



## Chapter 5

# Intra-Africa Academic Mobility and the Fourth Industrial Revolution

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### Introduction

There is a rising prominence in the discussion around ‘internationalisation at home’ concerning universities, especially in developing countries being urged to put in place measures to support the continental mobility of learners, as well as creating a conducive environment to attract international students. The diversity, inclusivity, and inequalities in access to relevant technologies are experiences that need to be interrogated if African universities are to play a role in the 4IR (Fourth Industrial Revolution), and not just be pawns (Paterson & Luescher 2022). The traction of the internationalisation of education in the socio-economic development is encouraging many African countries, as well as IHEs (institutions of higher education) to embrace strategies meant to attract international students. These strategies are aimed at harnessing the full potential of the internationalisation of education and also reversing the trend of one country as an exporter of students to a host country, as it has big implications on the image of a specific institution in the home country. There are specifically efforts geared towards creating an environment that encourages institutional partnerships and attracts students to certain IHEs in specific African countries.

This chapter discusses the initiatives to promote mobility within Africa and presents findings of a case study focusing on two universities in Kenya, which are the KU (Kenyatta University) and the USIU-A (United States International University – Africa). The case study applied a mixed methods approach, involving a survey that targeted about 100 international students in each of the two universities with in-depth interviews with 15 international students at each university. A document analysis was also carried out to establish the policy environment regarding internationalisation and particularly the mobility of students to the institutions. The chapter particularly highlights the motivations and experiences of students who have chosen to study ‘abroad’ but within the continent, in this case, Kenya.

Opportunities for the internationalisation of education lie in the fact that there is a growing interdependence with more and more institutions on an international level, requiring to network for purposes of the sharing of evidence-based practices, to share equipment as well as to enhance interdisciplinary cross-fertilisation to solve the complex challenges facing Africa today (Zolfaghari, Sabran, & Zolfaghari 2009:2). More universities are also focusing on international productivity, quality, and the impact of publications, as this gives them an edge in the increasingly competitive knowledge economy (Liu, Simonenko, & Anisimov 2019:258). There is also an increased demand for student and faculty exchanges, occasioned by globalisation and the need to gain intercultural competencies (Hudzik 2011:8).

The need to share information and gain expertise that is not locally available, provides even more demands for the exchange of students (Zolfaghari *et al.* 2009:6). For instance, the continent is rich in mineral resources, but lacks in infrastructure development, yet not enough engineers have been trained to exploit these opportunities within the continent. Mobility and the exchange of students is one of the ways through which the skills shortages could be resolved.

There are several benefits that can be attributed to internationalisation at home, which in this case is the mobility of students within the continent. Besides gaining intercultural competencies, the students' mobility, especially international postgraduates, serves the host country with scientific knowledge. Internationalisation has been strongly linked to improved quality training research and publications, as students who move from one country to another are to increase their academic outcomes and research performances. According to Halevi and Moed (2013:4), students who attain their PhD and postdoctoral degrees from prestigious foreign universities, for instance, have been found to perform better in research and publications than those who remain in their home countries in Africa, partly because of the networks which they create. The challenge facing Africa is that the continent is predominantly an exporter of postgraduate students. Therefore, creating an environment for mobility within the continent will enhance both research output and networks of students on the continent.

It is important to note that even though there are many benefits to internationalisation in a knowledge economy, there are also challenges that are overlooked. Countries at various levels of development experience diverse and uneven benefits and challenges that arise from internationalisation. As Lee puts it, there is 'a danger in blindly promoting internationalisation, without careful consideration of its intended purposes and unintended consequences' (Lee 2013:4 of 5). African developing countries have always prided in exporting students and researchers in the hope that they would gain those skills needed in their home countries. However, more often than not, they

lose good brains in the process as the students do not return. Beneficiaries of internationalisation have been and are mostly universities in developed countries with highly ranked global universities, a pointer that the quality of education plays a major role in the inward mobility of students. Many times, students are 'pushed' out of their home country due to inadequate or inferior educational resources or conflicts that render it impossible to study at home as is the case with many countries in Africa (Nyerere 2021:56). Many students are now doing research on the differentiation of standpoints concerning host and sending countries or regions by analysing the experiences of the international students (Kondakci 2011:575-576; Li & Bray 2007:794). This chapter also looks at the experiences of students who move and study within the continent.

Over the years, mobility has been in favour of the developed countries, and even with current challenges brought about by Covid-19 (Osman & Keevy 2021:84). This is partly due to the benefits of mobility at home that include lower costs of travel and programmes, as well as relatively lower costs associated with mobility within the region and/or continent (Lee & Sehoole 2015:829). The impetus is to raise and sustain a globally competitive knowledge-based society through less costly mobility programmes that offer higher benefits to countries and institutions in Africa. To this end, there have been efforts at the continental, regional, national, and institutional levels to encourage mobility of students within the continent.

