

IMPROVING ACCESS AND EQUITY IN EAST AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH INTERNATIONALIZATION

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Abstract

The 1998 UNESCO World Conference on Higher Education in Paris recommended that global higher education institutions should internationalize and reduce inequalities between developed and emerging countries. Since then, universities strive to incorporate an international dimension in their service. The aim was initially guided by the 20th century understanding of internationalization being just, fair, and an equitable process that promotes peace and mutual understanding. However, under the influence of the General Agreement on Trade in Services and competition, internationalization changed focus and became less inclusive. This paper explores inclusive international education in East Africa using narrative review methodology. Findings suggest that rather than promoting access and equity in higher education, internationalization, for example, excludes economically disadvantaged, disabled, and adult learners. Thus, in addition to internationalization at home, inclusive internationalization abroad strategies should be devised. Internationalization of higher education is more valuable if it translates into fair, just, and peaceful social systems.

Keywords: internationalization, access, equity, inclusion, higher education

Introduction

According to de Wit & Jones (2017), elitism, commercialization, and high educational costs, corruption, fraud, as well as the challenge of quantity versus quality are but a few topical issues of debate in international higher education. On elitism, Lorbeer (2020) explains that higher education institutions have become highly selective, and their acceptance rates are low. The tuition rates have been maintained steep and this 'locks out' students who cannot afford high education costs. Further, Kezar & Bernstein-Sierra (2016) explain that under the influence of commercialization, institutions have ignored their public good intention and now follow market oriented forces. Such factors make institutions less accessible and of limited benefit to many of the possible beneficiaries.

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East Africa's higher education has evolved since the time it was introduced by the colonialists. In Uganda, for example, the higher education system grew from a single university system in 1922 to a multi institutional system currently consisting over 50 public and private universities and other tertiary institutions (National Council for Higher Education, 2018). Further, under the influence of internationalization and regionalization, other developments have been witnessed in East Africa's higher education. An important issue that has characterized the said development has been the establishment of the East African Common Higher Education Area (EACHEA). According to Ogachi & Matiang'i (2018), one of the factors that contributed to the establishment of the EACHEA was the Bologna Process which established the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in Europe. The successful establishment of the EHEA encouraged Europeans to initiate replicas of the Bologna Process in other parts of the world, including East Africa. Other important developments in East Africa's higher education include students' mobility programs (Inter University Council for East Africa; IUCEA, 2015a), Academic staff mobility programs (IUCEA, 2015 b) and establishment of East African Qualifications Framework for Higher Education (IUCEA, 2015c) among others.

While the mentioned efforts have linked regional institutions, scholars (e.g., Knight, 2014; de Wit, 2014) explain that internationalization keeps on changing such that its current policies and practices have proved to be less inclusive (de Wit & Jones, 2017). To these authors, international education worldwide excludes some social groups of students. At the same time, globalization and the General Agreement on Trade in Service (GATS) increased liberalization in higher education (Knight, 2002), further complicating the higher education landscape. GATS - a treaty by The World Trade Organization was implemented in 1995, to establish a dependable and predictable set of international standards for trade in services. This facilitated the gradual liberalization of the services markets (Global Affairs Canada, 2013). GATS formalized market practices and protocols for transnational trade in services, including education (Tilak, 2011). According to the GATS Framework, trade in education takes the form of cross-border education service provision where students remain in their home country. Another form is the student mobility program in which students travel across borders to pursue studies in other nations. The other forms include the commercial presence of a foreign institution in another nation, and staff mobility as explained by Tilak.

Globalization and the GATS Framework have transformed internationalization and made it a market-mediated process hence altering its perspectives on education and its very purpose (Kirchhoff, 2017). Therefore, today's internationalization is not what it used to be (Knight, 2014). As opined by Stein (2019), a critical review of internationalization is now necessary. From a critical perspective, internationalization should advance to become more comprehensive, deliberate, and less elitist (for all students and staff). It should also become less centered on students' mobility, and less economically motivated, to improve the caliber of teaching and research and contribute meaningfully to society (de Wit et al; 2015). From the beginning, the primary goal of internationalization was to raise the quality of research and education, and prepare students, faculty, and graduates to better participate in global and intercultural societies (de Wit, 2011). However, economic intentions have now substituted the said primary intentions (de Wit & Deca, 2020), which has rendered it less inclusive. Therefore, innovative policy interventions and procedures to make internationalization more inclusive, despite the different socioeconomic and demographic aspects of students, are necessary. Involving students that are least served by the current internationalization strategies is essential for the achievement of global sustainable development goals. The Academic Cooperation Association (ACA, 2019) holds that 'students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, students without higher education background, students with disabilities, students from minority or migrant backgrounds, students with a refugee

background, adult learners, and working students are underrepresented' in international higher education (p.2.). While this submission was made in reference to Europe, a similar situation exists in East Africa.

