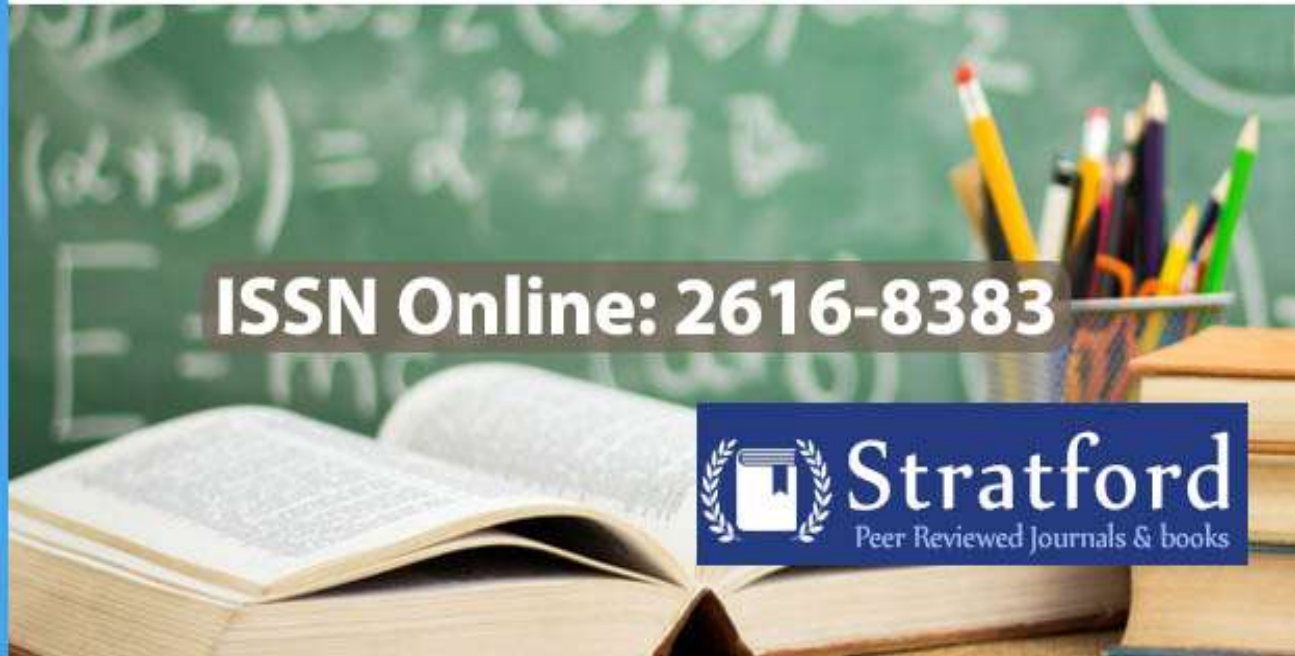


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Globalization and Higher Education in Africa (A Review of Literature)

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Abstract

The knowledge industry is credited for accelerating the emergence of global societies where national peculiarities are growingly being replaced by a homogenized global culture. Both theory and research attest that knowledge and innovation is the seedbed of globalization, a widely entrenched concept that has become a typical model of socio-cultural and economic development of the 21st Century. The notion of globalization presents similar and dissimilar opportunities and challenges for communities in different contexts. An awareness of these challenges and opportunities has been at the heart of regional, national and institutional response to globalization. The move towards a Knowledge economy brings to the fore the place of education in any discourse on globalization. Higher education systems (HE) are particularly inextricable themes. Globalization in HE encompasses those forces that push HE systems towards common values, models and structures at regional, continental and global levels. These systems do not only drive and ride on globalization. They are also subject to globalization as evidenced in extant literature.

Keywords: *Higher Education, globalization, harmonization, accreditation*

1.0 Globalization

Globalization encompasses the widening and deepening worldwide interconnectedness, interdependence and convergence of technologies, ideologies, knowledge and information, values, policies, and procedures among nations (Knight & Woldegiorgis, 2017). It depicts the increasing socio-economic interdependence among countries and their organizations/institutions as reflected in the flow of resources including goods and services, financial capital, knowledge, innovation and technology across borders (Hitt, Ireland & Hoskisson, 2009). It has also been conceptualized as the integration of economies via movements of goods, capital, ideas, and labor (Bloom, 2006). Viewed as a process, globalization entails the cultural, political, economic, and technological meeting and mixing of people, ideas, and resources across local, national, regional, and international borders. This process is portrayed as having increased in intensity and scale from the late 20th century to the present time (Jackson, 2016).

