Chapter 1

International Partnerships Between Universities: A Literature Survey

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1.1 Introduction

Cross-border partnerships are increasingly important for higher education in the twenty-first century (Oleksiyenko & Yang 2015, Sanders & Wong 2021:214). While virtually all universities in the world, in their pursuit of internationalisation, strive to enter into partnerships with universities abroad, there is no synthesis of literature on the many case studies on such partnerships or the various models of international partnership to guide such activities. The purpose of this chapter is to fill this lacuna and to serve as a frame for the chapters and discussions in the rest of the volume.

The chapter commences with a survey of the contextual background: the essential international dimension of universities, the enhanced imperative for internationalisation in the contemporary era in history, and how international partnerships between universities are put into service of this need. The research method is then explained, followed by the rationales for forging international partnerships between universities. Steps and decisions in forging such partnerships are then outlined. Subsequently, modes or models of partnerships are surveyed. In the final sections, the benefits and challenges of forging international partnerships are

highlighted, and lessons learned are enumerated. From this, suggestions for the path forward, regarding such partnerships in general, and between Japanese and South African universities in particular, are made.

1.2 Contextual Background: The International Dimension of Universities and the Enhanced Imperative for Internationalisation in the Contemporary World

From the earliest beginnings of the university as an institution, an international dimension has been noticeable. The medieval university in Europe is widely regarded in the literature as the prototype of the modern university, with the granting of a charter to the University of Paris by the Pope in 1080 taken as year one of university history (see Boyd & King 1975). Duggan (1916:100) enumerates that one of the five key features of the medieval university which distinguished it from the two other education institutions in medieval Europe, namely the Cathedral Schools and the Monastic Schools, was that the university attracted students from all over Europe, whereas the Cathedral Schools and Monastic Schools received all their students from their immediate hinterlands only. In parts of the world beyond Europe (even in North America), the university commenced as an importation, not autochthonously. Hence, the first batch of professoriate were always expatriates (in practice in the new world, much more so in the Global South, this dominance of expatriate faculty continued long after the founding of the universities in those regions).

In the current age of globalisation, the pursuit of internationalisation by universities has not only been rendered easier (due to factors like enhanced technology), but the rationales for internationalisation are ever stronger—and manifold. Knight's (1996) taxonomy specifies political, economic, academic and cultural rationales for the internationalisation of higher education. Welch, Yang & Wolhuter (2004) add to these scientific and scholarly rationales. Buckner (2019) shows how these rationales, or at

least the hierarchy of rationales, are context-contingent. The author wishes to highlight three perspectives on the rationales behind the internationalisation of universities, ranging from self-centred to altruistic. These perspectives can be identified in various national contexts.

The first is the merciless international competition brought about by the context of the contemporary globalised world. Thomas Friedman (2009) has coined the term 'flat world' to denote a world wherein whatever advantage geography (location, climate, mineral deposits, freshwater resources, biota and the like) has bestowed on a country has been wiped out by the technological advances of the twenty-first century. Henceforth, there will be a more equal playing field in which the competitive advantage of nations will be determined by factors such as policy or political environment, moral fibre or social capital, and—very importantly—the quality and development of human resources, a force that has also impacted the university sector (see Morel 2023; Wildavksy 2010).

The second perspective is Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power'. In contrast to 'hard power', referring to military and trade relations between nations, soft power refers to the use of an international actor's values, cultures and institutions as primary currency to attract, repel or influence players on the international stage (see Leon 2013:229). Education, specifically the export of education, is then one instrument of soft power (see Zapp & Dahmen 2017).

The third perspective comes from the field of Comparative and International Education, in which the authors are engaged. Leading scholars in this field have long contended that one *raison d'être* of teaching and researching the field (and of international education in general) is to contribute to communication between diverse people, and to international understanding and peace (see Arnove 2003; Jones 1981:24).

One increasingly employed mode of higher education internationalisation is forging partnerships between

universities of different national jurisdictions (Tekleselassie & Ford 2019).

