Global Competence and Internationalisation of Higher Education in Africa: Towards a Conceptual Framework for Learners with Special Needs

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Abstract
The necessity of advancing international competence for Africa's higher education students is becoming more apparent as the international community becomes more interdependent and connected. We are all aware today that we live in a global community with forces that directly affect our lives being shaped by persons and events far away from us in places we have never seen or visited. Internationalisation of education is now very high on the agendas of national governments, international bodies and institutions of higher education. The question that begs for an answer is; Are universities and colleges in Africa preparing their students to function effectively in a global society in which time and space no longer insulate the nations, people and markets of the world? This paper aims to discuss the framework for a comprehensive global higher education system that encompasses global issues and challenges. The authors have noted in their discussion some gaps that need to be added to the global perspective on international education. They argue in the article that educationists in Africa, for the most part are not adequately prepared to teach learners with special needs and even those who wish to do so face a lot of challenges given the multiple demands on special needs education. Extraordinary commitment is therefore necessary to integrate special needs education into the internationalisation of higher education programme in Africa.

Keywords: Globalisation, Global competence, International education, Internationalisation, Special needs education

Introduction

Internationalisation of education has been established as a way of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension in the purpose, functions or delivery of post secondary education (Knight, 1993). It has more to do with the specific policies and programmes undertaken by governments, academic systems and institutions, and even individuals in dealing with globalisation (Altbach, 2002). According to Mengisteab (2006:3), "Globalisation represents a process of rapid intensification of economic, political, and cultural interconnectedness among the different actors and geographical areas in the global system". However, Nsibambi (2001:1) stresses that, "Globalisation is not a value-free, innocent, self-determining process. It is an international socio-politico-economic and cultural

permeation process facilitated by policies of governments, private corporations, international agencies and civil society organisations". While proponents consider globalisation as the answer to the social, political, and economic ills plaguing developing countries, critics (Prasad, Rogoff, Wei & Kose, 2003) argue that it creates social and economic inequalities with disabled people being a case in point, as they do not benefit from 'international education' or 'international programming' (Okebukola, 2014).

Internationalisation of education can either be "home" or "abroad". "Home" is when global perspectives are infused in the curriculum or having foreign (international) students on university campus; for example, the current trend of having students from Namibia, Swaziland, Angola or Mozambique at various universities in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, "abroad" is when an institution can send its students to study abroad, setting up a branch campus overseas or engaging in an inter-institutional partnership. Thus, this phenomenon has seen mobility of university students and staff, programmes, institutions, the rising prominence of collaborative research, evolving curricula as well as approaches to teaching and learning. It is assumed that of all regions in the world, Africa's higher education system is the most diverse (Okebukola, 2014). Diversity in race, gender, linguistic orientation and other socio-economic and cultural attributes is prevalent. Differentiation in terms of school types that make up the higher education sub-sector is also vast. These characteristics present a context which makes Africa unique (Association of African Universties, 2007; Materu, 2007; Okebukola and Shabani, 2007).

Regrettably, of great concern is the fact that learners with disabilities have essentially been excluded from meaningful education in Africa at all levels from early childhood to higher education. Where educational provision for this sub-population exists, it tends to be piecemeal and largely uncoordinated. Although there has been very little research on learners with disabilities in higher education in Africa, there is indeed a growing body of anecdotal evidence pointing to the fact that higher education does not meet the requirements for the inclusion of people with disabilities into the community (Admon, 2007; Laron, 2005). This is despite the fact that the higher the levels of education of people with disabilities, the better the chances for them to integrate into society in general, and into employment in particular, so that they might sustain themselves financially with dignity.

Defining Global Competence and Internationalisation of Education
There is a growing debate nowadays among scholars as they search for a succinct definition of the terms global competence and internationalisation and there is also a general agreement that there is no simple or an all encompassing definition of these contemporary terms in education. This sentiment is a realisation that both the formulation and implementation of globalisation and internationalisation was predominantly American based until a few years ago. As the international dimension of higher education gains more attention and recognition, people tend to use these terms in the way that best suits their purpose. However, even if there is no agreement on a precise definition, this paper attempts to give working definitions and parameters for the advancement of debate on internationalisation of higher education.

