INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: CHALLENGES AND PROGRESSIVE APPROACH

Christiana N. Nwadiokwu, Ph.D and Favour E. Nwadiokwu

Abstract

Higher education has profoundly changed in the past two decades, and those involved in the academic enterprise have yet to grapple with the implications of these changes. Academic institutions and systems have faced pressures of increasing numbers of students and demographic changes, demands for accountability, reconsideration of the social and economic role of higher education, implications of the end of the Cold War, and the impact of new technologies, among others. While academic systems function in a national environment, the challenges play themselves out on a global scale. We can learn much from both national experiences and international trends. Ideas and solutions from one country or region may be relevant in another. This paper exposes the challenges and progressive approach to internationalization of higher Education. Some of the challenges include: Effect of demographic changes on the provision of higher education, funding the adverse effect of a deteriorating economy on quality education and the role of universities in the political and cultural changes. Recommendations include: rapid expansion of students' enrolment, finance, research and development, information and communication, equity and access, issue of Braindrain, research development and unemployment.

Keywords: International, Higher Education, Challenges & Progressive Approach.

No Academic institutions worldwide stem from common historical roots and face common contemporary challenges, it is especially appropriate that international dialogue will take place. A comparative and global approach to thinking about higher education benefits everyone but the experience of one country may not be directly relevant to another, yet issues and their solutions touch many nations. This essay has several key aims:

- to highlight issues in higher education that face many countries and about which an international discussion can contribute insights;
- to contribute to the internationalization of higher education through discussion of international initiatives and linking of people and institutions committed to a global perspective and expanded international programs:
- to create a network of colleagues and centers working in the field of higher education worldwide in order to foster ongoing dialogue, communication, and possible collaborative research and
- to link policymakers, key administrators, and the higher education research community in a creative dialogue on the central issues facing contemporary higher education.

Background and Global Perspective

While it may not yet be possible to think of higher education as a global system, there is considerable convergence among the world's universities and higher education system. The medieval European historical origin of most of the world's universities provides a common antecedent. The basic institutional model and structure of studies are similar worldwide. Academic institutions have frequently been international in orientation-with common curricular elements and in the medieval period, a common language of instruction –Latin. At the end of the 20th century, English has assumed a role as primary international language of science and scholarship, including the internet. Now, with more than one million students studying outside their borders, with countless scholars working internationally and with new technologies such as the internet fostering instantaneous communications, the international roots and the contemporary realities of the university are central. (Amabile, 1988).

Higher education systems have also been moving from elite to mass to universal access, as Martin Trow pointed out in the 1960s "In his book higher challenges". In North America, much of Europe, and a number of East Asian countries, academic systems approach universal access, with close to half the relevant age group attending some kind of post-secondary institution and with access increasing availability for non-traditional (mainly older) students. In some countries, however, access remains limited. In china and India, for example, despite dramatic expression, under 5 percent of the age group attends post-secondary institutions. In some countries with relatively low capital income, such as in the Philippines, access is high, while in some wealthier nations, it remains a key point of challenges. Throughout Africa, access is limited to a tiny sector of population. Access is an increasingly important issue everywhere, as populations demand it and as developing economies require skilled personnel.

Demands for access come into conflict with another of the flashpoints of controversy of the present era-funding. Higher education is an expensive undertaking, and there is much debate concerning how to fund expanding academic systems. Current approaches to higher education funding emphasize the need for "users" to pay for cost of instruction, as policymakers increasingly view higher education as something that benefits the individual, rather than as a "public good" where the benefits accrue to society. This new thinking, combined with constrictions on public expenditures in many countries, have meant severe financial problems for academic. These difficulties came at a time when higher education systems are trying to provide expanded access. Higher education's problems have been exacerbated in many of the poorer parts of the world by the idea, popular in the past several decades and stressed by the World Bank and other agencies, that basic education was most cost-effective as a result, higher education was ignored by major lending and donor agencies. Now, higher education is back on the agenda of governments and multilateral agencies just as academe faces some of its most serious challenges.

