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DEHub

Innovation in Distance Education

Internationalisation and Globalisation of Higher Education:

Implications for Africa's Higher Education System

DEHub Monograph Series 2013

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DEHub Monograph Series 2013

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Dessalegn Mihret

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Innovation in Distance Education

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Abstract

While governments are responsible for ensuring that their national education systems adequately meet the human resource needs of their countries, the provision of education––especially higher education––is gradually shifting to the private domain and is increasingly commoditised. Amidst these global trends, the higher education sector in Africa remains poorly developed and unable to cope with increasing demand; the reason is partly caused by a focus on primary and secondary education in earlier times, and a lack of focus on the development of a tertiary education sector. Despite excess demand, Sub-Saharan Africa has, on a global basis, the lowest higher education participation rate; preventing the region from providing the specialist knowledge and skills required to support its development. This paper explores global developments in higher education in order to assess opportunities that the global higher education market can provide to Africa to help it overcome low domestic higher education opportunities.

Key words:

Internationalisation, globalisation, higher education, distance education, Africa

Introduction

Governments have traditionally been largely responsible for ensuring that their education systems are well equipped to meet the human capital requirements of their countries. However, increasingly, the provision of education is being shared by the public and private sectors; with the private sector share growing significantly, especially in low and middle-income countries (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2003; Ziguras, 2003). Internationalisation of higher education, which originally involved movement of students and academics across countries to strengthen cultural awareness, enhance curricula and research and assist developing economies to build relevant human capital for their development needs, has expanded to cross-border trade in education with the rise in private sector participation in higher education.

There has been significant growth in higher education trade over the last two decades. According to Bashir (2007, p. 12), the number of students studying abroad rose by almost 50 per cent from 1.64 million in 1999 to 2.45 million in 2004. Providers are mainly from the North (United Kingdom (UK), United States of America (USA), Canada and Australia) and students are from the South (mostly low and middle-income countries). The USA is the world's largest magnet for international study, drawing the majority of its students from Asia (Teferra & Knight, 2008); in 2004, the USA accounted for 26 per cent of students studying abroad, followed from a distance by the UK with 9.6 per cent (Bashir, 2007, p. 17). The USA earned US$14 billion of the total of US$28 billion in education exports in 2005.

The development of various forms of delivery methods, including distance education and partnership programs, is behind the growth in higher education trade, which has become an important source of revenue for provider institutions and their governments.

Despite its purported contribution to human capital development, the trade in higher education is not without problems, particularly for countries in the South. Among these are: widening the gap between rich and poor; and the threat of loss of national culture and increased brain drain as foreign educated students from the South enter the global labour market seeking better paid jobs and improved standards of living in the North. These challenges, in some way, defeat the purpose of using higher education to build human capital for the development needs of the South, especially the low-income countries.

Alongside these global trends in the delivery of higher education, is the crisis in the higher education sector in Africa, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, emanating, to some extent, from education policies recommended by international development agencies as part of the economic rescue packages presented to African governments in the 1980s and 1990s (Bloom, Canning & Chan, 2006). These policies required African governments to invest in primary and secondary education as a poverty reduction strategy at the expense of investing in higher education, which was deemed inefficient. The lack of attention to the tertiary education sector has meant inadequate resources to absorb the increasing number of secondary school graduates. The result is that Sub-Saharan Africa now has the lowest global higher education participation rate; less than five per cent in 2007 compared with a global rate of 26 per cent and over 70 per cent for North America and Western Europe (Altbach,

Reisberg & Rumbley, 2009). This is occurring at a time when higher education is crucial to the development of the continent: as a consequence, to cope with increasing demand for more highly educated individuals, the region imports skills from the North at exorbitant cost, further retarding development.

In this paper, we explore global developments in the higher education sector to assess whether the global market in higher education presents a way for Africa to meet its demand for higher education. The rest of the paper is organised as follows: the next section provides an overview of the method for conducting a literature review of the relevant issues regarding higher education for Africa; the 'method' section is followed by a section that explores the concepts of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education; the fourth section presents the origins of the global trade in higher education and is, in turn, followed by a section that discussed the challenges of the trade in higher education; the sixth section discusses the higher education scene in Africa and explores trends and responses by various stakeholders to the challenges; finally, the paper concludes with recommendations for addressing the higher education crises in Africa.

Method

This review covers the relevant literature for the period 1995 to 2009. The year 1995 is chosen as a starting point because it marks the beginning of trade in higher education under the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) and the recognition of cross-border higher education in the literature. Thus, although international education has a relatively long history, the trade in higher education has only recently gained prominence.

Desktop keyword web searches were conducted using the Google Scholar search engine which enables keyword searches across multiple databases simultaneously and provides advanced search options for refining searches (Jacso, 2005). Various combinations of the following keywords were used:

> 'globalisation/globalization/internationalisation/internationalization/transnational/cross-border' and 'higher/tertiary/education'; 'distance education', 'e-learning', and 'Africa'

A research assistant employed for the literature search was initially briefed by the investigators who provided directions for the search. The assistant summarised documents from the search, categorising them by keywords. The summaries were then screened by the investigators. Although the search was limited to documents in English, the literature examined spaned North America, Latin America, Europe, Australia, Africa, and Asia, providing a global perspective to the issues investigated while focusing on Africa.

