

## **Students' Mobility in the East African Community: a catalyst for internationalisation of higher education in east africa**

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### **Abstract**

Universities worldwide are ever striving to improve the quality of education they are offering while focusing on international, intercultural or global dimensions. It is notable that institutions globally have to comply with the ISO specifications which stand out as a yardstick for quality checks. Internationalisation incorporates student mobility into its concept while bringing Universities on board to realize its universal nature. Students' mobility plays a big role in internationalisation of education as it involves cross-border flow of students from various countries with different backgrounds and cultures. In East Africa, a recent study indicates that increased mobility is characterised with a significant number of post graduate students. Most of these students are professionals in various fields and therefore are resourceful when strategically incorporated into the university set up to enhance international, intercultural or global dimensions into the education system. Students' mobility in the East African Community is a fast growing phenomenon and could be very useful towards attainment of higher educational goals. With these dynamic changes, university policies may be modified to cater for opportunities that arise with students' mobility in relation to internationalisation of education. This paper aims at examining the contribution of students' mobility on internationalisation of education in Universities with prime focus on East Africa. This will help Universities to elevate internationalisation of Higher Education which has been facing numerous challenges in the region. The information obtained is based on a research conducted

**in East Africa and an in-depth analysis of literature in the related field.**

**Keywords:** *Students' Mobility, East African Community, Internationalisation, Higher Education*

**Introduction**

The universal nature of higher education is a term that almost goes unnoticed when the term University is often mentioned. The Universality of higher education is one important element as far as higher education quality globally is concerned. With increased rates of globalization, the universal nature of higher education manifests itself further in various components in higher learning. Globalisation calls for unity; that is, higher education institutions worldwide functioning as a unit as they try to achieve common goals of education while conducting higher education activities.

Globalization “refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole”; in other words, it covers the acceleration in concrete global interdependence and in consciousness of the global whole (Robertson 1992, p. 8). As far as quality of higher education in a nut shell is concerned, this implies that higher education institutions try to achieve a common status as other higher education institutions globally; hence, the Application of ISO 9000 standards to education and training in Universities. In as much as the Universities across the globe try to cope with globalization challenges, the internationalisation of higher education is affected either positively or negatively. External effects on higher education are very important: “For present-day higher education, external influences play a dominant role in determining the nature of the curriculum. Higher Education of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is challenged by a variety of external

factors... it is not only challenged by governments and broader society to demonstrate its relevance, but also by the ever-increasing globalization of knowledge.” (Jooste, 2005-2006:11).

Therefore, one of the most important issues is that universities should be able to understand the forces that emanate from globalization with a keen eye on opportunities that arise from it such as making use of increased mobility rates globally. Without examining the effects of globalization on

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internationalisation of higher education, the Universities may lose track on important and innovative processes that may affect internationalisation goals in higher education institutions.

However, it is necessary to be clear that student mobility should not be misconceptualised as a yardstick for measuring the extent of globalization. According to Knight (2011), “A long standing myth is that the more foreign students on campus the more internationalised the institutional culture and curriculum will be.” Many a times, when people think that the more the number of students in a University, the higher the rates of internationalisation. In contrary, it is possible to have a high number of international students in a university and have low rates of internationalisation. To demystify this misconception, this particular case perceives students’ mobility as a phenomenon that can impact positively on internationalisation of education through the students. Based on interaction between home and international students and staff, these international students can bring new ideas and approaches to learning.

### **Definition of terms**

In this research, the key terms include students’ mobility, East African Community (EAC), Internationalisation of Higher Education and Higher Education. These terms are defined as follows:

***Students’ Mobility:*** Student mobility refers to international students who travelled to a country different from their own for the purpose of tertiary study (Ischinger, 2006). In Universities in EAC, we have foreign students both from EAC countries and from other countries worldwide. In this scenario, student mobility in East Africa will lay much emphasis on those students who are originating from EAC.

***East African Community (EAC):*** The East African Community is the regional intergovernmental organisation of the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and the Republic of Uganda, with its headquarters in Arusha, Tanzania. The Treaty for Establishment of the East African Community was signed on 30 November 1999 and entered into force on 7 July 2000 following its ratification by the

original three partner states – Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda. The Republic of Rwanda and the Republic of Burundi acceded to the EAC Treaty on 18

June 2007 and became full Members of the Community with effect from 1 July 2007 (EAC website).

**Internationalisation:** “Internationalisation at the national level/ sector/ institutional levels is defined as the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of post secondary education” (Knight, 2004, p. II). This is the working definition of internationalisation as proposed by Knight (Knight et. al. 2008, p. 15). This paper adopts Knight’s definition and focuses on the intercultural, international and global dimensions of education in Universities.