This analysis comes at a time when technologies are being deployed in different measures to support university teaching and learning. The 4IR provides both opportunities and challenges to developing countries for the provision of education. The technologies allowing students to study specific courses in institutions outside their home countries have enabled some open universities like the University of South Africa to thrive on the continent. However, these same opportunities have, in most cases, worked in favour of universities in the West who have both the infrastructure and capacity to deploy online education. Many universities in Africa and specifically in Kenya, have not been able to take advantage of the technologies guaranteed under the 4IR to improve access and quality of education (Lupanda 2020), therefore only enabling them to host students mainly for conventional contact learning.

### **Efforts to Encourage Students' Academic Mobility**

Currently, there are efforts that encourage internationalisation and students' academic mobility in many parts of the world, also in Africa. Africa is enhancing quality education and creating an environment that attracts students to study on the continent. A favourable environment can be achieved through improving the quality of African institutions, making them attractive to

foreign scholars and students – from abroad, but also from Africa. Through this, the continent will benefit from not only improved and quality education and training, but also from having the students remaining and working on the continent. *Agenda 2063: The Africa we want* (African Union Commission 2015) is one such continental strategic framework that is advocating for quality in the delivery of education through cutting-edge research, innovation, the promotion of experiences, sharing and learning from each other, as well as the establishment of communities of practice in the education space.

Other efforts at continental level include the implementation of the African Higher Education Harmonisation Strategy. This is the 'Arusha Convention' which was originally referred to as the UNESCO Regional Convention of 1981. The convention was reignited in 2007 to facilitate the recognition of studies, certificates, diplomas, degrees, and other academic qualifications in HE (higher education) in the African states. There is also the intra-Africa mobility scheme – the Mwalimu Nyerere mobility scheme – crafted in 2007 to develop and retain high quality human resources for Africa's development (European Commission 2013:20). This scheme, like the HE harmonisation strategy and the centres of excellence, is intended to promote intra-regional student mobility among African IHEs through the provision of scholarships to Master's and PhD students to study at universities outside their home countries but within the continent.

At regional level, there is also an intra-regional African student mobility which has gathered tremendous acceptance over the past years. In East Africa, the intra-African mobility of students dates back to independence days when Makerere served the entire region (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck 2015:111). Some of the efforts that Kenya and other EAC (East African Community) member states are adopting to enhance student mobility, include the establishment of quality assurance units at national/ministerial and institutional levels, the establishment of credit accumulation and transfer systems, the relaxation of travel rules for students within the region, and the harmonisation of fee structures for students from EAC countries. The five EAC member countries, Kenya included, plan to achieve a unified regional HE system which would boost student access and mobility (AfriQAN 2013). The countries have consequently drafted a credit transfer system and qualifications which, when approved, would allow students to start a degree course in one institution and complete it in another within the East Africa region (Nganga 2014). So far, more than 100 universities that are members of the IUCEA (Inter-University Council for East Africa), have scrapped higher tuition fees for students from Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda to facilitate smooth movement. These are the five countries that form the EAC, an alliance geared towards economic cooperation and future political integration.

The 15 members of ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) have, on the other hand, outlined various areas of cooperation in education as well as a general convention on the recognition and equivalence of degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other qualifications in the member states of ECOWAS (ECOWAS 2014:1 of 7). This is after the adoption of the ECOWAS Convention on the recognition and equivalence of degrees, diplomas, certificates, and other qualifications in 2003, as an annex to the Protocol on Education and Training clearing the way for the region's Academic Mobility Scheme as from the 2015/2016 academic year.

The SADC (Southern African Development Community) region on its part has innovatively proposed the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) (Jaftha & Samuels 2017:1) that pursues the harmonisation and standardisation of education and training systems. The framework was intended to lead to the mutual recognition of qualifications within the region, in line with the SADC Protocol on Education and Training at the postgraduate level (Chien & Kot 2011:3 of 17).

### **Challenges Facing Students' Academic Mobility In Africa**

Besides quality constraints that have to address many of the efforts to encourage mobility within the continent, there are issues concerning disparities in teaching and curriculum standards, as well as the measurement of its impact. Teaching is not among the assessment criteria in most of the quality initiatives, partly because of a lack of agreed procedures, standards, and measurements for excellence in teaching. A diversity of approaches is currently in use in various contexts and it is likely that research will continue to determine the definition of the overall excellence in HE, hiding the huge challenges facing the mass provision of HE, especially in Africa. According to Gollin (2013:2 of 5), the current diversity in teaching approaches and the rapid changes in international HE are complicating the process of credit transfer when students are crossing national boundaries, thus hampering the successful mobility within the continent. Altbach (2015), on the other hand states that teaching quality is seldom measured adequately, partly because the assessment of the teaching effectiveness is not easy and there are no widely accepted parameters. The standard metric that is widely used and which has been regarded as inadequate, is that of student evaluations where they give their opinions. Further, current debates emphasise learning as much as teaching and there is little agreement about how to measure either teaching or learning. There is only a handful of cases like Spain's International Campus of Excellence initiative, Ireland's Program for Research in Third-Level Institutions, South Korea's World Class University Programme, and Germany's Excellence Initiative, that also include teaching in their quality assessments. A vast majority of initiatives, however, concentrate on research-related factors

like merit in research, the innovativeness and feasibility of the proposed research project(s), and the utility of the outcomes (Wespel, Orr, & Jaeger 2013:13).

