Trends & Futures of International Higher Education Partnerships & Collaboration: Comparative Potential Pathways for African & Asian Centres of Excellence

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Abstract
In a world characterized by the potential and promise of dynamic change and increasing complexity, it is paradoxical that amidst notable and significant levels of economic development, creation and growth of wealth, and lowering of global poverty, there yet remains the scourge of wide-spread inequality, exclusion and escalating levels of violence. These changes impact many communities globally, further compounding their vulnerability. ("Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?", UNESCO Report, 2015). In international higher education delivery, other significant factors affecting global dynamics include technological innovations, digital options and platforms like the internet, which render geography irrelevant. Additional workplace demands include the need to build capacity in communication and critical thinking skills that are driving post-traditional forms of higher education. However, these are more easily acquired from informal learning experiences than through formal institutions. Questions therefore arise pertaining to relevance of international education, in a world where information is expanding exponentially, and shared through gaming, virtual reality, text messaging, social reading, and social networking. In such contexts, would formats beyond traditional semester systems work best in educating the next generation of business and community leaders? In a time of 24/7 "point, click, study," just-in-time training, and asynchronous learning, our presentation explores and contrasts Asian and African approaches to internationalisation of business education, and inquires if traditional "bricks and mortar" concept of universities and higher education institutions (HEIs), will remain a viable option for collaborative international education partnerships.

Keywords: Collaboration, internationalization, partnerships

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Complexity and paradox

In a world characterised, and sometimes mesmerised, by the potential and promise of dynamic change, it is paradoxical that amidst significant levels of economic development and wealth creation, and lowering levels of poverty, there is yet persistent inequality, exclusion and escalating levels of violence, which affect many communities worldwide, heightening vulnerability (UNESCO, 2015). International human rights frameworks, while being championed as enshrined freedom for all, continue to be challenged at different levels of implementation. Religious and cultural intolerance is increasing, coupled with political and economic conflicts, largely mobilised along group and personal identity lines. Meanwhile, technological progress is bringing communities closer together by facilitating connections and greater access to knowledge.

Within this context, this thought piece responds to the call for collective dialogue and action, as expressed in a United Nations policy paper entitled *Rethinking Education: Towards a Global Common Good?* (UNESCO, 2015). The paper acknowledges that current global changes signal new, unfolding contexts, with vital implications for our approaches to problem solving. It proposes more attention should be given to a 'humanistic vision' of development, based on 'respect for life and human dignity, equal rights, social justice, cultural diversity, international solidarity and shared responsibility for a sustainable future' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 84).

Recognising the value of a human rights based perspective to underscore equity and sustainability in development agendas, promoting collaboration and partnerships is a necessary approach to collective accountability and the distribution of global common resources and goods. Collective societal endeavours in a changing world are imperative to address the critical problems we all face.

While acknowledging that the world has made significant strides through scientific and technological advancement, the UNESCO Report alludes to the dual potential to realise extreme, idealistic and dystopian possibilities. It emphasises the need to develop close familiarity with the opportunities and risks associated with ensuring benefits are available to all, 'in an emancipatory, just and sustainable way' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 84). The effective management of this fine balance of making inclusive wealth and prosperity possible should be a fundamental purpose in this global age.

Emerging global conditions require a deeper understanding of perspectives and discourse regarding the nature of human development, and our collective roles and responsibilities to actualise solutions.

The contemporary context of complexity and societal transformation demands that we rethink, with great urgency, the purpose and organisation of our development efforts and growth actions. Real outcomes from tangible interventions are the difference, in a literal sense, between life and death for multitudes. Hence, there is a need for new avenues of exchange that enable closer collaboration and cooperation among individuals and institutions in development planning and implementation. Emerging global conditions

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In response to the above, higher education is increasingly faced with the need to address the international education dimension, fuelled by the need for cross-border and inter-disciplinary collaboration. At the forefront of considerations are the growing demand for well-prepared graduates who can respond to global trends through expanded understanding and experience of international, intercultural and global realities and opportunities (APAIE, 2017). International higher education within a turbulent economic and political climate is also uniquely positioned to direct an interchange of ideas towards long-term policy formulation by creating better educated and more thoughtful public citizens who can peacefully tackle cultural differences. Contextual readiness to foster this capacity is spurred by the intellectual and actionable will of learners across the world, who are now better equipped to take advantage of this positioning.