**Higher Education:** Higher education refers to post secondary education. Sometimes it is referred to as tertiary education. In this case, the author concentrates on university education in EAC.

## **Objectives**

Internationalisation of education in Africa has been facing challenges over the past decade. However, at a more practical level, internationalisation is proving to be a useful tool for helping institutions benchmark and come up with innovative solutions to ongoing management, academic, and research-related challenges (Hans de Wit et. al, 2005). The East African community has recorded an increase in international students in Universities with a very significant percentage originating from the region. This population comprises of both undergraduate and postgraduate students who can impact greatly on internationalisation of higher education. Therefore, this paper aims at examining the contribution of students’ mobility on internationalisation of education in Universities with prime focus on East Africa. This will help Universities to elevate internationalisation of Higher Education in their institutions of learning.

## **Methodology**

This research paper is based on the findings of a research conducted in East Africa and an in-depth analysis of literature in the related field. Therefore, more information

was obtained by use of library research, whereby the researchers used document analysis to come up with findings on the contribution of students' mobility on internationalisation of education in Universities with prime focus on the East African region.

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### **Student Mobility Rates**

Concerning globalization in higher education sector, the rise of student mobility rates cannot be neglected. Student mobility and its influences on internationalisation of education in higher education cannot be disregarded. Currently, the phenomenon has been characterised by increased trends. As an aspect of globalisation, the student mobility is fastened by increased globalization impacts on higher education. Globally, we realize an increased in-and-outbound flow of students in various countries with various interests in higher education. This has been increased by global demand of Education.

“By 2025, global demand for international higher education will increase to 7.2 million. This four-fold increase from 2000 represents a compound annual growth rate of 5.8%.” (Böhm, 2002:VI).

Furthermore, Böhm attributes the development of a new competitive environment to the success of countries such as the U.S.A, U.K and Australia, in attracting international students. Therefore student mobility can change the face of higher education by creating a competitive environment that can lead to improvement of various aspects of higher education and thus internationalisation of education.

### **Student Mobility Rates in EAC**

For long, there has been unclear track record of student mobility case in EAC. Although East Africa has had a long history of regional migration, there are no accurate data to approximate the numbers involved or that can be used to make future projections. (Nyaoro, 2010). Even though, a research conducted in universities in EAC with concentration in four Kenyan Universities (Kandie, 2014) indicates that over 25% (of a total of 966 foreign students

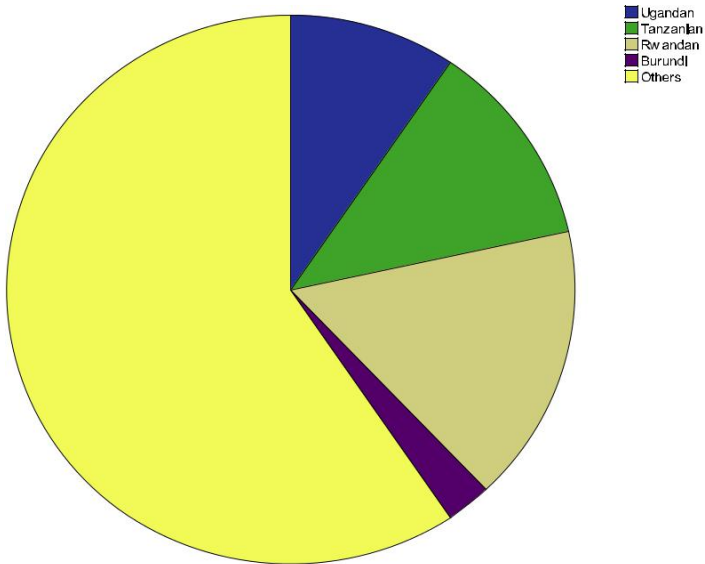


from the four universities) of the foreign students in these Universities are East African Students. The research furthermore indicates that more than 50% of these East African students are post-graduate students. Table 1, Figure 1 and Figure 2 clearly shows the scenario.

Distribution of Foreign Students in the Kenyan Universities.

