Globalisation, Internationalisation and Higher Education in Mauritius: The Compromise of Quality

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Abstract

This article discusses the implications, risks and benefits of globalisation and internationalisation of higher education in Mauritius. Mauritius is one of Africa's success stories in terms of political stability, democracy, peace and development. Being a resource-poor country and because of the remoteness and small size of the island, diversity of the population and lack of indigenous culture, Mauritius has always been closely connected to the global economy and society. Given the absence of high-value natural resources, a key resource the csuntry has had to rely on is human capital and Mauritius has invested heavily in education through the welfare state which provides free education at all levels. In order to widen access to higher education, the Mauritian government has opened up the sector to foreign higher education institutions. A growing number of Western and Indian foreign accreditation bodies offer courses in the country in parallel with the local tertiary institutions. The article shows that while Mauritius has been open to internationalisation to enable the higher education sector to grow, this is taking place at a substantial financial cost, which is to the detriment of the quality of education and also to local higher education and examination bodies. The sector has become riddled with corruption as politicians bypass regulations and quality for financial gain. Moreover, the form and direction that internationalisation is taking is highly imbued with a Western bias which is more expensive, does not encourage the development of local knowledge and also portrays an image that western academic certificates carry a higher value. Mauritius is also not linking up sufficiently with African higher education institutions, apart from a few South African universities.

Résumé

Le présent article traite des implications, des risques et des avantages de la mondialisation et de l'internationalisation de l'enseignement supérieur à

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l'île Maurice. L'île Maurice est l'une des réussites de l'Afrique en matière de stabilité politique, de démocratie, de paix et de développement. Etant un pays à faibles ressources et en raison de l'éloignement et de la petite taille de l'île, de la diversité de sa population et du manque de culture autochtone, Maurice a toujours été étroitement liée à l'économie et à la société mondiales. Face à l'absence de ressources naturelles de grande valeur, le pays a dû s'appuyer sur le capital humain, une ressource clé, et investi massivement dans l'éducation par l'intermédiaire de l'Etat providence qui offre une éducation gratuite à tous les niveaux. Afin d'élargir l'accès à l'enseignement supérieur, le gouvernement mauricien a ouvert le secteur aux établissements d'enseignement supérieur étrangers. Un nombre croissant d'organismes d'accréditation étrangers occidentaux et indiens offrent des cours dans le pays parallèlement aux institutions locales d'enseignement supérieur. Le présent article montre que l'ouverture de l'Ile Maurice à l'internationalisation pour permettre au secteur de l'enseignement supérieur de se développer s'est faite à un coût financier substantiel, qui est au détriment de la qualité de l'éducation, mais aussi de l'enseignement supérieur et des organismes examinateurs locaux. Le secteur est maintenant gangréné par la corruption puisque les politiciens contournent les règlements et la qualité pour le gain financier. De plus, la forme et la direction que prend l'internationalisation sont fortement imprégnées d'un parti pris pour l'Occident qui est plus couteux, ne favorise pas le développement du savoir local et donne aussi l'image que les diplômes universitaires occidentaux ont plus de valeur. En outre, l'île Maurice ne s'associe pas suffisamment avec les établissements d'enseignement supérieur africains, à l'exception de quelques universités sud-africaines.

Introduction

Education on the African continent has been internationalised since colonial times and thus has a long history. Although Africa had its ancient indigenous academic traditions, these traditional centres of higher learning disappeared or were destroyed by colonialism (Teferra 2008:45). The bulk of higher education on the continent has therefore largely been a product of European colonialism and modelled on European university traditions and colonial languages have remained as central elements of internationalisation (Teferra 2008). Moreover, in terms of the number of academics holding a foreign degree, the numbers of graduates having a study-abroad experience and the amount of foreign knowledge and concepts that have been imported, Africa as a region has one of the most internationalised higher education systems in the world (De Wit 2012). With the emergence of an increasingly competitive knowledge society and global higher education market, African institutions have little choice but to participate (Jowi 2012). Indeed, in the current global economy and networked society, internationalisation of the higher education

sector and higher education institutions has become inevitable and a necessity on the African continent, more so with the crunch on state resources devoted to the educational sector.

African regional bodies have set up a number of initiatives specifically geared towards promoting internationalisation of higher education on the continent. The African Union Commission (AUC) for instance, is working on harmonising Africa's higher education system which is diversely structured along geographical, colonial, linguistic and structural lines. There has also been the implementation of the Pan African University (PAU), which was a step towards the implementation of the Arusha Convention and aims at harmonising academic programmes across borders to enable better collaboration, quality assurance, structural convergence, compatibility, recognition and transferability of degrees to facilitate mobility (Teferra 2012). The PAU reinforces the spirit of Pan-Africanism in higher education and has developed centres of excellence in higher education through collaboration and cooperation between African countries (Jowi 2012). The specialised regional centres have been set up in each of the five regions of the African continent. They focus on research and postgraduate training and are hosted in existing African universities (African Union 2008).