Global competence refers to the acquisition of in-depth knowledge and understanding of international issues, an appreciation of and ability to learn and work with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The concept is becoming such a pressing concern for public education because economies are becoming more interdependent, societies are now more diverse and global challenges are becoming more complex. On the other hand, Hunter

(2004) defines global competence as having an open mind while actively seeking to understand cultural norms and expectations of others, leveraging this gained knowledge to interact, communicate and work effectively outside one's environment. Global competence requires a positive disposition toward cultural differences and a framework of global values to engage in difference. This requires a sense of identity, self esteem and also empathy towards others with different identities. An interest and understanding of different civilisation streams and the ability to see those differences as opportunities for constructive respectful and peaceful transactions among people are pertinent. This ethical dimension of global competency includes also a commitment to basic equality and rights of all persons and a disposition to act to uphold those rights (Gutmann, 1999; Reimers, 2006). It also requires deep knowledge and understanding of world history, geography, the global dimensions of topics such as health climate and economics and a capacity to think critically and creatively of current global challenges.

The other contemporary term, internationalisation is defined by Harari (1992) as the whole range of processes by which (higher) education becomes less national and more internationally oriented. Dutch scholars, Arum and Van de Water (1992:91) define it as "the multiple activities, programmes and services that fall within international studies, international educational exchange and technical cooperation." Knight (1993:6) defines it as " the process of integrating the international dimension into teaching, research and service functions of an institution of higher education. Ebuchi (1990) says internationalisation is a process by which the teaching, research and service functions of a higher education system become internationally and cross culturally compatible. A more succinct definition is one given by Knight (1993:21) who describes internationalisation of higher education as, "the process of integrating an international/intercultural dimension into the teaching, research and service functions of an institution".

In general terms we can safely define internationalisation as the complex of processes whose combined effect, whether planned or not is to enhance the international dimension of the experience of higher education in universities and similar educational institutions (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 1994). The above interpretations have clearly demonstrated that different meanings attributed to internationalisation emphasise various aspects and benefits. If we examine the collection of definitions, rather than each of them separately, it is interesting to note that there are basic principles and approaches that underline the various definitions attributed to internationalisation.

Rationale for Globalisation and Internationalisation

A great diversity of arguments, social, economic and educational are deployed to support the internationalisation of higher education. Some of the arguments have their origin in the needs of society or economy and others have origins in the needs of education itself. Internationalisation of education is usually perceived as having a positive effect on economic growth and investment in the future economy. For both the public and private, perhaps this could be the most important reason for investment in international cooperation in higher education. According to Knight and De Wit (1995), many national governments create scholarship programmes for foreign students in the hope that they will become the future decision-makers in the private and public sector of their home countries and by then will remember with gratitude the host country that gave them the opportunity to become what they are now. Such investment will, it is hoped, bear fruit in the form of favoured treatment

of the former host country when large orders are placed and contracts negotiated against international competition.

Globalisation of our economy has created a demand for an international labour market. The demand for labour in the global economy is used very frequently by politicians and international educators as the reason for internationalisation of higher education. Education should be designed to promote international skills and global competency. There is also an argument that considers international educational cooperation as a form of diplomatic investment in future political relations. In the first place, the provision of scholarships to those likely to become future leaders is considered to be a way of endowing them with knowledge of the host country and sympathy with its political system, culture and values. The US Advisory Commission on Public Diplomacy (1995) stated that exchanges and training have direct and multiplier effects that make them among the most valuable instruments of America's foreign relations. The same argument was also used in the UK to welcome foreign students and educate them on generous terms.

Internationalisation of education can be initiated for reasons of income generation because the more foreign students paying a high tuition fee, the higher the economic return and the less the national government needs to invest in higher education. In 1979, the UK government adopted a full-fee policy (i.e. the requirement that students pay a tuition fee equivalent to the 'real cost' of their education) with regard to students from outside the European Community. As a consequence, the internationalisation of higher education in the UK has been understood in that manner. Callan (1993:9) says,

> The full-cost fees policy was resisted at first but later became, ironically a financial lifeline to institutions in the face of progressive restraints of public expenditure through the 1980s.