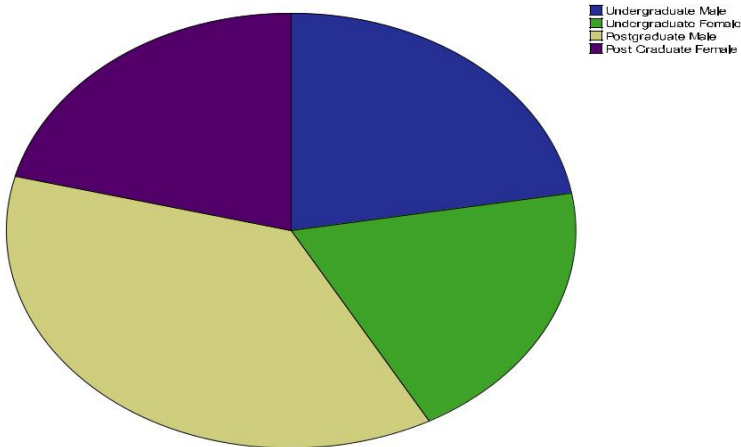
Nationality	Undergraduate Male		Undergraduate Female		Postgraduate Male		Post Graduate Female		Total	
	Column Sum %	Mean	Column Sum %	Mean	Column Sum %	Mean	Column Sum %	Mean	Column Sum %	Mean
Ugandan	4.7%	16	4.8%	9	10.1%	29	9.9%	15	7.1%	69
Tanzanian	6.1%	21	11.8%	22	15.3%	44	13.2%	20	11.1%	107
Rwandan	5.0%	17	6.5%	12	13.6%	39	17.2%	26	9.7%	94
Burundi	4.4%	15	9.7%	18	1.0%	3	2.6%	4	4.1%	40
Others	79.8%	273	67.2%	125	59.9%	172	57.0%	86	67.9%	656

Source: Kandie (2011)



**Figure 1:** *Distribution of Foreign Students in the Kenyan Universities*





**Figure 2:** *Distribution of Foreign East African Students according to gender and course level in Kenyan Universities*

### **Internationalisation of education and Students' Mobility**

From the statistics, it is clear that post graduate East African students are more than their Undergraduate Students counterparts. This fact is significant as far as internationalisation is concerned. Because internationalisation involves the process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of higher education, then interaction of such post-graduate students with the other key stake holders of higher education, may play a big role in boosting internationalisation. The key stake holders include the university management; academic and non academic staff and also the students. Joint programmes that encourage the sharing of ideas and new ways of doing things involving the foreign international students may improve quality of Education in Universities. This is so because the post-graduate students are professionals in their fields besides being from different cultural backgrounds and have very innovative insights into higher education.

According to Gabriella (2010), "...universities cannot engage in developing our future society unless they engage in developing



intercultural dialogue. Universities cannot be universities unless their mission is to offer an education that is greater than the sum of their individual academic disciplines.” This implies that universities must integrate intercultural dialogue for it to be complete. Students from vast cultures must get an avenue where they can interact freely and therefore strengthen intercultural dimension of higher education.

### **Conclusion**

Students’ mobility rates are fast expanding globally. This comes with rise in the number international students in universities. Considering East Africa, it is notable that there is significant number of post-graduate students in Universities in East Africa. For this reason, these students can play an important role in internationalisation of higher education. The diverse culture in the educational setup can help in developing multicultural consciousness and interaction in the university. Through the participation of international students especially the post-graduate students in learning/ teaching, training, seminars, social/ interactive activities and administration among other core functions of universities, intercultural, international and global elements can be realized in these institutions. Offering work-study, volunteer opportunities for international students incorporates international and multicultural dimensions in service delivery. The process of interaction is a two way gain to the countries involved. This is so because these international students share their home experiences with students/ staff in the host institution and after completion of studies, they in turn share in their home countries the experiences gained while being an international student.

The mandate presented to international professionals gives them an opportunity to make a difference with positive impact on internationalisation of education. International experience comes about with new ideas that can enhance the delivery of services within institutions of higher learning, nurturing novel research opportunities and excites the quest for innovative solutions for common challenges.

Development of regional blocs is also an important issue as it enhances collaborations in institutions of higher learning and research. Such efforts have long history in EAC and some are marked by joint initiatives in establishing institutions in the region. For instance, the formation of



IUCEA way back in 1980 brings on board all stakeholders in institutions of higher learning to enhance collaborations in Universities. The key strategic intervention which IUCEA Secretariat aims to put in place is to ensure that IUCEA becomes an effective and all-embracing research and human resource development institution for East Africa. Among them, Introducing institutionalized “Free Movement of Students” in East Africa was emphasized (IUCEA, 2008). Therefore, students’ mobility stands out as a very important issue as far as regional collaborations are concerned. With these dynamic changes in higher educational sector, universities can employ a strategy to harness the potential in international students/ professionals into building internalization sustainable development.

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