There is also a lack of adequate efforts in assessing the impact of internationalisation at institutional on continental level. This makes it difficult to allocate sufficient resources as there is no demonstrable impact due to a systematic data collection and an analysis and dissemination of information regarding internationalisation on the continent.

Additionally, the advent of Covid-19 highlighted some of the challenges that had always gone unrecognised. The various measures which were put in place to reduce the spread of the virus, including a shift to remote learning were hurried and unplanned (Nyerere 2020). Universities were forced to suspend full-time campus-based operations, such as teaching and research, which have had a disproportionate significant negative impact on students from disadvantaged backgrounds, like the refugee students and those from countries faced with conflict (Arnhold, Brajkovic, Nikolaev, & Zavalina 2020:5 of 24). The countries bordering Kenya that deliver the majority of mobile students to this country, lack the infrastructure to support online learning, meaning that for these students, it was almost impossible to continue learning during the pandemic.

### Study Justification

Research has indicated that students studying abroad are facing certain challenges that can be addressed by moving them within the region and/or continent. Some of the issues identified, include family, financial, psychological, and social barriers, or feelings of social exclusion (Sanchez, Fornerino, & Zhang 2006:29). Regional and continental mobility present a solution to some of these challenges, while responding to the needs and expectations of globalisation. Increasingly, more students in Africa are choosing to study in countries other than their own, especially those who share their borders. Recognising the emerging trends in mobility within Africa, this chapter aims to highlight the experiences of students who have chosen to study 'abroad' but within the continent. It also discusses the motivations of these students to select specific IHEs.

### Study Questions

This chapter wants to answer the following questions: Why do international students choose to study in Kenya, and more specifically, the specific institution they are attending? What are international students' academic experiences? What kind of support is available for international students to

interact with and access quality education in Kenya? What are the students' future plans after their studies?

## **Methodology**

This chapter utilised both quantitative and qualitative methods to uncover the motivations and experiences of international students in Africa. A survey instrument was used to collect statistical information from 85 international students in each of the two universities, KU and USIU-A. Interviews were conducted with participants (i.e., students) by inviting those who have completed the survey to indicate their willingness to participate further. A total of 30 students, 15 from each institution were interviewed. The interviews explored similar questions to the survey (demographic characteristics, including country of origin, field of study, and degree programme), though in more detail, so as to fully address the research objectives. While the survey data were being collected, we accessed and analysed relevant documents, such as international education policy information, recruitment materials, and admission applications. The first year of this project stretched from August 2015 to May 2016. It focused on establishing contact with the relevant institutions and rolling out the survey, while the second year (May 2016 to May 2017) focused on interviewing the international students. Combined, the document analysis and interviews set the context to interpret the student data.

## **Results**

### **University education in Kenya**

The first university college, the Royal Technical College was set up in Kenya in 1956, and later, in 1963, became the University College, Nairobi – a constituent college of the then University of East Africa (Chacha 2004:1 of 11).

Since then, HE in Kenya has expanded tremendously. Currently, the country has 71 universities, both public and private, up from 26 a decade ago. The available resources and teaching capacity are, however, not expanding at the same pace, but the country is nonetheless working to establish minimum standards for an ongoing Credit Accumulation and Transfer System project, a process led by the country's Commission for University Education. Besides, the country has pronounced itself in various policy documents on the need to have collaborative teaching and research programmes as one way of exchanging and sharing information, facilities, and expertise in the region and beyond (Republic of Kenya 2007:96; 2013:3).

### About the Universities

#### *Kenyatta University*

At institutional level, the two universities (KU and USIU-A) have prioritised internationalisation through their policies and programmes. The policy documents that guide the internationalisation efforts at KU are an internationalisation policy as well as a partnerships policy. The internationalisation policy depicts a target of at least 10 percent of the total student population. The university had, at the time of this research, not attained this target, as the proportion of international students was less than one percent. The university also has a Centre for International Programmes and Collaboration, established in 1994, which facilitates linkages and partnerships. This centre acts as a home for all the internationalisation programmes and is key in facilitating internationalisation efforts at the university.

Besides, KU has established an Intra-Africa Semester Abroad Programme which is a student mobility programme that focuses on encouraging movement of undergraduate students between African universities. The programme was started in 2012 with the signing of memoranda of understanding between KU and several partner universities across Africa to increase mobility for undergraduate students across the continent. This is because mobility is important in building networks that are very useful in future endeavours. It also opens up the student's mind to new ideas and diverse cultures, and allows the sharing of experiences and best practices.