At the continental level, the Association of African Universities (AAU) provides a forum for consultation, exchange of information and cooperation among higher education institutions in Africa (Hoosen *et al.* 2009). Regional research networks and organisations such as the Organisation for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA) and the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) support local universities in joint research programmes, staff exchange and capacity building (Jowi 2009). Moreover, regional university organisations which foster intra-regional academic exchanges and partnership and promote internationalisation within the regions as well as amongst African universities have also been set up on the continent. These include the Inter University Council for East Africa (IUCEA) and the Southern Africa Regional Universities Association (SARUA). There is also the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Protocol on Education and Training which proclaims equal university fees for all citizens from the SADC region. Jowi (2012) nonetheless notes that the current low uptake of intra-Africa partnerships is largely due to the lack of funding and hence this calls for greater financial support in the higher education sector on the continent.

African universities have engaged in internationalisation primarily for academic purposes. The aim was to strengthen existing academic institutions and enhance research capacities as well as knowledge production (Teferra

and Knight 2008; Jowi 2010). Internationalisation is also expected to enable African universities to address resource challenges which have so far inhibited success as these universities would then be in a stronger position to compete for and benefit from global opportunities and resources. At the level of research, innovation and knowledge production, international collaboration would help African universities and promote scientific and economic development on the continent (Jowi 2012). Moreover, internationalisation through collaboration with foreign governments and established higher education institutions, carries the potential to contribute to training and capacity building for African universities, as well as to enrich research capacities, curriculum and teaching methods (Ogachi 2009; Jowi 2012). Internationalisation also brings the possibility for revenue generation, enhancement of institutional competitiveness and the development of strategic alliances which would enable African universities to make a more profound contribution to research and knowledge production (Jowi 2009).

Challenges of Internationalisation for Africa

Despite the positive contribution, internationalisation also carries risks for higher education institutions on the continent (Teferra 2008; Jowi 2010). Internationalisation of higher education in Africa needs to be carefully planned and supported by the various actors and institutions concerned. Due to its turbulent history and political and economic instability, Africa's engagement with internationalisation comes from a much weaker position (Teferra 2008). In fact, African universities struggle to adequately respond to the demands for internationalisation due to weak and inadequate institutional structures and capacities for internationalisation, as well as poor planning and inadequate financial support. Internationalisation of Africa's higher education is also hindered by dependence on external forces and because the 55 countries on the continent lack a common system and culture and face different challenges and complexities (Teferra, cited in De Wit 2012). This renders the formation of a single African higher education system and a unified approach to internationalisation virtually impossible.

Since the 1980s, higher education in Africa has experienced reduced investment from both the state and international donor agencies, which resulted in a neglect of the higher education institutions on the continent (Hoosen *et al.* 2009). The major global initiatives for development and education, including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) have also ignored higher education, despite the fact that higher education represented a key factor for attaining the goals of these initiatives (Hoosen *et al.* 2009). Weak government structures, quality

concerns and poor regulatory mechanisms render Africa more vulnerable to global forces in the higher education sector (Sawyerr 2002). In fact, effective institutional quality assurance has been hindered by poor funding policies and lack of human capacity (Materu 2007). This state of affairs affects the recruitment of students and staff from overseas, which is an important component of internationalisation. The recruitment of foreign students and staff has not been vibrant in African universities largely because of the perceived low quality of academic programmes, institutional infrastructure and facilities, poor marketing of academic programmes, rising local demand, lack of credit transfer modalities and weak institutional support (Jowi 2009). African universities have also not adequately responded to curricula requirements for international students as the academic programmes have been mainly tailored for the national higher education requirements (Jowi 2009:269).

Internationalisation carries the risk of the brain drain being exacerbated by cross-border higher education and here Africa finds itself at a disadvantage because of historical, economic and political factors. Trade liberalisation with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) enhance the growing mobility of academics, professional and skilled workers, leaving African universities starved of critical human resources. In fact, the last two decades witnessed a rapid rise in student enrolments in parallel with a continued loss of intellectual capital or the brain drain and a major reduction in public financial resources allocated to higher education institutions on the continent. Globalisation and internationalisation have in fact magnified the brain drain from Africa, with a negative impact on quality as African universities have to do more with fewer resources at the level of infrastructure, staff, teaching and research facilities (Jowi 2012; Sawyerr 2002). The progression of graduate training, recruitment and retention of qualified academic staff has not kept pace with the increased enrolment (Mihyo 2008) and the brain drain has led to a lack of expertise in key sectors (Teferra 2008; Sawyerr 2002). Such a situation therefore renders it difficult for African countries to compete in the global knowledge economy (Hoosen *et al.* 2009).

