

Tertiary Education Curricula Internationalisation in Southern Africa: Its Impact on Global Employment Opportunities

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Abstract

While education systems in Africa share common backgrounds historically (educationally, socially, politically, economically and culturally), they are deep variations in the approaches and contexts resulting in many questions than answers. The purpose of this study was to interrogate the current tertiary education curriculum, provide a rationale approach to curricula design that will produce international graduands, not local manpower. With the speedy at which all aspects of life are being globalised, it is important that, the education sector in the continent takes the lead. The study reviewed current literature, documents to obtain key data required to make informed conclusions. The study revealed that there was no consistency in terms of policy formation among tertiary institutions in the SADC region, hence the need to harmonise efforts of international curriculum design. This is despite efforts by individual countries with South Africa taking the lead. The study therefore recommended for deeper involvement by SADC and tertiary institutions in creating a Secretariat, that is legislated and working as a hub for educational Development in Southern Africa in a bid to full fill the United Nations dream for Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals in the face of a globalised world.

Keywords: Internationalisation, curriculum, global employment

Introduction

The internationalisation of higher education has become an important consideration and research agenda world-over. Governments' policies in Southern Africa require continuous redesign, adjustments, re-engineering and reviewing and impartial implementation to promote student values and attributes, including intercultural awareness and engagement, competition edge and global citizenship. This paradigm shift calls for concerted effort between and among governments in Southern Africa, to revamp the tertiary curriculum and give it an "international outlook". In the same endeavour products of the system (graduates) in the region will be competitive enough to be employed locally, regionally and globally.

Overview to internationalisation

Cosmopolitan, human capital has become an integral ingredient in the set of competencies considered to provide a competitive edge and to be required for effective citizenship in the 21st century. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries are part of this global wave. Internationalisation of education, especially at tertiary level has become a more common phenomenon in institutions around the world, serving as a tool to provide graduates with cosmopolitan capital and relevant capabilities for the future.

Though there is hot academic debate on internationalisation and cross-employment, few attempts have been made to characterise and measure the intensity of the internationalisation process at the institutional level (Gough, 1998). The focus of internationalisation should begin with re-visiting curriculum presently in place at institutional level, up it to national level till integration at regional level (Gough, 1998). The purpose of this study is to provide a platform of debate on rationalisation and harmonisation of tertiary curriculum that will provide a global outlook and, increase employment opportunities for graduates within the region. In addition, the study intends to provide a new direction in educational policy research which reflects the increase political, social and economic salience of internationalisation in institutions of higher learning. The paper is positioned and hinged on research and teaching development activities in which internationalisation, globalisation and curriculum issues are talk of the day.

Statement of the problem

Globalisation has posed many challenges to global economic and Southern Africa is not spared. The global economic down turns which is characterised by drops in GDPs and severe jobs losses, is a clear testimony and a wake-up call for higher education institutions to create new global and international competencies. The message is very clear that those that are skilled and qualified to secure the benefits of the global economy will survive in the 21st century. Thus the compelling pressure from all angles is for Southern governments to have a re-look at the higher education sector, and create a curriculum that will see the employability of graduates for the new economy. The study is therefore, carried against a background to deepen the debate on higher education and training for Southerners to harmonise regional education systems through creating a boundariless curriculum. The ultimate goal is to create a *Boundariless* graduate (graduates who are employable beyond their national boundaries).

Research questions

The following research questions were posited:

What is the degree of curriculum internationalisation in Southern Africa?

What impact does internationalisation of curriculum have on employment opportunities?

Research objectives

Given, the above research questions, the following research objectives have been formulated:

To assess the degree of curriculum internationalisation by tertiary institutions in Southern Africa

To assess the impact curriculum internationalisation have on employment opportunities

Significance of the study

The study is a key starting point in opening broader debates towards creating what I will refer to as an “Afro-flavour global curriculum for the Southerners”. This will go a long way for higher education policy makers to promote an education hub, from which all countries in the world can draw inspiration. The study therefore is in its own right an “opportunity provider” to all interested stakeholders to further create debates at institutional, national and regional level of how memorandum of understanding(s) between and among Southerner’s institutions of higher learning can be entered into.