The programme was started with the aim to address the imbalance created by student exchanges between African universities and those from outside Africa. This is regarded as unique and affordable, and is aimed at providing an opportunity to students for one semester to experience academic and social environments other than theirs, and to promote a continental collaboration while amending the challenges of high living costs and airfare to countries outside Africa that have historically inhibited the movement of African students. One unique feature of the programme which has hindered the mobility of students in the past, is credit transfer. The students take units relevant to their courses and thereafter credit transfers are effected upon the receipt of transcripts from the host university. Therefore, students do not need to redo the same units at their home university.

#### *United States International University – Africa*

As for USIU-A, the internationalisation of education is key to its existence as expressed in the university strategic plan 2015-2020. The university admits students from various countries to reflect its mission (USIU-A 2015). At the time of this chapter, the proportion of international students at USIU-A was 15.3 percent of the 6,398 total of university enrolments (USIU-A 2016). Given

that the majority of universities around the world aim at a target of 10% proportion of international students, USIU-A is certainly ahead. The university also has a dedicated international office that deals with all international student matters, but unlike the KU office which houses all international linkages and collaboration programmes, the international office at USIU-A deals only with international student matters.

### Choosing to Study in Kenya

#### *Sources of Information on Universities in Kenya*

The research for this chapter revealed that international students are accessing information from a diversity of sources on the courses offered at the two mentioned universities in Kenya. Among the sources are the internet with the institutions' websites where the students access programme brochures and advertisements. Others are informed of the institutions by alumni, family, and friends. Figure 1 below shows the extent to which international students who participated in the study, relied on the various sources to get information on the programmes and courses of KU and USIU-A.

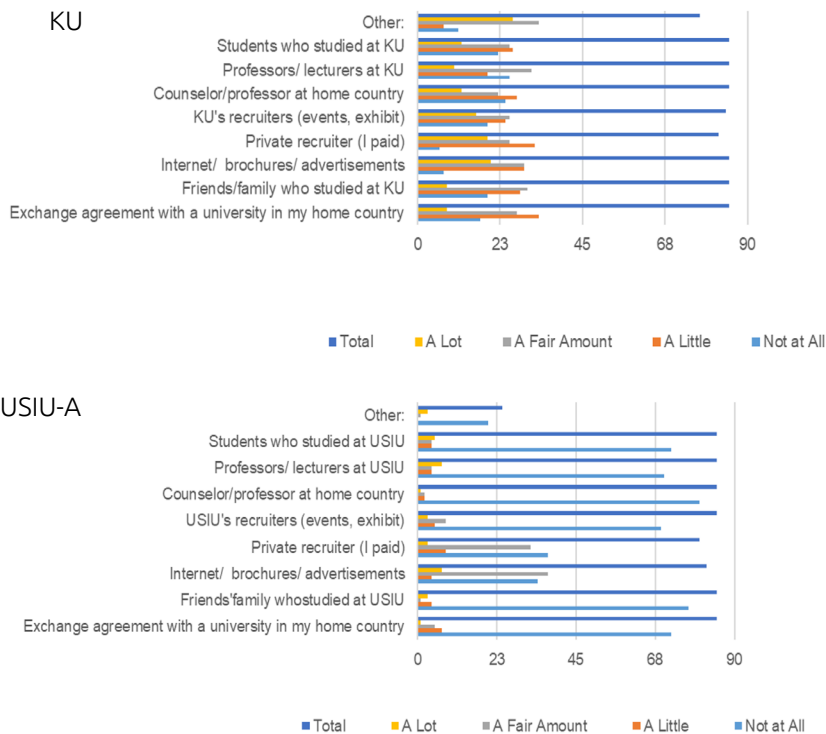


Figure 1: Extent to which international students relied on various sources of information in choosing KU and USIU-A.

### Reasons for Choosing to Study in Kenya

The choice by different students to come to Kenya is influenced by diverse factors. Among those influencing factors is the proximity to home countries. Those from the EAC feel specifically that studying in Kenya is cheaper in terms of fees, travel, and living expenses.

#### *5.4.1 Tuition Fees*

Universities in the region have now categorised all Eastern African students as local students, whereas a student moving to study at any of the five East African partner states pays the same tuition fees as local students. The institutions are, however, retaining their individual fee structures. The only difference for the mobile students within East Africa is that they are not entitled to access their host country's government student loan scheme or bursaries and are expected to pay up full-cost fees. In Kenya's public universities, students from the EAC pay full tuition fees as do Kenyan students or the self-sponsored students, attending parallel track programmes. Before, all non-Kenyan students were categorised as foreign students and charged 20 to 30 percent more than the local students, depending on the university.

Generally, and in comparison with countries offering quality education in other parts of the world – Europe and North America, and closer home in South Africa – Kenya was considered affordable in terms of tuition fees and living expenses. This influenced many of the international students being interviewed as referred to below.