Lambert (1988:12) corroborates this argument saying, "...the US has come to realise that...the import of foreign students is a major asset on our international balance sheet." In the newly democratised and independent African nations and countries in Asia, the academic infrastructure is not yet adequate to absorb national demand for higher education and research. In some countries like Norway for instance, the government deliberately stimulates study abroad instead of creating new facilities. Alongside these economic and political rationales, there are arguments which have a more cultural and educational character. A study by the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) showed that the primary reason for internationalising universities was to increase the international and intercultural knowledge and skills of students and to promote research which addresses cultural interdependence (Knight, 1995). It is also frequently argued that international academic exchange is more important for the individual's personal development. American universities for example, focus on individual development as an important argument for internationalisation. It is sometimes loosely referred to as 'academic tourism'.

From an academic perspective, an international approach to higher education attempts to avoid parochialism in scholarship and research. Internationalisation efforts are intended to enable the University/College community to have the ability to understand, appreciate and articulate the reality of interdependence among nations and to prepare staff and students to function in an international and intercultural context. Closely related to the above is the argument that internationalisation of education can

strengthen the core structures and activities of an institution and may enable initiatives to be taken that would not otherwise be possible on the basis of local resources and expertise. Since the pursuit of knowledge in the modern world requires vast resources which are not all available in any one university, international cooperation between higher education institutions in many cases then becomes a necessity. The above are the main rationales and incentives used in the debate on internationalisation of higher education. These social, economic, political and educational arguments are often used by the different stakeholders independently or in combination to justify internationalisation of higher education.

Global Trends on Internationalisation of Higher Education
In 2012, at least four million students went abroad to study up from two million who were abroad in 2000. Traditional student destination countries such as United States of America remain today strong magnets for students seeking a high quality education. In 2012 for example, the USA hosted 18% of the world's total number of international students, UK (11%); France (7%); Australia (6%) and Germany (5%). This however was a drop in all the top five countries which saw their international enrolment figures decline from 55% in 2000 to 47% in 2012 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2012). This is so because there now exists regional hubs which not only attract a share of the global population of international students but are becoming favoured destinations for students within regions. Lower travel costs and cultural familiarity are part of the appeal. There was an increase in Sub-Saharan Africa from 18% to 28% with South Africa attracting 22% of international students in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2012. In percentage terms, the top 10 destination countries are as follows;

- United States (18% of total mobile students)
- United Kingdom (11%)
- France (7%)
- Australia (6%)
- Germany (5%)
- Russia (4%)
- Japan (4%)
- Canada (3%)
- China (2%)
- Italy (2%)

It is again interesting to note that 67% of the total number of international students are found in North America and Europe. In absolute terms, the largest numbers of international students are from China, India and Korea thus Asians alone account for 52% of all students studying abroad worldwide. Below is an illustration of the growth of international students' figures from 1975-2009.

Figure 1.1: Growth of internationalisation of higher education (1975-2009)
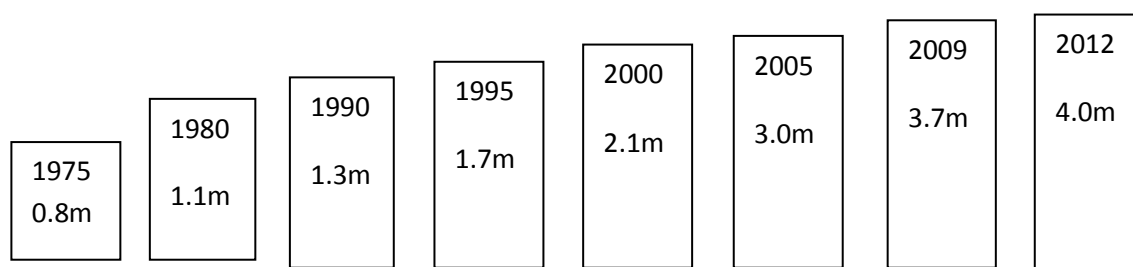
Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics 2012.

