

Transnational Education in Sub Sahara Africa: Strategic Partnerships

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Bohm, Davis, Meares, and Pearce (2002) predicted a fourfold increase in the number of students pursuing an international higher education degree from 1.8 million students in 2000 to 7.2 million in 2025. Some of these students will be international exchange students from the continent of Africa, taking courses in Western countries, but a significant population will prefer to remain in their home country and use online learning facilities, and technologies as substitutions (Knight, 2012) (Waterval, Frambach, Driessen, & Scherpbier, 2015). A major catalyst is Transnational Education (TNE) defined as movement of people, programs, curricula in HEIs across national jurisdictional borders (Harris, 2019). TNE is a subset of educational internationalization and can be part of development projects, academic exchange programs, and commercial initiatives.

How can African countries improve HEIs? Advances from online learning, and cross border partnerships may be an answer (Harris, 2019). Consider Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, and Kenya uniquely positioned to develop effective HEIs, beyond the present-day footprint.

Keywords: Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Education Partnerships, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), Transnational Education (TNE)

INTRODUCTION

Today, at least forty Sub-Saharan African (SSA) countries are celebrating independence since 1957. Since those triumphant battles for freedom, many countries formed universities by creating new institutions or transforming existing institutions. Many scholars and policymakers are championing Africa's significant role in the next 50 years, especially regarding HEIs (Addaney, 2018) (Fafunwa, 2018). Africa's development will depend upon an improved education sector (Teferra, 2016) (Trines, 2018). Highly populated and economic marvels, Egypt, Nigeria, and South Africa all have universities in the top 500 of the global ranking. In short, HEIs delivery options are discussed in capacity building terms: face-to-face, campus-based, and especially distance education (Leautier & Mutahakana, 2012) (Arias, Evans, & Santos, 2019). The challenge is to ensure that training is relevant regarding current developmental priorities and workplace needs. Moreover, the HEIs will erase the negative imprints of Africa's historical marginalization (Dia, 1996; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013). This paper will discuss the pathway African HEIs develop regarding TNE partnerships.

To understand the high stakes of HEIs in Africa, consider the following factors. Number one, the African continent, is an endowed border that aligns the Atlantic Ocean, Mediterranean Sea, Gulf of Aden, and the Indian Ocean. Number two, the continent is populated by 1.32 billion people or about 17% of the

world population (Worldometers, 2019). Third, with 200 million inhabitants aged between 15 and 24 years of age, Africa is the youngest continent in the world. Fourth consideration, Africa is projected to increase in population size over the next 15 years, followed by the median growth projection of 1.68 billion people in 2030. Additionally, the growth trend represented by Nigeria, Africa's largest economy (GDP of \$405.1 billion in 2016) population grew from 95 million in 1990 to 200 million in the year 2019. Nigeria's population will double to more than 400 million by the year 2050. At that time, Nigeria will overtake the US as the world's third most inhabited country (Arias et al., 2019; Dampson & Edwards, 2019; United Nations, 2015). The challenge for Africa is to turn its demographic growth and youth population growth into evidenced-based education initiatives that will create positive economic development (DeGhetto, Gray, & Kiggundu, 2016).

Higher Education Institution (HEIs) Ranking and Growth Dilemma

The best performing African HEIs selected span north, south, east, and western regions, from Uganda to Nigeria to Egypt and South Africa, according to the Times Higher Education's World University Rankings 2019. Overall, Egypt and South Africa represent Africa's highest-ranked countries in the HEIs ranking, with 19 and nine universities respectfully. However, South Africa is the only country with a university in the top 500. The classification rates HEIs performance using 13 specific indicators: teaching, research, research impact, innovation, and international outlook. Only the University of Cape Town is Africa's top university at position 156 out of 200 worldwide rankings (AU2063, 2015; DeGhetto et al., 2016; THE, 2019).