International higher education changing demographics: Where are we now?

International higher education is big business with US$32bn contributed to the world economy by international students in 2015 to 2016. This amount is projected to reach US$1-trillion over the next decade (Dennis, 2018).

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates current numbers of internationally mobile students at more than 5m. It notes that there will be more than 8m students studying outside their home countries by 2025.

Countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam that are among the fastest growing economies, with expanding middle classes and populations. They are expected to dominate the international higher education market, where previously North American and European students did. With an estimated growth of the Asian middle class from 600m in 2010 to 3bn in 2030, this group will represent 66% of the total middle-class population in the world. Accompanying this population growth are parallel shifts in international and regional student mobility as an impact of economic buying power. These trends are compelling China, a leading exporter of students, to also focus on the reverse trend and become a major importer of students, with an enrolment goal of 500 000 international students by 2020 (Dennis, 2018).

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With an expanding middle class also present in Africa, seeking an international experience has fuelled student mobility on the continent, and higher education institutions (HEIs) are being pushed to offer academic programmes that include affordable, flexible and relevant international experiences. A pertinent concern therefore is: Where do these international students study, and what other global trends are likely to contribute to future African international student mobility? (Dennis, 2018).

Changing landscapes and ripples in the expansive macro-environment impact on international higher education institutions as well as geopolitical competition, iterating waves of migration, unpredictable security threats, growing income gaps and technological innovation. In the same breath, international educators are tasked with exploring ways to eliminate social fissures that have contributed to the rise of nationalism, nativism, xenophobia and multiple 'isms' that are flaring up around the globe. As the UNESCO Report indicates, 'the changes in the world today are characterized by new levels of complexity and contradiction' and these changes 'generate tensions for which education is expected to prepare individuals and communities by giving them the capability to adapt and to respond' (UNESCO, 2015, p. 9).

These factors and demands are complicated by an inexorably complex, interactive and inter-cultural space, increasingly mediated by technology.

The role of technology in educational delivery is a significant factor within fast-changing global dynamics, with particular impacts for the African region. Digital options and platforms such as the internet have surpassed physical geography, influencing the ways higher education is consumed. While students will continue to study abroad, they may never leave their home countries in order to do so. According to the *Digital Learning Compass: Distance Education Enrollment Report 2017*, 30% of students worldwide are enrolled in at least one online course. To bridge the digital divide, the introduction of artificial intelligence may, if correctly applied, provide additional opportunity to upskill Africans and develop expertise in under-resourced areas.

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HEIs have a unique opportunity to optimise technological potential in order to engage with a new population of learners. To do this, they need to overcome traditional challenges of enrolment; they need to invite and engender interaction with greater and diverse numbers of learners, and they need to attract a growing group of mobile international students. These trends are in keeping with the upward population growth trends that will see an African region with the most youthful population worldwide by the year 2025. This growing population warrants attention in view of growing skills development imperatives.

Business requirements: internationalization

As part of the approach to education, teaching and research employed by African universities, there is the need to sharpen the requisite tool box of interpersonal, professional, research and technical skills graduates require in order to be successful in an internationalised world. University, political, economic and corporate leaders can jointly set an agenda to better prepare graduates to contribute to the needs of social and community upliftment.

The priorities for higher education, and especially for international education, in this environment include:

- **Ensuring equitable access** to higher education for diverse groups of students
- **Developing and adhering to a broader approach to internationalisation**
- **Valuing and promoting international education in all disciplines**
- **Foregrounding partnerships and collaboration** to optimise resources and talent.

