

# **From localization to internationalization of higher education: Globalization and transformation of university education in Uganda**

*Author: Sekiwu Denis*

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The thrust for globalisation of society has taken centre stage. This means that people around the world are required to develop high level but low cost technologies and innovative competencies in order to enhance social development. In the field of higher education, university managers need to join the technological revolution by adopting low cost ICT and E-learning facilities. This paper examines the role of E-learning in university effectiveness so as to deal with the challenges of Social and global competitiveness in developing countries. The paper defines the concept of E-learning, justifies the need for E-learning in Universities in developing countries, obstacles and challenges of embracing E-learning innovation, involving academics in E-learning reform in Universities, implementing E-learning technologies and innovation in Universities, and the remedies for ensuring successful E-learning in Universities in developing countries.*

*With the impact of globalisation, universities in the developing world have become competitive in terms of providing quality and flexible educational services to the diverse students' communities. Therefore, creating an enduring vision and a strategic implementation framework for the effective implementation of technological innovations and E-learning seems critical. The demand for skilled workforce equipped with technological skills and competencies to cope with the ever-changing responsibilities at the work place warrants universities to adjust their teaching strategies beyond face-to-face instruction in the classroom. However, it requires institutional leadership in order to promote technology use in university education.*

## **Introduction**

Globalization has had both positive and negative impacts on society in the developing world especially as regards the promotion of higher education. Indeed, in a way, globalization can be regarded as “the direct consequence of the expansion of western cultures across the world via settlement, colonialisation and cultural mimesis. It has displayed great power over “other” cultures especially the indigenous African culture, and is often seen as especially unfavorable to small and weak cultural societies. This fear

of homogenization is expressed even in the development of higher education in many countries (Back et al. 2007; Knight and De Wit, 2007).

Nowadays, international contexts have to be taken into account when higher education in developing countries has begun to integrate into the world community to meet with the global demands and even conform to the international practice. As the globalization process is transforming higher education across the world, and is expected to strongly influence the international nature of the university (Kishun, 1998), the concept of globalization has indeed become increasingly important to debates about the future of higher education. Therefore, educators need to examine the forces of globalization and the immediate background against which higher education internationalization is implemented in developing countries. Open learning, for example, is becoming a hit reality in most universities and the need for placement facilities in foreign universities is now the talk today than ever before. Previously, few parents could afford to take their children to study abroad because they lacked the capacity to afford this type of education. In addition, distance learning was quite minimal because of the lack of Internet facilities. However, today, the internationalization of higher education is more popular and relevant because capacity is available.

It is, thus, high time to analyse the nature of globalization and how it affects higher education in more academic terms. A good understanding of these issues can perform a valuable service to bring a critical voice to the idea of globalization, which is all too often simply accepted as a positive force (Cox, 2006). This article adopts the “critical theory” as a theoretical framework. This is based on a belief that critical theory offers valuable analytical insights to delineate a bigger and clearer picture of the globalization discourse at local, national, and global level. Critical theory is about unearthing changing power relationships with a view to offering voice to “the unheard” and challenging inequalities. As Capper Hanson and Ropers Huilman (2004) have pointed out, the critical theory calls into question power relationships that exist in society and views them within social, historical and economic contexts.

## **Conceptualization of globalization**

Globalization was already a buzzword of the late 20th century, and is even in danger of becoming a cliché (Held et al. 1999). Yet, it lacks precise definition (Kellner, 1998). There have been a variety of different discourses, which have created a huge academic and popular literature on globalization and related topics. According to figures assembled by Busch (2007), the number of articles with the terms “globalization” and “global” in the title have increased almost threefold in the past decade hence making the concept more popular and relevant. The controversy about globalization is connected to a wider debate about modernity (Giddens 1991; Robertson 1992; & Albrow 1996). For some, globalization can be understood simply as the global diffusion of “western modernity”, that is, “westernization”. By contrast, several prolific scholars draw a distinction between westernization and globalization (Giddens 1990). There are an increasing number of attempts to develop explanations of globalization, which highlight the complex intersection between a multiplicity of driving forces, embracing economic, technological, cultural and political change (Giddens 1990; Robertson 1992; Scholte 1993; Axford 1995; Albrow 1996; & Rosenau 1990, 1997).