Academic systems and institutions have tried to deal with these financial constraints in several ways. Loan programs, the privatization of some of the public institutions, and higher tuition are among the alternatives to direct government expenditure. In many parts of the world, including most of the major industrialized nations, conditions of study have deteriorated in response to financial constraints. Enrollments have risen, but resources, including faculty, have not kept up with needs. Academic infrastructures, including libraries and laboratories, have been starved of funds. Less is spent on basic research. Conditions of study have deteriorated in many of the world's best-developed academic systems, including Germany and France. Students have taken to the streets in large numbers

to protest declining budgets and poor conditions for the first time since the 1960s. There has also been a dramatic decline in academic conditions in sub-Saharan Africa and in some other developing areas.

While these trends and the circumstances discussed below vary to some extent from country to country, there is considerable convergence. Academic leaders worldwide worry about the same set of topics. Specific conditions vary from one country to another, and there are certainly major differences between the Netherlands and Mali, (Peter 2006). Yet, solutions from one country may be relevant, at least in terms of suggesting alternatives, elsewhere. For example, there is much interest in Australian ideas concerning a "graduate tax"-a repayment scheme based on postgraduate income. The United States, as the world's largest and in many respects leading academic system, experienced the challenges of universal access first, and American patterns of academic organization are of considerable interest elsewhere.

We live in a period of rapid change in higher education, a period when we can learn much from the experience of others. In short, higher education has gone global but with a variety of accents. These global concerns or issues are actually not discrete topic areas. They are better understood as issue clusters. Each of the following are actually related concerns that are increasingly difficult to isolate and manage in a reductionist manner.

Challenges and Progressive Approach

As the present century draws to a close, social pressures and the specific requirements of the labor market have resulted in an extraordinary diversification in universities and in programs of study. University education has not been exempted from the force and urgency with which educational reform is politically advocated as a response to the economic imperatives. Universities no longer have a monopoly on higher learning. In this regard, it is imperative that the university in Africa continues to demonstrate its relevance to local problems. In doing this it must be both the repository and creator of knowledge; and it must become the principal instrument for passing on accumulated experience, cultural and scientific, for socioeconomic development.

(a) Rapid expansion

The main pressure being put on universities in Africa today include rapid expansion in student enrollment despite dwindling financial provision. The pace of expansion over the past 20 years has been enormous, as evidence by the number of institutions of higher learning especially in Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania. The number of profession faculties and departments in all universities also showed a corresponding increase in sub-Saharan Africa Uneso/World Bank (2000).

The demand for higher education is also illustrated by the number of African students seeking to attend universities in the United Kingdom, the United States, and India. While the expansion enabled training of much-needed manpower in the earlier days, the current growth exceeds the capacity of African economies to meet the high demand for university education. Strategies to cope with the expansion problem must therefore be sought.

(b) Enrollment

Expansion in enrollments has enabled university education to move from elite to mass access: as a result, universities in Africa have become more and more open. The elitism observed among the pre-independence graduates-"School Certificates talking only to graduates and graduates only to God" (Ishumi 1994, 63)-is no longer present. The geometric rise in number of students

enrolled in universities in Africa is best illustrated by the situation in Kenya. There, enrollments in public universities rose from a mere 400 students in 1964, at the time of independence, to slightly over 41,000 students in 1997. Due to the population expansion, the demand for university education far exceeds the capacity of the public universities. Nearly 150,000 students take the national examinations at end of secondary School. Of this number, about 80,000 apply for university admission. Nearly 30,000 candidates meet the minimum university entry requirement.

The maximum capacity according to African Union (2006) in the public universities is 10,000. This works out to be about 7 percent of those who complete secondary school education. Private universities mainly by religious groups fill the gap left by the public universities and in part meet the demand for tertiary education. Two problems that the private institutions seem to be precipitating are encouraging moonlighting by professors and lecturers from the public universities and contributing by the imbalance between science and arts-based programs. Whereas public universities have reduced this imbalance to a ratio of 45:55, private universities are reversing this trend by concentrating their course offerings on arts-based courses (Global Education Digest, 2003).