'I wanted a place where I could sponsor my education because when I came here, I wasn't sure that I could obtain a scholarship, so I wanted a place where if I would be able to raise some funds to sponsor myself if I was unable to secure a sponsorship...When you compare KU with other institutions in South Africa, you will understand that in terms of tuition, what is being paid here is less...and even when you look at the living costs here in Kenya, it is quite smaller than what is required in other parts of the world like Europe or America' (Rwandese student at KU).

'I chose KU because of poor educational development in my home country for so many years and I had been doing my studies in Kenya since class eight up to now. What made me want to study in Kenya also is because it is not far from home. In fact, our country (South Sudan) has joined the EAC and so there is now flexibility in terms of people's movements and big discount in terms of fees for us' (South Sudanese student at KU).

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'I had tried one university in Namibia, one also in our neighbouring country Zambia and a few others...I was admitted in Namibia and here (KU) and so it was a matter of choice between the two. Because I am in hospitality, I chose to come here because it is not too far from home to experience a different culture and to have a different exposure from Southern Africa that would benefit industry back home' (Malawian student at KU).

'Before I came here, I was studying at a university in Nigeria but I had also attempted to study at other universities abroad like in South Africa at University of Johannesburg and University of Pretoria. The problem with them was high fees and a lot of paperwork involved, so I gave up, but when I tried USIU-A, I found it affordable, the application process was smooth and even the visa to enter Kenya is issued on your arrival' (Nigerian student at USIU-A).

### *Proximity to Home Countries*

The majority of the international students at the two universities come from other African countries. Those interviewed cited proximity to their home countries, affordable tuition fees and living experiences when compared to other countries like South Africa, Europe, and North America. This confirms the reasons cited for mobility within Africa in an economic and utilitarian study (Jon, Lee, & Byun 2014:703). Figure 2 below shows the weight that international students place on their reasons for a choice of the institutions of KU and USIU-A.

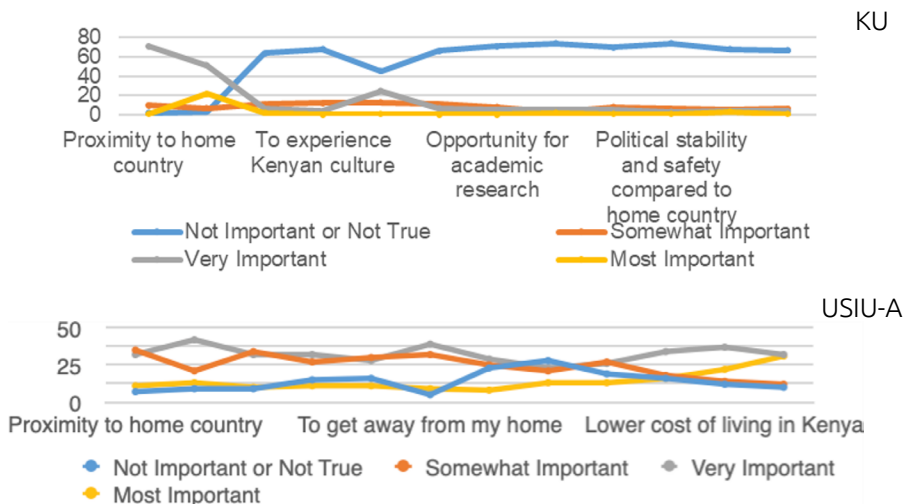


Figure 2: Reasons why international students chose KU and USIU-A

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For both institutions, students considered proximity to their home country as an important factor. Many students from other African countries do not find a big difference between studying at home and studying at a university within Africa. They find a lot of similarities with their home country which help them settle faster.

‘Us students from other African countries feel “home away from home” here. This is not really abroad...there are many similarities with my home in the way people behave in the streets, the food, the weather’ (Nigerian student at USIU-A).

‘I wanted to study somewhere outside Tanzania but within Africa to get exposure. I first considered South Africa – University of Johannesburg, but it was too expensive for me. My next option was Kenya, and when I looked at the list of good schools, USIU-A was one of them. I chose USIU-A because of diversity as I realised from their website at the time there were students from about 64 countries’ (Tanzanian student at USIU-A).

‘I did my undergraduate at home (DRC), so I decided to come to Kenya because I wanted to have another learning experience outside my country. I chose Kenya because I wanted to study in an English-speaking country and I did not want to travel far’ (DRC student at KU).

‘I just came to study in Kenya because I wanted to experience a new life outside Uganda but did not want to go far from home. Kenya is the best for me because I can go home cheaply by bus when I want to go. Also there are no issues with visas as I can use my national ID to come in’ (Ugandan student at KU).

