Rewards and Challenges of Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa

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Abstract
The present process of internationalization has not only reframed by the initial conceptual framework, but also reshaped the relationship between countries. Until recently, higher education in Africa, Latin America and Asian, even in the better developed nations of the East such as Japan, China and India, remained largely peripheral internationally. The mainstream of higher education has become that of Western Europe and the USA. This situation undoubtedly holds considerable challenges to the higher education institutions of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. It has also motivated them to search for alternatives.

In spite of the various attempts to find out regional revitalization strategies, African higher education, due to the “invisible hands”, has continued to be peripheral. Higher Education Institutions are either impacted to accept the policies and roles of the centers or forced to change their policies in favor of the conditions of the centers. Actually, African Higher Education faces challenges from both external and internal factors such as, from the outside, the asymmetric partnership with the centre and un contextualized policy influence, and from the inside, poor political resolve and incapable capacity and lack of a working system.

For developing countries like in Africa, Higher education is an important instrument of knowledge production and application to narrow down the gap between them and the matured economies. Its improvement and development is indispensible. And one of the assumed strategies of improving and qualifying higher education (research and teaching) is internationalization. Many African universities considered it as having the benefits of enhancing networking, teaching and learning, and research. Internationalization has also risks since it causes grave loss of intellectual and professional resources in the form of brain drain, increases the hegemony of the mainstream/western knowledge and cultural values, further commodify higher education, and sustain inequality between North-South universities…

This paper will assess and analyze the rewards and challenges of the internationalization of higher education as a result of center-periphery relations, with particular emphasis on Africa. The paper will be developed on the basis of my own research.

Key words: Higher education, internationalization, center, periphery, rewards, challenges, Africa
Rewards and Challenges of Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa

The post-modern higher education is operating in a complex, turbulent and fluid environment of change of fast and overloaded information, competitiveness, uncertainty, and arguably in decline (Becher, 2001) One of the change aspects of Higher Education, since the second half of 20th century, is the dynamic transformation of Internationalization in scope, role, actors, concept, activities, aims, and rationales …

“Academic institutions are always been part of the international knowledge system” (Altbach, 2004), and in the age of what is known as globalization they are closely linked to the global/worldwide trends in science and scholarship. Scott (1998), however, argues that “universities, almost from their beginnings, were national institutions” that grew under the protection of nation states. And the idea that traditional universities were international is rhetoric and mythical because the universities of the Middle Ages first developed “into a world in which nation-states did not yet exist in a form we could recognize” (Scott, 1998). Even today, before a university has become an international institution, it had to be a national institution first. However, due to the dynamism of higher education and the production of knowledge, the emergence of phenomenon of globalization and the knowledge economy, the internationalization of higher education is in the process of transformation.

The present process, aim, scope, actors and activities of internationalization of higher education are remarkably different from the past. Higher education internationalization has been understood by its traditional initiatives/activities such as student and staff mobility, curriculum change and institutional collaboration for both teaching and research. Due to the radically new, complex, differentiated, and globalized socio-economic, cultural and political context, internationalization of higher education has embedded new actors, aims, activities, rationales and processes. This transformation has led scholars to a re-examination of terminologies, conceptual frameworks, values, purposes, goals and means, and impacts of the internationalization of higher education. (IAU, 2012)

Until recently, higher education in Africa, Latin America and Asia (even in the better developed nations of the East such as Japan, China and India) has remained largely peripheral internationally. The leadership/mainstream of higher education has become that of Western Europe and the USA. This situation undoubtedly holds considerable challenges to the higher education institutions of countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe. Globally, most of the higher education institutions in these countries were considered as peripheries; whereas higher education institutions in Western Europe and the US were regarded as benchmarks/mainstream/centers from where the various higher education reform ideas were emanating and diffusing. “The powerful universities have always dominated the production and distribution of knowledge while weaker institutions and systems with fewer resources and lower academic standards have tended to follow in their wake.” (Altbach, 2004b)
This does not seem to be true today, however. Some universities have begun to challenge the centers. Asian and other universities have developed their own regional strategies to compete effectively. The establishment of regional higher education/university associations is part of such a strategy. And yet, universities are collaborating under the strategy of internationalization. Altbach (2004) has predicted that “as Asian universities grow in stature, they will need to become able to function in a highly competitive academic world. All of the elements of academic life, including research, the distribution of knowledge, the students, and the academic profession, are part of the internationally competitive market place.” For instance, Asian countries have become more popular destinations for study abroad and international exchanges. (Clothey, 2009) They are challenging the centrality of the traditional higher education mainstream. There seems to be a geographic shift in emerging centers of power from Europe to Asia Pacific, and particularly to East Asia.

However, the situation in Africa is different. Despite the fact that Africa has pre-colonial universities, the colonial period universities in were colonial institutions designed to train colonial elites to assist the colonial administration. Modern African universities, which were continuations of the colonial institutions that were staffed by the colonial faculty members, aimed at “hybrids of colonial institutions-designed to train an elite skilled class for post-independence governance- and modern institutions preparing African students to be the next leaders in the national development.” (Bulfin, 2009)

Unlike any other corner of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa has been challenged by high number of higher education participation which is faster than nation’s financing, technical, and management capabilities. However, there are some indications of elusive successes amid of fragile economies and democracies. (Johnstone, 2004) It is also struggling in the middle of financial austerity and unprecedented student, societal, and government demands and expectations (Johnstone, 2004). The situation is a laissez-faire expansionism driven by supply-side pressures that certainly, as evidenced in some countries, will lead to further incapacitations.

