Rewards and Challenges of Internationalization of Higher Education in Africa

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Abstract
The present process of internationalization has not only reframed 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 uncontextualized 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 indispensable. 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

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 …

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)

The purpose of this paper is to uncover the rewards and challenges of internationalization of higher education with special emphasis to Africa.

“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.

In the past five hundred years, since the times of the Reformation, universities have divorced from the “hitherto accepted value that knowledge is universal.” (Wit, 1998) Since the second half of the 20th century, however, due to a number of “change forces”, (Fullan et.al. 2009) the “universal-university world or the universalism of learning” has been restored and higher learning has entered into the process of knowledge economy/society and dynamically transformed internationalization. (Wit, 1998) The internationalization of higher education has become part of the priority agendas of many stakeholders such as national and supranational governments, international bodies, the industry, and higher education institutions...

Accordingly, the definition and concept of internationalization of higher education has gone through various stages in time and space. Higher education internationalization has been shaped and reshaped by the dynamic international context. For instance, globalization is an important contextual factor that shape higher education internationalization through the intensification of mobility of ideas, students and academics and expanded possibilities for collaboration and competitions and the global dimension.
of knowledge. In regard to competition, globalization has created what Duderstadt (2009) phrased as “Darwinian Competition” in which the fittest would survive and the winner-take-all.

With globalization emerged new aims, additional functions, activities/scope and actors attached to higher education, which also affected the internationalization of higher education. With the changes of the international context; the purpose, goals, meanings and strategies of internationalization of higher education also changed. (IAU, 2012) The changes include the following points: (Bulfin, 2009)

- New activities such as trans-boundary Mc Donaldization of HEIs,
- New aims such as preparing students for the global and the knowledge economy scenario,
- Serving the development of national identity, promoting the international competitiveness, competence and accomplishment of stake-holders’ specific rationales...
- Institutional strategies and government policies to internationalize their HEIs’ research and teaching
- New actors such as industrialists, bankers and other stake holders
- Promotion of multiculturalism, peace and mutual understanding, quality of life...

At least, the internationalization of higher education has been looked into four ways in the literature on the basis of the US¹ practice and context. (Hamrick, 1999)

- Traditionally, internationalization of higher education has been described and understood as international studies such as area studies as political science, cultural anthropology...
- The second meaning includes such activities that promote the interaction of local students with students and staff from other countries.
- Internationalization of higher education has been conceptualized as the technical and academic support rendered by US institutions to other institutions in other countries
- The most recently applied definition of internationalization of higher education is broad in scope and function, and its rationale is to prepare “people to function in an increasingly international and culturally diverse environment” under the stronger and broader influences of phenomenon of globalization.

Currently, Internationalization of higher education is broadly defined as an imperative “process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education.” (Knight, 2003 quoted in Altbach, et.al, 2009) It also includes a wider range of academic related activities such as student and staff mobility, internationalization and harmonization of curricula, quality assurance, and inter-institutional cooperation in teaching-learning, research and community services. (Vught, n.d)

Not only the conceptual framework of internationalization has got momentum, but also the relationship between countries also seems to be dynamically changing.

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¹ The idea of higher education internationalization seems to develop from the American political and educational concern that the USA was losing its position of world economic leadership and that American education would have to prepare future generations to function in a more competitive and more international marketplace. American education leaders also advocated for internationalization due to the increasing interdependent nature of the world.
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 the case for some of the peripheries, however. 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.

The case of Africa is different. African Higher education continued to be peripheral as usual. 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. 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 uncontextualized policy influence, and from the inside, poor political resolve and incapable capacity 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>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic Benefits</th>
<th>Adverse Consequences</th>
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<tr>
<td>Improve quality of teaching, learning and research</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>Stakeholders deeply engage in national, regional, and global issues</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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