenues. Africa countries will have the potential to become the main source of recruitment of qualified workforce by the rest of the world provided these countries and their HEIs can take advantage of the demographic dividend to transform their WAPs into highly educated and skilled WAPs.

36. Mr. Chairman, the issue is can African economies support and fund university education for their increasing WAPs? Will the current regime of IHE compound the challenges posed by the need to take steps to educate and train the required workforce needed to transform the DD into a force for Africa’s
development in the technological age? Reaping economic growth from the change in population age structure will require the implementation of specific education policies including targeting aspects of the internationalization of Africa’s higher education system to promote the supply of the needed large and highly educated labor force to drive Africa’s development.

37. Educational expansion policies could be implemented in conjunction with policies to improve access to quality higher education through specific internationalization initiatives targeted at HEA. For example, by taking advantage of the DD, African countries could target educational policies aimed at massive roll-out of home grown academic programs supported by specific internationalization collaboration initiatives that for example promotes affordable quality higher education program delivery, scientific and industrial research and R&D efforts, human resource capacity development, faculty and student exchange and academic standards among others.

Concluding Remarks

38. The world economy is experiencing the effects of rapid globalization and liberalization as well as the impact of the information age which is driving Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) efforts worldwide.

39. We submit that: Higher Education in Africa (HEA) is facing new challenges as well as being presented with opportunities resulting from the renewed impetus that IHE has been experiencing globally in the past two decades or so.

40. We argued that: HEA will need to recognize and take steps to mitigate and address the risks associated with a number of the identified challenges to set the stage for availing of the opportunities that can be derived from the internationalization of Africa’s higher education system.

41. We pointed out that: Taking advantage of the predicted demographic dividend through among other things targeting the implementation of specific national, sub-regional and Africa-wide, higher education internationalization initiatives can enable HEA to play a catalytic role to accelerate the Africa’s development in the emerging information and technological age.

42. It is our contention that: Failure to do so will mean the marginalization of Africa’s HEIs within the global higher education space and a considerable reduction in their relevance to play a meaningful role towards educating, training and transforming Africa’s WAPs into *highly educated and skilled WAPs* to support Africa’s development in the years to come.

43. On a final note…The Internationalization of Higher Education (IHE) permeates every aspect of today’s higher education globally and the internalization of HEA either directly or first through
regionalization efforts is not negotiable if Africa’s HEIs will remain viable, relevant and sustainable nationally, regionally and globally.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

References


