



A Neglected Impediment to True Africanisation of African Higher Education Curricula: Same Agenda, Differential Fee Regimes

Chinedu. I. O. Okeke*

Abstract

This paper focuses on various international fee regimes within African universities and aims to sensitize debates around this highly neglected issue. My primary goal is not only to challenge arbitrary policy, but also to produce a useful sociological framework capable of enabling Africans to participate in their own educational development wherever they may choose to study. This paper targets African curriculum policy-makers and stakeholders and by focusing on the differential fee regimes, it is possible to show how such policy impinges upon current discourse on the Africanisation of higher education curriculum in very complex and subtle ways. Without disregarding recent efforts, however, I want to suggest that promoting an all-inclusive higher education environment within Africa without a single unified tuition policy negates all efforts toward an African curriculum agenda. An example is drawn from the thinking of the Bologna Process and the challenges such development presents to the African continent. The paper concludes that until differential policy regimes within African tertiary institutions are included on the agenda of various efforts toward the harmonization of African higher education, the journey towards a true Africanised, decolonized and all-inclusive education curricula for Africans may remain a mirage.

Résumé

Cet article traite de divers régimes de taxes internationales au sein des universités africaines. Il vise à susciter des débats autour de ce sujet peu considéré. Mon objectif n'est pas seulement de contester une telle politique,

* School of General and Continuing Education, University of Fort Hare, South Africa.
Email: okekechinedu@yahoo.com

mais aussi de produire un cadre sociologique qui permet aux africains de participer au développement du système éducatif là où ils ont choisi d'étudier. Ce travail s'adresse au programme des décideurs et intervenants africains. En se concentrant sur les régimes de frais différentiels, il est possible de montrer comment une telle politique empiète de manière très complexe et subtile sur les débats actuels de l'africanisation de l'enseignement supérieur. Sans mésestimer les efforts déployés récemment, je voudrais suggérer que la promotion d'un environnement « tout inclus » de l'enseignement supérieur en Afrique, sans une politique de scolarité unifiée, nie tous les efforts effectués en faveur d'un programme africain. L'exemple est tiré du Processus de Bologne et des défis qu'un tel développement présente au continent africain.

Introduction

Reforming African higher education curriculum policies in the light of the concept of Africanisation appears to be at the heart of current debates and reforms issues flourishing across Africa (Nekwhevha 2000; Higgs 2003; Hahn 2005; Chetty 2006; Pityana 2006; and Serpell 2007). In this paper, I want to argue that although much has been said about higher education through various nomenclature including Africanisation, transformation and Renaissance, as yet African higher education policy-makers have however failed to forge a new identity to cope with the pressures of dissatisfaction amongst Africans. Identity as I would like to refer in this paper is such that it symbolizes unity, coherence and single purpose (Mokadi 2004). I want to argue that such a proposed African identity appears to be a wild goose chase inasmuch as the quest for educational advancement by Africans is met with the divisive and somewhat frustrating mechanisms as the international fee regimes of African higher institutions. Any attempt toward rethinking of African curriculum studies must address this much neglected aspect of Africa's educational advancement.

This paper focuses on various international fee regimes within some selected African universities; its target audience is however the African curriculum policy-makers and stakeholders in African higher education institutions. My primary goal is not only to sensitize debates around such policy arbitrary, but also to produce a useful sociological framework capable of enabling Africans to participate in their own educational development wherever they may choose to study. By focusing on the differential fee regimes, it is possible to show how arbitrary policy impinges upon the discourse on Africanisation of higher education curriculum in very complex and subtle ways. Within the framework of discourse analysis, I want to unpack an unquestioned process of institutionalized symbolic violence that poses serious threat to the call for a unified African-type curriculum framework. Without disregarding recent efforts, however, it would appear that promoting an all-inclusive higher education environment within Africa without a single unified tuition policy negates all efforts toward an African curriculum agenda. The paper concludes that until

such differential policy regimes within African tertiary institutions are revisited, the journey toward a harmonized, true Africanised, even decolonized and inclusive education curricula may remain an illusion.

Interest in the issue of international fees within African higher institutions started with my presentation at the Second African Conference on Curriculum Development in Higher Education, 16th to 18th September, 2008. In my paper titled 'A framework for curriculum policy for social cohesion in Africa', I noted that Africanisation of higher education curricula implies achieving common ground within its entire corollary, arguing that there is the need to make explicit what it is that higher institutions intend to achieve through Africanisation. In that paper (Okeke 2008), I also noted it would appear very difficult in the current state of extreme disparity within Africa's higher education policy documents to assess the extent to which the continent can claim Africanness and argued that Africanisation of higher education must be total. More over, I equally noted that if the Africanisation project is not total, touching on all aspects of Africa's higher institutions' lives, it cannot be said to be complete. My paper highlighted the need for all Africa's higher education policy-makers to begin some serious consideration over such discriminatory tendencies within African universities with particular reference to pedagogical languages and tuition fees. This paper, which now focuses more deeply on the issue of international tuition fees imposed on African students by African universities, is a continuation of that discussion.