Globalization has also been equated to the strategy of approaching worldwide markets with standardized products and services. Such markets are commonly created by end-users, who prefer low-priced standardized goods and services, and by international corporations that use worldwide operations to compete in local markets (Pearce & Robinson, 2005). The central idea in

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globalization is convergence and interdependence of worldwide communities. This has primarily been made possible by advancement in science and technology. Other factors have also contributed to this entrenched and increasing global convergence and interdependence. The move towards geo-social, political and economic cooperation among world regions such as Africa, Europe, Asia and North America is one such factor. The gradual reduction of tariff barriers and other obstacles to free trade worldwide is another. Advancement in science and technology has also eased and speeded up flow of knowledge and technology, and enhanced diffusion of cultures and ideologies across borders. Of significant interest also, is the competitive advantage obtainable from operating in low-cost economies compared to traditional bases. Important too is that emerging cross-cutting issues such as terrorism, pandemics, environmental degradation and global warming, and proliferation of arms have brought the world to a common discourse.

2.0 Précis of Effects on Higher Education Systems

Globalization has far-reaching effects. It presents common similar and dissimilar opportunities and challenges for communities in different contexts. The global adoption of knowledge development as the central tool for poverty reduction coupled with the move towards a knowledge economy (KE) where economic growth and competitive advantage rest upon intangible assets such as knowledge, skills and innovation potential have shifted global focus from the traditional factors of production: land, capital and labour (Wangare, 2015). Disruptive technologies have so replaced, obsoleted and revolutionized traditional industries and institutions that they have threatened the livelihood of entire communities. By merging many local, national and regional markets into one borderless global market, globalization has not only presented opportunities for income generation but also compounded the competitive pressures faced by individuals, institutions and societies. An awareness of the resultant challenges and opportunities has been at the heart of National and institutional response to globalization.

2.1 Globalization and Education

The move towards a KE brings to the fore the place of education in any discourse on globalization. Higher education systems (HE) are particularly inextricable themes. These systems, according to Knight and Woldegiorgis (2017), are both objects and agents of globalization. The critical role of HE as an agent of globalization is in developing knowledge, skills and mindsets; capabilities- so to speak, which drive the globalization agenda. Both theory and research attest that knowledge and innovation are the roots and mainstay of globalization. HE trains manpower, which spawns innovation and drive competitiveness in a knowledge based global economy.

The convergence of HE structures; the growing mobility of students and professionals across borders; the existence of regional quality assurance frameworks and their agencies; and the standardization of programmes and curricula; give credence to HE systems as agents of globalization in the sense that they facilitate and accelerate the process of interdependence. Simultaneously, as objects of globalization, HE systems, ideologies, policies, institutions, curricula, pedagogy and assessment are increasingly being transformed by globalization. In retrospect, HE and indeed education as we know it today, is arguably a facet of globalization whenever education is treated as an integration, synthesis and diffusion of cultures and ideologies across nations.

2.2 Manifestation of Globalization in Higher Education

Globalization in HE encompasses those forces that push HE systems towards common values, models and structures at regional, continental and global levels. Knight and Woldegiorgis (2017) model globalization along four approaches: internationalization, liberalization (entrepreneurization, according to King, Marginson & Naidoo, 2011), universalization and de-territorialization. Each of these approaches has disparate impact on HE systems singly and collectively.

Internationalization is characterized by national institutions assuming international standards. This approach has a long history in HE; arguably even before the adoption and large scale uptake of ISO certification (International Organization for Standardization) in HE management. Internationalization is thus HE institutional response to globalization. HE institutions may initiate bilateral and multilateral relations across borders; recruit international students; and pursue education policy reforms to meet international standards among other strategies. When globalization is modeled along liberalization, the focus is to promote increased trade across the globe. King, Marginson and Naidoo (2011) however tie internationalization to liberalization and advance the view that internationalization is mainly based upon the emphasis on higher education as an economic investment, and on universities as quasi-commercial entities rather than public organizations rendering services for the common good. In this case, the knowledge industry is regarded as a global business with as much potential as any other. HE thus opens up to the market forces of supply and demand (albeit not without regulations). Concerted efforts are directed to enhancing ease of movement of people and capital in higher education services among different countries. The aim is to facilitate cross-border, online and distance education across nations.

On a different note, rather than adapting to the pressures visited upon social entities by globalization, HE network systems pro-actively promote and spread their own significant educational policy values, models and experiences to other parts of the world in order to shape and influence policy process of others through a process of universalization. The diffusion of the Bologna Process in Africa through the African Union Strategy for the Harmonization of Higher Education Programmes (AU-HEP) is a case in point. The European Union (EU) has mainly promoted the Bologna process in Asia, Latin America and Africa through funding and technical support. Universalization is seemingly thus the antithesis of internationalization in that while internationalization is an adaptive process that entails importing internationally accepted best practices, universalization aims at diffusing best practices in the form of policy values, models and experiences to other parts of the world in order to shape and influence policy process of others as per the interest of promoters (King et al., 2011; Knight & Woldegiorgis, 2017). The aim is to propagate the emergence and adoption global policy.