### *Quality and Reputation of Institutions*

Research has established that quality is a major ‘pull factor when it comes to attracting international students’ (Altbach 2004:21). This study established that students indeed chose the host institutions in Kenya, guided by its reputation that they gathered from other sources like friends. Others got the information through web searches and used web rankings to choose the universities in Kenya. The students’ choices were thus partly influenced by their perceived quality of education and access to learning resources in the two universities. Asked what they thought of the quality of education they were receiving, all the international students interviewed, agreed that it met their expectations. The students noted that they were exposed to quality tuition, learning facilities, and an internal environment, characterised by a diversity of students. Here is a snapshot of their responses.

'KU has a very good learning environment in terms of library facilities, both online and in hard copy and I think these are very important when one is pursuing this education...KU has a good and large repository of resources' (Nigerian student at KU).

'The curriculum has never been a waste of time...especially doing the course work. It is very relevant...sometimes I reflect and ask myself... what if I had not done coursework and just climb through the research programme, I would have been empty, honestly...the more you interact with the curriculum, you realise that there are so many things that one needs to know...the curriculum was more interactive...the curriculum is treated differently at this level' (Ghanaian student at KU).

'Here at USIU-A, I feel like I am having the same knowledge with people who are outside there, like UK, US because they are international courses' (DRC student at USIU-A).

'Coming here has exposed me to other ways of thinking, other ways of doing things beyond the classroom. For example, people here in Nairobi tend to be fast in pace, working hard and I think that is something that has impacted on me and I would like to apply at home' (Malawian student at KU).

Among the students interviewed, there was a general agreement that the education they received met their expectations. The post-graduate students particularly liked coursework preceding their research, which they said was not common in their home countries. The students also agreed that they had been exposed to learning resources, access to internet, equipment, and a library, things that they did not really have in their home countries. There were, however, a few cases, particularly students from neighbouring Somalia and South Sudan, who were honest to state that they had no standards back at home to compare with. This is because of the challenges they were experiencing with war and instability, running down institutions, including education. HE is thus not developed in their countries and they felt that Kenya was the closest opportunity they had at getting a university education. The country is thus playing a unique role not just in the traditional academic student mobility, but to offer training to students of neighbouring countries which are affected by war or are just recovering from war and need skills to rebuild their countries.

Students who took part in the survey, confirmed that they had learnt a lot in various fields, including general knowledge and new cultures. The knowledge they gained went beyond their professional careers as expected

of internationalisation and academic mobility. Figure 3 below shows their responses in terms of learning outcomes.

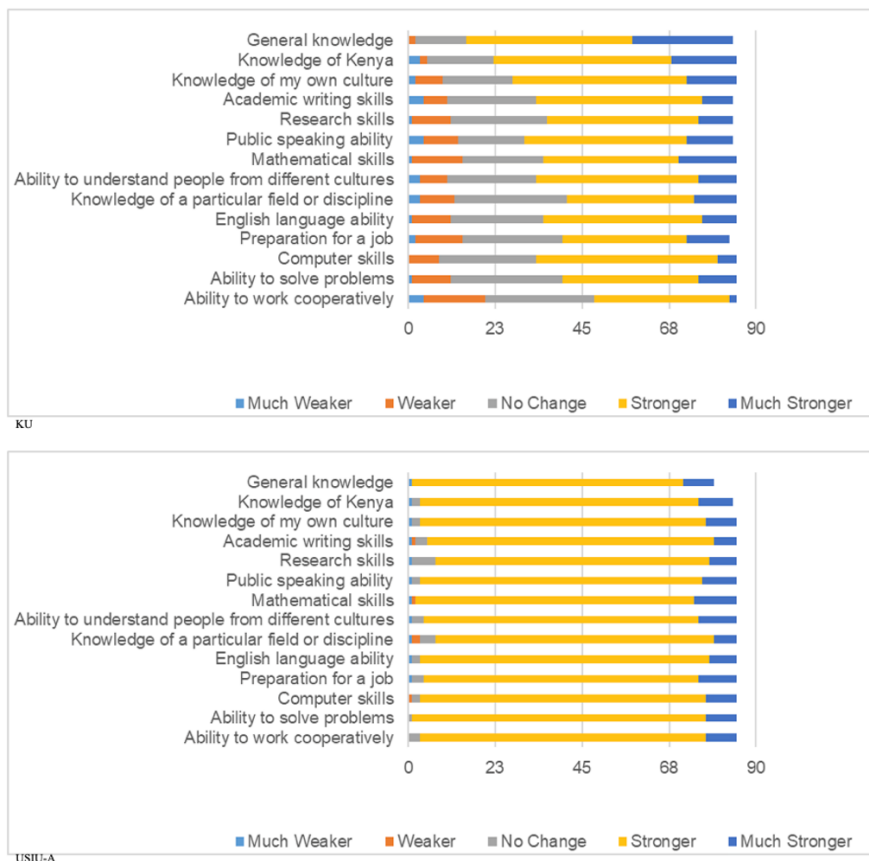


Figure 3: International students ranking of the knowledge and skills gained

### Visa Application Process

The other consideration cited by students to have influenced their decisions to study at these two universities in Kenya is the visa application process. The launch of national identity cards as travel documents within the Eastern African region has made it easier for cross-border students to access education at universities of their choice, further enhancing the regional academic mobility of students. Students from countries in the EAC do not need visas, whereas those from other countries in Africa like Nigeria have an online application platform which is easy and fast to use.