Against this backdrop, this paper discusses its theoretical orientations followed by perspectives of inclusive internationalization in East Africa's higher education. Inclusive internationalization of higher education is used in this paper to refer to the process guaranteeing equal access and participation in international education activities (at home and abroad) for all students (DeLaquil, 2019). The method used to develop the paper is then highlighted, and the study's significant findings are pointed out. This is followed by the possibilities for promoting inclusive international education in East Africa. This paper contributes to critical scholarship on internationalization of higher education and submits that strategies to improve the participation in internationalization of vulnerable students such as the economically disadvantaged ones, those without higher education background, students with disabilities, and students from minority or migrant backgrounds should be put in place to make it more inclusive and of benefit to many.

Theoretical Orientations of the Study

The theoretical foundations for inclusive internationalization stem from the liberal and public-good aims of higher education and the critical epistemological stance on internationalization (Janebová, & Johnstone, 2020). This can further be explored basing on de Wit et al. (2015)'s definition of internationalization of higher education as "the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society" (p.29). This definition shows that internationalization of higher education should lead to the improvement in the quality of education and research so that both graduates and staff are equipped with competences to contribute to a better world. Therefore, internationalization should be accessible to students and staff irrespective of the socioeconomic circumstance.

Streitwieser et al. (2019) hold that as a public good, higher education and its international dimension should be humanistic, founded on international understanding, and peace building as the case was in the 1950s. With this understanding, internationalization of higher education should not exclude some students' social groups. It should rather facilitate all learners to realize their full potential with everyone being a beneficiary. Further, internationalization of higher education can contribute to peace building; for example students improve their communication skills and civic engagement when engaged in mobility programmes. They also think more critically about the connections between national and international problems compared to those that do not engage in mobility (De Wit et al. (2015). In effect, mobile students can contribute to the establishment of peaceful societies. This perspective exemplifies what internationalization was in the 20th Century. As explained by De Wit et al. (2015), internationalization, cooperation, and exchanges between nations and higher education institutions back then were geared toward fostering peace and understanding. However, the possibility of realizing such benefits increases when all social groups of students partake in internationalization activities such as study abroad programmes.

From the 'public good' perception, internationalization contributes to students' academic and personal development for the good of the society. The intercultural competence and the international dimension of the curriculum facilitate diverse societies to understand one another and foster harmonious global communities (Juliane, 2017). However, the likelihood of this scenario is more possible when more students - irrespective of their inherent difficulties - have opportunities to participate in benefit from international education. Therefore, inclusive internationalization, contributes to the

public good aims of higher education by facilitating institutions to perform their public roles better, and minimize tendencies towards unhealthy competition, individualism, and global capitalism (Janebová, & Johnstone, 2020). In other words, inclusive internationalization should subdue the neoliberal tendencies with capitalistic intentions while promoting global competence and relevance and service for everyone.

Internationalization has often been said to lead to homogenization and academic capitalism (Appe, 2020) because it compels institutions to compete for limited resources which prompts them to act similarly (Zha, 2009). Institutional functional structures eventually converge, and become homogeneous (hence the term homogenization). Additionally, many higher education institutions aim at boosting their income as they fulfill their roles in teaching, research, and community service amidst internationalization (Appe, 2020). According to Slaughter & Rhoades (2004), this is "academic capitalism," i.e. "a regime in which colleges and universities engage in market and market-oriented behaviors" (p.37). Academic capitalism for example occurs when university employees conduct patented research, or when they sell instructional materials (Appe, 2020). However, such tendencies can be minimized through inclusive internationalization.

