Internationalization of Higher Education and Research in Ethiopia: Considerations for Institutional Strategy

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Abstract: In Ethiopia, research is not only small in size but also largely set as a component of the higher education system. Therefore, policy and strategic decisions at national level are often developed in blended manner that encompasses both aspects. Internationalization has for the first time emerged as a policy issue in the fifth Education Sector Development Program, in which research also gained attention, though less than deserved. This paper examines the practice of internationalization of higher education at institutional level and the existing loose-defined policy space. Finally, the paper outlines possible institutional strategies for the internationalization of research.

Keywords: higher education; internationalization; Ethiopia

INTRODUCTION

The internationalization of research is embedded within the general concept of internationalization of higher education. This is more so in Ethiopia where research is predominantly done with in higher education institutions. Although a relatively recent phenomenon, the Internationalization of higher education (IoHE) has gained a prominence as a subject of policy formulation. It has attracted the attention of wide range of stakeholders from the individual student or staff who decides to enroll or work with institutions in countries other than their own, to the supra national organs that are committed to the advancement of policy and the promotion of the practice in internationalization. An increasing volume of research is being produced in a continuing attempt to understand the phenomenon. This has resulted in the concept of IoHE taking deeper root and expanding its range of dimensions (de Wit & Hunter, 2015), gradually establishing its place in the field of higher education.

As the involvement of different actors to promote and tap into the advantages of IoHE, continues to grow, there are also skeptics who question its long term benefits, particularly for developing countries. They argue that internationalization is shaped to fit to and to propagate western hegemony in education, and needs to be reconsidered (Patel, 2017). Nonetheless, developing countries around the world are crafting policies for and investing resources into IoHE to make the best out of what it offers. Recently Ethiopia has also introduced IoHE in its grand education plan – the Fifth Education Sector Development Program (ESDP-V).

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This short paper looks into the practices of internationalization in the Ethiopian higher education, and lays down the outline of the current policy framework. It then specifically focuses on possible institutional strategies for improving the international nature of research with in the broader frame of IoHE. But, first an introduction to the general concept.

The concept of Internationalization of higher education

IoHE means different things to different people and carries different implications for specific contexts. This is explained by the multiplicity of dimensions, manifestation and actors in IoHE. As a result, the concept has evolved to be called by, or associated with, a number of different terminologies which, one way or another, address a certain aspect of IoHE.

Table 1
Evolution of International Education Terminology

New terms since 1990s	Existing terms since 1970s	Traditional terms
Generic terms		
Globalization	Internationalization	International education
Borderless education	Multicultural education	International development
Crossboarder education	Intercultural education	cooperation
Transnational education	Global education	Comparative education
Virtual education	Distance education	Correspondence education
Internationalization "abroad"	Offshore (overseas) education	
Internationalization "at home"		
Specific terms		
Education providers	International students	Foreign students
Corporate universities	Study abroad	Student exchange
Liberalization of educational services	Institution agreements	Development project
Networks	Partnership projects	Cultural agreement
Virtual universities	Area studies	Language study
Branch campuses	Double joint degrees	
Twinning programs		
Franchise programs		
Networks		
Global education index		

Source: Knight (2008) p. 12

Though universally acceptable definition is not possible, the following general definition, given by one of the prominent scholars in the field, Jane Knight, is commonly used. She proposed that IoHE perceived either at the national/sector or institutional level can be understood as "the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (Knight, 2004, p.11).

This definition encompasses not only the broad categories of the content of internationalization but also common ways of integration. It can be reinterpreted to fit to specific circumstances and needs based on the   purpose, function and delivery mechanisms a specific institution or higher education system pursues.

Another possible way to understand the concept of IoHE is in terms of its underpinning rationales. As IoHE takes place at different levels and for different purposes, various actors with specific motives/rationales are involved. The overall rationales for IoHE are summarized into four major categories by deWit (2002,).