Another proactive approach to globalization in HE is modeled along a process of De-territorialization. This entails delegation of national sovereignty (territory) to regional/international body. This is in tandem with the growing role of regional and international organizations in dealing with various socio-economic and political issues on behalf of sovereign countries. For instance, EU Commission (EUC) and the Bologna Secretariat are charged with spearheading European higher education reforms and creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Similarly, the African Union Higher Education (AU-HE) Initiatives champion harmonization of African higher education systems. Globalization of HE has thus changed the context of HE policies from a national to an international process. The issues of regulation of

student mobility, employability of graduates, transferability of credits, comparability of qualifications, and concerns for quality and relevance are no longer the exclusive domain of a single state (Goujon, Haller & Kmet, 2017).

Table 1: Comparison of the Bologna Process & the AU-Higher Educ. Harmonization Strategy

Bologna Process (1999)	AU-HE Harmonization Strategy (2007)
Recognition of qualifications through common framework of readable and comparable degrees.	Recognition of qualifications through the development of Pan-African QA and Accreditation Framework.
Mobility of students and researchers.	Promote intra-Africa mobility of students & academics.
European dimension in quality assurance, with comparable criteria and methods.	Co-operation in quality assurance through implementation of African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM).
European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) - compatible credit systems also covering lifelong learning activities.	Credit transfer and accumulation system (CATS).
Creating European Higher Education Area (EHEA.)	Creating African Higher Education and Research Space (AHERS).

Source: Goujon, at al. (2017).

Clearly, globalization and increased pressure from competition have compelled HE to institute changes that have impacted the quality of education. Demands for transferability of students and educators, and trade in higher education have compelled international institutions to operate offshores schools and campuses. Expansion in ICT in HE has been the chief vehicle for cross border, distance and online education. Eased mobility, and the expansion of cross border education have at the same time raised concern for quality, relevance, recognition of qualifications, transferability of credits and regulation of trade in higher education (Knight & Woldegiorgis, 2017). These concerns have generated policy discourse among governments, higher education institutions and experts; and spurred the push for standardization of education systems to enhance comparability.

3.0 Regional Systems of Accreditation and Programmes

Simply stated, accreditation is the process by which an association or agency evaluates an educational institution or programme of study and formally recognizes it as having met and satisfied, or exceeded, certain predetermined requirements and criteria or standards of educational quality (Hassan, 2014). It is an evaluative decision made by a recognized accrediting agency/institution that a particular school or university or specialized program complies with the standards of membership of the accrediting body (Skipper, 2017). Essentially, accreditation is a voluntary process by which HE institutions demonstrate to each other, employers and licensing agencies, that their credits and degrees meet minimum standards. It is a recognized tool for self-regulation of the higher education industry.

Accreditation plays a critical role in quality control in higher education (Hassan, 2014; Skipper, 2017; & Hayward, 2006). Accredited institutions gain national, regional and international recognition not only for having achieved standards of quality but also for demonstrating a commitment to continuous quality improvement. Accreditation enhances credit transferability and ensures even-handed treatment of transfer students between schools or colleges. This way, the reciprocity of recognition of qualifications and facilitation of mobility of academic personnel are ensured.

Accreditation provides mechanisms for governments to regulate higher education particularly in the face of liberalization of HE. It protects the public from fraudulent or substandard tertiary education providers by providing for licensure in professional fields like accounting, medicine, law, education and engineering. In addition, it sets the minimum standards for higher education institutions. In so doing, it enhances employability and labour mobility by way of instilling employer confidence in educational credentials. Accreditation is also commonly used as an eligibility criterion, by public authorities and others, in awarding grants or other financial support, including student aid/loans. More often than not, it upholds the unity of the professions and disciplines by bringing together practitioners, teachers and students in an evaluative activity directed at improving professional preparation and professional practice. Institutions also benefit from accreditation in terms of the value of the external perspective provided by peer reviews.

Regional systems of accreditation are the offshoots of regional and sub-regional frameworks for socioeconomic policy cooperation among nations in close proximity. The policies were primarily aimed at spurring economic growth and development within regions of interest (Hayward, 2006; & Knight; Woldegiorgis, 2017). Likewise, regional systems of accreditation are geared towards fostering comparability of degrees and to encourage mobility between institutions within the same region. The Pioneer of regionalization in HE is the European Union's Bologna Process of 1999 spearheaded by France, Germany, Spain and Great Britain. In Africa, similar initiatives date back to 1980 with the Arusha Declaration which aimed at bringing together diverse and disparate higher education systems in Africa. This was however only actualized much later through the AU-HE harmonization strategy of 2007.