Literature review

Several studies have been carried out on the subject of internationalisation of the curriculum and the subsequent benefits in terms of employment opportunities to the graduates (Kurght, 2008; Beelem, 2007; Crowther et al, 2001; Least and Beelen, 2010). Internationalisation and globalisation are related but not the same thing. My personal view is that globalisation is the context of economic and academic trends that are part of reality of the 21st century and cannot be denied. It is inevitable change. Internationalisation includes the policies and practices undertaken by academic systems and institutions and even individuals to cope with the global academic environment (Knight, 2008). The motivations for internationalisation encompass commercial advantage, knowledge and language acquisitions, enhancing the curriculum with international content and many more. Attempts to monitor international initiatives and ensure quality are integral to the international higher education environment. Thus, my opinion is that if internationalisation aims to enhance institutional and academic quality, the ultimate beneficiaries will be students and hence they should be at the heart of our effort. This, indeed, can be done through consultative internationalisation of the curriculum.

The prevailing global trends make me to suggest that curriculum internationalisation is a response to the need to prepare learners for work in the new reality of a globally interconnected world. Whether or not they plan or decide to work away from home or overseas, today’s graduates, and those of tomorrow, are faced with increasing international contexts and intercultural challenges as migration and a mobile workforce results in diverge, multi-cultural workplace.

Definition of key terms

The following section presents definitions of key words central to this study.

Internationalisation

It is a process of integrating an international, intercultural, global dimension into the goals, teaching/learning research, service delivery of higher education institutions and systems (Knight, 2008).

Employability

This refers to a state of being able to be employed “internationally”. Thus one’s competencies are not confined to local skills requirements.

Curriculum

This refers to course content design that captures and takes into account global content skills. In other words the syllabi are designed to foster what I will refer to as “unlimited broad-based competencies”. This allows an individual to be able to perform beyond local skills-requirement.

Global mobility

An internationally mobile student is a student having crossed a national border in order to study or to undertake other study-related activities for at least a certain unit of a study program or a certain period of time in the country they have moved to (Richlets and Terchers, 2006).

The internationalisation of a higher education institution is a change process from a national High Education Institute into International Higher Education Institute leading to the inclusions of international

dimensions in all aspects of its holistic management in order to enhance the quality of competencies (Sodergvist, 2007).

Literature available shows that the definition of internationalisation includes teaching and learning strategies, governance, human resources development, quality assurance as well as resource mobilisation (Bartel, 2002; Ayoubi and Massoud, 2007, Sodergvist, 2007; Elkin, Fansworth and Templer, 2008; McClellan, 2008). It is interesting to point out that the Southern African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA, 2004) expanded on Knight's definition by including internal development context and South Africa's role in developing higher education in the SADC region:

"...the process of integrating and international, intercultural and global dimension into the purpose ... and its responsibility towards the development of higher education in the region and the commitment"

Facts and Opinions

1. South Africa has more international students than any other country in the SADC region. It has the largest and possibly strongest higher education system offering a full range of courses and qualifications not always available in nations with smaller university sectors.
2. The SADC Protocol on Education and Training was signed in Malawi 1997. Article 7 AI of the Protocol states that "member states agree to recommend to Universities and other tertiary institutions in their countries to reserve at least 5% of admission for students from SADC nations, other than their own. South Africa has reached that in 2003 and in 2008, 5.7% of the country's student cohort from the SADC region.
3. South Africa is the most popular place to study in Africa, and is one of the world's top 20 host nations for American students.
4. Zimbabwe is the major source of students to other SADC countries.
5. South Africa ranks 10th (in the 2008 OECD report) as the preferred destination for international students and is the only African country that features.
6. Worldwide, there were over 2.9 million international students in 2006, a 3% increase over the previous year.
7. By 2025, almost 8 million students are projected to be studying outside their home country (OECD, 2507).

Debate on internationalisation and new learning technologies

Curriculum internationalisation has big dilemmas especially when the following question is raised: what would internationalisation mean for a programme with students from all corners of the world, who have little or no interaction with one another? Do such programmes run the risk of reinforcing stereotypes or reinforces and perpetuate certain cultural values and norms? Of significance is the need to tap into diversity of the learner population for the benefit of all perhaps there will be potential for some genuine intercultural learning (Jones, 2013).