Africa has also experienced an expansion in the numbers and types of providers of higher education. While this can be beneficial, it also presents several challenges in areas such as quality assurance, commercialisation and commodification, as well as relevance (Jowi 2009). New providers include private institutions and foreign universities which offer higher education through different modes, including distance learning, and rely particularly on the use of ICT for programme delivery. The new providers of higher education

are expected to work towards satisfying the growing demand for university education on the continent. However, according to Ogachi (2009:332), the establishment of foreign-owned private universities and programmes has taken place in a 'manner that assaults the working of previously existing public institutions and universities in carrying out their mandates'. African public universities therefore suffer negative consequences as a result of unequal partnerships, unfair practices and reduced funding.

The next section focuses on Mauritius, analysing the implications of internationalisation for the country as well as on the higher education sector in general, with particular emphasis on the University of Mauritius which is the oldest established public university.

Education in Mauritius: An Introduction

Mauritius is a small island of 720 square miles, located in the south western Indian Ocean with a population of approximately 1.2 million inhabitants. It is one of the three small islands collectively called the Mascarene Islands. Mauritius lies on longitude 57 east of the Greenwich Meridian and its latitude ranges from 19 58' to 20 32' in the Southern Hemisphere, just north of the Tropic of Capricorn. The Island of Mauritius has experienced successive waves of colonisers from the Dutch to the French and finally the British in 1810. The Dutch and the French brought slaves from Madagascar and the African continent to work in the sugar cane fields. Following the abolition of slavery in 1835 under British rule, Indian indentured workers were brought from India to replace slave labour in the sugar cane plantations. At that time, a small number of Chinese immigrated to Mauritius. The latter were mainly tradesmen and merchants. The French played a highly significant role in the history and development of Mauritius, initially as settlers and then as a local dominant group. Mauritian society is plural and multi-ethnic with the population presently made up of different groups.[1] Class and ethnic divisions in the population of Mauritius are very pertinent and the different ethnic groups have preserved their cultures and customs. Mauritius, just like its neighbours on the African continent, experienced internationalisation in its education sector since colonial times. The strong colonial influence is indeed still very much visible with English and French being the languages of instruction in the country.

Mauritius gained political independence in 1968 and became a republic within the Commonwealth in 1992. Compared with most African countries, Mauritius has a long tradition of democratic governance since independence. Mauritius is indeed known for its sustained political stability and its ability to preserve basic democratic rights for every citizen in a society consisting of

different religions, ethnic backgrounds and languages. There has also been reference to the 'Mauritian Miracle' with Mauritius being considered as a model of development (Brautigam 1999a, 1999b; Alladin 1993). From the perspective of a small developing country endowed with limited resources, Mauritius has made commendable progress. Mauritius is ranked 64th in the 2015 Human Development Report with a Human Development Index (HDI) value of 0.781,[2] putting the country at 'high human development' level (UNDP 2016). Mauritius has maintained a democratic system of government and is now a republic within the Commonwealth. Mauritius is also a member of a number of regional African bodies, including SADC, COMESA and the African Union.

The post-independence government introduced a comprehensive welfare package that included free education and health services, universal pension and a subsidised food scheme. Since independence in 1968, the government embarked upon a strategy of widening access to education with the establishment of primary schools in remote areas and the construction of more girls' schools all over the island which increased access of education to girls. In 1976, the state decided to sponsor secondary education, thereby increasing the enrolment of students at secondary level. This policy had a significant gendered impact since most girls had been previously denied access to secondary education by conservative and low-income families. In 1988, university fees were abolished for full-time undergraduate courses at the University of Mauritius, which was the only state university in existence at that time. This policy measure rendered tertiary education more accessible to the lower income groups and to girls as well. Mauritius also resisted pressures from the IMF and World Bank to scale down welfare benefits in order to maintain social cohesion in its plural society. As such, unlike many of its African neighbours, free education was maintained in Mauritius despite the implementation of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs). The maintenance of the welfare state enabled the country to almost eradicate illiteracy. The 2011 census showed that the literacy rate of the population aged 12 and above was 92.3 per cent for men and 87.3 per cent for women.[3]

Higher Education in the Mauritian Context

The vision of the current government is to transform Mauritius into a regional knowledge hub to serve the region and as a multi-disciplinary centre for higher learning and excellence. For this vision to succeed, tertiary education will be required to play a major role. At present, two major state institutions over see the higher education sector in Mauritius. These are: (1) the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education

and Scientific Research and (2) the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC). One of the visions of the Ministry of Education is to transform Mauritius into a knowledge-based economy by 2022. In line with the national priority of government, the Ministry of Education aims to widen access to quality tertiary education of international standards and promote research, science and technology inview of increasing competitiveness at country level. Many students have been missing out on university education due to limited space in the public tertiary institutions and universities. The Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (GTER) rose from 20 per cent in 2003 to reach 45 per cent in 2011/12. The government aims to improve access to tertiary education to attain 72 per cent GTER by 2015 and to make tertiary education more widely available to the population by using the 24/7 concept to include late night and weekend classes.