From the critical epistemological perspective of inclusive internationalization, proponents argue that there should be social justice in pursuing the international dimension of higher education (Janebová & Johnstone, 2020). Social justice refers to fair and equitable division of resources, opportunities, and privileges in society (Mollenkamp, 2022). Therefore, a socially just internationalization process provides opportunities that equally benefit all students. Without inclusivity in internationalization, social justice becomes minimal and the inevitable inequalities between humans or institutions become reproduced or worsened i.e. inclusivity attempts to overcome the challenges from internationalization. Wiebk & Mucha (2020) advocate for inclusivity as a remedy to inequalities that are reproduced through internationalization. For instance, despite the different internationalization strategies, women are given less priority than males in East Africa while accessing higher education. In 2018, the regional gross enrollment ratio for women was 8%, compared to 10% for males (UNESCO, 2021). Further, only 43% of Sub-Saharan African students studying abroad are female, according to Bandhari (2017). This shows that internationalization has not helped this region attain gender parity in higher education.

Additionally, Brooks & Waters (2011) described how social class advantage and inequality are reproduced through international student mobility. Rich families support their children to obtain foreign education credentials that give them a competitive edge on the job market (Waters, 2006) hence perpetuating societal and economic inequalities. Explaining about this issue, Marinoni & de Wit (2019) highlighted that study abroad programs benefit only two percent of the world student population and attributed it to family and job related limitations. In other words, mainly students with a higher social economic background (e.g., from a rich family and well-paying jobs) benefit from international education. It should therefore be a concern for policy makers to avail themselves of the benefits of international education to the less disadvantaged students (e.g., through internationalization at home). Moreover, student flows seem to follow specified paths with clear sending and receiving countries. In this way, countries and students engage in and benefit from internationalization unequally. In the East African region for example, the major receiving countries for international students are Uganda and Kenya while Tanzania, South Sudan, Burundi and Rwanda tend to serve as sending countries (Trines, 2018). Cognizance of such inequalities, the paper explores possibilities of providing international education to East African students through uncommon paths.

The two theoretical orientations so far explained clarify the purposes of inclusive internationalization, i.e., strengthening the public roles of higher education (DeLaquil, 2019) and elimination of injustices associated with improper internationalization (Wiebk

& Mucha, 2020). This paper submits that these purposes should guide all internationalization activities in higher education institutions to promote inclusion. According to Chao (2014) for example, international student mobility, whose original intentions were to promote more cross-cultural understanding, teamwork, and friendship, has grown significantly in commercialization and is now seen as a significant industry. To make it inclusive, institutions of higher education should expand their internationalization efforts beyond commercialization and other practices that exclusively benefit advantaged students from high school and instead help students from a range of backgrounds, ages, and phases in their personal and professional life. Flexible learning pathways should be made possible via avenues for internationalization both at home and abroad, which should also be accommodating for students of different backgrounds.

Inclusive Internationalization of Higher Education in East Africa

Inclusive internationalization mainly benefits students in vulnerable situations and contributes to social justice and the overall aims of higher education (ACA, 2019). The aims of higher education include preparation of graduates to live as productive citizens in democracies, for sustainable employment, for personal growth, and for teaching, learning, and research that advances and maintains society (Sjur & Radu, 2010).

Inclusive internationalization complements *inclusive education* as a global education policy that has existed since the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on special needs education (Verger et al., 2012). The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on special needs education advocates for inclusive education institutions and processes (UNESCO, 1994; Educational Guruji, 2022) and provides the policy orientations for this paper. Inclusive education recognizes the necessity and urgency of providing education for all learners regardless of their gender, age, ability, ethnicity, and impairment, access education. It also requires that all learners receive the education that enables them to participate and achieve within the education system (Kaplan et al. 2007). This ties in well with the fourth sustainable development goal which aims at ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all (United Nations, 2015). This is because an education that is inclusive and broader to include various international and domestic perspectives contributes to innovation, enhances higher education quality and excellence (ACA, 2019).

Therefore, considering the challenges associated with widening access to higher education for some student groups that have remained underrepresented over the years, advocating for inclusive education remains fundamental. Despite this understanding, Van Mol & Perez-Encinas (2022) explain that 'international student mobility' which is the most popular form of internationalization in Africa is a 'socially selective process' (p.1). According to Lörz & Marian (2011), a student's current opportunity structures determines how likely they attain international education. Therefore, socioeconomically disadvantaged students who have a limited *opportunity structure* are restricted from participating in international education (Netz & Finger, 2016). Furthermore, Schnepf, Bastianelli & Blasko (2022) assert that policies promoting internationalization rarely target students from the lower socioeconomic backgrounds. The participation of such student in international education is therefore constrained by the lack of supportive policies. The next subsections discuss this situation with emphasis on the East Africa.