Historically, HEIs in Sub-Sahara Africa (SSA) experienced significant expansion (Darvas, Gao, Shen, & Bawany, 2017). In 1970, there are less than 400,000 tertiary students in the region. However, in 2013, gross enrollment in higher education in the countries of SSA grew approximately to 7.2 million (Bosman & Strydom, 2016) (Mba, 2017; Teferra, 2016). During the same year, the total enrollment ratio (GER) for tertiary education grew at an average annual rate of 4.3 percent, which outpaced the global average of 2.8 percent (Darvas et al., 2017). The challenge of a fast-growing youth population in the SSA region is where the opportunity is found. SSA countries can equip an expanding pool of youth with access to education, endow them with cognitive, socioemotional, and technical skills, and create a conducive environment for job-creating business (Addaney, 2018; Arias et al., 2019; Union, 2015). SSA countries are focused on tertiary education for knowledge provision (Darvas et al., 2017). The SSA's workforce is projected to almost double to 1 billion by 2040 underlines the scale of the demographic challenge going forward and brings into sharp focus the need to expand access to quality tertiary education. In the absence of effective policies to equip workers with the skills they require to compete in the labor force, a rising tide of under and unemployed youth has the potential to undermine social cohesion and to contribute to political instability. HEIs can train and educate more workers with skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods, drive job-creating economic growth, and enhance economic competitiveness and productivity (SDGC, 2017) (Fafunwa, 2018). To achieve these ends, the doors to higher education must be open to all worthy students, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, and regional origin (Tobenkin, 2016) (Dampson & Edwards, 2019).

Antecedents and Contradictions of Isomorphism and Institution Theory

The power and influence of market forces accommodate two possible institutional responses to the increased market competition: HEIs can diversify in an attempt to capture a specific market niche, or they can imitate the activities of their successful competitors. Institutions adopt the characteristics and practices of HEIs operating in the same environment (Ven & Poole, 1995) (Darvas et al., 2017). File and Goedegebuure (2000) suggest two types of institutional isomorphism: (1) *mimetic isomorphism* that results from market insecurity caused by external environmental factors forcing the institution to mimic or copy other more successful competitors; (2) *normative isomorphism* that develops through heightened professionalism, where professionalism leads to homogeneity and similar practices based on shared standards (Knight, 2015; Kotoua, Ilkan, & Kilic, 2015)(Knight, 2015; Kotoua, Ilkan, & Kilic, 2015)(Knight, 2015; Kotoua, Ilkan, & Kilic, 2015)(Knight, 2015; Kotoua, Ilkan, & Kilic, 2015)(Knight, 2015; Kotoua, Ilkan, & Kilic, 2015)(Knight,

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During 2014-2015, the World Bank-sponsored HEIs research regarding 12 African, European, and East Asian countries. The research findings suggest that the expansion of higher education in Africa had shown differentiation (Mwilongo, 2015). Instead, there was evidence of institutional isomorphism that promoted newly established institutions replicate the dominant 'mother' university (BC, 2017; Cloete, 2015) (Ven & Poole, 1995). Ng'ethe, a professor and researcher from the University of Nairobi, confirmed that the expansion of higher education in Africa had not developed by differentiation. The first consideration, most African HEIs African funding, is total student enrollment centric. Therefore, if the HEIs starts with the intention of curriculum specialization, in a context of low regulation, then institutions are free to add other academic programs, which are often high-profit courses (Cloete, 2015). The second consideration, a phenomenon in African HEIs is offshore providers. While these institutions do introduce differentiation by offering degrees from other countries, they also provide popular courses in money-making areas. Consider, for example, business administration or information and communication technology. Moreover, Ng'ethe concluded that "overseas universities are not driving a high level of differentiation." The third consideration, institutional governance, in which institutions are constructive matches, under similar laws, does not allow for differentiation in governance mechanisms (Cloete, 2015; Deephouse, 1996; Subotzky, Njuguna, & Afeti, 2008).

Consider asymmetrical power relationships regarding developing countries tertiary organizations that seek partnerships with Western organizations (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005; Fisher, 2012; James, 2001; Nkomo, 2015). According to neo-institutional theorists DiMaggio and Powell (1983), coercive, mimetic, and normative mechanisms lead to isomorphism or more significant similarities between organizations. The organizational theory offers that the changes occurring are due to their coercive isomorphism, a result of formal and informal pressure among tertiary organizations seeking to grow and expand academic services, as well as influences from cultural and societal expectations (Zoogah, Peng, & Woldu, 2015). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest that the more dependent an organization is on its exchange partners, then dependence leads to more significant similarities between organizations. According to this perspective, dependent organizations would be influenced by formal and informal pressures and norms, gradually becoming more similar to influential organizations (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005).