Higher education must be aligned with the needs of future professionals who will be stemming from incoming graduating cohorts. It is the ambitious, forward-thinking and agile HEIs, organisations and governments that will take advantage of the disruptive changes in the market, and create unique opportunities for entrepreneurship and innovation with benefits for broad communities.

Useful questions for international educators to ponder are: How will higher education be re-imagined in a global context? How can universities prepare global-ready graduates?

Traditional approaches to international education may no longer be viable, and in rethinking internationalisation, flexibility is required to allow adaptation to a rapidly changing world. With increasing technological innovations, will the traditional bricks-and-mortar concept of universities remain a viable option for higher education? How will international education be affected as access to information and learning is expanding exponentially? What formats, beyond traditional education systems, may best fit the next generations?

Jane Knight's often cited definition of internationalisation of higher education (2005) has been expanded upon to state that:

'Internationalization is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society' (De Wit, Hunter, Howard, & Egron-Polak, 2015).

For businesses, a future view of the role of international higher education may suggest the importance of partnership and collaboration between corporate practitioners and academic providers. This collaboration bridges the theory-practitioner gap supporting relevant skills building of graduates, and meeting corporate interests.

Partnership models may include regular opportunities for learners to apply the knowledge they have acquired in a variety of industries internationally, throughout the duration of their studies. Companies benefit from learner knowledge, have exclusive access to fresh ideas, as well as exposure to the capacities of developing professionals and the talent pool internationally. For learners, opportunities for real-world consulting will sharpen capacities and preparedness to enter and succeed in the job market.

Emerging notions of post-national citizenship

International higher education provides graduates with high employability and skills while also fostering responsible citizenship and solidarity in a global world. International higher education plays a crucial role in the changing nature, definition and formation of citizenship, with the emergence of transnational and post-national forms of citizenship.

Students with international exposure have international mindsets that can more readily recognise our shared global commons as an increasingly complex web of connections and interdependencies. International higher education cultivates an experiential awareness that in a shared world, individual choices and actions may have repercussions for people and communities – locally, nationally and internationally.

International higher education celebrates cultural diversity, and promotes the sharing of diverse perspectives between educators and learners from a variety of backgrounds. It is an approach to learning that allows for the inclusion of diverse participants, and encourages appreciation of differences and similarities across social and cultural spaces.

Rising migration flows highlight the challenges of intercultural encounters, and there is a need for more cultural tolerance in a world where diversity is a reality. We are witnessing a rise in cultural chauvinism and identity-based political mobilisation that present serious challenges to social cohesion throughout the world. While cultural diversity is a source of enrichment, it can also give rise to conflict when social cohesion is under strain. International higher education can contribute to better preparing young professionals for diverse workplaces and more diverse societies generally.

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New communication technologies and social media are an essential catalyst in this transformation, with new spaces, relations and dynamics offered by digital media. Increasing integration of technology into our everyday lives, and the availability of multiple intercultural interactive spaces will diffuse traditional interpersonal barriers.

Towards networks, partnership and collaboration

Amidst the global risks we have the capacity to generate solutions, create knowledge and collaborate, which are essential building blocks for sustainable futures. The international higher education community can assist in developing creative and critical thinkers who can solve problems and construct conducive dialogue spaces to address shared critical challenges in the economic, social and human development of world societies.

The internationalised workplace is demanding skills such as intercultural communication, diverse team management and visionary leadership. Such leadership necessarily includes multiple perspectives, sets strategic and future goals collaboratively through dialogue, and enables integrated implementation of solutions. Foundations for this skill set are rooted in the international higher education experience.

A future of individuals, communities and societies interconnected beyond the limits of the national state will demand an awareness of global citizenship, enabling them to contribute to new modes of identification and resource mobilisation, and recognise that massive collective effort and commitment will be required to address current problems facing the world.

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