1.3 Impetus and Rationales for Forging Partnerships Between Universities

The motives and rationales for forging international partnerships between universities are manifold. Even universities within the contextual similarities of one national jurisdiction can differ much in their motivations for seeking and entering into international partnerships, as Montgomery's (2016) research on universities in China reveals. As was stated earlier, Jane Knight (1996) enumerates political, economic, academic and cultural rationales for the internationalisation of higher education.

In an age where universities frantically race to secure a place in the many (and high stakes) international rankings of universities, it seems as if academic reasons constitute a prime motivator for internationalisation in general, and for forging partnerships in particular. Even in the case of mission-driven universities, academic reasons seem to override cultural, religious or any other particular mission which a university has set for itself, as Reid (2019), for example, reports in his research on how Christian universities enter into partnerships with non-Christian universities.

In the globalised, competitive contemporary world, one new phenomenon has given even further impetus to universities entering into partnerships with universities abroad. This new development is the global university ranking industry, while non-existent one generation ago, has taken the university sector by storm. These ranking systems typically include a factor of internationalisation in their indices. In the QS World University Ranking formula, for example, 5% of the total score is allocated to international staff and students (QS World University Rankings 2021).

In current times of increased attention to the student corps constituency in higher education, attention should also be paid to the rationales and benefits of international

partnership from the side of students. Chouhan, Handsley, Herriot & McGowan (2020) have investigated an international partnership between a British and an American higher education institution and found that field trips and student exchange have the potential to enhance the self-esteem and self-confidence of students, whilst delivering a co-created curriculum in a fun and engaging manner, drawing those at risk of marginalisation, academic failure or underachievement back into the mainstream.

From the side of students, there is also the consideration that international experiences promote the development of a global cultural awareness and a better understanding of culture's impact on decision-making (Lopez, Kemp & McKenzie 2019). As more companies grow their global operations, they increasingly attach value to students with a global competency (Eaton & Kleshinski 2013). What comes to mind here is the belief of one of the major shapers of the field of Comparative and International Education in the twentieth century, GZF Bereday (1920-1983), namely that the study of Comparative and International Education can promote mutual understanding between nations (Wojniak & Post 2020:66)—a claimed end of Comparative Education often repeated in the literature ever since (see Marshall 2019:17).

Lacy, Merilus, Liu and Lacy (2022) found that, as measured by articles in Nature Index, the number of international scientific collaborations globally and the number of co-authored publications has tripled during the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Moreover, the impact of these co-authored publications was considerably higher.

1.4 Requirements, Pitfalls and Considerations in the Forging of International Partnerships

Etling & McGirr (2016) enumerate the following as common elements of strong and productive partnerships between universities:

- Partnership contracts should specify shared goals and values (these do not necessarily have to be identical, but should be compatible and clearly defined).
- Contracts should express clear expectations (on the understanding they may change and be adjusted over time).
- There should be joint planning (meaning goals and the implementation plan should be collaboratively formulated, with the role of each party clearly spelt out).
- The perceived gains or rewards should outweigh any risks involved ("win-win" outcomes should be envisaged).
- Strong support from top management should be forthcoming.
- Partnership contracts should be flexible and adaptable (meaning there should be space for partners to broaden or narrow the scope of work over time, and to strengthen relationships).
- There should be equity and not asymmetrical power relations between partners.

Based on their empirical study, interviewing a number of university administrators and international organisations with experience in forging international partnerships between universities, Clark and Wilson (2017) found the following potential pitfalls of forging international partnerships between universities: lack of adequate funding, poor administrative support, lack of trust or familiarity with other institutions, onerous constraints placed on the collaboration participants (including the ironing-out of legal issues and technicalities) and difficulties with managing the ongoing collaboration (agreeing administration, streamlining technology), bureaucratic encumbrances and the long time it takes to set up an agreement, and the even longer time it takes to get the partnership going.