Access to Internationalization Activities of Higher Education in East Africa

Access denotes how educational institutions and policies ensure—or at least strive to ensure—that students have equal and equitable opportunities to take full advantage of their education (The Glossary of Education reform, 2014). Despite this understanding, access to internationalization activities in higher education (e.g., study abroad) varies with the social class of the student (Netz et al., 2021) and the student's disability status

(Soorenian, 2017) or even refugee status (ACA, 2019). The scenario contradicts the fundamentals of internationalization. According to de Wit et al. (2015), internationalization is “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (p.29). With some social groups of the student population (e.g., lower socioeconomic background students, students without higher education background, disabled students, and students with a refugee background) in East Africa not accessing internationalization activities, it is likely that institutions have not emphasized inclusivity in pursuance of pursued internationalization.

There are several challenges surrounding the internationalization of higher education in East Africa. The first challenge stems from the interpretation of internationalization. For East Africa (as the case is in many other parts of the world), internationalization is interpreted mainly in terms of mobility which is opposed to global citizenship (Morosini et al., 2017). Therefore, the East African region mainly experiences internationalization in terms of mobility of students and staff. This used to be from the global south to the global north, but cases of intra-African mobility have increased recently (Sehoole & de Wit, 2015). The sizeable number of international students, mainly from East Africa studying in Uganda (ICEF Monitor, 2017) attests to increasing intra-African student mobility. However, while intra African mobility is growing, student mobility from Africa to countries in Europe and elsewhere still exists. For example, there are several scholarships for Rwandan students to study in the US, with one of the conditions requiring students to return home after graduation (Ngabonziza, 2015). This conforms to the idea advanced by Teferra & Knight (2008) that the study abroad policies in Africa aim to promote economic development by supporting students to study in the global north and ensure they return to their home countries after graduation.

These examples address the academic, sociocultural, political, and economic rationales of internationalisation while ignoring the humanistic rationales advanced by Streitwieser *et al.* (2019). Humanist rationales emphasize fostering cosmopolitanism, social responsibility, and cultural competency (Khoo, 2011). They also provide a basis for foreign partnerships, study abroad, international service learning and volunteering programs, and they are addressed through policies, curricula, and practical initiatives (de Wit et al., 2015). These rationales are of a humanitarian nature, with students looking to “give back” in acknowledgment of their relative advantage in the current systems. As explained by DeLaquil (2019), the humanistic rationales of internationalization of higher education need to be promoted since they contribute to the realization of “civil and human rights, social justice, and human dignity, and higher education as a public or common good” (p.6). It is by such rationales that internationalization can be made inclusive and of better quality with a purpose of creating a socially just society.

Further, internationalization abroad rather than internationalization at home is emphasized in East Africa (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). Consequently, students with mobility challenges do not access the benefits of international education. This is because most of the internationalization practices in East Africa’s higher education focus only on those students capable of traveling from one country to another for study purposes. Common mobility challenges include financial constraints, family responsibilities, and workplace restrictions (Hauschildt, 2016). While there has been improved access to education for the disadvantaged groups at primary and secondary levels, evidence of comparable strides having been made in higher education is not documented. According to Nshemereirwe (2015) for example, the Ugandan Government widened access to basic education through Universal Primary and Secondary Education programs. However, economically disadvantaged students from secondary school are challenged to access

higher education partly because of unfavorable selection procedures (Schnepf, Bastianelli & Blasko, 2022).

The selection criteria for higher education students in Uganda for example favor students of higher socioeconomic status. Interventions such as the higher education students' loan scheme (Higher education financing board, 2020) and the district quota system have been implemented to improve access to higher education for the disadvantaged student groups (Tusiime, 2018). However, these interventions have not contributed to inclusion of such students in the internationalization agenda due to the limited scope of internationalization in these institutions. On the other hand, inclusive internationalization focuses on flexible work arrangements to improve staff opportunities, affirmative action initiatives to increase student participation in mobility programs, shared leadership and decision-making on internationalization strategy, and a reconsideration of how internationalization is defined and carried out at an institution (ACA, 2022). In East Africa, however, student mobility has been normalised as the only form of internationalisation, yet it limits access to international higher education opportunities.