Institutional Theory

The institutional theory derives exceptional research literature from institutional sociology (P. DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Fay & Zavattaro, 2016; Meyer, Ramirez, Frank, & Schofer, 2007; Oplatka & Hemsley-Brown, 2010). Institutional theorists describe two organizational types: technical and institutional. Technical institutions follow well-defined technologies with easily identifiable and measured outputs (Claeyé & Jackson, 2012; Vaira, 2004). Consider this case, instead of efficiency, the institution strives to develop activities and structures identifiable both internally and externally as legitimate (Deephouse, 1996; P. J. DiMaggio & Powell, 2000). HEIs, manage within an organizational field where external constituencies project how institutions should operate, defining them as institutional organizations. For example, government agencies, accreditation bodies, and disciplinary associations all attempt to manage the activities of colleges and universities. When HEIs operate within the guidelines and accepted notions, external constituents view the college as a legitimate actor within the higher education field. The marketplace then rewards legitimacy with notoriety, funding, faculty, and more students (Nkomo, 2015) (Sandeen, 2014).

Moreover, the environment with normative expectations provides positive or negative outcomes that shape institutional behavior. DiMaggio & Powell (1983) describe expectations and pressures on the organization as the "iron cage," which pushes HEIs toward isomorphism or the implementation of actions and strategies that resemble other HEIs. Isomorphic tendencies are practiced by other colleges when

following the steps and behaviors of other HEIs considered successful within the target market and community (Subotzky et al., 2008).

Developing research universities is a constant discussion and considerable debate from various policymakers (Altbach, 2013; Arias et al., 2019; Dampson & Edwards, 2019; SDGC, 2017; Tobenkin, 2016). The international aid agencies, NGOs, and the World Bank articulated the value that HEIs represent and now understand that research universities are also essential for national development. Research university's discussion has emerged on the policy agenda in many developing countries, especially as more HEIs seek to compete in the global knowledge economy (Zoogah, Zoogah, & Dalaba-Roohi, 2015).

Consider the research universities of the developing world that have not achieved the top levels of the global rankings; they are essential assets within their respective countries. Additionally, they are improving their global reputations and their competitiveness on the international stage (Altbach, 2013) (Porter, 1990; Ven & Poole, 1995; Wilkins & Huisman, 2012).

Partnerships

A partnership is regarded as the most vital relationship defined by organizational value principles and a review of the literature (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Additionally, a partnership is defined as organized groups incorporating strategic solutions for reaching efficiency and effectiveness. A partnership is also a dynamic relationship among diverse stakeholders based on mutually agreed objectives and pursued through a shared understanding (Publow, 2010). It encompasses the most rational division of labor based on the respective comparative advantages of each partner. The partnership incorporates mutual influence, a balance between synergy, and individual autonomy. These lead to mutual respect, equitable decision-making, mutual accountability, and transparency.

TNE partnerships between the North and South are often characterized by the existence of asymmetries between the two partners at several levels – asymmetries in resources, capabilities, and most importantly in ‘power’ (Trines, 2018). Global partnerships are shaped by power relations that help to maintain the boundaries of partnerships (Dia, 1996). Additionally, Brinkerhoff (2002) points out that the intrinsic power relations in international development make it impossible to exclude power from a partnership (Brinkerhoff, 2002). Within the field of educational partnerships, the importance of country ownership has increased; there has been mass discussion in the last five years (Casciaro & Piskorski, 2005).