Drawing from the business sector's resource-based theory, Sanders and Wong (2021) explore international partner selection among higher education institutions in Hong Kong, Singapore and Japan. They identify eleven attributes

that influence international partner selection for higher education institutions in these contexts. These considerations include: four technical capabilities (curriculum and pedagogy, academic staff, funding and language), four managerial capabilities (commitment and support, flexibility and adaptability, cultural understanding and fit), three intangible resources (reputation, location and opportunities for students and existing relations) (Sanders & Wong 2021).

Evers and Lockhoff (2012) of the European Association for International Education have developed a four-step model to forge international partnerships between universities. These four steps are:

1. Finding a suitable partner: Potential partners' history of international cooperation, vision, strategies, academic expertise and interest and *strategic priorities should be studied thoroughly and critically. They should be compared with corresponding elements of the home university to ascertain that* the ambitions of the institutions are realistic, complementary and compatible.
2. Developing a shared vision,
3. Getting institutional commitment from all sides and
4. Ensuring longevity.

1.5 Models of International Partnerships Between Universities

The European Association for International Education lists the following components which can be included in international partnerships between universities (Sandström & Weimer 2013):

- Student, staff and support staff exchange
- Research projects
- Joint research and innovation
- Joint or double degree programmes (see LaFleur, 2018; Russell, Dolnicar & Ayoub 2007). This is a growing practice. For example, in 2019, 12,821 students were enrolled in two simultaneous undergraduate courses at Colombian universities (Pineda, Celis & Anzelin 2022).

- Curriculum development
- Knowledge exchange (including on servcies)
- Capacity building
- Virtual collaboration (which gained prominence during the Covid-19 pandemic, see Enkhtur, Li & Zhang 2023).
- Joint use of facilities or infrastructure
- Education to business

To these can be added:

- International field trips for students (see Chouhan et al. 2020)
- Joint research training of students (see Adriana, Mauricio, Doleres, Loreida, Kodri, Edgar & Yu 2019)
- Research training for doctoral students visiting foreign faculty (serving as host supervisors) at universities abroad (see Shen, 2018)
- Joint teaching and training programmes (see Nguyen, Nhan & Hien 2021).

1.6 Benefits Emanating from International Partnerships Between Universities

A voluminous corpus of literature reporting on empirical research testifies to the benefits derived from international partnerships between universities. These benefits pertain to students, faculty, universities and nations.

For students, international partnerships between universities, even if only virtually via online collaboration, have much potential value to bring together students and teachers from widely differing backgrounds, cultures and locations. These interactions offer intercultural awareness and intercultural education (see Lopez et al. 2019), combining global perspectives (Bosio 2023) and local relevance. This has been found to be effective even in cases where international cooperation between students from different nations take place only electronically (see Adriana et al. 2018). Reporting about their research on the impact of international field trips of students within the context of international partnership

between institutions, and using Maslow's Theory of Needs as a framework for interpretation, Chouhan et al. (2020) argue that such international experience harbours significant benefit in building self-esteem and self-confidence in students, enhancing extra-curricular activities whilse delivering a co-created curriculum in a fun and engaging manner, especially for students at risk of marginalisation, academic failure or underachievement. Research, such as that of Wiers-Jensen (2019), found that the motivations for international students can also be very pragmatic, but still rational. These include getting education in English (the rising international lingua franca), the attraction to countries with no-fee or low-fee higher education, the prospects of securing a job and being able to study in a safe environment.

For faculty, empirical research has documented a demonstrable positive impact on international collaboration (see Payumo, Gerard & Neisler 2019; Ravitch & Carl 2018). Intercultural education, specifically learning how to teach and manage students from different cultural contexts, has also been registered in international collaboration, even in cases where such collaboration takes place exclusively digitally (see Adriana et al. 2018).

At the university level, partnerships with universities abroad have the instrumental value of earning points on global university rankings and furthermore offer opportunities for academic cross-fertilisation and enrichment (see Wolhuter 2023).

At the national level, the internationalisation of universities enhances the global standing of universities and the national higher education project, while in a competitive, globalised world, the nation as a whole can benefit from the expertise drawn from the internationalisation of higher education initiatives (Tetrevova & Vlckova 2020).

