

INTERNATIONALIZATION OF UNIVERSITY EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

A. G. OSSAI, Ph.D

*School of Education,
College of Education, Agbor,
Delta State.*

E. N. NWALADO

*School of Education,
Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba,
Delta State.*

And

H. I. AJUDEONU, Ph.D

*School of Education,
College of Education, Agbor,
Delta State.*

Abstract

Internationalization has to do with the impacting of knowledge, skills and values associated with universal appeal and application. Presently, there is competition among tertiary institutions to internationalize. Nigeria should not be left behind. This paper reviewed recent literature on the prospects and modes of university internationalization. It also reviewed the challenges inherent in internationalizing Nigerian universities. Using four genetic perspectives which indicated the shortcomings inherent in the activities, competencies, ethics and processes in the internationalization of university education, the following recommendations were used to guide Nigerian universities on the part of global relevance; adequate funding, terms of exchange of staff and students, benchmark for academic standard and quality in all universities, communication linkage of all universities, seminars and workshops of international standard, cross-campus research collaboration and developing partnership models where Nigerian academic can partner with their foreign world class counterparts.

Key words: Internationalization, university, staff and students, inter-institutional collaboration.

University is the highest level of educational institution established for the purpose of manpower training, research and community service. It is an educational institution where advanced knowledge and diverse skills are acquired in order to meet up with the high level manpower needs of any nation. It is also seen as an intellectual or academic centre where international standards are set and the nation's high level manpower are produced for all aspects of national development both for present and future generations.

Internationalization is not a new nomenclature in higher education. Universities, though national entities, are recognized as most international institutions even in time of aggressive nationalism.

Internationalization has been one of the most powerful and pervasive forces at work within higher education around the world during the last two decades. With remarkably few exceptions, no corner of the globe or institutional type has proven itself immune to the call to "internationalize" in some fashion. (Altbach, 2010) In this process, practical applications and conceptual understandings of internationalization have evolved significantly, while the overall stakes in the internationalization game have become noticeably higher.

The international activities of universities dramatically expanded in volumes scope and complexity. These activities range from traditional study-abroad programmes, allowing students to learn about other cultures, to providing access to higher education in countries where local institutions cannot meet the demand. Other activities stress upgrading the international perspectives and skills of students, enhancing foreign language programme and providing cross-cultural understanding.

Internationalization is often confused with globalization (Altbach, 2004). Globalization is the economic, political and societal forces pushing 21st century higher education toward greater international involvement Global capital has, for the first time, heavily invested in knowledge industries worldwide, including higher education and advanced training. This investments reflected in the emergence of the knowledge society, the rise of the service sector and the dependence of many societies on knowledge products and highly educated personnel for economic growth.

According to Vaghese (2008), internationalization of education is the imparting of knowledge, skills and values which have universal appeal and application. It involves a shift from producing for national markets to international markets. This implies changing the orientation of courses offered in the domestic universities, which sometimes is referred to as internationalization at home (Varghese, 2008). This may take place without the presence of any foreign provider at home. As distinguished from globalization, with the emphasis on worldwide condition that influence perception of space, mobility of action, the nature of communication and orientation to social interaction, internationalization focuses attention on the international exaction of individual, groups and social institutions to cross national borders in pursuit of social, economic, political or cultural benefits from higher educational institution perception,

Doughlas & Nelson (2012) defined internationalization as a matter of integrating transnational elements into purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education. That is colleges and universities are internationalizing their behavior when they reshape their purposes to attract international students, to deploy their programme across national borders, concentrate on internationally advantageous educational programme niches, restructure work roles or compensation system to recruits, retain or manage employment. The scope of internationalization ranges from traditional study abroad programme taking courses at colleges, universities in other countries through internet or face to face arrangements such as branch campuses or franchise. Other activities include international partnerships, academic programme and research activities that emphasize advancement of international students perspective and skills, promotion of foreign language programme and access to cross-cultural understanding. This paper therefore, attempts to take a critical look at the internationalization of university education in Nigeria from the perspective of prospects and challenges.

Theoretical Framework

The theory of internationalization connotes putting in place a multinational institution with universal goals, vision and objectives that transcend the original boundaries with relevant human and material resources to function across borders. This theory propounded by Buckley and Cason (2007) cited in Uche & Ahunanya (2013) insisted that higher education institutions should adopt 'international strategic management model'(ISMM) in order to understand and control the dictate of the expanded boundaries to be in deep contact with the external environment without disregard to the growth of her internal organizational structure. This theory was originally linked to business thinking as an international requirement to reach most parts of the world with the same business, similar products and services. This could be the original global conceptions as the ideological and philosophical thinking did not have clear cut demarcations from today's internationalization and inter-continentalisation or cross-breeding of resources, human labour, capital/fiscal efforts, transfer of technology, multi-tasking of roles and specializations, extension of programmes as in organized study tours, all types of exchange programmes as well as networking of both ideas, goods and relevant factors. Education is recognized as 'fee riders' product and service. The university sells her public goods which is learning and knowledge to those who become committed to it for private use, for public purposes and for national development. Nigerian higher institutions should therefore embrace internationalization as a strategic model which involves having a critical corporate perception of our institutions with a perfect conceptual key for doing business abroad in order to survive at home. In other words, universities should reach out to gain more in order to attain subsistent and sustainable heights.