While many would argue that globalization is neither a wholly novel, nor primarily modern social phenomenon, there are striking novelties in the degree of expansion in the trade and transfer of capital, labour, production, consumption, information, and technology, which might collectively be enormous enough to amount to qualitative change (Miyoshi 1998), and require a rethinking of social theory and politics in the current situation as a response to new developments in society and culture (Kellner, 1998). In the preceding, globalization is associated with political and economic hegemony. More so, it is a highly differentiated phenomenon involving domains of activity and interaction as diverse as the political, military, economic, cultural, migratory and environmental. The concept of globalization spans variously separate yet overlapping domains (Harding, 2000).

In the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the world order demanded that highly indebted poor countries (HIPIC) adopt the idea of globalization, through encouraging liberalization policies, so as to deal with the question of economic and social deprivation. The 1990s

saw the beginnings of globalization in the developing world. In higher education in Uganda, globalization was sparked off by the privatization of higher education and the Universalization of basic education. Ultimately, however, globalization is a process spearheaded by multinational financial and industrial conglomerates (Burbach et al. 1997). The widely discussed globalization phenomenon fundamentally results from the globalization of economic life, which is largely a Universalization of capitalism (Albrow, 1996). Today's globalization is a market-induced, not a policy-led process driven by market expansion.

The triumph of global capitalism is the triumph of the transnational capitalist classes in selling the culture-ideology of consumerism, and delivering goods and services through transnational corporations and other economic institutions. The market's need to expand and grow in perpetuity makes it a powerful and dynamic force in the world. Indeed, some see today's market-driven globalization, with its push for commercial interests that protect profits, not people, as unstoppable on a world scale. Professor Mahmoud Mamdani in his book, "Scholars in the market place" on privatization of public universities in Uganda argued similarly that higher education has taken a profit driven lineage which cannot be stopped however there is need to restructure many things in public universities in order to cope with the global changes. Globalization and global integration are policy shifts to promote economic efficiency through the liberalization and deregulation of national markets and the retreat of the state from many economic activities. On this account, the dominance of economic forces was regarded as both necessary and beneficial even in the logic of managing higher education.

Arguably, the market has gone too far in dominating social and political outcomes because it is widely recognized that this is the sole trend towards the drastic modernization of the world. However, the opportunities and rewards of globalization have spread unequally and inequitably – concentrating power and wealth in a select group of people, nations and corporations, while marginalizing the others. In many universities today, where higher education is largely private, it is the children from the rich families that can ably afford to pay for their education fully. In Uganda, the situation is becoming even worse now that the government is trying to pull away from sponsoring

higher education. The consequence is the ever-increasing tuition fees and accommodation as a response to the forces of demand and supply of education initiatives. Worse still, hostel fees and food are also items that are shooting because business people want to make profits. The lesson learnt here is that when the profit motives of market players are unconstrained, they challenge people's ethics –and sacrifice respect for justice and human rights by increasing prices at the expense of society's potential to meet these expenses and thus its ability to offer decent education to every one.

It is just here where the market falls short. It places the whims of the rich over the most elementary necessities of the poor. The market cannot safeguard the needs of those without money, which is why so many people die every day within sight of global abundance. This is why students often take to streets and strike against what they call “unfair university policies” and protest against increase in tuition fees. In this sense, the market is deaf and blind. It responds only with the sensory equipment that can detect money. With market mechanism as its core, globalization undermines certain basic human needs which managers call the physiological needs. While some economists claim that the market provides conditions for creative entrepreneurship, it is argued here that it does not necessarily cater for the poor with little capital and no incentive to accumulate capital.

In this sense, the market of higher education today encourages selflessness and deprivation, which is all subverted in the market forces and in privatization of public university education according to the most recent market's crude calculus and globalization trend. The market becomes the object of so much remorseless propaganda in the world that good governance, freedom, choice among others are all smuggled routinely into the promotion of free markets. The media tout these ideas even in the face of human misery and socio-economic exclusion that disfigure the face of the earth.