The debate on internationalisation to me, cannot be complete without mentioning, the Sodergvist's position. He alludes to the view that internationalisation introduces a change process in the management of the internationalisation project in higher education institutions and suggest a five-stage model that starts with the zero stage. According to Sodergvist, (2007), the zero stage is characterised by marginal internationalisation activity. The stage is posited to be followed by the student mobility stage, the curriculum and research, subsequent to that is the institutionalisation of internationalisation and commercialisation of the outcome of internationalisation and commercialisation of the outcome of internalisation.

Rationale for internationalisation

Internationalisation scholars (De Wit, 2006; Knight, 2004, Sodergvist, 2007; McClellan, 2008) argue that they are four broad categories of rationale for internationalisation of higher education, which however, may vary from one country to another or one region to another, or one continent to another. I have provided a brief summary of the rationale in the table below.

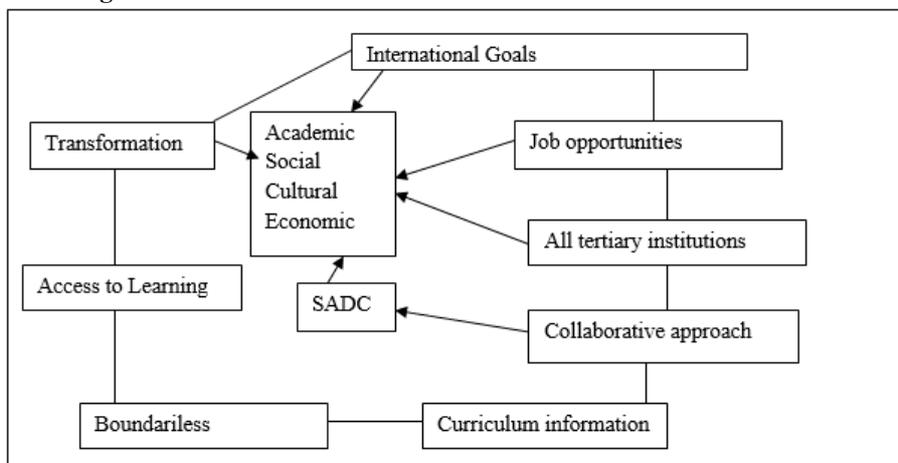
Table 1.1 Rationales for Curriculum Internationalisation

Rationale 1 Economic	This includes economic growth, national education demand competitiveness, and the labour incentives. Income to fund higher education has become one of the key drivers of internationalisation, because tertiary institutions can no longer rely on local fees from local students.
Rationale 2 Academic	Includes international ranking and international research collaboration. It is necessary of the globalised labour market in order to attract students and academics from the international pool. Watheter (2010) pointed out that an internationalised institution that seeks to prepare graduates to perform successfully in an international arena will be characterised by a multiplicity of cultural styles with concomitant demands on teaching and learning strategies.
Rationale 3 Social and Cultural	This has much to do with the role tertiary institutions plan in promoting intercultural competence and social cohesion (De Wit, 2006). The social and cultural aspect can be only achieved through infusing intercultural dimensions in teaching learning, research and community outreach activities (Mswell, 2011).
Rationale 4 Political	The focus is on foreign policy, regional and international trade agreements that promote interregional cooperation. A good example is the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which have fuelled heated debates about the sustainability of Universities in their domestic countries.

Source: (self created by Gwakwa, 2013)