Internationalisation and Globalisation of Higher Education

The concept of the internationalisation of higher education is eclectic in nature and has been variously defined––reflecting the concept's complexity and multidimensionality, with each definition developed for the specific context in which it is used (Callan, 2000; Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Chan & Dimmock, 2008). Knight (1994), cited in Knight (1999), defines internationalisation of higher education as 'the process of integrating an international and intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and services functions of the institution'. This definition emphasises the trans-national and intercultural dimensions of the concept and the importance to enhancing scholarship within an institution (Knight, 1999). It focuses on internationalisation of higher education from the perspective of provider institutions. Yang (2002, p. 83) draws attention to the contextual differences in definition of the concept, noting that at the national level internationalisation means "a dialogue with those in other countries". Like Knight, she emphasises the intercultural aspect of internationalisation.

In a subsequent publication, Knight (2003b, p. 2) widens the geographical coverage implied in her earlier definition by including the word 'global' while limiting the type of education to post-secondary education. She explains that the broader definition incorporates the perspectives of nations, sectors and institutions/providers, and that activities associated with internationalisation of education usually occur in post-secondary institutions (Knight, 2004b). Knight (2003a) differentiates internationalisation from globalisation of higher education. The former refers to willing and proactive participation within the national laws of the transacting parties while the latter is an uncontrollable, borderless, and seamless process that gives little attention to the policies and regulations of the states and nations involved (Mthembu, 2004). Globalisation denotes leaving higher education to the control of market forces and moving it from 'welfare' to a 'competitive' position with national interventions designed only to enhance competitiveness (Yang, 2002). Altbach et al. (2009, p. ii) highlight the uncontrollable nature and the issues associated with globalised higher education, explaining that it is "the reality shaped by an increasingly integrated world economy, new information and communications technology (ICT), the emergence of an international knowledge network, the role of the English language, and other forces beyond the control of academic institutions". As such, globalisation relates to market factors such as efficiency, profit-orientation, stakeholders and competitive advantage. Unlike internationalisation, globalisation constrains, rather than enhances choice at the institutional level (Yang, 2002).

Researchers such as Yang (2002) present internationalisation and globalisation as two distinct phenomena while others, such as Altbach and Knight (2007) and Knight (1999), portray the two concepts as intertwined. Knight and de Wit (1997), cited in Knight (2004b, p. 8), refer to globalisation as "the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, values, and ideas … across borders" so that, despite its market orientation it involves an element of cultural exchange requiring both provider and recipient countries to address issues of culture to enhance trade. Further, government intervention continues in this global trade, limiting its free market status (Altbach et al., 2009). In this paper, we view internationalisation and globalisation of education as interrelated because, in spite of its emphasis on trade, globalisation provides avenues for enhancing scholarship in both recipient and provider institutions. This approach enables the investigation of relevant issues from the perspective of governments as well as the specific programs and policies of the institutions involved. The origins and forms of the commercial trade in higher education are explored next.

Globalisation: the Commercial Trade in Higher Education

A number of factors account for the growth in the higher education trade, the most prominent being the global surge in demand for volume and quality higher education. Students want products with higher rates of return than are available in their home countries. The inability of several countries to meet the rising demand for volume and quality higher education from domestic capacity has led them to turn to imports to make up for the short supply (Bashir, 2007). According to Bashir (p. 35), global enrolments in higher education were in excess of 114 million in 2004, representing a 62 per cent increase over enrolments in 1999. Although the number of students studying abroad also increased, this segment of the market accounted for only a small percentage of the import of higher education. In many middle-income countries experiencing short supply, excess demand was mostly met by expanding the private sector through various partnership arrangements with foreign providers.

The surge in demand for higher education is also fuelled by the knowledge and skill requirements of global firms seeking technical and professional employees with up-to-date hard and soft skills that can be readily applied on-the-job. Students find the prospect of working in a global or multinational company in their home countries attractive because it offers a higher standard of living than can be attained in domestic organizations. Since domestic institutions in many middle- and low-income countries do not meet the knowledge and skills requirements of these global firms, students from the South prefer education from foreign partnership institutions or foreign universities whose programs are recognised in the global labour market. The potential for temporal or permanent migration to a country in the North with significantly higher standards of living than in the home country also increases the value of foreign over domestic education (Bashir, 2007). Similarly, the prospects of gaining admission to a postgraduate program in the North and ultimately temporal or permanent migration, enhances the attractiveness of foreign programs to students in the South.

Although GATS has made it possible to trade in all types of services, including education (Ginsburg, Espinoza, Popa & Terno, 2003), it is not the primary source of expansion in the trade in the higher education. Only few countries have made commitments under GATS and several of these have maintained restrictions on the operations of foreign providers in their countries (Bashir, 2007). In general, governments in developing economies are hesitant at committing to GATS because of a fear of losing control over the regulation of their education systems. Countries in the North have also opposed the inclusion of higher education in GATS (van der Wende, 2002).