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has been mandated to promote, plan, develop and coordinate post-secondary education in Mauritius. It oversees the functioning of tertiary education institutions and is responsible for allocating public funds to the tertiary educations under its purview. The TEC also monitors the use of these funds to ensure accountability and optimum use of resources. Since 2005, the TEC has been given the task of implementing a regulatory framework which would ensure the quality of post-secondary education, as well as to determine the recognition and equivalence of post-secondary qualifications (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources 2008). This has a direct impact on internationalisation as TEC registers private and foreign tertiary educational institutions and universities and accredits their programmes. TEC determines the equivalence of academic or professional qualifications obtained in or outside Mauritius, and also has the responsibility to ensure the establishment of internal quality assurance systems in all post-secondary institutions in Mauritius. In this regard, TEC has adopted a model for quality assurance that is commonly used internationally (Mohamedbhai 2008). Moreover, TEC advises the Ministry of Education and Human Resources, Tertiary Education and Scientific Research on policy issues pertaining to tertiary education. While the functioning of TEC is supposed to be autonomous, this institution has been subjected to a number of scandals recently, which led to the destitution of its director Dr Praveen Mohadeb in November 2012 because of conflict of interest and unethical conduct (Le Mauricien 28.02.2013).

Tertiary education and training in Mauritius is currently characterised by a multiplicity of providers and is diversified by mode of delivery, field and level of study. As at October 2012, Mauritius had a total of 74 tertiary educational institutions, both public and private. In addition to the publicly funded institutions, there were 64 private educational institutions and 76 awarding

bodies that delivered courses at tertiary level in the country. These courses were mainly concentrated in the highly demanded areas such as Information Technology, Law, Management, Accountancy and Finance. Whereas some provide all levels of tertiary education in a range of disciplines, others centred their activities on a few selected disciplines mainly at undergraduate levels. Within the public sector, the country has ten tertiary education institutions. These include four universities: the University of Mauritius (UOM), the University of Technology Mauritius (UTM), the Open University of Mauritius (OUM) and the Université des Mascareignes (UdM). The origins of the University of Mauritius (UOM) date back to British colonial times in 1924 with the setting up of the College of Agriculture. It became established as a university in 1965 and currently dominates the tertiary education sector locally. The UTM became operational in September 2000 and works closely with government, business and industry. The OUM, which was set up in July 2012 by the government, has taken over the distance education activities of the Mauritius College of the Air. It promotes access to tertiary education through a mixed mode of open and distance learning and face-to-face interaction, with the aim of providing opportunities for non-traditional learners as well as enabling lifelong learning for adults wishing to pursue further studies. The Université des Mascareignes (UdM) was established in May 2012, amidst much criticism from the opposition which argued that quantity was being promoted at the detriment of quality and there was a greater need to strengthen existing universities. The Institut Supérieur de Technologie and the Swami Dayanand Institute of Management were integrated into the UdM. So far, courses have been offered at diploma level.

The other tertiary education institutions in the public sector are: the Mauritius Institute of Education (MIE), the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI), the Rabindranath Tagore Institute (RTI), Mauritius Institute of Training and Development (MITD), Mauritius Institute of Health (MIH) and the Fashion and Design Institute (FDI). The MIE was founded in 1973 and initially focussed on teacher training, education and curriculum development. It offers training to school teachers in programmes ranging from certificate, diploma and PGCE. The MIE also offers a Bachelor's degree in education (BEd) and Master's programmes in education in collaboration with the UOM and the University of Brighton, UK. The MGI was established in 1970 as a joint Government of Mauritius-Government of India venture to promote education and culture, with emphasis on Indian culture and traditions. It now runs certificate, diploma and degree-level programmes in Languages, Fine Arts and Performing Arts and Master-level programmes in Languages in collaboration with the UOM. The Rabindranath Tagore Institute was set up in December 2002 with a cultural vocation and works under the aegis

of the MGI. The RTI currently offers tertiary-level programmes in Arts and Craft. The MITD, previously known as the IVTB, was set up in 1988 to promote vocational education and training with the aim of supplying a trained workforce for the industrial, service and domestic sectors. From 1998 the MITD began offering tertiary programmes at the levels of certificate and diploma in selected areas such as Hotel Management, Fashion and Textile Design, Automation and Information Technology. The MIH was set up in 1989 to cater for the training needs of health professionals, local and regional. As per identified needs, it organizes courses and programmes, mostly at post-graduate level of short duration, for medical and para-medical personnel. The Fashion and Design Institute was set up in 2008. The Institute is now offering tertiary-level programmes such as Fashion and Textile, Graphic Design with Animation.