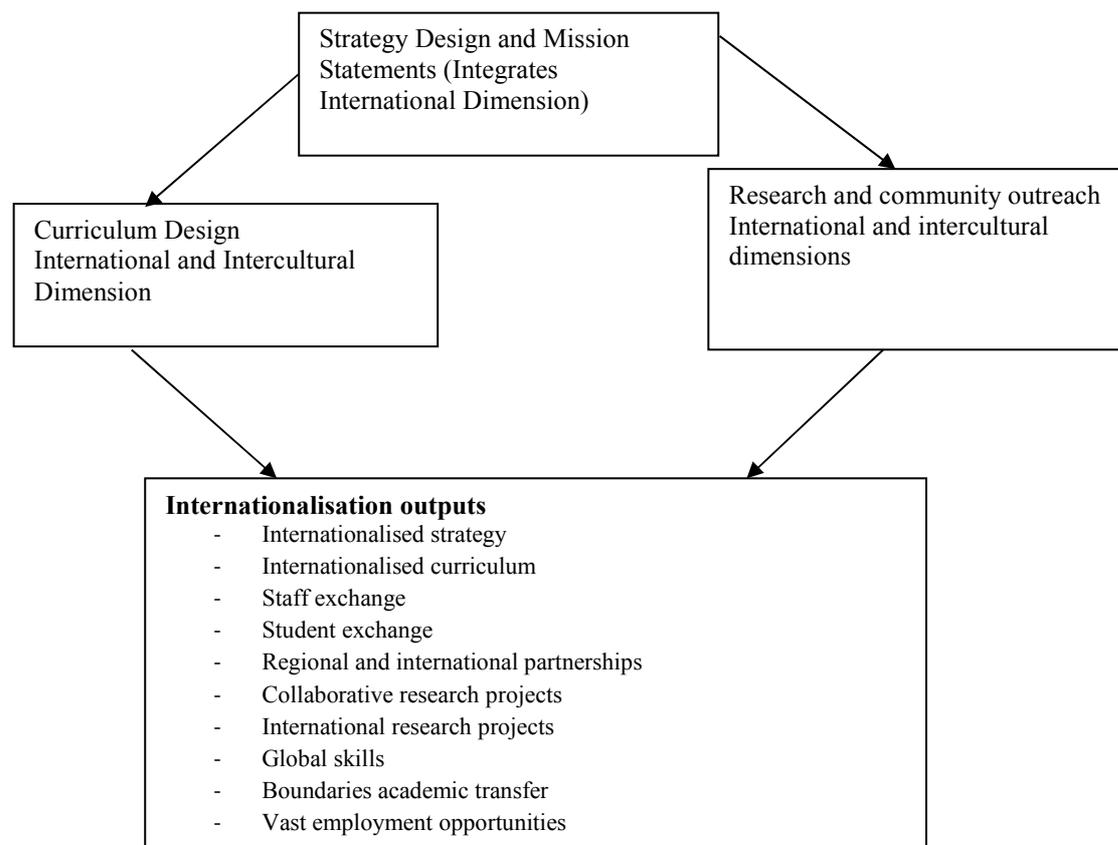
These goals above, are a reality and a must fulfil by tertiary institutions. To be able to satisfactorily attain them, there is therefore need for collaboration and harmonisation of curriculum for the region. To be silent about internationalisation of the curriculum is self-defeating; If Africa has to position itself competitively in the global arena from a social, economic, political and academic perspective, it has to review its curriculum and skills base. It is my view that SADC protocol on higher education should tightens its policies and move with speed to find a way in which her higher education curriculum get-upped. The diagram in the next page provide “Scatter factors” critical for the attainment of internationalisation goals.

Figure 1.1 Scatter diagram: Internationalisation



Below is a diagram (collaborative with the scatter diagram above) showing key out puts from internationalisation and international dimensions. Insights into global upkeep can also be drawn from the figure.

Figure 1.2 Internationalisation: Activities and Output



Research Method

The study focussed on the need to interrogate existing curriculum within the tertiary institutions in Southern Africa, mainly focussing on the curriculum internationalisation. Thus the impetus of the study originates from my desire as a scholar and researcher, and having worked in several universities in the SADC region, I felt there was need to re-ignite a seemingly abandoned topical issue. The study is qualitative in design, with however, pockets of statistical analysis to complement the qualitative design. The use of qualitative design is advantageous because it enables the researcher to delve deep into the phenomena, touches on the lived experiences of the phenomena being studied. In this case it is the Universities and the curriculum issues. The first step in the study involved review of literature on the subject of internationalisation. The second step involved primary research in which data was physically collected from ten universities, which constituted sample size. In addition, 38 students across the region were interviewed. The interviews used open ended questions which allowed for further clarification on cropping issues. Telephone interviews and in-depth interviews characterised the form of methods employed for those universities that I did not physically visit. Personal experience and observations played a critical role in supporting findings obtained through use of the former two approaches. Data was coded, and was analysed thematically. Analysed data was confirmed with the participants to ensure trustworthiness and reliability. The names of institutions could not be disclosed for ethical reasons.