In spite of the impediments to general acceptance of the free trade in education under GATS, the growth in demand for foreign education, both within and outside home countries, is predicted to continue, fuelled by greater integration of the global economy, the opening of a global labour market which promises higher standards of living than is available in domestic organisations, the liberalisation of trade under GATS, as well as growth in foreign direct investment (Bashir, 2007). Bohm et al. (2002), cited in Teferra and Knight (2008, p. 29), estimates that demand for international education will grow to about 7.2 million in 2021. We examine the forms of trade in higher education next.

Forms of Trade in Higher Education

As noted above, the movement of students from one country to study in another accounts form a small percentage of the global trade in higher education. Despite its relatively long history, the strategy entails high cost, especially from the perspective of students from developing countries. In addition, knowledge and skills acquired may not be directly applicable to the home country and this higher education trade strategy adds to the brain drain.

Various cross-border arrangements account for a large percentage of the trade in higher education (Cambridge & Thompson, 2004; Chan & Dimmock, 2008; International Council for Open and Distance Education (ICDE), 2009; Teichler, 2004). In their Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education, UNESCO and OECD describe cross-border education as 'higher education that takes place when students follow a course or program of study that has been produced, and is continuing to be maintained, in a country different from the one in which they are residing' (Daniel, Kanwar & Uvalic-Trumbic, 2006, p. 6). Cross-border education encompasses a wide range of activities involving academic linkages and agreements, international development/aid projects, and international commercial trade initiatives. It requires movement of people, providers, programmes and/or projects/services across jurisdictional or national boundaries (Knight, 2003a). Cross border arrangements can be categorised according to whether they involve program or provider mobility. Examples of program mobility arrangements include franchises, twinning, double/joint degrees, various types of validation and articulation programs, and virtual or distance programs. Provider mobility programs cover branch campuses, independent institutions, acquisitions and mergers, study or teaching centres, affiliations and networks, and virtual universities (Teferra & Knight, 2008).

The content developer and the student are separate for most part of the duration of cross-border program mobility arrangements (Hülsmann, 2004). The learning process is, therefore, organised into two main teaching functions: first, content development and presentation; and second, learner support or dialogue. Content is provided through various media (for instance CD-ROMs, books, Internet) while communication platforms such as online educational software, tele- and video-conferencing, webcasts are used to provide learner support (Hülsmann, 2004). Distance education has gained prominence in the last decade, following rising demand for internet-based degrees in the South. It has evolved with technology, enabling providers to offer similar learning experiences to both distance learners and students in traditional classrooms using various e-learning models. Therefore, it is now possible for providers to widen their cross-border geographical coverage (ICDE, 2009). State-of-the-art distance education models facilitate delivery of education in a flexible way to fit the individual circumstances of the student (ICDE, 2009). On the negative side, distance education programs may not be recognised by both provider and recipient countries for purposes of further studies or employment (Bashir, 2007).

The physical presence of a provider in the recipient country in the form of branch campuses, franchises or joint venture arrangements with local institutions can enable programs to be adapted to the specific needs of the recipient country. It is preferred in countries such as

China and Malaysia, where foreign providers are required to enter into various joint venture arrangements with local institutions. While branch campuses provide high quality programs, they are expensive to both provider institutions and domestic students and, where demand is not sufficient––as in the case of University of New South Wales (UNSW) in Singapore, the cost of failure can be high (O'Keefe, 2007). Provider mobility programs also include temporal visits by professors and researchers of providing institutions to the recipient country (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Knight, 2004a), with the potential for enhancing the education quality of both provider and recipient. Ultimately, the educational outcomes from such visits depend on their length and the activities undertaken during the visit. These visits must be tied to a distance education program to be effective for trading in higher education.

A number of opinions have been expressed for and against the trade in higher education. Proponents stress the enhancement of overall efficiency of the tertiary education sector in middle- and low-income countries (Ginsburg et al., 2003) and increased choice to buyers. Opposing views are several and centre on the lack of clear understanding of what is being traded and the reduction of provider institutions to business centres with externally controlled performance targets (Lynch, 2006). These performance targets require measurement of intangibles whose values are yet to be clearly defined. Since these intangibles are not all measurable, those critical to providing quality education are often excluded from the assessments (Lynch, 2006), leaving the consumer unclear about what is purchased.

Governments in developing countries are particularly concerned about the threat of loss of culture and setback to development of their countries (McBurnie & Ziguras, 2003). Thus, while the trade in higher education has potential for addressing gaps in the higher education sector in developing economies, there are significant hurdles to realising this potential. In pursuit of our investigation of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education as interrelated concepts, we examine the rationales for both in the next section.

Rationale for Internationalisation and Globalisation of Higher Education

The rationales for internationalisation of higher education are diverse and are based on the form of internationalisation, stakeholders and the outcomes that stakeholders pursue in their internationalisation initiatives. However, a major aim is to enhance scholarship. Although this can be achieved through globalisation, the aims of the global trade in higher education are mainly economic. Consistent with the emphasis on scholarship and skills development, Knight (2007) reports that in a survey of higher education institutions in 58 developing and 37 developed countries, revenue generation was rated low as a rationale for internationalisation. She notes that profits and commercial trade in higher education are not outcomes desired for internationalisation of higher education but that countries engage in it for educational reasons (Knight & de Wit, 1995).