Despite the preceding, international student mobility has expanded and will continue to do so (UNESCO, 2017). However, as it expands, the underrepresented international students should be supported to navigate the challenges associated with their mobility (Baxter, 2019). This is because these students already have disadvantages limiting their chances of participating in international education. Whereas this course of action has been popular in the western world (ACA, 2019), no comparable action is witnessed in East Africa.

Although students with disabilities can for example access higher education, the process is still associated with selective inclusion (Ludeman et al., 2020). According to these authors, selective inclusion refers to an approach to inclusion that is "impairment-based" and prioritizes specific types of disabilities over others. Consequently, not all students with disabilities can access higher education as specific disability types are prioritized over others (Kauffman et al., 2023). According to Ludeman et al. (2020), some students with disabilities face discrimination and impediments to fair participation after accessing higher education. With such discrimination, such students are not able to access international higher education. Further, higher education institutions, especially those that treat disability issues separately from other diversity and transformation priorities, consider enrolling and supporting students with disabilities expensive hence not providing them with the desired support. For disabled students to succeed, they must feel comfortable, and welcomed (Skidmore, 2019). This contributes towards inclusivity and it can be achieved through increased engagement in learning, cultures, and communities, as well as reduced exclusion of the disadvantaged students inside and outside institutions (Gill & Singh, 2018).

Furthermore, the number of women accessing higher education has increased worldwide. This is partly attributed to the global push to encourage female education (Emily & Cathryn, 2017). However, this intervention has not had comparable effects on the participation of women in international education in East Africa (Adima, 2021). For the whole of Sub-Saharan Africa, only 43% of the total mobile students are women (Rajika, 2017) indicating that African women do not fully engage in international education. In Europe, more women participate in mobility programs than men and this has been attributed to enabling policies (Di Pietro, 2021). East Africa should adopt similar strategies for purposes of social justice. It has been a common practice for emerging economies such as the East African ones to copy practices from the developed countries without questioning or adapting them to the African situation (de Wit & Jooste, 2014). East Africa for example differs from North America in terms of history, size, culture, and economic capacity. Such differences influence the success of a given policy or practice. To

ensure that there is desirable success, practices borrowed from foreign lands should first be adopted to the African context. This is because failure to adopt the policies and practices to local situations has not always brought a positive impact. An illustration of this is the procurement policy for public construction projects in Uganda, which was created based on lessons learned from developed nations (Park, 2019). The policy stipulates that funds should not be distributed for initiatives until at least nine months have passed (Kagina, 2017). Experience has shown that such procedures complicate operations, are unrealistic and overly strict (Park, 2019). Therefore, while we argue for inclusivity in East Africa's internationalization, the possible strategies must be contextually relevant.

Equity in the Internationalization of Higher Education in East Africa

Equity in the realms of education refers to fairness, impartiality, justice, and equal opportunity for all students to fully participate in all academic opportunities (Mintz, 2021). Therefore, equity in the internationalization of higher education entails not only widening access to international education opportunities for all students but also their success (Almeida, 2018). Expanding the number of international students is not enough, the students must for example be supported to overcome barriers for mobility in disregard of their gender, age, socioeconomic background, or ethnicity (Haapakoski & Pashby, 2017). According to Hauschildt (2016), this entails:

- provision of a supportive and competitive fee package for international students;
- retention and post-qualification employment for international students; and
- provision of social-cultural support for international students.

Only few African countries have strategies for improving equity in the internationalization of higher education (Netz et al.; 2021). In East Africa, equity in internationalization has not attracted significant attention from researchers and has thus not been fully explored. However, as advanced in this paper, internationalization opportunities should be equitable for the benefit of all students irrespective of their positional disadvantages.

Methods

We explored the most recent studies about internationalization, access, and equity in East Africa's higher education to establish new interpretations using the narrative review methodology (Onwuegbuzie & Frels, 2016). This type of review attempts not to generalize knowledge from the literature; but rather summarizes or synthesizes what has been written on a subject for purposes of demonstrating the value of a given point of view (Pere & Kitsiou, 2016). It therefore gives the reviewer a thorough background for comprehending current knowledge and emphasizes the importance of new research (Cronin et al., 2008). The findings from the review are presented in a condensed format summarizing the literature reviewed (Helewa & Walker, 2000).