Results

The results from this study are, indeed an extension of the presentations by various scholars on internationalisation and job opportunities by graduates exposed to a borderless (Boundaryless) curriculum. What I am to present are the compressed views and opinions of various authors from literature, and also views coming out from the primary investigations which I carried out to support my desk study. The authenticity of the results hinges on the adoption of triangulation method in data gathering-review of literature, primary data approach and personal experience and observation on curriculum issue.

Literature on internationalisation tertiary curriculum is scanty, and more studies need to be undertaken especially with reference to SADC region. Significant attempts are being made especially in South Africa where most of the scholars are found, who have made strides to research and popularise internationalisation of higher education curriculum (Richters, 2006, Iya, 2009). Most of the literature provides for the aspect that social and cultural rationale, as pointed by De Wit, (2009) has more to do with the role universities plan in promoting

intercultural competence and social cohesion. This can be enhanced when academic institutions of higher learning, research and carry out community outreach activities (Msweli, 2011). The other interesting revelation from the reviewed literature is that most widely accepted view for internationalisation (McClellan, 2008, Sodergvist, 2007, Knight, 2004) is the four broad factors that drive institutions to foster internationalisation. They mention the economic rationale, academic, social and cultural and political rationale as the key drivers. Countries in the SADC region are faced with a challenge of failing to create opportunities through creating binding networks to pursue the harmonisation agenda. Creating a *boundariless* curricula ultimately result in the “production” of *boundariless* graduates who are able to compete globally (self-quote). I am strongly convinced that a “universal curricula brings with it more benefits that enables people to be employable beyond their local borders. A further position that is clear is that SADC countries need to re-define internationalisation, and move away from the myopic view of student mobility to a view of systematic internationalisation “as enunciated by Crowther (2000). Indeed literature shows that internationalisation; within the tertiary institutions in the region now include teaching and learning, quality assurance, governance, human resource development and resource mobilisation (Bartell, 2003, Sodergvist, 2007, Ayoubi and Massoud, 2007).

While internationalisation is common among many tertiary institutions, the indication is that the curricula is confined to local context at most, leaving room for further debate, and raises questions on whether that local content provides enough flavour for global competitiveness.

Arguments put forward by Turnbull (1995) are that all knowledge traditions are spatial in that they link people, sites and skills. Thus, I concur with others (Hardins, 1993, 1994, 1998a) on the post-Kuhnians and post-colonial science and technology studies, where all knowledge traditions are seen as spatial in that they link people, sites and skills together. Thus the need to recognise knowledge systems (including Western science) as sets of local practices so that it becomes possible to “decentre” them and develop a paradigm within which different indigenous knowledge systems can be equally compared rather than absorbed into an imperialist archive. Our education system seems to allow, the abandonment of our own indigenous knowledge system, in the name of internationalisation, by adopting foreign knowledge system in *toto*. I am an opposer to such a system that tends to embrace foreign systems holistically and allow the absorption of one’s. I want to believe at this juncture that the colonial mentality that our education system carried is by now in the archive of imperialist reservoirs. This view despite her doubts about many of the claims that have been made for the universality of some knowledge systems (especially those based in masculinist and western imperialist epistemologies, she has entertained the possibility of “universal ethnosciences” arguing that all knowledge systems are ethnosciences and capable of being universal if they adopt her principle of “strong objectivity, a version of empiricism which privileges multiculturalists and feminist value positions. The same sentiments are shared by Turnbull (1997), who, however, detaches a knowledge traditions “ability to travel” from any assumptions about its supposed “Universalising tendencies”, preferring instead to find ways in which different knowledge systems can co-exist. In that scenario, I tend to argue and share equally with Turnbull that, the strategy is to abandon an “overly representational view of knowledge in favour of recognising that all knowledge is “both performative and representational.”

Primary findings

Apart from the above literature review findings, I also had an opportunity to interact with ten universities within the SADC region. By and large, I physically visited three countries, South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana, where I interviewed responsible authorities, including students soliciting their views on internationalisation of the curriculum. The other seven Universities were interviewed either by email or telephone through contacts, I had created.

The universities surveyed showed a growing sense of their place within Africa and this indeed was reflected in what is taught. All the ten Universities concurred that internationalisation of curriculum was necessary and inevitable. However, 60% of the Universities expressed fear of losing their identity, as they felt that universalising their programme contents, would jeopardise their creative systems. Two of the universities in South Africa and the other one in Zimbabwe believe that internationalisation of the curriculum did not mean losing one’s identity. In fact their views were concurring with Turnbull view that, it is a collaborative effort, in which the indigenous knowledge system is fused or partnered with those global requirements.