Internationalisation of higher education is employed as a foreign policy dimension to develop diplomatic relations among nations. It has been used to spread political ideology, build political and economic allies, and promote international understanding and national security (Knight & de Wit, 1995; Qiang, 2003). In the 1950s and 1960s, America supported education in Africa to counter the spread of communism, while the Soviet Union made similar investments in Africa to spread its political beliefs (Samoff & Carroll, 2002). Official Development Assistance (ODA) comprises about one-eighth of the value of education exports involving students studying abroad and three countries: France, Germany and Japan, are responsible for almost 80 per cent of ODA (Bashir, 2007, p. 21). ODA is aimed at encouraging foreign investment, penetrating foreign markets, promoting skilled migration or other geopolitical interests and may be detrimental to capacity building efforts of the recipient countries (Bashir, 2007; Knight & de Wit, 1995; Qiang, 2003).

Knight and de Wit (1995) suggest that educational institutions encourage student and staff exchanges with a conviction that participants will enhance their knowledge when exposed to complex intercultural settings around the world. They explain that American universities incorporate study abroad components in their under-graduate programs to expose their students to broader cultural settings and help raise their cultural awareness. Cooperation among educational institutions in internationalisation initiatives provides opportunities for participating institutions to develop their intellectual capabilities at low cost (Knight & de Wit, 1995). Consistent with this, Knight (2007) reports that internationally-oriented staff and students and improved academic quality were identified, in her survey of higher education leaders, as the two most important benefits of internationalisation. Yang (2002) stresses the importance of internationalisation to critical thinking, self-reflection and enquiry with respect to relationships at national, regional and local levels. She explains that an international approach helps institutions avoid parochialism and instead pursue scholarship and research through interdisciplinary cooperation.

Although the flow of higher education students occurs mainly from South to North, countries considered to belong to the South, such as India, China, Malaysia and the Philippines, also attract foreign students to earn income and improve the quality and cultural mix of their students (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Knight (2007) reports that improving academic quality, research and curriculum are fundamental objectives towards which higher education institutions in the South should strive in order to engage in internationalisation of higher education.

Globalisation of higher education is considered necessary for economic development and participation in the global economy (Altbach et al., 2009; Knight, 2004b, 1999; Qiang, 2003). For countries in the South, it promises enhancement of economic competitiveness through provision of skilled labour, technological advancement as well as access to the global markets (Knight & de Wit, 1995; Qiang, 2003); it also promotes social mobility and can help minimise social and economic inequities. The trade in higher education has enabled countries such as China and Malaysia to bridge the gap between demand and supply of higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007; van de Wende, 2003).

In contrast to internationalisation, profit is a key motive for trading in higher education for both profit and traditional non-profit institutions in the North (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Trade in higher education is an important source of income and competitive advantage for countries in the North. Altbach and Knight (2007) and Knight and de Wit (1995) note that individual full-fee paying students constitute a major source of income for the higher education sector in Australia, UK and USA.

International graduate students comprise an important source of 'cheap' labour for their host countries, providing research, teaching and other services at low cost. Apart from direct financial gains to their host institutions, these students boost the national economies of their host countries by their expenditure on housing, food, health and other necessities of life. Moreover, countries in the North actively recruit the best and brightest students from the South to improve their human capacity and replace retiring and mobile faculty (Knight, 2007). The total economic gains from the trade in international students are considerable for provider countries (Altbach & Knight, 2007).

At the individual level, students and their families purchase international tertiary education for better employment prospects, higher salaries, improved living standards, as well as access to global investment opportunities (Bloom et al., 2006).

Although the overall positive outcomes for internationalisation of higher education are evident, the same cannot be said for the global trade in higher education, which poses several threats, particularly to the South. Some of these threats are discussed in the next section so that the gains presented above can be measured against the threats when evaluating the potential of globalisation for solving the Africa's higher education problems.

Challenges of the Global Trade in Higher Education

Despite the potential advantages, there are significant threats that reduce the value of the trade in higher education to recipient countries. Some of the threats emanate from a mismatch between knowledge and skills gained, and the needs of recipient countries because these needs are not clearly defined nor are the quality of the products offered readily assessable. There are also conflicts between individual and national objectives for recipient countries: individuals aim at improving their positions in the global labour market while the interest of governments lies in curbing the brain drain associated with globalisation of higher education.

The global higher education market is far from liberalized and the South, fearful of the implications for their economies, use various measures to protect their national institutions from outside competitors and to guard their citizens in a market where quality is indeterminate (Teichler, 2004). Some African countries prohibit private and foreign institutions in order to minimize risk to national policy objectives and national sovereignty (Potashnik & Capper, 1998; Van Damme, 2002).