## International Students' Experiences

### Personal Interactions

The students who participated in the study were in agreement that learning abroad brings new experiences. Studying away from home helps one to discover other people's behaviours, as well as their way of life and thinking, and *inter alia* opens the scope of analysis and comparison. However, this largely depends on the kind of interaction the students have in outside campuses. The majority of those interviewed, commended the two institutions, KU and USIU-A for the initiative to take them on tour to various parts of the country as part of their welcome and familiarisation with the country. They said this had exposed them to various sites and cultures of the Kenyan people besides the regular interaction with their peers at the universities.

The students knew well that interacting with other students – local and international (from other countries) – would give them a chance to understand other cultures, and they were making conscious efforts to gain this valuable learning outcome.

'I do interact with students from my home country from time to time, but I deliberately interact less with Nigerians and the reason is that these are people I know; we are from the same country, so we have some level or relationship already...I feel I need other relationships somewhere else, that is the reason...I am interested to know other people, other cultures, and learn about their experiences and how I can use the same to better my life' (Nigerian student at KU).

There were a few cases, however, where students said they felt more comfortable interacting with the students from their home countries. These students specifically referred to the language barrier, as local students chose to speak in their national language, Kiswahili. For example, one of the interviewed students said that he interacted more with students from his own country, Angola and neighbouring countries who speak the same language: 'My friends are from the Angolan community in this university and those from Mozambique because we speak the same language, Portuguese.'

There were also those who felt more comfortable interacting with other international students more than the local students. Those who were more comfortable interacting with other international students, felt that they had more in common and that the other international students would understand their circumstances better than the local students. It is interesting that many of these students would like exposure to other cultures than their own, but

were more comfortable learning these from other international students than from the local students.

### **Some of the Challenges that the International Students Experienced**

Overall, students felt that they received good if not better treatment than their local counterparts. They felt that their concerns were attended to faster, and the university community – international student offices, students, and staff at the universities – were welcoming and ready to assist them to settle. They also referred to the opportunities provided to the international students to tour the country, opportunities not provided to local students, as an advantage they have. That notwithstanding, the international students expressed a concern over some challenges they were experiencing ranging from cumbersome application processes to inadequate accommodation, and poor student support services, as discussed below.

#### *Language Barrier*

International students faced some challenges related to social integration. One of the hindrances to this integration is the language barrier where international students cannot communicate in the dominant local languages. In Kenya, though the English language is used as a medium of instruction, Kiswahili is the national and therefore dominant language. Kiswahili is only spoken by a few countries, mainly in the Eastern African region. The majority of the international students therefore, even those from other parts of the continent, found it a barrier in socialising and communicating, especially outside campus. Generally, some international students felt excluded when their peers talked Kiswahili during group/classroom discussions. Due to the language barrier, some had been conned by vendors taking advantage of their inability to communicate in the local language, whereas others were afraid to leave their areas of residence unaccompanied due to the fear of harm or abuse.

#### *Poor International Student Support Services*

Students also cited challenges accessing student support services. Key among them was the issuance of students ID (identification) cards. The students needed facilitation to get ID cards without which they were unable to open a bank account or even register their telephone cards. The slow process of acquiring IDs also impacted on students travelling to home countries because it became difficult to travel back to Kenya the second time without a student ID card. This has put a strain on students who wanted to travel back home months after reporting even for emergencies.

'When I was coming, I didn't get a big challenge for visa...rather when I went back to my home country after one year, to return back to continue my studies, it has been a big challenge...because apparently, I didn't have a student's pass, it wasn't yet out, so I was rejected when I applied for a visa to come back to Kenya (Cameroon student at USIU-A).

#### *Inadequate Accommodation Facilities*

The study established that international student accommodation was not sufficient at the two universities and students were forced to hire their own accommodation outside campus. Inadequate accommodation forced the universities to come up with varied criteria in housing the international students. Whereas KU prioritised students on short term stay in offering accommodation within the university hostels, USIU-A considered those enrolled for full-time courses for university accommodation. The university goes further to explain who qualifies for university accommodation as the undergraduate students taking nine credit units or more and graduate students registered for at least six units a semester. None of the two universities had an international students hostel in place which proved a challenge for international student interns of both managing rents at market rates, interaction with the community outside the university who only speaks the local language, as well as security concerns.

#### **International students Plans after Study in Kenya**

Up to 98 percent of the students being interviewed, affirmed that they would go back home after their studies. A number of them said they would go back home to develop their education institutions and infrastructure, while others wanted to go back and engage in entrepreneurial ventures. The remaining two percent of the interviewed international students said that they would continue to higher levels of education – Master's and PhD – in Kenya or other countries to the north of Africa. Studies like those by the European Union (2015:3 of 23) have also shown that mobility within the continent increases return rates to 97 percent as opposed to those who leave the continent. Many of the scholars who leave to study outside the continent fail to come back.