The United States saw a significant drop as a preferred destination of foreign students between 2000 and 2012 falling from 23% of global market to 18%. Coming down to Africa, Zimbabwe for example has got students studying abroad as shown below;

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10 938 -------------------------South Africa
 1 125-------------------------United States
 1 059-------------------------United Kingdom
    657-------------------------Australia
    381-------------------------Malaysia
    240-------------------------Canada
    110-------------------------Germany
     65-------------------------Netherlands
     57-------------------------Russia
     53-------------------------India
Below 50---------------------rest of the world
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(Source: UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2012)

The total number of students studying abroad is 27 994 compared to only 352 the total number of international students studying in the country. South Africa, Zimbabwe's neighbouring country on the other hand presents a sharp contrast to the situation in Zimbabwe. The total number of South Africans who are studying abroad is 6 378 compared to 42 180 international students studying in the different South African Universities. Of these, 10 938 are from Zimbabwe which has only managed to attract not more than five students from each one of these countries, America, Britain, Cuba, Japan to mention just a few[1]. Given this insightful statistical data, it would be interesting to establish disaggregated figures which also show how many of these international students in higher education abroad are students with disabilities. However, our general assumption is that there are disproportionately few as compared to those without disabilities.

Right to Education for Persons with Disabilities

Data collected by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2011 in households in Malawi, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe indicate that between 24% and 39% of children with disabilities had never attended school, compared to the much lower rate of between 9% and 18% of children without disabilities who had never attended school. Several other studies also show that children and young people with disabilities are less likely to proceed to higher levels of education than their non-disabled counterparts, yet, education in general, and post-secondary education in particular, is a predictor of gainful employment in meaningful occupations and opens opportunities for career development, resulting in improved quality of life (Sachs, 2011). Education has been described as both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realising other human rights. Furthermore, the lack of education in early life has been shown to significantly increase the chances of poverty in adulthood.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the first human rights instrument in the twenty-first century, is the major law that makes provisions for persons with disabilities at the international level. The Convention has led to

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[1] Figures presented in this paper were obtained from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS). These data cover only students who pursue a higher education degree outside their country of residence.

the confirmation of disabled people as rights-bearers and valued members of society. Article 24 of the CRPD provides for the right to education for all persons with disabilities and places emphasis on the need to ensure inclusive education at all levels for them. In addition, the Article is framed in terms of 'persons with disabilities' as opposed to 'children with disabilities' first, because not everyone receives education as a child, and second, because education is a life-long activity. However, despite the revolution in social and legislative policies on provision of equal opportunities for education and employment for people with disabilities, there is clearly still a long way to go in this regard.

Purpose of Education

Education can be viewed as a tool for personal and social development and the vehicle through which equal opportunities for all can be guaranteed in an all-inclusive and barrier-free society. To this end, it should impart knowledge, promote imaginative understanding and creativity, instil positive moral values, provide room for enjoyment through various activities, involve and empower an individual and the community, and finally, promote independence/interdependence amongst individuals at both the micro and macro levels (Warnock Report, 1978; Chataika, Mckenzie, Swart, Lyner & Cleopas, 2012).

In most countries of the majority world, particularly in Africa, learners with disabilities have largely been denied meaningful formal education due to some cultural beliefs and traditions which also determined how they were generally treated. The widely held beliefs that children with disabilities are a curse or punishment by God, or that disability is a result of witchcraft, were (and may still be) prevalent in most communities in these countries today (Chataika, et al., 2012; Shava, 2008). It is from such assumptions that negative attitudes about people with disabilities emanate and hence, usually lead to a widely held view that it is not worthy investing in the education of disabled people. But, as one disability activist succinctly puts it, "The consequence at the end of the day of denying disabled people an education is much more expensive than provision of education." (Mpindu, cited in Peters, 2001: 153).