Apart from the UTM which charges tuition fees to students, the other publicly funded tertiary education institutions do not charge fees on the full-time programmes offered. The budget of these institutions is largely financed through the Government Recurrent Grants and the tuition fees that they charge for part-time courses carry a high subsidy element (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources, 2008). Almost all of the state-funded tertiary educational institutions have links with overseas institutions, either for curriculum development, for the mobility of staff and students, or for advice on academic and administrative matters (Mohamedbhai 2008). However, none of these institutions had a well-structured international office and Mohamedbhai (2008:291-2) notes that generally no specific budget was allocated for internationalisation, although institutions like UOM made financial provision for the visits of external examiners and other short-term academic visitors.

In terms of enrolment, UOM and UTM had the highest numbers in 2011/12, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Student enrolment in public-funded tertiary institutions in 2011 /12[4]

Institution	Number	Percentage
University of Mauritius	11,239	24.4
University of Technology	4,370	9.5
Mauritius Institute of Education	3,903	8.5
Mahatma Gandhi Institute	597	1.3
Open University of Mauritius	664	1.4
Swami Dayanand Institute of Management	560	1.2
Institut Superieur de Technologie	302	0.7

Mauritius Institute of Training and Development	507	1.1
Mauritius Institute of Health	122	0.3
Fashion Design Institute	152	0.3

The figures in Table 1 show that UOM has the largest student population and enrolment rate. It is the oldest and most established university in the country and its degrees have international recognition, as students with an undergraduate degree from UOM easily obtain admission to postgraduate studies in renowned universities overseas. Moreover, the quality of courses is monitored periodically and in this regard, external examiners are used. UOM has undoubtedly made a major contribution to progress and development of the country and was the main provider of tertiary education until the establishment of other state-funded institutions of higher education as from 1999, and the recent policy of allowing foreign higher education institutions to set up branches on the island.

The UOM has however been experiencing financial difficulties in recent years, which have affected its activities and strength as an institution. According to Mohadeb (2010), government spending on higher education accounts for only 25 per cent of total expenditure in the education sector. The government, through the TEC, has been restricting the availability of state funds to UOM, arguing that the university has been generating funds on its own (Ramtohul 2012). Government policy of increasing access to tertiary education in the country also compelled UOM to increase student intake, despite limited financial and infrastructural resources. Moreover, in 2007 UOM faced severe budgetary constraints which led to a policy of austerity requiring new arrangements for large cohorts of up to 300 students in certain lectures and a new policy for final year undergraduate students to undertake their dissertations as a group work instead of individual work, as had been the practice. The students' union and academic staff protested against these measures. The Vice Chancellor at that time, Prof Indur Fagoonee, explained that these changes were caused by the difficult financial situation of the university and the fact that the Ministry of Education had not permitted the university to introduce proper tuition fees. The lack of funding and overdependence on the state for funds put UOM in a tight situation, curtailing its autonomy and affecting the quality of research and teaching and ultimately, academic freedom through knowledge production and expression of ideas (Ramtohul 2012). This situation also affected internationalisation, collaborative research and outreach due to the shortage of funds. The university is not allowed to introduce tuition fees for its full-time courses as such a policy needs to be approved by government and for most politicians in

power, this would be an unpopular political decision. Moreover, the lack of funding, opportunities for research and autonomy has contributed to a 'brain drain' at the level of academic staff of UOM, especially those holding doctoral degrees. On this issue, Mohamedbhai (2008) highlights the fact that because of their government-regulated salary structure, publicly-funded institutions struggle to recruit highly qualified foreign academics who could help build new programmes, create an international culture within the institutions, and mentor younger academics. The low salaries also offer little motivation for highly qualified Mauritian academics to continue working for the public universities. Here, there is a need for universities to have greater autonomy in establishing their own salary structures so that they are more marketable in the international academic arena and able to recruit highly qualified and experienced academic staff both locally and from overseas.

Mauritius also has three higher education institutions that have a specific regional status. These include the Institut de la Francophonie pour l'Entrepreneuriat which was set up by the French university agency AUF and caters for students from the African region; the Sir Seewoosagar Ramgoolam (SSR) Medical College which is an Indian institution affiliated to the University of Mauritius and the Mauras College of Dentistry which is also an Indian institution affiliated to the University of Bhavnagar in India. The SSR Medical College and the Mauras College of Dentistry are owned by private Indian trusts and were set up to mainly serve students from India and the Indian diaspora in the African region, while also accommodating a smaller number (about 20%) of Mauritian students (Mohamedbhai 2008). The degrees of these institutions are awarded by the organisations with which they are affiliated – the UOM in the case of SSR Medical College and Bhavnagar University – India – in the case of Mauras College. Almost all teaching staff in these institutions came from India, although a few Mauritians were also employed on a part-time basis (Mohamedbhai 2008).