While it is argued that globalisation of higher education increases access and provides greater choice for consumers, in reality it widens the equity gaps in society; only the few rich who can afford the high cost of international education usually have choice, leaving the poor with no choice at all (Lynch, 2006; Potashnik & Capper, 1998; Zondiros, 2008). Lynch (2006) argues that choice is of little value to the poor who are concerned with access, affordability and quality. The disparities in access further widens the social divide within a nation: those with foreign education are able to enhance their standards of living with professional jobs in the North or the best jobs in their home countries, while those unable to access either foreign education or higher education in their own countries are relegated to menial jobs or remain unemployed (Lynch, 2006).

Another source of exclusion associated with globalisation of higher education is the predominant use of English as a medium of instruction, despite differences in the levels of English language competency among different regions of the world (Callan, 2000). Many students from the South lack English language skills (Zondiros, 2008), requiring that they develop English language competencies or that content is translated into their native languages if they are to obtain value from the education provided (Kawachi, 2008). The predominant use of English language excludes some countries from the global trade in higher education. For example, Francophone countries are under-represented in this trade due to language barriers and the low representation of French universities in the cross-border higher education trade (Bashir, 2007). It is also not clear whether the use of English language reduces the learning process for students from non-native English speaking countries.

Disparities in access to ICT present another source of exclusion from the global higher education market. While the Internet has eased communication profoundly, access is not even across countries and among individuals in a country. For instance, internet access was as low as 1.5 per cent in Africa in 2006, although the rate was two per cent for South Africa and five percent for North African countries. In the same year, telephone access for the continent

stood at a low level of ten percent (ICDE, 2009). Thus, despite the potential of technology to provide access to far-reaching markets, it is creating a digital divide between the North and South (Moyo, 2003) and between different segments of society in the South. Attempts by the North to implement ICT solutions for education without adequate adaptation to the developing world are blamed for the difficulties encountered with education projects such as the African Virtual University (Moyo, 2003). Countries such as Brazil have implemented digital inclusion strategies but the problem remains widespread (ICDE, 2009).

Quality control is a major barrier to effective trade in higher education because quality assurance mechanisms are not well developed in the trading arena (ICDE, 2009) and pursuit of economic gains encourages shortcuts among providers, leading to negative academic outcomes (Knight, 2006). Complaints about quality of foreign programs are common among Southern countries and have attracted increased attention from quality assurance oversight agencies around the globe (Helms, 2008). Moreover, as part of the efforts to address problems with quality, UNESCO's Council for Higher Education Accreditation (2009) has issued a statement on measures for identifying and discouraging degree mills, urging governments to use their legal and regulatory frameworks to assist with eliminating degree mills.

Without appropriate quality standards, it is impossible to assess the quality of higher education on the market. Lynch (2006) questions the reliability of league tables that rank universities around the globe, explaining that they are developed by organisations with commercial interests rather than by the institutions with academic interests. The extent to which league tables incorporate important criteria such as research capability and teaching quality in arriving at their rankings is unclear (Lynch, 2006).

While several provider institutions have taken steps to have their programs accredited by various quality organisations, contextualisation of content is an issue that is greatly ignored, so that content developed by foreign providers sometimes fails to address national needs of recipient countries (Moyo, 2003). It is argued that export of educational programs designed in certain cultural systems to different cultural settings has the potential to dilute national cultures and encourage an orientation to established market and democratic systems (Bates, 2001). The trade in Western higher education could therefore draw recipients away from their national or local development priorities, and cultural and economic needs of their countries (Yang, 2002). It contributes to the brain drain and is therefore counter to the development of recipient countries.

The employment rationale for globalisation of higher education has been challenged for encouraging proliferation of programs in business, science and technology over equally important programs in the arts and humanities (Samoff & Carroll, 2002). These programs merely spread what is already known and leave little room for basic research, and for critical and creative thinking from which innovations arise. They could therefore discourage new knowledge discovery and application of learning to specific contexts.

Distance education is seen as a way of increasing access to higher education (Altbach & Knight, 2007) by reducing cost to consumers (Moyo, 2003). However, the high infrastructure cost is a challenge to provider institutions. Some researchers advocate increased spending in this area by both provider and recipient countries to enhance value to both (Moyo, 2003).

More recently security threats and tightened visa requirement have restricted students' ability to travel to provider countries to study (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Australia for example, requires foreign students from certain countries to pay tuition fees up-front and provide evidence of adequate finance for living and medical expenses before being issued with visas. Such restrictions exclude a large percentage of potential students from studying in the North. Added to these are problems with racism and xenophobia in host countries, especially for African students (Teferra & Knight, 2008).

The above challenges have important implications for the value of the trade in higher education to recipient countries. To enhance value, the programs traded must be accessible, available, affordable, relevant, and of acceptable quality (ICDE, 2009; Potashnik & Capper, 1998).

The higher education scene in Africa is examined next.

Higher Education in Africa

While Africa can boast of the world's oldest continuous higher learning centres, these traditional learning centres were destroyed during colonisation (Teferra & Altbach, 2003) and replaced by academic institutions organised according to models in the colonising countries (Teferra & Knight 2008). In many instances, higher education institutions established during the colonial period were aimed at pursuing the interests and policies of the colonizers––even so, they were given little attention (Teferra, 2008). Some of the legacies of colonialism still remain, especially the use of English and French as the primary media for instruction. This section covers the current state of higher education in Africa and the initiatives from various stakeholders to address the associated problems.