Thus, we conducted an electronic preliminary literature search following the recommendations of Polgar & Thomas (1995) i.e. to first identify the existing reviews and assess the volume of potentially relevant studies. The preliminary literature search indicated that, while some literature on internationalization in East Africa exists, minimum attempts have linked it to improving equity and access for disadvantaged students in internationalization of higher education. Based on this knowledge, the author re-focused the study's topic, purpose, and objectives on inclusive internationalization.

Another electronic literature search for both indexed and non-indexed literature sources using the terms 'inclusive internationalization of higher education in East Africa' produced 3,640,000 results, which served as the basis for the data gathering. The output was reduced to 61 sources after the search was repeated with the specification that the

words "inclusive internationalization" of "higher education" in "East Africa" had to be present. Recalling that internationalization of higher education became a topical issue in the last 30 to 40 years (de Wit & Deca, 2020) and considering that inclusive education gained prominence after the 2006 UN Convention (de Beco, 2022), literature published between 2000 and 2022 were more relevant for this paper. Publications before the year 2000 were given less attention though not entirely excluded. One by one, the sources were examined for relevance based on the content in their abstracts. Eleven pieces of literature were left for the researcher after the process was finished because the content was repetitive or diversionary. Also, a book search was conducted at the Makerere University library. This search turned up 25 pieces of literature, which indicates that East Africa has not given inclusive internationalization as an area of study greater attention. Only four of these were pertinent for the study after they had been examined for relevance based on the abstract content. Thus, a total of 15 sources provided data for this study. Electronic and hard copy publications such as books, journal articles, policy documents from the Inter University Council for East Africa were reviewed in line with those published by prominent scholars on internationalization worldwide. A document review guide was developed and notes pertinent to inclusive internationalization in East Africa generated. The findings obtained were summarized and reported in this paper.

Findings and Discussion

The paper reports on efforts to increase inclusive internationalization in East Africa's higher education. There has been growth in East Africa's internationalization activities since 2000. For example, according to Ogachi (2009), East Africa is home to several foreign-owned universities. The region also hosts franchise arrangements whereby regional institutions collaborate within and beyond the region. The collaborations facilitate student and staff mobility and research (IUCEA, 2015, a & b). Additionally, there has been establishment of institutes by foreign universities. For example, the establishment of the Confucius Institute at Makerere University (Uganda), Kenyatta and Nairobi Universities (Kenya), the University of Rwanda, and the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania). Additionally, regional universities adopted a corporate governance culture as they got internationalized (Bisaso & Nakamanya, 2020). However, these internationalization strategies brought about structural and managerial changes in higher education institutions but did not improve inclusivity of disadvantaged students.

In Uganda's Makerere University, there is teaching of international mobility master's programs and the establishment of international quality assurance standards (Bisaso, 2017) as internationalization strategies. However, the study found no evidence of a global citizenship oriented curriculum in East African higher education institutions. Global citizenship equips students with essential competences for them to survive and perform in the ever-changing world (Massaro, 2022). Thus, a global citizenship oriented curriculum offers students avenues to work in cross-disciplinary teams and develop solutions to global problems; develop leadership skills, critical thinking abilities, and cross-cultural awareness (Hammond, 2016). This would allow institutions to churn out graduates that can withstand social, political and environmental challenges that may confront them as global workers. This overcomes the unrealistic nationalistic tendencies that can undermine the goals of internationalization or discourage cooperation and integration.

Further, the study reports that there has been internationalization of the curriculum content, teaching methods, and assessment methods (Bisaso, 2017). However, as argued by Leask (2018), with internationalization, the curriculum should be made "more inclusive and less elitist than it was in the past" (p. 8). From the time higher education was introduced in East Africa by the colonialists, a narrow curriculum that prepared students for government service and shaped the African elite was administered

(Sicherman, 2002). However, in view of the current learner needs and the purpose of higher education, the curriculum must be wide to cater for all learners. Thus, East Africa's higher education institutions must prioritize inclusivity as they pursue internationalization. As suggested by Bisaso & Nakamanya (2020), hiring international faculty, using benchmark cases for teaching and using blended or online learning resources with collaborating universities would improve inclusivity in internationalization.