(c) Equity and access

Regrettably, women have not benefited proportionately from the dramatic expansion of higher education. The proportion of women in African universities is as low as 20 percent in several countries Ngur (1987). The low percentage of women's participation shows that the continent is underutilizing more than 50 percent of its available human talent. In Kenya, despite the enormous expansion explained above, inequalities persist in access for female students from the arid and semiarid parts of Kenya Ojobo (2008).

The Joint Admissions Board-the board that deals with university admission in Kenya-has created special criteria to address this problem (Commission for Africa, 2004). African universities must understand that the empowerment of women through education would contribute to all areas of development and determine to a large extent the pace of development on the continent. Universities face the challenges of ensuring the participation of women in higher education both as students and professionals. Universities in Africa must offer an environment in which women can function effectively.

(d) Higher education finance:

Expansion of student numbers in African universities has been achieved without a proportionate rise in the resources available to higher education. Universities face the task of raising the founds that will enable the institutions to meet the demand for the expansion and improvement of educational opportunities. As a result, most universities have experienced funding crises over the last decade. In Africa, this is partly due to structural adjustment programs, partly due to policies that encourage free tertiary education, and partly due to poor financial management practices.

According to Tetty (2006). To meet this challenge, Kenya, for example, has established the Commission of Higher Education, which coordinates policies on university education; introduced payment of tuition and accommodation fees by students; and established the Students Loans Board to assist students from poor social backgrounds. Financial constraints have led the universities to introduce school-based programs for teachers (at Kenyatta University) and parallel degree programs (private) at the University of Nairobi and Makerere University in Uganda Devesh (2008). These programs enable universities to raise extra funds. Universities must also learn to use existing

resources more efficiently and find cheaper ways of operating. Involvement of the private sector in financing higher education could also be intensified.

The nonperforming economies of African countries have not only affected the operation of local universities but have also greatly reduced the migration of students from Africa to universities in Europe and America. In a world that is fast moving toward globalization, this could be a dangerous trend for Africa.

(e) The issue of brain drain

The loss of talented staff-brain-drain has become one of the critical issues facing African Universities. In the past, qualified staff would not return to their home institutions after obtaining higher degrees from universities abroad. In recent years, African universities have watched qualified staff move to other African Universities, especially in the south. Studies have shown that it is the highly trained and experienced staff who leave in search of greener pastures. African universities face the serious problem of retaining their trained staff through intellectual and monetary incentives. In the 21st century, the issue of brain drain must be addressed because it creates a continuing need for staff development and has negative effect on training and research -World Bank (2002).

(f) Information and communication technology

Information technology is the science of collecting, storing, processing, and transmitting information. The above tasks are accomplished through computer networking, which has spread rapidly in sub-Saharan Africa during the last decade. As a result, most African nations have established connectivity through computer networks. However, universities in Africa face serious constraints related to the cost of using computers as a means for information exchange. In 1996, the World Bank came up with the concept of the African Virtual University (AVU). AVU is a concept of distance education, which uses a technological mode of instructional delivery. The main objectives of AVU are to improve the quality and relevance of science, engineering, and business instruction in sub-Saharan Africa; raise the enrollment levels in these areas; and support and encourage Arica universities to develop, on a competitive basis, a curriculum that could be broadcast to other African countries. AVU is currently implemented in six Africa countries: Kenya, Zimbabwe, Uganda, Zanzibar, Ethiopia, and Ghana. Several other countries will soon join the project.

The AVU project is perhaps the only project in Africa that enhances international cooperation in higher education at the regional level (African) and a global level, by collaborating with institutions-mainly in the United States and Canada. For the participating universities, the AVU project has helped to solve one of the major problems facing researchers and scholars in African universities: namely, Lack of up-to-date journals and accessibility to information from other libraries.

The digital library is a giant step forward for these universities. For example, Kenyatta University, in Kenya, where the AVU project first started, is currently able to access more than 1,700 journals through the AVU digital library, and this number is destined to grow to over 2,400 journals. In the world today and more so in the 21st century, development is and will become increasingly dominated by the new forces of modern technology. Universities must participate and benefit from the emerging science and technology revolution. Unless African universities take up the challenge, they face the prospect of becoming marginalized.