Current state of Higher Education in Africa

The structural adjustment (SAP) and economic recovery programs (ERP) of international development agencies such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank in the 1980s and 1990s required African governments to increase participation rates for primary and secondary education, and reduce investment in higher education (Bloom et al., 2006). The premises for these policies were that primary and secondary education provided higher returns, addressed issues of access and equity and was more suited to poverty reduction than higher education. It was felt that Africa had too many graduates in several fields with limited research skills, creating inefficiencies in higher education (World Bank, 2004). Furthermore, tertiary qualified graduates were likely to leave for countries that paid more for their skills (Bloom et al., 2006). Taken together, these factors led to reductions in government investment in higher education in Africa. Following this strategy, donor international organisations also shifted assistance from higher education to primary and secondary education (Samoff & Carroll, 2002). These changes were expected to improve efficiency and quality of higher education, and increase the number of primary and secondary students, in line with Africa's development needs. Instead, the result has been large-scale neglect of higher education in Africa, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Despite having the lowest higher education participation rate in the world (Altbach et al., 2009) SSA countries are unable to cope with the rising demand for higher education fuelled by the expansion of secondary education capacity without a matching increase in tertiary education capacity.

The current contention is that economic development requires balanced emphases on primary, secondary and higher education. Higher education is critical to development of human capital required for: access and use of global knowledge in science and technology, technological and professional skills for development, generation of new knowledge and understanding through research, and productivity improvements. Bloom et al. (2006) note that shortage of the relevant skills means development projects are undertaken at high cost to African countries which must import these resources from the developed world. The added cost of transportation, accommodation and other related expenses increase the overall cost of such resources to African countries over and above the cost to the developed world.

Traditionally, public universities have been the main providers of higher education in Africa, following the public sector orientation inherited from colonial masters (Altbach, 1999). However, these universities are currently unable to meet the growing demand for volume and quality higher education. They face overcrowded lecture halls, poor infrastructure, and large student to teacher ratios. In addition, outdated library facilities, incompetent management, weak student preparation for higher education, rising cost of higher education, stagnating staff salaries that encourage moonlighting, loss of good staff to institutions overseas, and negligible research output have all contributed to lowering the quality of higher education from public universities in Sub-Saharan Africa (Kamba, 2000). Few African universities have a presence among global higher education institutions and are barely mentioned in the league tables that rank global universities.

Lack of resources and high dependence on foreign aid impede development of the higher education sector in Africa towards what is desired by Africans. Bashir (2007, p13) reports that, although the number of African students studying abroad increased by 78 per cent between 1999 and 2004, most of the increase was funded by ODA. Dependence on foreign assistance has encouraged external forces to dominate the dialogues that are shaping higher education on the continent so that the African higher education sector is becoming oriented towards policies favoured by the donor countries (Teferra & Knight, 2008). The higher education trade is predicted to grow significantly but the share of bilateral aid will shrink; a situation that requires African governments to reduce their dependence on foreign aid for higher education development. Furthermore, bilateral aid tends to be tied to students studying abroad which has few short-term benefits to recipient countries and possible negative fiscal and economic effects from the associated skilled labour migration (Bashir, 2007).

Added to problems of lack of resources and dependence on foreign aid, the global bias against Africa, the tendency to ignore African scholarship, and the domination of the means of knowledge production and dissemination by the rich industrialised countries, continue to undermine Africa's effort at building a recognised higher education sector (Knight, 2008). The inability to capitalise on pockets of opportunity, due particularly to the skewed power relationships in the global knowledge market, adds to the problem. In addition, lack of adequate data for tracking institutions and their performance present setbacks to evaluating gaps in the higher education system in Africa and devising strategies to close them.

In the midst of the above predicaments, Africans have attempted a definition of 'African university' with an aim to position it as unique to the universally recognised university institution. Proposed definitions centre on philosophy, or purpose and academic content, with a view to rejecting what is foreign and advocating instead a focus on service to Africa's environment, socioeconomic conditions, and needs (Mthembu, 2004). In an age of convergence in economic orientation and social values, African universities have to become oriented towards trends in global higher education before pursuing uniqueness, by applying global trends to the African context (Mthembu, 2004). Despite the merits of this vision, its realisation is fraught with difficulties, given that African universities evolved from colonization and have always taken the form and substance of similar institutions in their erstwhile colonising nations. Moreover, the recent push by international development agencies to encourage Africa to fit in with global trends in technological development and established market systems, in addition to political upheavals, socio-economic setbacks, rising debt, unfair terms of trade, and net decline in development aid to the continent (Teferra & Knight, 2008), make the search and implementation of unique characteristics in higher education almost impossible.

Response to the Crisis in Higher Education by Stakeholders

Stakeholders with the power to make a difference in the higher education scene in Africa include (but are not limited to) African governments (responsible for higher education policies), international development agencies (which influence higher education policies on the continent through their development programs), representations of governments from developed countries with interest in the policy outcomes as providers, and non-governmental organisations with philanthropic motives. Samoff and Carroll (2002) argue that different players with varying motives confuse policy directions for higher education in Africa. Some are pushing for institutions tailored to Africa's specific needs while external parties advocate conformity with international standards, through the replication of Northern institutions seen as exemplifying these standards (Samoff & Carroll, 2002).