Most of the private institutions offering higher education in Mauritius are local branches of overseas institutions that offer programmes ranging from certificate to postgraduate, through a mixed-mode system which encompasses distance learning as well as face-to-face tutorials. For private institutions, fees are unregulated and students generally bear the full cost, unless they are on a scholarship. The press reports that tuition fees are to be paid in foreign currency as well (Le Mauricien 30.06.2012). Table 2 highlights the profile of the foreign awarding higher education bodies by country of origin operating in Mauritius at the moment.

Table 2: Awarding bodies of higher education by country of origin (2012)[5]

Country	Number of awarding bodies
Australia	3
France	8
India	8
Malaysia	1
Reunion Island	1
Pakistan	1
South Africa	4
Sudan	1
United Kingdom	26

Table 2 clearly shows the existence of a western bias in the provision of foreign higher education in Mauritius despite the fact that the island aims to become a regional provider of quality higher education. With the exception of India and South Africa, the majority of foreign providers of higher education are from the UK, France and Australia. Given the high value of the currencies of these First World countries vis-a-vis the Mauritian rupee, this situation represents a drain of financial resources and foreign currency from Mauritius, when quality tertiary education is available on the African continent as well, and at lower cost. This is an area which warrants greater exploration and more sustained cooperation in terms of internationalisation of higher education in the African region for the mutual benefit of all.

Costs and Benefits of Internationalisation in the Mauritian Context

Although until the beginning of the twenty first century Mauritius did not have an explicit policy on internationalisation of higher education, internationalisation has existed in the country since colonial times. Under British colonial rule in the 1920s, a post-secondary College of Agriculture was set up to primarily train technicians for the sugar industry. The best students of the college were then given scholarships to obtain a degree at the University of Reading in the UK or at Louisiana State University in the United States (Mohamedbhai 2008). The structure and mode of operation of the University of Mauritius was also largely designed on the model followed by British universities. The British government played a key role in the establishment of the University of Mauritius (UOM) and provided generous funding to establish linkages between the UOM and British universities. The setting up of the Mahatma Gandhi Institute (MGI) is also an example of

internationalisation with a 'cultural rationale' that took place immediately after independence (Mohamedbhai 2008:267). It was established in 1970 as a joint venture of the governments of Mauritius and India, with the mission to provide an academic and cultural basis for the promotion of Asia, (mainly Indian) cultural traditions in Mauritius. In fact, with its strong colonial links to France and Britain and its population of largely Indian origin, Mauritius belongs to multiple networks. These include those of Indian Ocean nations, Europe, India and Africa through its active membership in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) (Weeks 2008).

At the moment, in spite of 48 years of independence, Mauritius still follows the British educational system where Mauritian students attending state schools and private secondary schools that are subsidised by government write British exams, namely Cambridge 'O' Levels and 'A' Levels to complete their secondary education. The French educational system is also operational in the country in a few French medium educational institutions such as the Lycée Labourdonnais, Lycée des Mascareignes and École du Nord. Other private schools such as Le Bocage use the international baccalaureate as the examining and awarding body at the end of secondary education. The culmination of secondary education and step towards higher education for Mauritian students are therefore assessed and determined by foreign examination bodies. These foreign exams however tend to weigh rather heavily on the budget of Mauritian students and the government as examination fees need to be paid to the international examining bodies. The high examination fees also represent an external drain of financial resources and foreign currency from the country towards the industrialised countries that administer these exams. While these exams are internationally recognised and the certificates facilitate students' access to universities worldwide, Mauritius nonetheless does have competent local examining bodies such as the Mauritius Examinations Syndicate and the University of Mauritius, amongst others. As such, local education and examination bodies need to be called upon to play a greater role in examinations and assessment in Mauritius. Such a step will save the country a considerable amount of financial resources and also boost the activities, credit and reputation of the local institutions. Internationalisation here needs to strengthen the local institutions such that they are able to offer such services in the region. Mauritius could also benefit from African expertise, which would be less costly than European examinations, for example from South Africa which has its own matriculation system.

Moreover, every year a number of Mauritian students go overseas for higher studies. Those who are scholarship winners are required to sign a bond to return to Mauritius to work after completion of their studies. Internationalisation is also highly visible in terms of the number of young