There are also sub-regional co-operations in HE like the Inter-university Council of East Africa (IUCEA) and the Africa and Malagasy Council for HE (CAMES). Both IUCEA { comprising five (5) countries), and CAMES {comprising nineteen (19) countries} bring together representatives from member countries, subject matter specialists, professionals, employers, labour unions and a wide array of other relevant stakeholders to discuss and develop minimum quality standards. Due to this participative and consultative approach, both agencies have high buy-in among members since concerns for individual member countries are addressed. Countries making up IUCEA and CAMES then ensure, through quality assurance at national and institutional level; that the minimum standards set at the sub-regional level through the facilitation of IUCEA and CAMES are adhered to. Sub-Regional cooperation safeguards the quality of HE at a time when incremental growth in enrolment in higher education is presently registered throughout the continent. Again sub-regional cooperation helps cut the cost of accreditation which often involves site visits.

Institutional accreditation focuses on the institution as a whole while program accreditation focuses on academic and professional programs. The processes of accreditation for both include peer reviews, site visits, and a report. The assessments involve judgment about quality, capacity,

structures, outcomes, and the need for improvement. Accreditation use externally set standards (external to the institution); unlike audits which use standards set by the institution itself.

4.0 Harmonization of Higher Education Systems in Africa

In order to align itself to the forces of globalization and secure itself a space in HE in the global economy, Africa has embarked on a harmonization strategy for its HE systems. Generally speaking, Africa as a whole has had disparate systems of higher education which limited the comparability of the quality of education offered across the region. Harmonization implies the agreement, synchronization and coordination of education systems to strategically develop and strengthen the capacity of HE institutions to respond simultaneously to the educational and employability needs of populations. The value of harmonization is in the trust and confidence, produced by consensual agreement concerning higher education (Ramdoo, 2015). The rationale for harmonization is based on the belief that such an initiative will help foster integration through consolidation of African systems of education. Harmonization is thus geared towards arriving at common grounds concerning HE. Such consolidation will offer assurance of the quality of education provided against locally, regionally and eventually internationally agreed upon benchmarks of excellence

Africa has a long history of HE harmonization initiatives. Before and soon after independence, EA, for instance, had a common curriculum provided through established regional organizations and institutions. The East African National Examination Council ensured standardization and quality assurance of basic education, while the University of East Africa served the region's HE needs. Such cooperation provided for sharing opportunities amongst the people of East Africa (EA) as well as their mobility. The break-up of the East African Community in 1977 regrettably led to fragmentation of HE initiatives, bred educational disparities and ultimately created institutional barriers.

With the adoption and operationalization of AU-Higher Education Harmonization Strategy, a consolidation of HE in Africa is within reach. Among the objectives of the strategy are: to bridge the gap between disparate educational systems in Africa towards a definitive African higher education space; provide an integrated platform for harmonization initiatives at regional and continental level; provide a framework for the development of effective quality assurance mechanisms which ensures that African education institutions become an increasingly dynamic force in the international HE arena; and to work in collaboration with the European Commission and the Association of African Universities, to implement the AU Executive Council's Decision on establishing a continental Accreditation Agency for higher education: the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (AU, n.d).

5.0 Weighting HE Globalization Initiatives in Africa

Harmonization initiatives for HE in Africa have been faced with a number of challenges which must be taken into account when assessing successes and non-successes; and when measured against the harmonization objectives outlined by the African Union. In assessing the status of implementation of its 2011-2016 strategic plan, IUCEA (2016) highlights some of these challenges. The majority of universities in Africa for instance lack financial independence which limits their ability to institute effective quality assurance mechanisms. For a long time now, to cite example, there have been reports of deep financial crises facing Kenya's major institutions of higher learning to the extent that the government has come under pressure from the World Bank

and the International Monetary Fund to institute radical measures as a turnaround strategy (Guyuyu, 2021).

Financial constraints particularly limit the ability of HE institutions to hire peer reviewers from across the globe. Programme accreditation particularly places a huge financial burden on individual institutions. This is compounded by high costs of reviews. Effective Quality assurance depends on availability of highly qualified faculty members and administrators. A scarcity of outstanding faculty and professionals who can serve as peer reviewers has adversely been cited as a major limitation (Knight & Woldegeorgis, 2017). Again, such experts need to be accepted as neutral persons to the review process.

Political partisanship in appointments of leadership and faculty and in accreditation of institutions and programmes of study is also not uncommon in the continent. This jeopardizes the meritocracy advocated by various African quality assurance networks; defeats accountability; and hampers pursuit and enforcement of regionally agreed upon quality assurance guidelines. It should also be borne in mind that H.E institutions across Africa differ in terms of ownership, size, stage of growth, historical background and resource endowment (King et al., 2011). These, among other factors, must be given due regard when assessing the successes of H.E harmonization initiatives as envisioned by the African Union.

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