

Conclusion

Constellations of Research, Innovation, and Internationalisation in Africa

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1. Introduction

African higher education has been experiencing tremendous growth for the past decade and this has resulted in the growth of research and innovation. The phenomenon of internationalisation has also grown tremendously in Africa as almost all nations and institutions are striving to develop one international component or another. National governments are increasingly paying more attention to higher education and increasing their investments in the same. This has created a new power dynamic in the higher education arena in Africa as some players have been more influential than others. Henderson (2015) argues that the higher education section is currently experiencing waves of internationalisation and globalisation, and researchers across the continent need to explore these phenomena so as to provide lenses with which we can try to describe and analyse what is happening in this rapidly shifting higher education terrain. Henderson continues that the shift in the balance of power we have witnessed and are currently witnessing, reflects both the provision and quality of higher education on the continent or regions of the continent outside of the traditionally dominant regions of the global North. African higher education is reasserting herself in the global higher education landscape and by so doing redefining its own path in the global stratosphere. The calls

for the decolonisation of higher education across Africa testify to this.

2. Postures on research

Thompson and Walsham (2010) in their analysis of literature on disciplinary research in developing countries like those in Africa unravelled four thematic concerns: first amongst them is the over-concentration or focus on the institutional and/or inter-institutional research context. This means much research on the continent still focusses on the university where the research was conducted, or on multiple universities, neglecting the country or the continent as a whole. The second is the concentration on design and/ or implementation of systems and approaches in a specific context. While design and implementation are important, the scope of the same also matters and this dictates the replicability of the same in other contexts. The third is where decision-making is located with regards to the purpose and shape of technology as it occurs in the marketplace. With the complicated nature of power dynamics across Africa, as well as the top-down approach with which most universities operate, decision-making will always be one-way; while the study of this can be very enlightening, it is also limiting. The fourth is the focus on engagement with other researchers and practitioners. Responding to this, Thompson and Walsham (2010, p. 113) argue that

“in contrast, we argue ... that aims to pursue a ‘developmental’ agenda needs to broaden, first, from an institutional to a global research frame to encompass a myriad of actors and their interests; second, from a focus on ‘point’ design and implementation to a wider critique that includes broader institutional, regulatory, and political infrastructures; and third, from examining... initiatives from a market-driven perspective to an engagement in strategic, policy-level debate about the transformative potential of education within broader developmental agendas. Finally, a ‘developmental’ ... agenda calls for a committed engagement with literature, researchers, and practitioners across a range

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of disciplines, implying a shift in the way in which ... research is planned and conducted”.

The fourteen chapters in this book discuss a myriad of issues with some being contextual in scope, while others are continental. Nevertheless, the drive to enhance research, innovation, and internationalisation on the continent continuous.

3. Postures on internationalisation

Internationalisation is increasingly gaining ground in the African higher education landscape with more and more national governments developing policies to guide the process of internationalisation on the continent. Writing about internationalisation on the African continent, Singh (2010, p. 271) argues that “African higher education has not only been a simple object of the internationalisation ideologies of others but has also developed a variety of accommodative and imitative behaviours which shift the epistemological gaze beyond the continent”. This means that while the continent has been copying, it has also been working to develop its own approaches and strategies to drive the internationalisation process. The conversations and debates pinpointed in some of the chapters of this book attest to that. Carmody (2017) supports this when he argues that Africa-to-Africa investment at all levels accounted for about one-fifth of all new foreign investment projects in Africa and this cut across different sectors. Beyond this, Africa-to-Africa internationalisation (be it academic mobility, curriculum internationalisation, medium of instruction, research and collaborations or partnership, etc) has grown tremendously in the past decade reflecting the substantial and diverse nature of African-originating foreign direct investment as opposed to the more ‘traditional’ partners who come from the global North and parts of the global South to focus primarily on resource extraction. While the scope of internationalisation on the continent is increasingly gaining ground, the process of internationalisation itself has been varied and far-reaching.

The debates on what constitutes internationalisation as well as how internationalisation should unfold has not made the conversation very easy. However, easy or not, the process is unfolding, and Africa is gradually becoming a partner with a voice, and not participating by omission as the case might have been in the past, but participating by contributing in the global sphere.

4. Postures on innovation

Smit, Williamson, and Padayachee (2013) argue that innovation does not necessarily directly consist of or is not a part of giant spaces of international advancements and ground-breaking accomplishments but consist of approaches or models which are new to the situation wherein they have been planned and engineered for the purpose of improvements. It is about reconfigurations or new configurations of current knowledge in applied contexts, with new context-oriented solutions emerging as innovation. Silver (2010) adding to this argues that what we understand as innovation is heavily dependent on where we find ourselves and why it (what we call innovation) is happening in our organisations, institution and or systems. Within the higher education arena, the innovator can be the institution, a group of researchers, an individual, a team or a committee, funding agency or a government department. Innovation in the higher education sphere is far-reaching and can range from novel technological inventions with patents, to teaching and learning practices or innovative research approaches, right down to theoretical development. Elrehail, Emeagwali, Alsaad, and Alzghoul (2018) add that there are several factors affecting innovation in higher education institutions and the response of different institutions to these challenges is what most often leads to innovation. To this end, innovation is the result of applied information and knowledge in certain situations and circumstances to generate new results. Silver (2010) concludes that there are several dimensions to innovation. The first is what he refers to as individual and group innovations, and this is often classroom- or course-