1. Political rationales: these include country relations and diplomatic purposes such as foreign policy/strategic alliances, national security, technical assistance, peace and mutual understanding, spreading national identity, and creating/enhancing regional identity
2. Economic rationales – these are more dominant and directly linked with globalization of economy. Economic growth and competitiveness, supplies to the labor market/national educational demands, and the financial incentives for institutions and governments.
3. Cultural and social rationales- these are concerned with the export of national, cultural and moral values, intercultural understanding, citizenship development (personal growth)
4. Academic rationales – an international dimension of (and productivity in) research and teaching, extension of the academic horizon, institutional capacity building, profile and status enhancement, improving quality and aspiration to international academic standards

THE PRACTICES OF IoHE IN ETHIOPIA

Historically, certain international elements are observable in the Ethiopian education. As Semela and Ayalew (2008) noted, traditional and religious educational institutions were connected with institutions and educational traditions of other countries. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church's connection to the Egyptian Coptic Church and contents of its curriculum from Greece, as well as the use of Arabic in Islamic Schools (Madrasas) can be considered as the earliest signals of internationalization in Ethiopian education. Over the years the arrival of missionaries and the return of foreign educated Ethiopians brought more content and form of educational delivery from abroad (Zewde, 2002).

In higher education in particular, the establishment of the first institution – University College of Addis Ababa – by Canadian missionaries, and the consequent role of foreigners in administrative positions, as well as the teaching and administrative contributions of foreign educated Ethiopians (Wagaw, 1990) established the international dimension. During the Derg era higher education was influenced by the global political dynamics of the Cold War. Not only educational curriculum was influenced by socialist ideology but the impact of

development aid and technical assistance from socialist countries, along with government sponsored scholarships to those countries played considerable role (Bishaw & Melesse, 2017).

Since the 1991 change of government, the liberalization of the higher education system created space not only for private providers but also for the substantial influence of donor countries and international organizations (Martin, Oksanen & Takala, 2000; Woldegiyorgis, 2014). Although currently there is no well-developed strategy and/or proper coordination for activities of internationalization, at institutional level Semela and Ayalew (2008) have identified different efforts that can fit in the domain of internationalization. These include:
Collaborative research and joint programs - Many of the senior universities have linkages with counterparts in Europe and North America. Conducting collaborative research and offering joint/sandwich academic programs (at graduate level) are among the common elements of such linkages.

Student and staff mobility - Although Ethiopia has a long way to go in becoming a favored destination for mobile students, some universities have student exchange initiatives. Refugee students from neighboring countries account for the largest share of degree seeking foreign students in the country. Besides the US and Western European countries India, South Africa and Saudi Arabia are among the common destinations for Ethiopian students, according to UNESCO. Staff mobility happens in two main ways: academic staff traveling abroad for further study, and short term trainings and/or learning and experience sharing trips as part of institutional partnerships in capacity building. Also, in addition to the expatriates who account for a substantial share of the academic staff in public universities, volunteers and visiting professors and researchers under schemes like the Fulbright represent the other facet of staff mobility.

Language of instruction - English has been the language of instruction for secondary and higher education since the beginning of modern education in the country. This has also been reaffirmed in the 1994 Education and Training Policy. Although the use of English as a medium of instruction is not necessarily equivalent to internationalization, it contributes in many ways (in curriculum, mobility, partnership, etc.) to the easier interaction of the higher education system with the rest of the world.

Collaborative cross border (distance) programs - programs by foreign institutions which are offered in some form of collaboration with local institution constitute another major international aspect of the Ethiopian higher education. Several such programs are offered in a form of distance and online education, at graduate level.

Current policy framework

The key role attributed to higher education and vocational institutions in the poverty reduction and development plan of the country provides the overarching policy framework.

Post-secondary institutions are responsible for the national capacity building agenda whereby enhancing their own capacity, among other things by creating international collaborations, is a priority. While Ethiopia does not yet have a comprehensive higher education internationalization policy/strategy, some important insights can be observed in the various national documents.

The 1994 national Education and Training policy has no clear stipulation pertinent to the dimensions of internationalization. It makes only two references in this regard: "international outlook" of citizens as one of the objectives of education and training; and the use of English as the medium of instruction and the right provided to students to choose one foreign language for the purposes of promoting cultural and international relations.

The 2009 higher education proclamation, which is revised from its 2003 version, makes several references to international good practices as a way of determining the most suitable or up-to-date institutional models and practices in areas such as academic freedom, status of academic staff, employment and promotion guidelines, status and organization of institutions, etc. International competitiveness is also identified as one of objectives of higher education. Although details lack, one can argue that the objective of being internationally competitive calls for international dimensions to be incorporated in the curriculum, practical training, institutional arrangement and practices as well as in extracurricular activities and composition of students and staff.