Continuing my argument therefore, this paper raises three questions that seriously challenge expert efforts toward African-type education curricula.

- First, why are institutions in Africa operating differential fee structures for different categories of students who study within same institutional pedagogical agenda?
- Second, what justifications appear to be laid down for foreign students for the somewhat exorbitant international fee structures; same course content, same assessment, same infrastructure, yet differential fee regimes?
- And finally, what is it that African educational institutions stand to lose if a unified tuition policy is established for both foreign and local students?

To address these questions, attention is drawn to the lessons from the Bologna Process (Bishop 2006; Papatsiba 2006; Sall & Ndjaye 2007). But before I do that, let me throw more light on the two concepts of Africanisation and African International Fee Policies (AIFS).

Africanisation and the African International Fee Status

One of the surest signs of a declining relationship is the absence of complaints. In contrast, the rising voices of Africans and academics alike are a good sign defining the African resolve for strength in unity. Such appears to be the driving

force informing all debates, meetings, conferences, seminars, symposia and workshops in most Africa's institutions of higher learning. According to Mazrui (2009) an African patriot should not allow despair to take over although things might look terrible at the moment. Professor Mazrui noted that if one is an African academic, she/he must endeavour to try and make contributions in his/her special field and try to see better times ahead. To me, that is why various Africans have risen to the challenges of a globalizing nature engulfing Africa at the moment. Such is also the impetus on which I draw; hoping as it were that my contribution would assist Africa in her efforts toward some worthwhile steps forward. This is therefore no time for sloganeering; rather the time is ripe when 'African universities should pay particular attention to the present international context...' (Sall & Ndjaye 2007:52).

The concept of Africanisation directs our attention to the fact that things are not going the way they should within the African educational, economic, political, and social lives. Africanisation demands a re-narration of the African existence. It is a call to all well-meaning Africans, but also to all institutions with a mandate aimed at the training of the mind, to the fact that now is the time to change our world in reflection of ourselves. Naude & Naude (2005) refer to the concept of Africanisation as an ideology highlighting the need for an education programme that must be inherently inclusive. This is of course true because any attempt towards curriculum rethinking in Africa must confront issue of policy diversity within Africa's institutions of higher learning as this appears to be at the heart of Africanisation. That equally appears to be what Naude and Naude (2005:74) meant when they said 'cultural justice is indeed a crucial dimension of the Africanisation of higher education'. Again the concept of Africanisation reminds Africans that something is missing, however, 'it should not be necessary for Africans to have to declare their Africanness; for institutions to declare their intention to Africanise; or for higher education to be constantly confronted with the need to transform' (Mokadi 2004:1).

For Africanisation to achieve its set goals it is imperative for African institutions and Africans themselves to invigorate that spirit of love and care defined through Ubuntu: 'the humanistic spirit which more clearly defines the morality of the various peoples of Africa' (Nekwhevha 2000:22; see also Broodryk 2006; Msila 2008:69). To me, the philosophy informing the Africanisation project does not deny Africans their citizenship or national autonomy, for we are by birth or by naturalization or by any other means Africans and politically independent. What the whole project demands is for various institutions that define our very existence as Africans to initiate some modes of consciousness because '...the reality of our situation is that as African universities, whether we like it or not, it is our responsibility to find solutions to the myriad of problems besetting our badly under-developed continent'

(Mokadi 2007: 2; see also Magagula & Mazibuko 2004; Mavhunga 2006). This is no time for sloganeering; the time is ripe for Africans and African institutions to take advantage of the rising African voices of great repute coming from various institutions within Africa and begin to initiate a genuine platform for real transformation.

Africanisation demands that all African higher education policy-makers to begin to seriously consider such discriminatory and divisive policies as the international tuition fees status for Africa citizens. Again, educational policy researchers are challenged by this author, to begin as a matter of urgency to provide answers to what African universities stand to lose if a unified tuition fees policy applies to all students of the African Union origin as is the case with our European counterpart. This is because Africanisation, of higher education curricula implies achieving common grounds. Otherwise one would argue that although 'colonialism in Africa provided the framework for the organised subjugation of the cultural, scientific and economic life of many on the African continent' (Higgs 2003:6), it would seem such an inherited subjugation mechanism lives on, resonating through such policy as the discriminatory international fee regime. This is one aspect of the colonial legacies all well-meaning Africans must rise against. Such differential fee-policy regimes pose serious threats to the whole idea of Africanisation but also to all efforts toward African higher education quality assurance as well as the harmonization campaigns currently going-on.