The study also notes that there are fundamental bottlenecks that must be overcome before realizing inclusive internationalization in East Africa. One major challenge is the ideology of nationalism in some East African countries (Wandia, 2008). National interests and positions rather supersede global interconnectivity for some countries in this region. This shows the undesirable situation explained by de Wit & Jones (2017) that international higher education is in a paradox characterized by trends toward isolation and inward-looking nationalism. Such tendencies weaken internationalization and disconnect the local from the global. Tensions between national interest and regional integration in the East African Community challenge the sustainability of the renewed integration efforts (Gumba, 2019). For example, the border restriction between Rwanda and Burundi and the recent closure of the Rwanda - Uganda border challenge students' mobility between such countries (Nakkazi, 2019).

Further, while student mobility in East Africa has been possible (ICEF Monitor, 2017), it mainly serves students with affluent backgrounds as the case is in the rest of Africa (Okusolubo, 2017). This is because mobility depends on students' access to funding from the state and philanthropic bodies but in most cases, the student's family pays for the tuition fees and cost of living (Kritz, 2013). This suggests that mainly the rich can access foreign education. This is because there are limited international scholarships for East African students (Adima, 2021) and few governments (e.g., the government of Rwanda) finance study abroad programs (Government of Rwanda, 2018). Considering that East Africa is still developing, most students are from a lower social-economic background and are not positioned to meet the high fees associated with studying abroad. They, therefore, do not participate in student mobility, hence their exclusion from international education.

Furthermore, internationalization in East Africa has been conceived in terms of competition between regional and national institutions (Provin, 2019) rather than global competence. Provin (2019) explains that in Kenya for example, in attempt to internationalize, several branch campuses for Moi University have been established all over Kenya. Branch campuses help universities to expand their student populations and raise their profiles. Additionally, it boosts prestige and tuition revenues while increasing the likelihood of attracting international students (Paniagua et al., 2022). In effect, competition between institutions as they strive to attract more national and international students increases when branch campuses are set up. However, the competition is mainly for international students since they pay higher fees. Therefore, the drive to attract international students is more of a profit making venture than provision of quality services. However, rather than competition, global competence (El Kahal, 2008) or what others have termed as global cooperation (Ndubuisi et al., 2022) should be the prime results of internationalization. The ideal purpose of internationalization should be the qualitative rather than quantitative growth of service provision and it is even less advantageous when such intentions are guided by the search for financial gains (de Wit & Deca, 2020). It is of greater benefit for institutions to develop internationalization processes based on reciprocity and equality and focused on improved international dialogue (Castro, Lundgren & Woodin, 2015) rather than competition. We hold that considerations to improve inclusivity should be devised.

According to Rajika (2017), only 43% of international students from Sub-Saharan Africa are women. This shows that international student mobility as an aspect of internationalization serves women to a less extent. This can be linked to limited resources, prioritization of boys' education, and early marriages, which collectively reduce the progression of women to higher education (UNESCO, 2022). At the same time, there are few women mentors in academia and leadership positions due to structural barriers that exist in higher education (Kagoda, 2012). For example, maternal household tasks and the absence of women-friendly facilities reduce the available time for women to conduct research and publish yet these activities influence their upward mobility in leadership positions (*ibid.*). These issues contribute to the exclusion of women as higher education students first and in internationalization.

Additionally, the findings indicate that there are no provisions to increase the participation of disadvantaged students, especially the disabled ones, in international education activities. While there are some attempts to improve the participation of some disabled students in higher education, there are no similar efforts geared toward their equitable participation in internationalization. This may be due to the lack of explicit internationalization policies (Jones & de Wit, 2021). Internationalization in East Africa largely occurs with no clear pathway and may be said to be a result of uncoordinated efforts and chance (Moshtari & Safarpour, 2023). According to Moshtari & Safarpour (2023), internationalization in East Africa is characterized by a lack of clear policies and guidelines, an ineffective organizational structure, issues with finances, infrastructure, and equipment, gaps in scientific, skill, and language competencies, cultural differences, and non-reciprocal relationships.