Transnational Education

Transnational Education (TNE) refers to the movement of people, programs, providers, curricula, projects, research, and services in HEIs across national jurisdictional borders (Knight, 2015) (Harris, 2014). TNE is a subset of educational internationalization and can be part of development cooperation projects, academic exchange programs, and commercial initiatives. While some countries such as China strategically use TNE to develop their capacity in HEIs (PIE, 2019) (WENR, 2019a). Other countries, such as South Africa and Nigeria, have had fewer positive experiences regarding the quality of foreign provision (Saint, Hartnett, & Strassner, 2003) (Bakare, 2012) (WENR, 2019c). What is the solution for improving the tertiary provision quality? TNE may offer a partial answer for tertiary provision, through program mobility and institution mobility across strategic borders. Globally, more students are being offered and are taking advantage of the option of obtaining a foreign degree or Higher Education courses. Due to technology and social paradigm shifts, a student can obtain a degree remotely via online. Although online services might not offer students the same cultural engagement experiences, online learning provides significant cost advantages. Small countries with small tertiary education systems are not always able to offer courses in all disciplines within the domestic system (Morelli, De Silva, De Lanerolle, Curzon, & Xin Sheng, 2010) (Chieh-Peng, Chou-Kang, Sheng-Wuu, & Yuan-Hui, 2010) (Trines, 2018).

Some countries may for historical reasons have the capacity to enroll all domestic students, but not in the fields most relevant for the country's economy or capacity-building strategy. This situation can lead to shortages in certain areas: agriculture, business, or engineering (Asunka, 2008).

Typology of Program Mobility

TNE programs can be physical or virtual movement of individual education/training/curriculum courses and programs across national borders through face-to-face, distance-learning or a blended combination modality. Academic credits towards a qualification can be awarded by the sending foreign country provider or by an affiliated domestic partner or jointly. Franchising, twinning, double/joint degrees, and articulation models are the popular mobility methods of TNE or cross-border program (Knight, 2005b). Listed below are summary descriptions:

Franchise. An arrangement whereby a HEIs provider in the source country A authorizes a provider in country B to deliver their curriculum course/program/service in country B or other countries. The HEIs provider awards the qualification/certification in country A. Arrangements for teaching, management, assessment, profit sharing, awarding of credit/qualification are customized for each franchise arrangement and comply with national regulations in country B and sometimes national regulations or codes of good practice of country A (if they exist and apply to the provider) (Knight, 2015).

Twinning. This example: The arrangements for these twinning programs usually meant that the first two years of coursework would be taken at the home institution, and the final two years would be taken regionally or abroad at the partner institution. Twinning is also known as a ‘two plus two’ model. For many reasons, these programs have undergone a remarkable metamorphosis in form and function. The two years abroad decreased to one year abroad, resulting in a ‘three plus one’ model. Moreover, now many twinning programs are ‘four plus zero’, meaning there is no mobility, and the student can take a full foreign degree at their home institution without ever leaving their country. (Knight, 2015).

Double or joint degree. Consider this is an arrangement where HEIs providers/partners in different countries collaborate to offer a curriculum program for which a student receives a qualification from each HEIs provider or a joint award from the collaborating partners. Arrangements for program provisions and criteria for awarding the qualifications are customized for each collaborative initiative following national regulations in each country (Knight, 2015).

Articulation. Consider various types of articulation arrangements between providers situated in different countries that permit students to gain credit for courses/programs offered by all the collaborating providers and partners. This agreement allows students to gain credit for work done with a provider other than the provider awarding the qualification (Knight, 2015).

E-learning or distance. Arrangements where providers deliver courses/programs to students in different countries through distance and online modes. This method may include some face-to-face support for students through private study or support centers. Delivery of TNE via distance education accounts for a significant and expanding proportion of global TNE activity. However, distance education is often happening outside a formal regulatory framework, in the absence of concrete national-level policies and plans to guide its development. This presents significant challenges in terms of quality assurance of distance education programs, recognition of distance education qualifications, and is part of the reason behind a worrying lack of data on distance education programs (Knight, 2015).

Nigeria

Many local, foreign and multilateral institutions are partnering with Nigerian universities and, in some cases, have funded targeted research areas: Science, Technology, Research, Engineering, Agriculture and Mathematics (STREAM), in addition to medicine, energy, water and food security, and sustainable environmental development (BC, 2017) (PIE, 2019).