More to the point of internationalization, the proclamation calls for institutionalized system for universities to conduct joint research with national and international institutions, research centers and industries. Nonetheless, there are no more details regarding the objectives and detail mechanisms of the process, making it difficult to conclude that the proclamation has indeed addressed issues of internationalization in higher education/research.

A breakthrough came with ESDP-V which offered a wider and more relevant view of internationalization. In terms of general objectives and approaches it stipulates that during the implementation of ESDP-V (2015 to 2020) the international competitiveness of graduates and standardization of certification in par with international practices (particularly in vocational training) has been emphasized. As such universities are expected not only to improve their communication with employers (national and international) and the labor market but also to strengthen collaborations with international institutions.
ESDP-V sets out internationalization as a possible strategic focus, articulated in what can be summarized in the following points.

- Institutional collaboration will take place at regional, national and international levels.
- Institutional collaborations are meant to expand "international dialogue and exchange" targeting improved quality and effectiveness in the core function of the university.

- International collaborations in particular have their central aim of promoting the import and export of local and international knowledge, technologies, and social and cultural experiences.
- Mobility of staff and students through joint academic and research programs are envisaged towards attracting international students, with regional focus.

To reach these general ends ESDP-V has outlined specific activities and set targets. In addition to the establishment of a national body to facilitate the development of system level internationalization strategy, institutions are required to focus on specific activities that are pertinent to the internationalization of research (MoE, 2015). The following points are more relevant.

1. Each university will have an international collaboration strategy and will open an international liaison office – since collaboration is a broad term, it can create opportunities for partnerships in research and publication.
2. Percentage of research funds secured from industry and international sources will reach 50% - although no further breakdown is offered, it can be assumed that application for research grants abroad, perhaps in partnership with foreign institutions and researchers, can possibly be among the targeted sources.
3. Share of joint research programs undertaken in collaboration with non-Ethiopian universities will be 20%. This is a direct call for institutions to undertake strategically targeted efforts to form and utilize international collaborations for research.
4. Student mobility through international exchange programs will be encouraged – this, particularly at graduate level enhances the international nature of research.
5. Percentage of foreign staff will increase to 10% (from 8% at the end of ESDP IV). Considering that each academic staff is required to dedicate a certain percentage of his/her time to the undertaking of research, foreign staff can bring in their experiences and capacity in research as they do in teaching.

Strategies for improving the internationalization of research

Mohrman, Ma and Baker (2008) characterize universities focusing on internationalization of their research, among other things, by: global mission that goes beyond boarders; research intensity; changing roles for professors confronted by different kinds of competitions (e.g. for publication, for tenure, for research grant, etc.); diversified funding; worldwide recruitment; increasing complexity as the number of stakeholders increases and their respective demand changes; dynamic relationship with government and industry; and global collaboration with similar institutions. Antelo (2012), who agrees to this characterization, adds that such universities also have the tendency for more involvement of faculty in institutional decision making processes. These characteristics can be understood as manifestations of strategic focus on internationalization of research.

Adapa (2013), on his part, emphasizes the engagement of early career researchers in international collaborations as a strategy to build lasting relationships and research networks.

Further he acknowledges the lack of coordinated strategic approaches in most universities. In recognition of the importance of coordinated approach to internationalization, citing the 1999 internationalization Strategy of the University of Waterloo, Adapa (2013, pp. 8-9) offers a comprehensive list of 13 activities that contribute to strategic internationalization of research in a university. On the other hand, in a 2005 ACE report Green (2005), who took rather a broader approach, identified six major dimensions of internationalization pursued by the more active research-intensive universities. These dimensions in Green's analysis are, however, presented for a comprehensive university where undergraduate programs and general internationalization, than internationalization of research in particular, is emphasized. By combining the two lists, the following seven strategic considerations can be identified for effective internationalization of research:

Clear institutional commitment – internationalization of research shall be articulated in the essential documents of the institution such as in its mission statement, strategic plan, various policies and procedures pertinent to the activities of the main institutional units, university website, prospectus, etc. Internationalization has to be clearly identified as one of the top priorities of the institution. Articulating commitment also requires the institution to undertake a periodic assessment of its internationalization activities examining progresses, shortcomings and potential for improvement.