Higher education policies of African governments vary across the continent. Teferra and Knight (2008), in their review of the higher education systems of 11 African countries, note the diversity of approaches adopted to connect higher education institutions to partners within and outside the continent. In countries such as Benin, Cameroon, Madagascar and Tanzania, highly centralised policy-making denies higher education institutions the autonomy to respond internally to labour market requirements and externally to changes in knowledge and technology (Moyo, 2003). Policy responses by African governments to the rising demand for higher education are short-term and include: increasing class sizes and teaching loads; replacing part-time with full-time faculty; and requiring students to pay full or partial tuition fees and living costs which were previously covered by governments.

Altbach et al. (2009) report that tuition fees and living expenses are major barriers to accessing higher education, while social inequities, associated with gender, geographical local and tribal and caste systems exclude certain groups from participating in higher education. Some African governments have responded to the affordability problem by providing scholarships and student grants or loans, but these funding programs have met with limited success due to deep-rooted social attitudes of dependency and fear of debt (Moyo, 2003). The governments of Ghana, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania have taken steps to increase participation by women.

The inability of African governments to fund growth in their public universities has encouraged an open door policy for private providers, with mostly foreign religious and not for profit organisations establishing higher education institutions in Africa. Despite this, Altbach and Knight (2007, p. 297) note that Africa, other than South Africa, has the fewest international and cross-border initiatives compared to North America, Asia Pacific, Europe and Latin America. In addition, Africa accounts for only a small percentage of students in the international higher education market. Strict government regulations and accreditation processes have reduced the number of foreign programs in South Africa (Altbach & Knight, 2007). Bond and Monash universities in Australia are among the few foreign universities with branch campuses in South Africa (Knight, 2007).

In contrast to countries restricting foreign providers, Knight draws attention to the cyber island initiative in Mauritius which, with help of foreign IT firms, is to be developed into a world-class integrated education and training centre with several foreign universities and professional bodies providing local programs at the diploma and certificate levels in specialised fields. Competition from foreign providers should help improve the quality of local providers in the higher education market in Mauritius. This initiative is also seen as effective for curbing the brain drain.

Without appropriate quality assurance and accreditation programs, an open door policy for foreign providers could encourage low quality education at high cost for consumers. Quality assurance programs are critical to development of a competitive higher education sector that contributes to economic development. Materu (2007) finds that the emergence of private providers in Africa has prompted institutions and governments to implement various quality assurance mechanisms to enhance existing programs and regulate new providers. However, only a third of African countries have formal quality assurance programs, varying in scope and rigour, from simple licensing of institutions by a responsible government official to comprehensive system-wide program accreditation and ranking of institutions. Assurance programs for the sector include institutional audits, and program and institutional accreditations, while academic audits and self-assessments are increasingly used for quality improvements within existing institutions (Materu, 2007). Materu identified cost and human capacity requirements as main challenges to effective quality assurance programs in the African higher education sector.

Although not directly targeted at Africa, countries in the North have taken the initiative to develop quality assurance programs of varying rigour to enhance the reputation of their programs in the higher education market. They include the Australian University Quality Agency (AUQA) and the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in the UK, both of which monitor and undertake quality reviews of higher education institutions (Olcott, 2009). Aside these individual assurance programs, regional assurance programs such as the UNESCO/OECD Guidelines for the Quality Provision of Cross Border Higher Education, and the OECD's Internationalisation Quality Review (IQR) assist participating institutions to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses in relation to threats and opportunities in the higher education market and identify future actions for improvement. A similar role was initiated by the Global Alliance for Transnational Education (GATE) in 1996 for the multi-national corporate community, national associations, governments, inter-governmental organisations and higher education institutions (Van der Wende & Westerheijden, 2001). These assurance programs, developed by provider institutions and countries, make no specific provisions for the needs of the African market.

International development agencies have assisted Africa's ailing higher education sector with variously structured aid packages including direct grants, technical assistance, low-interest loans, and partnerships. However, such foreign aid is usually aligned with skills and technology more suited to the needs of the funding countries and therefore discourages African institutions from using local resources to search for tailored solutions to their problems (Samoff & Carroll, 2002). The current focus in foreign aid to the Africa education sector is to develop the sector as a whole and not just the primary and secondary sectors (Heyneman, 1999; Samoff & Carroll, 2002).

A number of distance education programs have been trialled on the continent with varying levels of success. The University of South Africa (UNISA) is the major provider of distance education on the continent (Moyo, 2003). In-country distance education programs remain largely undeveloped in Africa due mainly to lack of government support and funding, and the inability to tailor the programs to specific needs of Africans (Jenkins, 1989; Moyo, 2003). In addition to UNISA's programs, the World Bank launched the African Virtual University (AVU) in 1997, an initiative aimed at providing African countries with world-class education and professional development (Moyo, 2003) with content developed by North-American universities (Samoff & Carroll, 2002). The project uses a combination of satellite and online technologies to transmit video and data resources from partner institutions to several sites

in Africa. Various interactive tools and multimedia resources, including digital libraries, are used for student learning and networking (Moyo, 2003). Success of the AVU project has been undermined by lack of information technology skills, inadequate management structures and policies, non-cohesive teams, and poor telecommunications infrastructure (Amutabi & Oketch, 2003). Some of these difficulties have been resolved by tailoring the project to specific socioeconomic needs of the target students and relocating its management to Africa.