Consider Nigeria gained independence from Great Britain in 1960; the country had already established six research-focused universities. By December 2016, Nigeria had a total of 143 universities spread across the nation. Research acquired during this study indicates that of 143 accredited universities, 45 (representing 31.9 percent) have existing TNE relationships with foreign institutions. Moreover, articulation agreements are the most frequently adopted model (Knight, 2015) (BC, 2017; WENR, 2019c).

Within the past decade, Nigeria has become the number one African country of origin for HEIs international students: Nigeria sends more students overseas than any country on the African continent.

According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS) research, Nigerian students abroad increased by 164 percent between 2005 and 2015 from 26,997 to 71,351 (Ekundayo & Ajayi, 2009; Fafunwa, 2018; Saint et al., 2003) (BC, 2017; UNESCO, 2019; WENR, 2019c).

In regards to African student mobility, regionalization is a growing paradigm shift for Nigerian students in recent years. Ghana passed the U.S. as the second-most famous destination country, attracting 13,919 Nigerian students in 2015 (UNESCO, 2019).

The National Universities Commission guidelines for TNE seek to define and regulate the scope of partnerships between Nigerian and foreign tertiary institutions. The guidelines provide for three models:

1. The twinning/articulation model
2. The branch campus model
3. The open & distance learning (ODL) model

The home country of the foreign HEIs must have existing diplomatic relations with Nigeria and a bilateral agreement that covers the provision of education at the university level, including mutual recognition of degrees, diplomas, and certificates. The foreign HEIs must be accredited by its home country to offer degree, diploma, and certificate programs (WENR, 2019c).

China

TNE and China student mobility is historically rooted in the master plan for growth and modernization. Higher education in China is composed of 2,000 universities and colleges, with more than six million students. The Chinese population is on record as 1.4 billion in addition to a burgeoning middle class. Consider the fact; China sends more students abroad than any other country in the world. An estimated 460,000 Chinese students enrolled at foreign HEIs in 2014, a rise of 11 percent over the previous year. The U.S. HEIs are essential destinations for these students, with 304,040 students enrolled in U.S. institutions 2014/2015 school year (WENR, 2019a).

SSA is a significant market for Chinese HEIs. Nine African universities signed cooperation agreements with various Chinese universities aimed at establishing academic collaborations in the fields of humanities and social sciences (PIE, 2019). Representatives of the universities signed the new agreements during a two-week tour of China in June 2019, sponsored by the newly established China-Africa Institute. The Agreements were signed with at least seven Chinese HEIs including the China-Africa Institute, China University of International Studies, North-West University of Politics and Law, Communication University of China, University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the International Poverty Reduction Center. African universities that signed deals included the University of Namibia, University of Zimbabwe, University of Zambia, University of Botswana, the University of Lagos from Nigeria, Makerere University of Uganda, the University of South Africa, the University of Makeni of Sierra Leone and the Open University of Tanzania (PIE, 2019).

Ghana

The tertiary education system expanded tremendously over the past decades. The number of HEIs increased from three in 1990 to 70 in 2014, while the tertiary GER increased from 2 percent at the beginning of the 1970s to 16.5 percent in 2015 (WENR, 2019b). Tertiary students increased from 16,161 in 1980 to 444,000 in 2017 (per UIS data). Ghana has become an HEIs alternative for Nigerians, especially since the country is less costly and closer to home than study destinations like Australia, Canada, China, or the United States (UNESCO, 2019; WENR, 2019b). Many Nigerians accept schooling in Ghana as a rescue option from strikes and complicated admission process (Dampson & Edwards, 2019; UNESCO, 2019).

Consider China is a popular destination for SSA students, primarily from Ghana. Ghanaian students in China increased since 2011, driven by scholarship funding. The research data indicates, Ghana is the largest African sender of international students to China: 5,552 Ghanaian students in the country in 2016

compared with just 1,753 in 2011, an increase of 217 percent in five years (UNESCO, 2019) (WENR, 2019b).

Transnational education led to broader innovation and wider access to HEIs. However, the proliferation of these programs has also raised concerns about the wide-ranging levels of quality assurance that can be found. The multiple program formats further illustrate some of the challenges that evaluators face. When reviewing educational records from these programs, not only is it essential to check the usual factors, it is also critical to raise such questions as:

- Where is the program being taught and who is teaching the program?
- Who is the awarding institution?
- Do the proper authorities recognize the awarding institution with the appropriate quality assurance mechanisms in place?