Institutional mechanisms - Craft proper policies and procedures to provide seed funding and other forms of support for international initiatives; reporting mechanisms to identify and keep track of international research projects in order to consider them in fundraising priorities; and setting guidelines to ensure part of the overhead gains is reinvested in similar initiatives all play important roles. The presence of dedicated human resources, such as offices responsible for the various activities in internationalization or campus wide standing committees, along with the necessary resources, including office space, mechanisms of communication, etc., take another dimension in this regard. However, it needs to be noted that this can be done in many different ways depending on the circumstances of the respective institutions.

Marketing - showcasing research and scholarly strength of the university to other institutions, international researchers, potential donors, alumni, etc. by participating as well as organizing relevant academic conferences, by advertising on journals and other scholarly publication outlets. Universities need to establish, cultivate and maintain relationship with stakeholders who can be potential sources of funding. Marketing also works internally. Effective communication of internationalization agendas and activities, use of the university website, group email, newsletter, bulletin, etc. to reach out to faculty and researchers to keep them informed of internationalization activities and update them on opportunities plays a crucial role.

Support system - Faculty are the ones who will be directly involved in international research, hence, they have to be supported, motivated and rewarded for achievements in this specific area. The professional development of faculty with respect to international engagement has to

be institutionally supported by earmarking resources for this specific purpose. Organizing workshops on how internationalization works and how to engage in international research collaborations, providing technological support, flexibility to accommodate for study abroad or research visits, support in grant writing, etc. constitute the kind of institutional support needed to promote internationalization of research.

Incentive schemes - Establish a reward system in performance review, promotion and tenure of staff that acknowledges participation and excellence in international research. There should also be an institutional mechanism in place that supports and incentivizes faculty and researchers to apply and obtain external funding for research. In light of promoting internationalization of research it is possible to set varying incentives to provide more reward for international grants, or for those done in collaboration with foreign institutions/colleagues, compared to other domestic sources.

Support for young professionals - In addition to making international research engagement as a criterion for promotion and/or other forms of reward, universities should invest in supporting particularly their junior faculty. Creating a system that especially encourages graduate students and early career researchers to be involved in international research projects not only helps to enhance their capacities but also to ensure continuity of international engagement at institutional level.

Overall international environment - institutions have to make sure that there is enough support for attracting international students (more at the graduate level concerning research) and for international activities on campus that generate exposure to global issues. In addition to offering scholarships and other financing schemes for international graduate students, organizing on campus international events, such as speakers series on international issues, communication of international research, integration activities for international students, etc. as well as opportunities for [graduate] students to participate in international events, such as conferences, colloquiums, research visits, study abroad, etc. are some of the mechanisms to support internationalization of research.

FINAL POINTS FOR CONSIDERATION

The Ethiopian higher education has had international dimensions since its inception in its modern form. Though one cannot completely disregard the arguably negative consequences in detaching higher education form local realities, it can also be argued that the Ethiopian higher education has opportunities to a fairly easy readability and interaction with the rest of the world. This is, among other things, due to its language of instruction and the mobility of students and staff.

The recent impetus for the internationalization of higher education in general and for enhancement of research engagement in particular, through institutional collaborations and other mechanisms, needs to be cultivated. It is imperative that Ethiopia needs to develop a

comprehensive strategy for the internationalization of higher education, including research. In the meantime, institutions should effectively use the current policy space that encourages engagement in international partnerships and short term in- and out- bound mobility of students and staff.

To this end, institutions need to have their own internationalization strategies which outline their goals, mechanisms and the possible ways to enhance the in-house capacity and quality of research. It is important to underline that institutions need to frame their strategies from their own point of strength. While it is vital to refer to and learn from the experiences of other institutions, Ethiopian higher education institutions need to look into their own relative advantages to negotiate partnerships. This requires identifying their niche areas of research advantage which can be of interest for potential partner institutions, donors and research funding agencies. However, it is equally important to strike a balance with ensuring that research agenda is locally rooted and focused on addressing issues and problems of the country, and the local environment, vis-à-vis crafting research programs that are merely driven by international aspirations.

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