'After study, I will go back home and use the acquired knowledge and experience back home...I have learnt a lot of things here, especially in terms of research, experiences in class which I want to use to make a difference in my country...I would want to make a difference out there' (Ghanaian student at KU).

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'My aspiration is to go back home and develop my country, using the education that I am undertaking because my country is still at a very poor standard level' (Somali student at KU).

'My aspirations are to start my own business...I am not yet sure that it would be good to do it outside my home country, whether here in Kenya or in another place because it is always easy to start and grow in a place where people do not know you' (Malawian student at KU).

'Due to the crisis back home, my aspiration is to become a humanitarian aid worker but before or later on I may venture into entrepreneurship or politics' (Somali student at KU).

'After study, ideally, I would like to get a job and if that is not fast coming, I would volunteer, do some internships...and then pursue a Master's degree. Right now I am thinking of Europe' (Nigerian student at USIU-A).

'I study business, so when I go back home, I will start a business. I will use the international networks I have created here at USIU-A to spread my business to other countries like Nigeria where my best friend comes from' (Cameroonian student at USIU-A).

### Discussion and Conclusion

Whereas universities relied more on the physical mobility of students over the years, the Covid-19 pandemic has caused several disruptions to HE, forcing universities everywhere into a crisis mode overnight. Responding to such an abrupt and multidimensional crisis has been a challenge not only to governments but also to the universities. The pandemic set in at a time when Kenya's HE sector was already facing serious challenges, which further compounded the challenges they have faced in responding to this crisis. The impacts of the pandemic made the universities in Kenya develop new adaptations and interventions, some of which led to monumental shifts which could have taken years, if not decades to realise. The requirements of these responses brought to fore the essence of strong local, regional, and international collaborations (Lues, Padayachee, & De Jager 2020).

The effect of the pandemic containment measures including social distancing, called for new digital oriented teaching, learning, and research skills that a majority of university students and lecturers were not previously exposed to. The adaptation has been slow, as most students, especially those from countries neighbouring Kenya that are in conflict would not keep pace. It is expected that with strategies adopted to keep students both local and

internal, learning will accelerate the universities' participation in the 4IR. Participating in the 4IR as key players, will assure diversity, quality, and equity in access to relevant HE both for the local students and the international students who want to study in Kenya.

The continental regional bodies, national agencies, and IHEs are already pursuing various initiatives of student mobility inside Africa. At a continental level, internationalisation initiatives have received support of the AAU (Association of African Universities) and the AU (African Union) Commission with the AAU overseeing the AfriQAN (African Quality Assurance Network) and the Europe-Africa Quality Connect pilot project (Shabani 2013:3). Institutions in Kenya draw their policies and actions from the IUCEA which is pushing the harmonisation of degree programmes in the region, and the African Agenda 2063 framework which encourages and promotes the sharing of experiences and learning among African countries. Collaborations are thus encoded in mounting internationally recognised programmes that can provide the experiences sought by mobile students. These collaborations, especially with the private sector and industry also became imperative during the Covid-19 pandemic. Some private sector entities supported with internet access, infrastructure, and technical capacities were needed by the institutions for containment measures.

Notwithstanding, students who participated in this study, confirmed that learning abroad brings new experiences and that they had been exposed to various cultures and different ways of thinking, which opened their scope of analysis and comparison, among others. They admitted to having their personal and career aspirations met by these international institutions. The majority of them indicated a readiness to return to their home countries, contrasting the experiences in most north-south mobilities where the best brains stay working at their host institutions.

However, this does not imply that the students did not face some challenges which need to be addressed to make institutions within the continent more attractive to international students. Some of the challenges relate to inadequate social integration where one of the hindrances is the language barrier which was indicated as an issue for those who do not speak the national language, Kiswahili. The other problem that should be addressed is to create a favourable environment for the international students regarding accommodation. The lack of international student hostels exposed them to incidents of insecurity or mistreatment when living outside university campuses. Some students also spoke out their dissatisfaction with the student support services like the slow process of acquiring student ID cards which impacted their visa processing and travel to and from home countries.

Besides, recently the students have faced some form of exclusion from learning, occasioned by the Covid-19 pandemic. The shift to online learning to limit the spread of the virus saw many students unable to connect with their institutions. The challenges included unpreparedness on the part of the host institutions to effectively teach, examine, and generally facilitate learning remotely. The infrastructural challenges discriminated against international students. Coupled with the lack of policies to support student learning off-campus, let alone in different counties, the limited access to remote learning facilities brought out inequalities against the intra-Africa mobile students. The challenges of access to technologies, if addressed in true integration of the 4IR, will ease most issues related to international student support services.

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