Mauritians going overseas to study in foreign universities. In 2011, 3,007 young Mauritians went abroad for university education, with the most popular places being Australia (29.5%), followed by the UK (28.7%), France/Reunion (17.8%) and India (8.9%) (TEC 2012). While many of these students are self-funded by their families, 30 receive scholarships from the government of Mauritius (the laureates) and others from foreign consulates. The laureate scholarships are very prestigious scholarships which are offered to the 30 best students (15 boys and 15 girls) and are sponsored by the government. The laureate scheme covers tuition fees, travel costs and living expenses. While the laureate scheme has had its merits, with quality higher education being offered locally at present, the heavy investment required by government to maintain this scheme is increasingly being questioned, more so because most of the laureates do not return to Mauritius after completion of their studies. There have been suggestions to offer such scholarships for postgraduate studies, which would be less costly as they are shorter in duration, than undergraduate study. Indeed, most students opt for higher studies in the UK, France and Australia, and given the high costs of living and tuition fees in these regions, this represents a drain of resources for Mauritius. On this issue, Mohamedbhai (2008:298) observes that the Mauritian government spends about US $3 million every year on these scholarships whereas this figure represented approximately 25 per cent of the budget of the University of Mauritius in 2004-2005. He proposes supporting the studies of the best students in local universities and using the remaining funds to improve and strengthen the local universities (Mohamedbhai 2008:298). The high competition for these scholarships and the prestige associated with the laureate scheme somewhat portrays tertiary education offered locally as inferior to higher education overseas, which is not necessarily true. Therefore, there is a need to promote the goodwill and image of local higher education institutions as being of international standards.

Internationalisation of tertiary or higher education in Mauritius now features prominently on the agenda of government and one of the strategic goals of tertiary education during the period 2008-2020 is the internationalisation of tertiary education in Mauritius, although enhancing the quality of tertiary education to attain international standards has also been identified as a critical challenge to the sector (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources 2008). The TEC, under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, organized an international conference on Internationalization of Tertiary Education in Port-Louis (Mauritius), from 23 to 25 March 2011. The aim was to bring together an international panel of tertiary education researchers and experts to discuss the impact of globalization on tertiary education. Through internationalisation, Mauritius is striving to become

the 'intelligent island of Africa in the global village' (Ministry of Education, Culture and Human Resources 2008:116). Furthermore, a report published by the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (2005) highlights the expectations of government, specifically stating that the UOM and UTM are expected to become reputable international institutions that will be able to attract foreign students. Although these universities would continue to receive state support, they are expected to generate their own funds (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research 2005). The government has also been encouraging renowned brand-name universities and institutions to establish branches or offshore campuses in the country, as well as the setting-up of high quality private universities which operate independently or in collaboration with overseas partners (Ministry of Education and Scientific Research 2005).

Furthermore, the Ministry of Education aims to attract 100,000 foreign students by the year 2020. These plans have however been critiqued as being too ambitious since the tertiary education institutions in Mauritius do not have accommodation facilities for foreign students and public transport becomes scarce after six in the evening, rendering it difficult for students to attend evening lectures. Additionally, there needs to be greater planning to upgrade existing infrastructure of the existing tertiary education institutions before increasing the intake of students substantially. Mohamedbhai (2008) also notes that given that entry to tertiary education in Mauritius requires the completion of 13 years of schooling as in the United Kingdom, students from Africa or Asia tend to have just 12 years of schooling. In order to increase the number of foreign students, Mauritius may need to introduce a preparatory year for foreign students who only have 12 years of schooling. Yet, so far, the branches and offshore campuses of foreign universities in Mauritius have been relatively more successful in attracting foreign students than the public universities in the country (News on Sunday 02.03.2012). In 2011, there was a total of 81 foreign students in four publicly-funded tertiary institutions, whereas the private institutions had 554 students (TEC 2012). This is an area which requires greater thought and planning as public universities could benefit from the revenue brought in by foreign students, but this is not happening. This state of affairs indicates that public universities are struggling to compete with the appeal offered by the private universities and offshore branches of foreign universities and therefore more needs to be done to upgrade the image of public universities in Mauritius. Also, fees and revenue paid by foreign students to public universities would remain in the country, whereas private universities which are offshore branches of foreign universities send the revenue and remittances back to their main institutions in the countries of origin.

Internationalisation at the level of universities and other institutions of higher learning in Mauritius has had significant benefits for the staff, students and institutions themselves. Indeed, Mauritius being a small and resource-poor country, regional and international cooperation, agreements and links with overseas institutions of higher education have enabled the country to benefit from foreign expertise and exchange of staff where there was a lack. Moreover, in disciplines such as medical sciences, internationalisation enables students to complete their medical degrees at overseas universities which have signed a memorandum of understanding with UOM. These include the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, University of Manchester, University of Cape Town and University of Bordeaux 2. There have been a number of degree courses which have been designed in collaboration with foreign universities (Mohamedbhai 2008). Such practices of internationalisation then strengthen existing universities and have a generally positive impact. On a regional level, Mohamedbhai (2008:27) notes that Mauritius has always been a keen and active supporter of regional cooperation. Yet, the steps that the country, as a signatory of the SADC Protocol on Education and Training, has adopted to implement the various clauses are not clear (Mohamedbhai 2008). He highlights the need for Mauritius to develop a strategy both nationally and institutionally for collaboration under this protocol.

Yet internationalisation also carries significant risks for existing public institutions in the country. Here Mohamedbhai (1998:295) highlights the problem Mauritius faces at the moment in the following statement:

> 'It is important for the country to first establish, through a clear vision and plan, a strong quality, public higher education sector, properly funded and supported, before opening up its borders to private institutions, whether local or international'.