Nothing demonstrates more clearly than the real purpose of the global economy: to conserve the wealth of the rich, to protect privilege, to maintain the advantages of the G-7 over the rest of the world. In this sense, globalization, which sets rules for the market, is both the vehicle and the newest incarnation of economic as well as cultural imperialism that has replaced more crude forms of domination and military occupation, to plunder and

dispossess the majority of the world's population. During what Hobsbawm (1994) calls the Short Twentieth Century (1914–1991), capitalism was challenged by another potentially global force: “real socialism,” in its own terms, or “world communism,” in the perception of its capitalist opponents. By the end of the Short Twentieth Century, real socialism was a spent force, leaving capitalism as the only apparent claimant to global research. Globalization, therefore, never meant global equality. Indeed, in effect it makes the children of the rich obtain more schooling than those of the poor guaranteeing the perpetuation of privilege, and maintains the caprices of the moneyed, over the very survival of those without it.

Gaps between the rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots, the overdeveloped and underdeveloped regions, have grown exponentially. For example, the income gap between the rich families and poor families leads to discrepancies in affordability of private higher education. The poor cannot access further education nor can they afford to sponsor their children overseas yet before globalization and privatization university education was public and all children had equal access if they managed to perform as expected. Education was on merit and the university in Uganda was a public good for all citizens irrespective of creed and money. So as education policy makers think of restructuring higher education and introducing more liberalized and global policy reforms in the sector, they should think in terms of establishing balance in access. It is true that higher education is becoming more private and expensive at the same time, which might drain society's capacity to ensure that all people gain access because of the income differentials and the notion of survival for the fittest. Let us look at the impact of globalization on higher education in more details.

### **The impact of globalization on higher education: The case study of Ugandan universities**

The aforementioned conditions of globalization have seen a rapid expansion of a global higher education market, based on the discourse of global competition. This phenomenon is principally economically motivated and commercial. Its process has been greatly fuelled by the same neo-liberal economics that have become the dominant paradigm for so much of the world over the last decades of the 20th century. According to neo-liberal economics, the provision of education as a “public good” paid for through taxation is

unjustified. It is replaced by an argument for placing education on a user-pays basis, and deregulating educational institutions so that they can vie for the educational dollar of students (or “clients”). This trend is especially manifest in tertiary education, in which a global market is taking shape. Too often university leaders believe that, to survive and prosper in a rapidly changing world, they must embrace the market place and become customer-focused, business enterprises (Currie, 2008). Very few people within higher education have clearly identified the differences between the effects of globalization and those of internationalization on universities. The two terms are largely used interchangeably. It is unclear where one starts and the other stops.

Majority of Ugandan dons and students applaud globalization as an inevitable world trend as indicated by 90% of the dons who argued that globalization has brought new exciting trends and thinking in higher education, income has increased and the public universities can now operate independent of government. They seem to overlook the possible negative impacts of globalization on Uganda’s higher education. When asked whether there could be a harmonious relationship between internationalization and localization, 50.27% questionnaire respondents answered positively. Only 9.09% respondents clearly did not respond. There were as many as 40.63% respondents who said no indicating that globalization could not in any way account for the local development of higher education. At the same time, nearly all the interviewees, who held senior academic and/or administrative posts in institutions of various types, warmly welcomed globalization (80.05 %).

Many of them, in fact, confused globalization with internationalization, without paying sufficient attention to make it more relevant to the local environment. Dons were asked to provide their input and remedies on the question of the relevance of the university curriculum. As high as 78.2% dons and 65% students said that universities in Uganda need to orient their curricular and training objectives towards the demands of industry in order to provide the right skills required in employment, 83% dons and 70% students said that universities should provide technically useful knowledge competencies in order to tackle the problem of unemployment and theoretical learning.

## **Economic pragmatism: The University and the business sector**

It is true that we cannot ignore globalization in university education development because it is the trend of our own times. However, in order to reap the best out of this relationship there is need to study the immediate benefits. The first reflection of the impact of globalization on higher education is to employ economic standards as benchmarks. This has led to an international tendency to overemphasize the practical, technical value of higher education. University achievements have been increasingly simplified to be deemed equivalent to applied research outputs. The number of publications, research grants, graduates count increasingly in universities, leaving educational values far behind. Such a tendency causes tensions between the more profitable applied subjects of science and technology, and those of basic theoretical enquiry, particularly arts and humanities subjects. It also creates institutional winners and losers; with a widening gap between the relatively few elite research universities and those more numerous middle-of-the-road, mediocre or even sub-standard institutions.