Approaches to Internationalization of University Education in Nigeria

Using the four generic perspectives of activity, competency, ethos and process, Knight in Delgado-Marquez, Hurtado-Torres & Bonder (2011) explained the different approaches to internationalization by different researchers, practitioners and higher education institutions. These include:

Activity Approach

This is apparently the most prevalent approach to internationalization of university education in the last century and it is still relevant as the incorporation of international dimension into specific educational activities determines how far the products of the system is globally acceptable. The most prevalent type of activities include international students, development assistance and academic mobility. This centres on categories and types of activities used to describe internationalization such as curriculum, students/faculty exchanges, technical assistance and international students.

Competency Approach

The competency approach is closely related to educational outcomes, values and attitudes of students. This approach focuses on generation and transfer of knowledge that will develop competencies in the personnel of higher education institutions to become more internationally knowledgeable and inter-culturally. Competency emphasizes the development of skills, knowledge, attitudes and values that are important for competition in the global market place. As the emphasis on outcome of education grows, there is increasing interest in indentifying and defining global international competencies.

Ethos Approach

The ethos approach to internationalization according to Ahunanya & Igot (2013) is an attempt to make more explicit in the culture of the institution the international dimension to the delivery of higher education. This approach focuses on establishing an atmosphere, beliefs and distinguishing character that encourages and fosters the development of international and intercultural values and initiatives. Emphasis is on creating a culture or climate on campus which promotes and support international/intercultural initiatives.

The Process Approach

The process approach focuses on the integration of an international and/or intercultural dimension into academic programmes as well as the guiding policies and procedures of an institution. Process approach focuses on policies and procedures put in place to encourage internationalization. It often concerns itself with the international process that are reflected in the teaching, research and community service that go on in the Nigerian higher institutions of learning. This centres on the integration or infusion

of an international or enter cultural dimension into teaching, research and service through a combination of a wide range of activities, policies and procedures. Internationally, the process of lecture delivery has become digitalized resulting in massive online courses.

Prospects of Internationalisation of University Education

Internationalisation of University education in Nigeria and of course in Africa and the world as a whole is of vital importance because of the following benefits derivable from it.

Promotion of international research collaboration:

Internationalisation of University education certainly brings about international research collaboration and cross-fertilization of ideas among institutions and the academics in different institutions in the world. Each coming with its own strength, there is a unique potential for fruitful exchange of ideas which may help solve some common problems in the society.

Promotion of international and intercultural understanding, cooperation and awareness:

Integrating an international dimension into the main functions of University education e.g. staff and student exchange or mobility certainly will lead to understanding of different people's cultures. It is when one understands the cultures of another person that he can better stay and work with him or her in harmony. This therefore brings about peaceful coexistence among different staff and students in different institutions, thereby fostering international peace.

Academic staff development: Collaboration with Universities outside Nigeria, particularly with Universities in other countries within Africa where the resources exist, presents the best approach towards achieving this aim. This implies that staff members can be placed in Postgraduate and training (study fellowship) programmes of the partner institutions to undergo studies for higher degrees or learn new techniques.

The advantages associated with this approach are that:

- The trainees have the chance to work in conditions more or less similar to what they know; there is a greater chance that they will return at the end of their studies.
- It is less expensive

Quality Assurance and Academic Standards: One of the dimensions of inter-institutional collaborations is staff exchange, where staff serves as visiting lecturers to other institutions. Also they serve as external examiners to other institutions other than theirs. They equally go on sabbatical leave and/or leave of absence to other institutions and also serve as examination moderators. The essence of all these, besides the

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economic motivate that is attached to it, is to bring about quality and standards in the University education.

Challenges in the Internationalisation of University Education

In as much as internationalisation of University education should be emphasized because of the enormous benefits that accrue to it, the under-listed factors are also identified as some of the risks and challenges associated with it. These include:

Cost Ineffectiveness

As different countries of the world vary in their levels of socio-political and economic development, so also the Universities in Nigeria, African, and the world in general differ in their revenue generation and funding. Universities in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, lack the economic capacity and requirements to embark on effective, successful, and persistent staff and student exchange programme, with universities outside Nigeria or Africa, due to the huge or increased costs involved.

Brain Drain

A fall out of inadequate funding of Nigerian Universities is the brain drain phenomenon (Ejiogu and Sule, 2012). Brain drain refers to the migration of academics, skilled professionals and high technical manpower away from the Nigerian University system in pursuit of self-actualization. Even young academic refuse to return to the country after their studies abroad; brilliant young graduates opting for careers in more financially rewarding sectors of the economy, rather than pursue higher degrees in preparation for employment as lecturers, scholars and teachers permanently leave the country or do not return after a period abroad. This worrisome situation according to Ejiogu and Sule, (2012), is generally attributable to "push factors" as pitiable and eroding salaries and allowances, derogatorily called "starvation wages; unsatisfactory working conditions, inadequacy of support staff, lack of up-to-date teaching and research facilities, social unrest, and discriminatory appointment and promotion practices. This situation is so alarming that between 1997 and 2009, the number of academic staff decline by 12% (Ejiogu and Sule, 2012). In fact, the continuous brain drain resulting from internationalization staff exchange (sabbatical) and others has left the Universities with less than 48% of its estimated staffing needs achieved. Worst affected in short fall are engineering 73%, medicine 65%, and the sciences 53% (Olufemi, 2000).