1.7 Challenges in Forging International Partnerships Between Universities

For all the benefits emanating from forging international partnerships between universities, it is also a field fraught with difficulties, caveats and challenges. Clark and Wilson (2017) identify a number of pitfalls in exercises of international partnerships between universities: lacking a shared vision between the two institutions, lacking financial commitment and administrative support and recognising that international partnership activities may conflict with other priority activities.

At times when social science scholarship has centred on asymmetrical power relations in the world and its effect on education, literature on unequal power relations between partnering universities appear with regular monotony (see Yarmoshuk, Cole, Mwangu, Guantai & Zarowsky 2020). Partnerships then tend to benefit the strongest partner, leaving the weaker partner with fewer benefits, marginalised or even disadvantaged. A substantial amount of this literature is about North-South partnering between universities. Mlambo & Baxter (2018) draw attention to the danger that international partnerships between universities, particularly between universities of the Global North and Global South, are often forged within the framework of such unequal power relations, and can serve the interests of the Global North party rather than constitute a mutually beneficial arrangement. In a recently published article, Asare, Mitchell and Rose (2022) reviewed over 1,000 studies published in English journals from 2010-2018 on research partnerships involving a sub-Saharan African partner and another from the Global North. The general pattern was that the latter is favoured disproportionally.

Ng and Nyland (2018) conclude from a case study of a partnership entailing a joint undergraduate degree in Early Childhood Education between a university in China and Australia that present political environments and changing rules within the international education market make

responsive and collaborative planning difficult to sustain. In such joint degrees, with students doing part of their degree at their home institution and the rest at a partner institution, there are always the caveats of de facto articulation barriers. And if that were true in 2018, during the years since the global context has remarkably deteriorated regarding being propitious to the free flow of international university partnerships (here the Covid-19 pandemic, the rise of political populism, xenophobia, the problems surrounding Russia and Ukraine and the ensuing strained international relations come to mind) (see Ghazarian, Bhandaria & Shuoyu 2023).

On the topic of asymmetrical power relations and the dangers of using universities and university partnerships as political instruments, it cannot be omitted to mention the widespread criticism that has risen in recent times regarding the Confucius Institutes (see Edwards 2021; Lo & Pan 2018;). This criticism revolves around the alleged use of such institutes to engage in industrial and military espionage, surveillance of Chinese students abroad and attempts to advance the Chinese government's political agendas on controversial issues such as Taiwan and human rights in China and Tibet, thus undermining academic freedom.

There are also challenges of a more practical or intra-educational kind, for example, international students encounter discordances in articulation between programmes in the exporting and importing country or institutions (see Wilson-Mah & Tomlinson 2018).

1.8 Conclusion

The increasing imperative and resulting practice of internationalising universities worldwide has caused the forging of international partnerships between universities to become more common and even be a characterstic feature of the university. These international partnerships can take on many forms, but they typically include one or more of the following elements: Student and staff exchanges, research projects, joint research and innovation, joint or double

degree programmes, curriculum development, knowledge exchange, capacity building, virtual collaboration, joint use of facilities and infrastructure, education to business ventures, international field trips for students, joint research training of students, research training for doctoral students visiting foreign faculty (serving as host supervisors) at universities abroad and joint teaching and training programmes, 2018). The exact nature or optimal nature of the partnership is determined by the (higher education system and societal) contextual contours and imperatives of the two institutions and countries.

While the benefits are manifold, there are also caveats in such international partnerships. According to scholarly literature on the topic, the most salient is asymmetrical relations that disproportionally benefits Global North partners in North-South partnerships. Each institution should, in view of its own mission, institutional resources and context, do its own calculus regarding who to enter an international partnership with to enhance its higher education effort. Therefore, in the next chapter, the societal and education contexts of Japan and South Africa will be surveyed before the scope for partnership between Japanese and South African universities is assessed in Chapter 3.

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