The thirty-eight students I managed to talk to revealed that, it was important to fuse cultures without abandoning any ones’. This is what one of the students has to say “without much ado, I believe, curricula design should adopt an “African taste” which embracing diversity. This will enable us to be globally competitive without losing our own *Africanness* in curriculum design.

I asked a question concerning how the Universities and other tertiary institutions could harmonise their curriculum and the general feeling was that SADC, needed to play a critical role in bringing together Universities and other tertiary institutions. The need to force strong networks and creation of a tertiary institution hub was echoed by all the ten universities. The general feeling among the universities was that by harmonising

the curricula, students would be able to transfer from one university to another without facing challenges. For example, an example of a student doing an Engineering Degree in Zambia could transfer to Botswana, in her third year and complete the remaining years in Botswana without her starting afresh.

In terms of impact on employability, it appeared good news for all, as graduands would be versatile to work anywhere in Africa and in the globe, unlike a situation where graduates of a particular country cannot compete effectively if employed in another country. Basically, there is a positive feeling that internationalising the curricula will create more job opportunities for the graduates and thus the contribution of Africa to economies of the world.

From the interviews carried on mode of internationalisation, the revelation was that more than 70% of the Universities in SADC region do carry out internationalisation at Home curriculum. This is a process of providing an international curriculum to students, without necessary moving them to other countries. It aims at making students intercultural and international competent without leaving their own country (Crowther et al, 2001). The implication of internationalisation at home therefore appears that it is a cheap substitute of student mobility, 40% of the Universities concurred that they were strengthening their international/intercultural context of curriculum. This however implies that, at individual level, universities were engaged in a transformative phase, in order to account for global trends.

Asked to indicate the rationale for internationalisation, the following were the results:

Table 1.2 Results on Rationale on Curriculum Internationalisation

	Frequency	% frequency
Enhance international profile and reputation	7	70%
Internationalise curriculum and improve academic quality	6	60%
Diversity sources of income	8	80%
Strength research and knowledge capacity production	10	100%
Respond to public policies	3	30%
Broad sources of students	8	80%

The major reasons emanating for internationalisation and hence call for re-design of curricula are the need to strengthen research (100%), broaden source of students (80%) and diversifying sources of income (80%). Given those drivers, it is ideal that Southerners create a memorandum of understanding through the SADC protocol on education and training to harmonise issues of international curricula.

As of what benefits they institution enjoy, the following results emerged:

Table 1.3 Benefits of Rationale Curriculum Internationalisation

	Frequency	% frequency
Enhanced international cooperation	8	80%
Strengthened research	10	100%
Increased awareness by international students	10	100%
Improved image of the institution	7	70%
Diversified revenue for the University	10	100%

All the factors gained higher rating suggesting that they are significant benefits of internationalisation.

On perceptions on job opportunities, results from curriculum internationalisation indicate that there was general consensus that the creation of such a state of academic paradigm had positive outcomes, as opportunities for jobs will be created. Graduates are not confined to their countries, and hence are employable elsewhere (globally). One of the Deans had this to say, “we do not want to produce narrow and shallow minded graduates by offering local context only we need to be able to export on labour and possibly earn foreign currency with the region and abroad”.

The study, also wanted to find out obstacles likely to be met due to internationalisation of the SADC higher education curriculum .The results are tabled below:

Table 1.4 Obstacles of Curricula Internationalisation

	Frequency	% frequency
Language barrier	6	60%
Limited expertise of staff	6	60%
Limited interest by faculties	4	40%
Insufficient funds	5	50%
Bureaucracy	7	70%
Lack of vision	6	60%
Limited student desire	1	10%
Industry not recognising output	3	30%
Lack of exposure by leaders	6	60%

The above results indicate that the major barriers include bureaucracy (70%), lack of vision (60%) and

limited expertise of staff (60%). These show the speed at which internationalisation can be realised. I believe, governments through SADC initiative should mobilise resources and conscientise institutions on the necessity to internationalise, and create employable graduates for the region and the globe at large.