Partnerships of universities with industry are a key to building successful economies of the 21st century. Industry's growing interest in university research is regarded as more an opportunity than a threat. However, the need to re-think the symbiotic relationship between higher education and the imperatives of the labour market should not be ignored even if globalization might embody unfavorable policy objectives. The idea of bringing globalization into the university development framework is to bring into effect the university and the business community where the principle of the corporate economy is in control of universities (Edwards, 2005). But surprisingly, the university in Uganda today is still teaching theoretical education rather than "practicum". There is very little consensus, for instance, as to what should be taught and how relevant it is to today's social system. Courses are often now cancelled unless enough students enroll because many universities purely depend on student payments.

Conversely, if a good many students are interested, any vacuous course can be taught. Accommodation and pragmatism are aggressively promoted as if they were the only viable strategies in the postmodern reality of the capitalist world. The university classroom as a talk show that promises to entertain, rather than analyse, seems to be more and more the typical undergraduate expectation. Hence the class- room is in danger of

becoming a sadly vacuous place that has little to offer except for licensing and professionalism without the substantive knowledge and ethics of profession. Students are merely enrolled because they have the money and professors no longer impart skills but merely pump volumes of knowledge, which are never put into practical use. Eventually, the university has remained theoretical because professors no longer have time for the students. They teach in more than one university in order to maximize economic potential which affects the quality of education students get because they can hardly pay attention to critical analysis of students' assignments and post graduate research.

### **The need for quality assurance and university transformation drives**

Under the impact of globalising market forces, there has been a general trend towards the reduction of public funding to higher education. Despite the continuing increase in student enrolments since the early 1990s, financing of higher education is still low which has led to decline in quality assurance in most universities. For example, the student numbers have increased without a commensurate increase in resources, instructional materials, and infrastructure. Most public universities are still dependent on those facilities they had before the globalization and privatization of university education before the 1990s. More still, universities today are facing a financial crisis than ever before because funding and financing their activities is being shifted more and more on to the shoulders of the individual than the state. Public universities are increasingly funded by non-governmental sources, especially via student tuition and other fees, donations raised from alumni and others, and direct payment from business for services provided by the universities. Higher education is being asked to be more accountable for how its diminishing portion of public financial support is spent (Altbach, 1997).

The ideology underpinning this transformation has been summarized as the assumption that education is a private matter of individual choices and personal benefits gained by graduates for the employment market (Boumelha, 1998). Behind this view stands the model of education that devolves the responsibility for the common good to the aggregate of atomized individual choices. This approach breeds a spirit of competition among the different higher education sectors, driving institutions towards the supposed rewards and incentives of the market place and away from the traditional concept of an academic community of scholars dedicated to the pursuit of learning (Curie, 2008; Edwards, 2005).

Universities, for example tend to be more business oriented other than being academic centers of excellence per se. Academicians do little research because they are busy looking for money around several universities in a market-oriented segment. This has greatly stifled performance of universities. Therefore, it is timely that all universities with the headship of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) to design quality assurance packages that will help boost quality education in all universities.

Under the conditions of globalization, the effect of government frugality in cutting back university funding, accompanied by the often-indiscriminate expansion of student numbers, has been deleterious. Across a range of developing countries, the quality of academic teaching has suffered diminishing lecturer-student contact, especially with senior staff, who often appears intermittently and whose lecturing standards may lose much through constant repetition and lack of updated material. The recent tension created by the mushrooming universities has cut deeply into the heart of higher education where most university dons no longer have time to attend fully to all their students because they have more than one university to attend (Hirsch, 1996).