Further, there are no internationalization strategies targeting refugees and immigrants in East Africa. Uganda for example hosts over 1.5 million refugees and asylum seekers, mainly from South Sudan, Burundi, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (UNHCR, 2021). With such a high refugee population, there should be provisions for their higher education. More so, there should be provisions to cater for their benefit in the internationalization agenda of higher education. Available information indicates that 57% of the refugee population in Uganda has no access to education (Schulte & Kasirye, 2019). This number includes the lower levels of education (primary and secondary) where there is free provision of free education. The situation worsens as one progresses to higher education.

Conclusion

The paper examined the issue of inclusive internationalization in East Africa. Much as East Africa has some strategies for internationalization in place, few of them are inclusive. There are no strategies that are in place to improve equity and access for women, students from lower social-economic status, students with disabilities, and other disadvantaged students to benefit from the internationalization. Perhaps this could be attributed to the absence of comprehensive internationalization policies in these countries. The way internationalization is carried out in East Africa contributes to the exclusion of the disadvantaged students from fully exploiting their participation in higher education. In such a situation, the internationalization agenda seems haphazard, non-exhaustive and leaves a lot to be desired. Considering these factors, student mobility and other forms of internationalization are elitist, and further propagate inequalities. Nationalism, unhealthy competition rather than cooperation seems to be the important issues that are pursued by regional higher education institutions hence contradicting the ideals of inclusive internationalization. Therefore, internationalization in East Africa is being carried out in an inappropriate manner and should undoubtedly be rethought to make it more inclusive. This is because inclusive internationalization conforms to the expectations of social justice and reinforces the roles of higher education as a common good of society. We discuss

possibilities through which internationalization can be made more inclusive in the next subsection.

Suggestions for Inclusive Internationalization in East Africa

In cognizance of the issues mentioned earlier that have limited achievement of inclusive internationalization in East Africa, internationalization should be re-oriented towards such realities to serve all students. Inclusive internationalization of higher education should be considered as a response to the main criticism of international student mobility which has been said to be elitist (Knight, 2009). Inclusive internationalization contributes to fairness and improves service delivery, as depicted in the theoretical orientation of this paper. However, we must always acknowledge the rationales of international education, its benefits, the contextual issues (e.g., the national capacity to provide a quality higher education programs), and the contribution of international education and economic and political interests.

One of the options to introduce inclusivity is through internationalization at home. Internationalization at home leads to integrating international and intercultural aspects into formal and informal curricula for all students within the national learning environments (Beelen & Jones, 2015). Therefore, incorporating students' learning outcomes from mobility into the core curriculum at home should be central to the internationalization agenda. This would make internationalization experiences available to students who remain in their home countries either by choice or because of the limiting circumstances.

Internationalization at home makes internationalization more inclusive and makes room to incorporate global and intercultural dimensions into the curriculum in cognizance of the difficulties for different groups of students at home (ACA, 2019). This can be achieved through online education activities so-termed as virtual mobility or virtual exchange as components of "Collaborative Online International Learning" (Jones, 2017). With such international engagements, the involved students and staff interact or collaborate virtually such that neither of them engages in physical movement. The desired competencies are transmitted to the intended recipients in their home country's environment virtually. Therefore, Collaborative Online International Learning is a practical pathway for providing international experiences for students who face mobility challenges outside of their home countries (de Wit, 2013). Never the less, we acknowledge the challenges associated with provision of digital education in Africa. Challenges related to internet connectivity, reliable power supply, availability of equipment and expertise are some of such challenges (Ayodele et al., 2016). These must be mitigated to realize success with such engagements. At the same time, as Cairns & França (2022) explain, digital or hybrid mobility provisions may not pass as complete substitutes of digital mobility. They are however alternatives that can be explored to increase inclusivity in international education.

As noted in the findings, there are limited scholarships in the region, and those available are not focused on disadvantaged students. Therefore, widening equity and access to international education for such groups would entail the establishment of a 'special needs scholarship' to facilitate the inclusion of such students, especially in mobility programs. This would entail improving collaborations between institutions both locally and internationally, to allow for the mobility of the disadvantaged students between East Africa and the rest of the world.

Additionally, East Africa should strive for an international education that focuses more on staff and students instead of the political and economic perspectives (Stein, 2017). This is what inclusive internationalization entails. This is depicted in the comprehensive definition of internationalization of higher education (de Wit et al.; 2015), i.e., the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into

the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education to enhance the quality of teaching and research for all students and staff and to make a meaningful contribution to society (p.29).

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