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related, and often borne out of a quest to address student needs or professional concerns. This can result in new teaching methods, curriculum practices, curriculum matters and responsibilities, and assessment strategies amongst others. It could also be geared towards student-led seminars, and laboratory simulations. The second is disciplinary initiatives and this is sponsored by professional or disciplinary-related bodies or subject associations or interdisciplinary associations who focus on informal or formal collaborations amongst subject specialists across institutions. The third is innovations responding to the educational media and this takes advantage of new technologies to develop new solutions to old and new problems, or developing technological ware such as software, e-mail, open or resource-based learning materials etc. The fourth, he says, is curriculum-prompted innovations directed towards solving the challenges experienced in courses or the semester as a whole and this can range from new assessment procedures to new content or teaching approaches and theoretical underpinnings. The fifth is institutional initiatives which includes, but is not limited to, policies and decisions of many kinds relating to the same concerning information technology, work-based or resource-based learning and staff development processes; new structures, including educational development units and similar bodies, teaching and learning committees, and the appointment of senior management to oversee the developments (pro-vice chancellors, deans). The last but one is systemic initiatives which include, amongst other things, government creation of new institutions or the reconfiguration of old institutions in various ways to create different kinds of institution like Open Universities, green fields universities, the funding of system-wide change (Enterprise in Higher Education, work- and skills-related developments); national agency schemes to extend the use of computers and educational technology; national pressure groups (Royal Society, Higher Education for Capability, Open Learning Foundation). The last is systemic by-products which come from within higher education institutions resulting from system-wide policies and practices (Teaching Quality Assessment, changes in student funding).

5. African higher education in Practice

The various national higher education systems which make up the African higher education systems have all contributed to the global system recognised today as African higher education. While the happenings in the different nations are too numerous to engage with here, it is important to look at a few initiatives that cut across the continent and how they are shaping the Africa higher education landscape. The first to be examined here is the harmonisation initiative. Adamu (2021) argues that harmonisation is the tool through which African higher education can make meaningful contribution to and be aligned with the African vision of integration. Harmonisation is not necessarily the same as standardisation, or the creation of uniformity in higher education systems, but rather the coordination of higher education efforts to provide better educational experiences on the African content. Two major strategies have been used to enhance the harmonisation agenda on the content. The two are academic mobility and programme development and implementation, and quality assurance and accreditation. The mobility of students, staff and researchers is one of the approaches that has contributed to the harmonisation agenda of African higher education. The Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, the Pan African University (PAU), the Mwalimu Nyerere Scholarship Scheme, and Tuning Africa are some initiatives on the continent that promote internationalisation and harmonisation of higher education through activities involving mobility, joint curriculum reform and development and teaching-learning improvement. Quality assurance and accreditation is the second strategy used to enhance harmonisation on the African continent. Enhancing the quality of higher education is a major strategy for the of harmonisation of higher education in Africa and since quality is at the heart of higher education, driving its achievement is at the heart of every higher education initiative. In Africa, there are numerous sub-continental quality assurance agencies and networks including the Southern African Quality Assurance Network (SAQAN), the Inter-University Council for East Africa (IUCEA), and the

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African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education (CAMES) which are becoming more active and visible. Working in close collaboration with these is the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), which was established in 2009, to bridge the gap between these sub-continental networks.

The tuning higher education in Africa Pilot Project, an initiative of the African Union Commission and the European Commission, is another initiative that has greatly influenced education on the continent. Hahn and Teferra (2014) argue that the Tuning Project created an opportunity for higher education stakeholders to have meaningful dialogue on several topical issues in higher education. Not only did the project led to improved understanding of a graduate's competences but it also became a stepping-stone towards higher education continental needs. The project led to the development of conceptual frameworks and frames of reference for degree programmes in thematic core areas for the sustainable development of Africa, namely in Medicine, Agriculture, Teacher Education, Civil and Mechanical Engineering. This project resulted in the creation of quality guidelines for distance education developed by the African Council for Distance Education (ACDE). Tuning still remains a new lexicon in the African higher education landscape. In the "Tuning Africa" pilot project, some five dozen universities were involved—and this comprises a small critical mass of champion universities, along with supporting political and intermediary bodies. Hahn and Teferra (2014) further state that the systematic engagement of stakeholders from the public sector, the private sector, and the academic sector demanded a well-coordinated dialogue that was supported by higher education leadership at all levels. Moving forward, policy at continental level is clear, though different institutions need to implement similar initiatives at the institutional, national, and regional levels.

Woldegiorgis (2021) argues that African higher education institutions have a unique role to play in the socio-economic and historical contexts of Africa. African universities have a role to play in African societies, and to fully perform

this role, comprehension of global knowledge systems is needed. In a bid to re-imagine and contribute to the future of African higher education, the different chapters in this book have engaged multiple subjects. This book has provided answers to multiple questions on several issues in African higher education. The book provides a thorough analysis of major trends, developments, and challenges that the higher education sector is facing, and also provides solutions to some of the challenges.

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