More still, parallel to financial cuts from the central government to the public university is the move to privatization, which tends to favor those who can afford the fees involved. The defects revealed in the functioning of the privatization measures, especially in relation to the caliber of graduates produced and the research quality and output of academic staff, demonstrate the danger of placing the fate of universities at the mercy of the market-driven forces of globalization. Uganda's higher education, cannot immunize itself against the international context. While investment still relies heavily on national funds, diversification via donations from society, enterprises, public institutions, local and foreign donors and individuals are being encouraged. Students are now required to pay some of their tuition fees. Universities are increasingly asked to raise funds from various income producing sources (Cleverley, 1987; & Bray, 2002) and to generate their revenues. As the professoriate is increasingly seen as a means to raise income for academic institutions (Altbach 1998), the need to operate profit-making enterprises distracts the staff from their legitimate academic functions. Engagement of faculty in moonlighting activities is a common event.

## **Globalised learning and teaching**

There is today an international tendency to plunge headlong into the surging market for electronic delivery of education without sorting out the hype from the reality. The language used today to promote technology-delivered instruction – convenient, self-paced, individualized and interactive, faster and cheaper, flexible as to time and space – echoes that of fads and movements throughout the 20th century. Early in the century motion pictures were speculated to replace textbooks as the principal medium of instruction. The radio revolution sparked a drive to hook up rural areas to universities and allow course taking over airwaves. Several decades ago, many heralded instructional television as the salvation of the classroom. The video, satellite, cable communications and the mighty Internet revolution followed. These developments later culminated into distance, and open learning, seen through the virtue university. In each case, technology enhanced and expanded learning opportunities for people who might not otherwise have had them. But history suggests that the impact of the cutting-edge technologies consistently fell far short of the claims made by their proponents (Gladieux, 2000).

The Internet can either enhance communities by enabling a new kind of local public space, or it can undermine communities by pulling people away from local enclaves and towards global, virtual ones (Doheny-Farina, 1996). There is, however, an acute shortage of thorough and realistic analyses of the intersection of these areas (Cunningham et al. 2007), while scholarly, journalistic, governmental or institution-specific material on the impact of communications and information technology, media influence, the global economy, or the future of higher education proliferates. Currently, the new sensation is on-line learning and teaching. The virtual university has arrived, and management has predicted that the residential university campus will be defunct in a few years (Gladieux, 2000). There are a good many economic, socio-political and technological reasons underpinning current plans for, and the practice of the globalised education. They relate to the supposed benefits of a global student body, enhanced access and flexibilities which are believed to overcome various structural rigidities of traditional universities: constraints on what constitutes the academic year, on where credits can be accumulated, and on how courses can be modularized (Edwards, 2005).

The visionaries and marketers of on-line education, however, often gloss over major complexities, including barriers of technological capacity and literacy, as well as culture, language, and learning style. The virtual campus may widen opportunities for some, but not generally for those at the low end of the economic scale. Virtual space is infinite, but it does not promise universality or equality. In fact, the latest data show that gaps in Internet access have actually widened, creating a “digital divide” between information haves and have-nots, which is liable to deepen disparities between rich and poor within countries.

On an international level, the digital divide may be more like a digital chasm, leaving Third World countries and regions, where a radio is a luxury and telephone and electrical service unreliable, even further behind in the global economy (Gladieux, 2000). But still distance or online education is still expensive for the average social being. Even in the industrialized countries, the equity and cost of distance of education can be serious issues. A substantial proportion of distance education students in most developed countries, for example, fail to complete their program of study because universities are overlooking students’ needs in their rush to embrace new technology. Computer are quite expensive and Internet facility expensive too.

## **Conclusion**

Despite some positive aspects, the globalization of higher education is ultimately based on the market-driven fundamentals of globalization. Thus it creates more challenges than opportunities, particularly for the non-western developing countries. The most prominent challenges include quality control, information management, its fitness for local societies, and costs and benefits. When all of these aspects accompany each other, it brings the dangers of total lack of the genuine educational values, quality control and regulation. It is a bad idea, as Altbach (1999) reminds us, to permit caveat emptor to dominate in higher education.

Contemporary higher education reform and development needs to be viewed from the perspectives of international contexts of devolution and marketisation, under which national governments cease direct control of the educational system, and move to more of a steering role (Hirsch, 1996); and education comes to be characterized increasingly as a

commodity (Apple 1982). What seems to be dangerously neglected is that the higher education cycle in Uganda has not adequately realized that market forces do not necessarily produce positive results, that decentralization does not necessarily lead to more local autonomy (Broadfoot, 1985), and that globalization has a darker side.

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