(g) Research and development

Research is one of the principal missions of the university. From the early 1960s, research was viewed as a tool for teaching and was mainly undertaken by foreign professors. In the 1970s and 1980s, the volume of research from universities grew steadily and was increasingly being undertaken by African scholars. In addition, a steady build-up of research capacity was achieved by most African universities in the 1970s Council of European Union, (2010) In Kenya, for example, units dealing with research were established within universities-such as the Bureau of Educational Research at Kenyatta University and the Institute of Development studies at Nairobi University. However, in the 1990s, research at African Universities started to decline due to lack of funds among other reasons.

Decline in institutional research reduces the ability of universities to acquire and use new knowledge to play an authoritative leadership role with respect to policy issues in various sectors of development. In the 21st century, African universities must put more emphasis on research and make a deliberate effort to facilitate training, engage in research, and disseminate findings. This will help build the much-needed intellectual capacity in research.

(h) University education and unemployment

The population explosion, expansion of student enrollments, the types of degree programs offered, and the poor economic situation in most African counties have all contributed to high levels of unemployment among university graduates. In most universities in Africa, university graduates in the arts and humanities are in oversupply, while other professions are undersupplied. Universities in Africa must ensure that their degree programs have the potential to get graduates employed.

Universities must also prepare students to respond to growing opportunities for self-employment. This requires reviewing the programs and methods of teaching and making them responsive to market demands. In Kenya, most universities are attacking the unemployment problem by introducing unemployment programmes of University Education and Unemployment. Students are also encouraged to equip themselves with the necessary skills (e.g. with computers) to make themselves more versatile.

Conclusion

Strategy for tackling the unemployment problem is to intensify the links between the university and the private sector. Few universities in Africa have taken the initiative to establish such links. Most of the training provided is thus not based on the needs of industry. Links and partnerships with the private sector can provide opportunities for employment and hence active participation in economic and educational development.

Recommendations

For effective internalization of Higher Education in Africa, the following recommendations are made as follows:

1. There should be innovative thinking and new strategies as essential guides to future educational provision and practice;
2. Government should improve evaluation and accreditation systems, review of programs to make them more responsive to societal needs;

3. There should be information on management of higher education, enhancement of gender equity, promotion of university linkages with the private sector, and involvement in policy analysis through research;
4. Higher education should require more effective utilization of new information and communication technologies. Universities in Africa need to review their missions and come up with specific strategic plans for the 21st century, based on each university's unique situation, as well as national and global issues affecting universities.

References

African Union (2006). *The Second decade of education for Africa* (2006-2010). Addis Ababa.

Amabile, T.M. (1988). *A model of creativity and innovation in organizations.* Greenwhich, CT: JAI Press.

Council of European Union. (2010). Joint progress report of the council and the Commission on the implementation of the 'Education and training 2010 work programme'. *Official Journal of the European Union* C117/111.

Commission for Africa (2004). Our common Interest: *Report of the Commission for Africa.* Pp. 450.

Devesh, K. (2008). Beyond the ABCs: Higher Education and developing countries. Working paper number 139. *Center for Global Development.* pp.109

Global Educational Digest (2003; 2004; 2006; 2007). *http://www.unesco.org.*

Ishumi, A. (1994). *Thirty years of learning: International development research center.* Ottawa, Canada.

Martin, T. (1960). *Higher Education Challenges.* New York Oxford University Press.

Ngur, N. (1987). "Women and Development in Education in Nigeria" Paper Presented at the seminar on women studies, university of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Ojobo, A. J. (2008) "Education: A catalyst for women empowerment in Ethiopia vol. 4 No. 1. Nigeria" *Ethiope Journal of Education and Science*, Addis Ababa.

Peter .M. (2006). Revisioning, Africa's Tertiary Education in the transition to a knowledge economy. South Africa. *http://www.ifoonet/Economicr/Africa Tertiary Education. Pdf.*

Tetty, W. (2006). *Staff retention in African Universities: Elements of a Sustainable strategy.* Washington D.C., the World Bank.

Unesco/World Bank (2000). Higher Education in Developing countries: Peril and Promise. *The task force on higher Education and society.* World Bank.

World Bank (2002). Constructing Knowledge Societies. *New Challenges for tertiary education.* Pp. 236 Washington D.C., the World Bank.