The Partnership of Higher Education on Africa, through the Association of African Universities, has also developed a consortium package to enable Internet access by universities in selected African countries. The aim is to help bridge the digital gap and improve teaching, learning and research (Teferra & Knight, 2008). Other ICT activities adding to higher education development in Africa include the African Journals Online, which provides access to more than 175 journals from 21 African countries, and the Database of African Theses and Dissertations (Knight, 2008).

In the next two sections we provide recommendations for addressing the higher education problems in Africa followed by a conclusion to the paper.

Summative recommendations

The following key points are noted for addressing the African higher education problem:

- African governments must broaden their higher education strategies, shifting emphasis from higher education policies based solely on domestic labour market conditions and higher education systems to one that considers regional and global markets, to avail themselves of opportunities in these markets. In particular, attention must be given to ICT developments and new content delivery methods which can be used to build higher education capacities through co-operative linkages and partnerships with international providers. These will ensure that education meets the required quality standards and are tailored to the human capital needs of African countries. In addition, it will encourage more students to complete their higher education at home and reduce the brain drain.

- Alongside policies aimed at expanding private sector higher education, African government must attend to governance and funding reforms in the public tertiary education sector, moving from protecting obsolete curricula and teaching methods to enabling self-reform in the sector. The aim should be to enhance the quality of their programs so that they are able to compete with the private sector and eventually in the global arena. This is consistent with the views expressed by Bashir (2007).

- Also in support of the position presented by Bashir (2007), relevant priorities must be assigned to various objectives in the higher education reform process. For example, the development of skills to meet labour market requirements should be left to the private sector, while the longer-term education for knowledge acquisition and innovation, such as through postgraduate programs and promotion of science and technology, will require government support and are appropriate for the public sector (Bashir, 2007).

- Appropriate mechanisms must be in place for accountability in the tertiary education sector. These include registration and accreditation programs for new providers as well as quality assurance programs involving monitoring and regular reviews of established institutions to ensure quality standards are upheld.

- Contextualisation of content is one of the key issues that warrant attention of education providers. Language of instruction must also be attended to and may require developing the English language competency of students before a program is offered. International providers need to consider and address the impact on learning from teaching in a language different from the dominant language in the recipient countries before embarking on cross-border offerings to Africa.

- African governments must address equity in higher education access, providing financial support in the form of student loans and scholarships to good students unable to pay for their education. Access to modern technology by potential students also deserves attention, as disparities in access can widen the social equity gap. Affordability and accessibility should be a criterion for evaluating private providers.

- Finally, as pointed out by Knight (2008), African governments can use ICT to tap the talents of migrants and the academic Diaspora to benefit higher education on the continent.

Conclusions

The trade in higher education has grown significantly over the last two decades, driven by demand for greater volume and quality education in middle- and low-income countries whose domestic capacities are inadequate to meet demand, leading to higher education imports, mostly from countries in the North. The integration of global economies, expansion of the global labour market, and skilled labour shortages in the North, have all improved the prospects of employment opportunities, with considerably higher standards of living than are available domestically, for graduates in the South. This situation has encouraged preference for foreign higher education provided within or outside the home country, further fuelling the higher education trade. Amidst these global trends, the higher education sector in Africa remains poorly developed and unable to cope with increasing demand. This is occurring at a time when Sub-Saharan Africa has the lowest higher education participation rate in the world, despite its critical need for trained manpower to support development.

Although the private higher education sector in Africa is growing to fill gaps in supply, growth is hampered by government restrictions and limited affordability and accessibility. Cross-border arrangements involving program mobility hold promise for addressing Africa's growing and unmet demand. Such arrangements will involve the use of ICT to provide students in recipient African countries with similar learning experiences to traditional classroom students in the provider institutions, with curricula tailored to the human capital needs of the recipient countries. The domestic use of programs developed in the North offer attractive solutions to Africa's higher education needs because costs are lower for participants because travel, visa and related costs are minimized or eliminated. While the initial set up costs will be high for providers, it is expected that payback will be short due to high demand.

Despite the benefits, the trade in higher education poses a number of threats to recipient countries such as diminished control over their education systems, intensified brain-drain, widening socio-economic gaps between the rich and poor, lack of focus on national priorities and values, reduced quality of higher education, and homogenization of curriculum. In view of these threats, African countries have taken protectionist positions against the global trade in higher education. Nonetheless, if the trade in higher education is an uncontrollable phenomenon, then African governments must take a more pro-active stance to exploit the potential advantages while safeguarding against the threats. Provider institutions competing for Africa's market must also take steps to ensure their services meet the requirements of governments rather than individuals in the recipient countries.

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