The institutional and consequently, national costs of providing education to learners with disabilities in the short term may look expensive, but the long term effects of denying them education are even much more costly for societies and nations. Reference can be made to the Reformed Church University and Reformed Church in Zimbabwe special schools cases of providing tertiary, primary and secondary education to learners with disabilities, expensive equipment, longer periods of learning etc). However, the long term denial of education to such an important part of the population in Zimbabwe has got a huge long-term effect on the performance of the economy and development of the country in general.

Educating Learners with Disabilities: Strategies for the 21st Century

The education of disabled learners can be categorised into two distinct classes namely; Special Education and Special Needs Education (Groll, 2000). Special Education suggests a "special", segregated approach to the education of pupils with special educational needs. This is education in schools and/or institutions where children with specific impairments learn on their own. We would like to argue that this type of 'segregated' education was brought about by the advent of the industrial revolution whereupon factories were built in towns and cities and people had to move from their homes and communities in search of work. This led to the institutionalisation of a few disabled children who could find places in the very few Mission institutions that were available for formal education. Segregated schooling therefore meant that children with impairments were isolated, discriminated against and excluded from

mainstream community activities by a society that has largely negated the values of 'Africanness', and is characterised by 'Western iniquities' of egocentrism, intolerance, selfishness and the sense of superiority of some individuals or groups over others.

Special Needs Education, on the other hand, denotes the education of pupils with Special Education Needs (SEN) within an inclusive environment. This educational approach can also be distinguished into two types. First, mainstreaming or integration is an approach in which pupils with SEN are integrated in different ways in ordinary schools wherein only a few ordinary schools are equipped with specialised resources in order to accommodate pupils with special educational needs. Second, inclusion is an approach by which all ordinary schools should cater for pupils with special educational needs as well. All schools should accommodate pupils with physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic, sensory and other needs. So, while integration is based upon the "human values" of participation and underlying differences, inclusion views it as a matter of human rights to transform the human values of integration into the immediate rights of excluded learners (Clark, Dyson, Millward and Skidmore, 1997).

Booth (2003:253) defines inclusive education as, "...the process of increasing the participation of learners in and reducing their exclusion from the curricula, cultures and communities of neighbourhood mainstream centres of learning." Booth's definition recognises the reality of exclusionary pressures in education and the need to identify and counter them if the participation of learners is to be increased. Ainscow (1999), in concurrence with Booth (2003) states that, "Inclusion has to do with overcoming limitations to participation". It is therefore an idea premised on the fundamental principle that every learner belongs to the community, and it essentially calls for a structural re-engineering of all schools or institutions so that they can accommodate the needs of all learners regardless of the nature and severity of their impairment or condition. In this process, there is need to conceptualise a new society that is inclusive and planned for all the people; and the guidelines for this process should be the principles of Universal Design (Phiri, 2003; Butler and McEwan, 2007). By definition, Universal Design means that the design of products and environments has to be usable by all people and to the greatest extent possible without the need to make adaptations or specialised designs (Holm, 2006). The purpose of Universal Design is to simplify life for everyone by making products, communications, and the built environment more usable by as many people as possible at no extra cost. Such arrangements benefit all people of all ages, abilities or circumstances (Phiri, 2003; Holm, 2006).

Inclusive education is therefore concerned with challenging the ways in which educational systems reproduce, perpetuate and maintain social inequalities regarding marginalised and excluded groups of students across a range of abilities, characteristics, developmental trajectories, and socio-economic circumstances (Liasidou, 2012). Thus, inclusion is inexorably linked with the principles of equality and social justice in both educational and social domains (Ainscow, 1999; Lipsky and Gartner, 1996). We also argue that inclusive education is neither 'foreign' nor even 'Western' (except perhaps for the terminology) as it advocates that learners with disabilities should learn alongside their non-disabled peers, which is akin to the calls of 'togetherness' upon which African 'humanness' is grounded. 'Inclusivity' has always been at the heart of Ubuntu and, of course, it has inevitably gone through significant changes influenced by time, space and such factors as colonialism and globalisation. It is a response to 'segregated schooling' which was created by the 'capitalist' demands of the global economy that necessitated increased concerns for effectiveness, value

for money and competitiveness (Liasidou, 2012). These ideologies have given rise to learners who are regarded as "human resources" rather than "resourcefully human" (Bottery, 2000:59). Inevitably, this quintessential construction of the modernist, unitary, humanistic 'ablist' normative values and expectations placed on learners is hugely problematic for students with disabilities and or special educational needs who require the support of others (Goodley 2007:321).