Discussion

In terms of curriculum inquiry, (Turnbull, 1997) the homogenise effects of globalisation and internationalisation or in the field of curriculum design might be facilitated by emphasising the performance rather than the representational aspects of curriculum inquiry. Thus, from the literature studied and general observations that I have made throughout my career in Universities, the internationalisation of curriculum and its inquiry should be understood not so much in terms of transnational local representations of curriculum into a universalised discourse, but rather, as a process of creating transnational “spaces “in which indigenous knowledge systems or traditions in curriculum inquiry can be performed together. There is need for vigorously and rigorous recuperation of indigenous knowledge systems, of course in both their performative and representational idioms. By re-engineering the curriculum, I do not mean that the local content be overshadowed by universality, especially by imperialist discourses and practices. I am still perturbed by Zimbabwe’s approach for example, where a good curriculum is equated with that of Cambridge and failure to pass English with a C renders an individual a “failure in life”. I want to believe that Zimbabwe is not alone in this imperialistic trail. The prevailing situation on global trends within our academic fraternity calls for the preparation of graduates effectively as reflected in the study. Hence the “must” incorporate global disciplinary perspective into curricula development. It is acknowledged in the study that the intercultural competence required to operate effectively in global contests is equally vital for increasing diverse and multicultural local societies.

The other revelation is that, there is need for graduands to challenge their own identity, values, assumptions and stereotypes and also question their status quo. This requires the Southerners to adopt an all inclusive approach to curriculum and pedagogy, and to recognise and value the cultural insights that the students and staff have that otherwise might be overlooked. The employment of resources of a diverse student and staff population is considerably beneficial in terms of transferrable skills. Of course this may be challenging on domestic campus, and will be more difficult for offshore branch computers or collaborative delivery with other partners, elsewhere. As alluded to, in the paper, studies in the region will have enhanced expectations of an internationalised curriculum to facilitate their transition into global work environments. It emerged from the study that internationalisation is a means to an end not an end results. Today’s students expect higher education to equip them with the tools to operate effectively in a globalised world, and international and intercultural competence is one of those tools.

Recommendations

The study recommends the formation of a regulatory Body at Regional level that promotes “harmonisation and regularisation of curricula for SADC member states. An all encompassing regional curriculum that has “an African flavour” need to be promoted in all disciplines. The implication therefore is, by creating what I call a *boundariless* curricula, our education system is enhanced and captures the *globalness* that is required to create “international graduates”. The design of the curriculum should not abandon local content at the expense of western or eastern content, but create “space for each” knowledge systems.

Universities in particular are encouraged to form strong networks, where they regularly meet to share experiences in curriculum design, research, teaching and community service. I recommend the formation of Centre for Curriculum Development for Southern African States (CCDSAS). A secretariat needs to be established to manage tertiary institution affairs. This secretariat can work hand in hand with SADC Protocol on education and training.

Universities are encouraged to enter into memorandum(s) of understanding, bilaterally and multilaterally to exchange ideas and experiences. SADC member state can also join network in other parts of Africa to share ideas. Students need to be strongly involved in curriculum design as well as industry and commerce.

Study implications to SADC Region

There are two significance contributions that this study makes. The first one is, “it opens a debate of engagement by all concerned institutions of higher learning to speed-up the process of coming with a mandatory formula of improving the present curricula, in line with global trends. This does not mean there is nothing being done by the respective authorities; serve to say a much deeper consented effort is called for.

The second contribution is that the study is not voting for a “universal curriculum perse” but a ‘Universal curriculum that merges or fuses local knowledge with other knowledge to create a “blend curriculum” that is *Africanness*, and beneficial to global needs.

Conclusion

African Universities and in particular the SADC region need to unquestionably invest in their people. The need for more relevant skills is critical and designing curriculum that is all encompassing is a necessary move, if the employability of our people in the global arena is to be guaranteed. It is high time, that a more focussed regulatory body be put in place through SADC initiatives to spear head for the formations of harmonised curriculum design units across the region. Let me put a note by saying: ‘No matter what SADC countries attempt to do in creating a “Universal Curriculum” my advice is that resisting the homogenising effects of cultural globalisation and internationalisation may be made precise by putting emphasis on the performance rather than the representational aspects of curriculum inquiry. The essence is to create, rather transnational “spaces” where local knowledge traditions in curriculum inquiry can be performed together with those of others.

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