Indeed, both UOM and UTM currently face financial, infrastructural and resource constraints. The problems faced by the public universities were highlighted by the opposition in parliament, with the result that the Prime Minister announced an enquiry to be undertaken by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (UK) (Le Mauricien 15.04.2014). If fact, since 2009, UOM has had seven vice chancellors and at UTM, there have been several student complaints about political interference in university matters and management (Le Mauricien 15.04.2014). Government policy of opening up the market for higher education runs the risk of rendering the existing public universities weaker, unless they receive greater support which will enable them to compete on more reasonable grounds with existing established foreign universities that set up branches in the country. Similarly, Altbach & Knight (2006:31) also argue that although attracting foreign education

providers to support the education and training needs of the cyber island may stem the brain drain or even stimulate brain gain, this could jeopardise the local education institutions. At the level of research and development, the TEC website highlights the fact that research at tertiary level has so far been concentrated within the UOM and to a lesser extent at UTM. It is only slowly gaining ground in the private institutions with the introduction of postgraduate courses in the latter. This state of affairs therefore underlines the significant contribution to research in the country that is being made by public universities, especially UOM which is the most established one. Yet research requires funding and therefore, the importance of investment and allocating adequate funds to the UOM, or enabling it to charge fees for its courses to raise funds. The contribution of foreign universities to research and knowledge production is relatively negligible as most focus on offering fee-based courses with an economic initiative.

Mauritius has also experienced problems with regard to quality with some of the foreign universities that have set up branches on the island. Indeed, while the Ministry of Education has forged ahead with its policy of expansion of access to tertiary education, with foreign institutions as key players, in some cases, quality has somewhat been compromised, despite the existence of the TEC as a regulatory mechanism. A number of these universities have been sanctioned and lost authorisation to recruit new students. The number has risen from five in September 2013 to eleven in July 2014. Examples include the Eastern Institute and Integrated Learning Management University (EIILM), an Indian higher education institution which was set up in 2007 and the problems were even raised in parliament as there were controversies regarding its registration in Mauritius and the recognition of the certificates issued by this institution. Another case is that of the Birla Institute of Technology, a branch of Birla Institute in Ranchi, India, which informed students in May 2012 that it would be closing down due to restructuring. In such cases, students stand to lose the most. There is also the case of the Mauras College of Dentistry, an Indian institution affiliated to the University of Bhavnagar in India, which is facing criticism based on quality issues and non-recognition of its certificates by the Dental Council in Mauritius (Le Défi Quotidien 06.03.2013). Here the future of about 60 students remains in jeopardy. The latest scandal in the higher education sector is that of DY Patil Medical College, affiliated to DY Patil Worldwide, which did not meet quality standards and was engaged in illegal medical practice. Following this scandal, TEC did not authorise DY Patil Medical College to recruit foreign students on postgraduate medical programmes in 2014. Students are unfortunately the primary victims of these private universities because in most of the problem cases, the certificates are only recognised by

TEC and not by foreign universities. These students will therefore not be able to pursue higher studies overseas.

Conclusion

The article has shown that Mauritius, like its neighbours on the continent, faces numerous challenges with regard to internationalisation of higher education. While internationalisation brings significant benefits to the higher education sector and institutions in the country, its implementation needs to be carefully planned and monitored. Indeed, given the smallness of the country and scarcity of resources, higher education institutions in Mauritius have no choice but to link up with foreign academic institutions in order to strengthen research collaboration, networking, staff and student exchange and quality assurance. Yet internationalisation should not be done at the expense of weakening existing public universities in the country. Sadly, this seems to be the situation in Mauritius, where there is a policy of opening up the higher education sector to foreign institutions while at the same time curtailing funding to public universities. Increasing foreign players and institutions in this sector also represents a drain on the financial resources and foreign exchange from the country. African countries, including Mauritius, therefore need to monitor internationalisation so that the local institutions are strengthened and stand to benefit from this global outreach and are not left weaker. Such a strategy will also contribute to growth and development nationally and revenue generation because stronger local institutions have a better chance of attracting foreign students and contributing to research and knowledge production.

Notes

1. Mauritian society is composed of four ethnic groups and four major religious groups, namely, the Franco-Mauritians and Creoles who are Catholic; the Indian community, Muslim and Hindu; and the small Chinese community, either Buddhist or Catholic.
2. http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/MUS.html
3. 2011 Population census - Main results. Available on: http://www.gov.mu/portal/goc/cso/ei977/pop2011.pdf - accessed on 22.05.2013.
4. Source: Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) website – http://tec.intnet.mu/tesm_rvw.php (accessed on 05.05.2013).
5. Source: Study Mauritius website - http://www.studymauritius.info/Where.aspx (accessed on 05.05.2013).

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