Ubuntu and Inclusivity

Inclusivity in education constitutes an international policy imperative that promotes the rights of disabled learners to be educated alongside their peers in mainstream classrooms (Armstrong and Barton, 2007; Kenworthy and Whittaker, 2000). Although it is a relatively recent policy phenomenon, it is our contention that it embodies ideas and principles that are rooted in 'Ubuntu', which is the African understanding of the genealogy of humanity. It is a strategy meant to contribute towards making education accessible to all by opening spaces, providing equal opportunities for the marginalised and creating inclusive communities, and ultimately promoting an all-inclusive society which enables all children and adults, whatever their gender, age, ethnicity, impairment, or HIV status, to participate in and contribute to the typical African way of life which is underpinned by tolerance, respect, human dignity and compassion. Amid loud calls for an African Renaissance, inclusive education (at both local and international level) is therefore the single most important social transformational vehicle through which an inclusive society can be realised wherein all human beings are treated equally and with dignity.

The philosophy of 'Ubuntu' is the spiritual foundation of African societies and a unifying vision or world view enshrined in the Zulu maxim 'Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu', that is, "a person is a person through other persons" (Shutte, 1993). This traditional African aphorism articulates a basic respect and compassion for others, and is an encapsulation of 'humanness'. It can be interpreted as both a factual description and a rule of conduct or social ethic within the African value system (Louw, 1995). As Mbiti (1992) cited in Chataika et al, (2012) explains, it is underpinned by the belief that, "Whatever happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: 'I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.' This is a cardinal point in the understanding of the African view of man."

Such an interpretation of 'humanness' and 'beingness', which is at the core of the very existence of Africans, could be the bedrock of education systems in promoting 'inclusivity'. Ubuntu-inspired inclusive schools and universities could therefore become mediating institutions in redressing wider social, political and economic inequalities as well as fostering more democratic and socially just ways of thinking and acting. Thus, these institutions will not only be focusing on enabling disabled students to "overcome" barriers to learning and participation by devising "specialist" educational measures and interventions intended to respond to students' right to education, but also on proactively seeking to address the barriers to learning and participation endemic to the curriculum, the assessment regimes and institutional conditions of current educational practices (Lloyd, 2008; Wedell, 2008).

Conclusion

Globalisation and internationalisation present to us a new and very important context for all of us. Responding to this context is of course a process, a space of possibility, rather than a

destination. Preparing students with the skills and the ethical dispositions to invent a future that enhances humans' well-being in this space of possibility is the most critical challenge for higher education institutions in our time. To do this we need to focus on developing global values, foreign language skills and globalisation expertise.

Internationalisation of education in Africa will however, for a long time, inevitably remain a pipe dream for disabled learners because, even in their own countries, they are grossly excluded. Inadequate accessibility of higher education institutions, lack of support, adverse social attitudes and social isolation, as well as low financial capacity, are the major hindrances to their full participation in education at all levels. However, studies have shown that positive institutional attitudes towards students with disabilities, the awareness of these students' needs, and the knowledge of the reasonable accommodations required, are all critical factors in ensuring access to higher education for disabled learners in Africa. This paper therefore underscored the need for Africa to 'go back to basics', that is to decolonise our education systems, design Ubuntu-based curricula and make our schools and universities run along the principles of 'inclusivity' and 'universal design'. This is the only way Africa can rid itself of the inequality, discrimination and exclusionary practices prevalent in its institutions' academic systems. African renaissance and an all-inclusive society could only be realised when our education systems are made inclusive from early childhood to higher education.

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