Nigeria, Ghana, and China are only three TNE examples used in this study that demonstrate partnerships and agency buy-in from HEIs stakeholders.

Francophone Articulation and TNE Ties

The process regarding articulation in Francophone West Africa is different. In Senegal moreover, Cameroon, HEIs deliver polytechnic-type degree qualifications are linked to the universities and are not viewed as separate or autonomous institutions. Graduates from the HEIs can be admitted into degree programs at the appropriate level, subject only to passing an entrance examination. The Francophone countries in SSA have been working with partners in France, and Canada, according to Ahmed Legrouri, vice president of academic affairs at the International University of Grand Bassam (IUGB) in the Côte d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast). French institutions recruit heavily from Francophone African universities modeled on the French higher education system and facilitating partnerships (Subotzky et al., 2008).

The International University of Grand-Bassam (IUGB) is an exception as it was established as an independent institution, offering U.S.-style curriculum in English, through a partnership between the Côte d'Ivoire and Georgia State University. The primary partnership interests of the university are faculty and staff capacity building, research activities, and study abroad opportunities for students (Subotzky et al., 2008).

Another French HEI expanding to 25 African partnerships is La Rochelle Business School (Groupe Sup de Co La Rochelle), a member of the network of the French Grandes Écoles and a nonprofit organization linked to the La Rochelle Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Tobenkin, 2016).

Capacity Building Justifications

The first consideration, the online curriculum cost of TNE is considerably lower compared to student mobility, both for students and governments. Program and institution mobility can potentially allow a more significant number of domestic students to participate in tertiary education, including people already in employment.

The second consideration, program, and institution mobility can alleviate brain drain syndrome as students do not leave the country. The business of teaching different programs can also provide new job opportunities for students who studied abroad and for mobile academics, and thereby facilitate their return.

The third consideration, consider collaboration between higher education institutions from developed and developing countries: program and institution mobility can have a positive impact on the higher education sector in the importing country. International programs are offered through local HEIs, and this partnership can assist the local institution in building capacity in teaching and curriculum design.

Each country, region, and HEIs must consider how to use TNE to maximize benefits, student engagement, employment outcomes for students, and minimize risks. An over-arching model does not exist, and countries must adapt regulatory frameworks to the local context. However, all countries should be aware of the opportunities that TNE offers.

CONCLUSIONS

The population of the African continent is 1.03 billion. This vast region has become the world's fastest-growing market for mobile communications and the internet in the world. However, the continent still has some of the world's lowest penetration rates in the market sectors (Kotoua et al., 2015). Even though Africa has a significant geographical area, there are still problems with communication networks and computer speed issues. During 2010 mobile users were about 90% of the population (Kotoua et al., 2015). However, online students require more than mobile telephony to study. South African research regarding distance education students at North-West University stated, 67% had no internet access at home, mainly for financial reasons (Geduld, 2013). The Ghana study revealed that five out of 22 students had computer and internet access at home (Asunka, 2008). Access to the Internet and technology skills application often create challenges for students when there is limited access to electricity and telephone networks (Geduld, 2013).

Many learners in classrooms today are digital natives, a category of learners who tend toward independence regarding learning styles. For this group of students, learning occurs beyond the boundaries of a traditional brick and mortar classroom.

In the absence of effective policies to equip workers with the skills they require to compete in the labor force, a rising tide of unemployed youth has the potential to speak openly and boldly and to contribute to political debate. HEIs can help inspire, engage, and endow an accelerating pool of workers with skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods, enhance economic competitiveness, and become leaders in the local communities and across traditional borders. To achieve these ends, the roads or avenues, doors, and windows to higher education must be open to all worthy students, regardless of socioeconomic status, gender, and regional origin (Tobenkin, 2016) (Dampson & Edwards, 2019; Dia, 1996). *The research we do regarding Tertiary Education in Africa can change the boundary conditions of what is positioned to be the whole of our understanding of management concepts, theories, and practices (Nkomo, 2015).*

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