The World Bank tends to favor privatization of public utilities and a bigger role for the private sector in many government-owned operations. So, not surprisingly, Africa witnessed a spectacular growth of private higher education, along with the introduction of tuition fees which it calls "cost-sharing program...accompanied by student loans and financial aid for low-income students". (Maslen, 2010)

Particularly, the changing dynamics of the African governance, economics, and society has required a parallel dynamism in higher education. Africa requires new partnership to improve the usefulness of higher education for Africa. The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD), accordingly, has laid down broad goals for African higher education, and the primary goal is the “Africanization” (Bulfin, 2009) of university faculty. This policy and goal seems to be against the broader principle of the internationalization higher education.
Most African universities even after the political independence/liberation were using expatriate professors or foreign educated Africans, who have lost their culture and assimilated into the metropolitan culture. Therefore, most of them were in a cultural dilemma and their assistance may be questionable.

Moreover, the post-Liberation African graduates went abroad for advanced degrees because Africa was not ready to accommodate. The paradox is that Africans obtained advanced degree outside Africa never return home. This further accentuates the brain drain, a situation that has forced Africa to hire expensive expatriate professors.

NEPAD, in addition to Africanizing African higher education, also intended to reverse brain drain by improving university governance, facilities, research and technology. (Bulfin, 2009) However, this is not an easy task in light with the poor economic capacity of Africa and the expensiveness of higher education.

Even though, a great deal of advances has been achieved in ‘Africanizing’ African higher education, it is still suffering from the copy-paste manner of reforms generated in the mainstream experiences/centers. African universities are still copying higher education management, funding, form of internationalization, curriculum, credit transfer... And yet, according to the 2003 IAU, ‘Internationalization of Higher Education Practices and Priorities’ survey report, Africa is not a preferred partner in higher education by the rest of the world.

Unlike any corner of the world, African Higher education continued to be peripheral. In spite of the various attempts to find out regional revitalization strategies, African higher education, due to the “invisible hands”, (Zgaga, 2013) has continued to be peripheral and dependent. Higher Education Institutions are either impacted to accept the policies and roles of the centers or forced to change their policies in favor of the conditions of the centers. Actually, African Higher Education faces challenges from both external and internal factors such as the asymmetric partnership with the centre and uncontextualized policy influences; and the poor political-economy resolve and performance incapacity and lack of a working system.

As a result and, ‘as internationalization of higher education evolves and grows in importance, a number of potentially adverse consequences of the process have begun to appear.’ (IAU, 2012) Some of the benefits and adverse consequences are shown in the table below.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Academic Benefits</th>
<th>Adverse Consequences</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improve quality of teaching, learning and research</strong></td>
<td>The gradual dominance of English may diminish the evolvement of diversity of languages studied or to deliver HE</td>
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<td><strong>Stakeholders deeply engage in national, regional, and global issues</strong></td>
<td>Global competition may adversely affect the diversity of institutional models, quality, and undermine HEIs of developing countries</td>
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<td><strong>Students will be better prepared as national and global citizens and as productive workforce</strong></td>
<td>Deteriorate the capacity of HE in developing countries through brain drain</td>
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<td><strong>Provide students the opportunity to access to programs nationally unavailable</strong></td>
<td>The competition may lead to unethical practices of large-scale international student recruitment, which may also overshadow the intellectual and intercultural benefits of internationalization</td>
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<td><strong>Enhance opportunities for faculty improvement and decrease the risk of academic ‘inbreeding’</strong></td>
<td>Transnational campuses and distance programs would have many potential disadvantages over the local HEIs, which are established to support the national socio-economic and political needs</td>
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<td><strong>Prepare the ground for networked research</strong></td>
<td>Reputation and ranking may force HEIs and stakeholders to look for partner not on real academic and related interests but on the desire to gain prestige by associating themselves with ranking Universities. This trend may result in exclusions</td>
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<td><strong>Offer institutions to learn from the international good practices</strong></td>
<td>May result in asymmetrical relations that may depend on the capacity of resource and thus the capacity to implement internationalization strategies.</td>
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<td><strong>Improves institutional policy-making, governance, student services, outreach, quality… through collaborative experience sharing</strong></td>
<td>Bench marking of large countries for internationalization may pose many challenges for small/periphery countries. This may have far reaching effect on HEIs of small countries and their academic life</td>
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**Issues for discussion**

- Do the adverse consequences question the inherent values and benefits of internationalization?
- Are the challenges and the adverse consequences avoidable? If avoidable how? If not avoidable, what could be done to mitigate the impacts and the challenges?
- Given the many-faceted adverse effects and impacts of internationalization of higher education, to what extent do impacted institutions have to respond and/or tolerate the challenges?
- How can these countries/HEIs able to establish a knowledge society/economy and become part of the global knowledge area?
- What are the requirements to be internationalized?
References


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