Loss of Cultural Identity

As internationalization of universities through staff and student exchange, and inter-institutional collaboration can bring about increased cultural understanding, loss or erosion of cultural identity may also be seen as one of the risks associated with it. It has been observed that some Nigerian wealthy parents who sent their children and wards

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abroad for University education ended up losing their children in prisons abroad. This is unhealthy development. Similarly, internationalisation of University education through staff and student mobility or exchange could bring about erosion of cultural norms, and identity.

There is often no periodic review of institutional structure, academic programmes, and facilities in line with the current global sophistication. At one of her meetings, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities (ASUU, UNILAG Branch) according to Okebukola (2007), deliberated on the need for structural review after which it reasoned that when such criteria is designed and used for assessment of the organizational health of universities, a lot of adjustments will be carried out to ensure balance. Absence of such comparative assessment tool have rendered many universities unfit with obsolete and irrelevant programmes being sold to their immediate environment, and to the country as a whole.

Nigerian universities also battle the expensive incapability to align some courses of study with labour market demand. This is followed by the indiscriminate upsurge in several departments of new courses in a copy-and-paste manner, renaming of courses in various faculties without adjusting content and outlines, hasty floating of centres or boards for new programmes, total lack of conformity to international standard as well as unsellable nature of some courses.

Most universities in Nigeria lack functional local and wide area networks and may therefore, not be part of those dreaming of internationalization. Information-seeking activities of internationalized institutions of learning can be rewarding and enjoyable with such mega dimensional library with properly networked services.

The most pervading of all the challenges to internationalization is the poor capacity of Nigerian tertiary institutions for basic and applied researches. Nigerian universities according to Oyene & Sola (2010) dangle between 16 and 24 percent of national research capacity, hence not contributing enough to national development. Research findings are data base for policy-making, raw materials for production functions of industries, information as feedback to practitioners and it provides the basis for advocacy, even for passing national bills.

Conclusion

Obviously, all institutions of higher education, public and private have evolved into global actors following the trend in other industries. The influence of internationalization on the character and behavior of higher education institutions has become a major theme in recent research. There is competition among world class universities to embrace internationalism. Nigeria should not be left behind for there is

need for her to work together with other parts of the world to address global challenges. This paper reviewed the rationales for internationalization of Nigerian universities, revealing in the process innovations and reforms that may take place in curriculum development, teaching and community service. Using the four generic perspectives of activity, competency, ethos and process, the different approaches to internationalization were explained. Strategies were suggested to overcome the constraints and challenges that prevent universities in Nigeria from becoming univertionalised.

Recommendation

The following have been suggested as recommendations for successful internationalization of Nigerian universities.

1. In order to internationalize the entrance into Nigerian universities, a one-time, online examination programme of global standard should be put in place to encourage foreigners access Nigerian universities with the minimum required qualification.
2. For effective internationalisation of Universities in Nigeria with a focus on staff and students mobility and interinstitutional collaboration, there is need for the authorities of each University to sign a memorandum of understanding on the conditions and terms of the exchange. A stiff punishment should be made to await the person(s) involved, should they fail to honour any aspect of the agreement reached on the memorandum of understanding.
3. Governments should step-up on funding of education, particularly at the University level. If Universities are well funded and the conditions of service are quite attractive, I see no reason why an academic staff who went on sabbatical to any foreign University anywhere in the world would not like to return to his original University after the duration of his sabbatical tenure. Individual Universities are equally hereby admonished to step-up on their internally - generated revenues. This is to ensure provisions of globally acceptable modern teaching-learning facilities in our University system, and also to enhance the welfare of students and the conditions of service of staff.
4. Universities should support staff and student mobility and inter-institutional collaboration (such as international research and conference) as aspects of internalization (because of its enormous benefits) by providing adequate financial resources and personnel to cater for this. There is also the need for a functional and implementable internationalisation policy, strategy and mechanism to be put in place within the institutions.
5. There is the need for Universities in the world to have a benchmark in academic standard and quality. Also there should be a minimum acceptable limit and standards for teaching-learning facilities in any University system in the world
6. Every citizen in every country of the world should imbibe the culture of peace; obedience to on stituted authority, rules and regulations; and discipline. Every University system in the world has a set of stipu8lated rules and regulations that guide

the actions and inaction of its members of staff and students. These rules are meant to bring about orderliness, peace, discipline and achievement of goals and objectives.

7. Communication linkage is a critical factor in the internationalization of higher education as that opens every institution to the larger audience and the wider world. There is therefore the need for the redesigning of the communication lines. E-university will play the magic transformational magic for prompt reach to foreigners and their various forms of educational programmes.

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