By the African International Fee Status (AIFS), I mean the policy whereby universities and other institutions of higher learning within Africa differentiate between the fees paid by students originating from within the geographical region or country where the institutions are located and other students coming from the outside of that region. For instance, various universities across the African continent have established differential policies on tuition fees and other fees paid by both home and foreign students. Whereas within the European universities, the status 'international students' refers to all students from outside of the European Union (EU), in Africa the same status refers to all students from outside a particular country where the university is located. While this situation may pose very serious implications for African efforts toward harmonization of African universities' programmes as well as for quality assurance, it however, raises fundamental questions over the whole concept of African Union and its credibility. With the exception of South Africa, which 'has already decided to treat SADC students as home students and treating them equally with regard to fees and accommodation' (Hahn 2005: 22), to the extent that this author has reviewed (see for example, United Nations 2001; AU 2007; Shabani 2004; Sall & Ndjaye 2007; AU 2008; AU/NEPAD 2009; AAU 2009; UNESCO/ADEA 2009) no known policy on unified tuition fee for

members of the African Union has been recorded any where or is even being discussed at any level.

While it is doubtful how African universities intend to achieve unity in diversity, quality assurance and harmonization under such a differential fee policy climate, it is however imperative for African universities and the African Union (AU) to begin as a matter of urgency, consideration of the issue being discussed in this paper; this is a necessary condition as Africa grapples with the pressures of globalization. However, it seems that Africa's educational policy-makers are contented with sloganeering, and all efforts toward harmonization and quality assurance are wasteful if they decide to turn a blind eye to the AIFS policies within African universities. More so, experience has shown that how university students source funds as well as finance their academic programmes impacts on their approach to learning. The implications are also manifold, impinging on quality, level of commitment, conscience and as well as on the feeling of patriotism on the part of such individuals. More over, while this practice may impact on the overall sense of commitment amongst its African victims, African institutions must begin to cultivate the habit 'to share good practice and practical examples of what has worked. We need to build a consensus of agreed principles and elements which form the essence of what we mean by, and expect of transformation' (Mokadi 2004:1). It can be argued that 'African universities could be inspired by present experiments in Europe' (Sall & Ndjaye 2007:50), and on this note, I turn attention to the lessons of the Bologna Process.

What lessons from the Bologna Process and European student mobility?

The necessity, successes and failures of the Bologna Process are well documented in the literature on world educational developments (see Zgaga 2003; Lunt 2005; Bishop 2006; Papatsiba 2006; Sall & Ndjaye 2007; AU 2008; Yavaprabhas 2008; Sheppard & Bellis 2008; Yavaprabhas & Nopraenue 2008). In 1999 some 29 European Ministers of Education and representatives of higher education institutions gathered in Bologna, Italy and agreed to embark on the structural reformation of higher education in Europe. It must be noted that this number has since enlarged to about 45 European States (see Bishop 2006). The aim of the proposal was to work toward achieving the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by the year 2010. This agreement, which was signed on the 19th of June, 1999 heralded what is today referred to as the Bologna Process. It is 'an attempt to coordinate responses to major challenges facing European Higher Education through a package of structural reforms' (Lunt 2005:89). While this author is aware of various criticisms of the Bologna Process, it is however, important to note that '... the BP is said to be one of the most profound changes encountered by European Higher Education' (Papatsiba 2006:96).

The objectives of the Bologna Process are very many and well documented in literature. They include the following:

- easily readable and comparable degrees;
- uniform degree structure – a three-cycle framework (3 - 2 - 3);
- the establishment of a system of credits with the objective of establishing a system of credits to promote widespread student mobility;
- increased mobility so that obstacles to the effective mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff will be removed;
- the promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies; and
- the promotion of the European dimension in higher education with closer international co-operation and networks; language and cultural education (Bishop 2006:4).

Of these objectives, it is the increased student mobility which has direct import on the focus of this paper, more so, because of the need to demonstrate how such a unified policy could help improve the lot of students. Although the BP is not without criticisms, it however ‘expresses the conviction of many European countries and many academic institutions ... to continually improve the quality of their education, to ease student mobility, and to assist young people in obtaining mutually recognized qualifications’ (Zgaga 2003:251).

It must be noted that the Bologna Process has inspired a number of moves toward the restructuring of higher education in other regions, for example, in the Latin America, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia as well as the Arab countries (see Yavaprabhas 2008; Yavaprabhas & Nopraenue 2008). It is therefore important for African higher education experts and policy-makers to begin to assess the implications of the BP on the internal arrangements of higher education processes within the African continent. This suggestion appears plausible for Africa as the BP ‘seems likely to have a profound effect on the development of higher education globally as... other continents are taking a close interest in the reform process and beginning to consider how their own systems can be more closely aligned with Bologna thinking’ (Bishop 2006:3). In addition to the above, there is a growing feeling across Africa that the continent could benefit immensely from such cooperative mechanisms as the BP. For instance Sall & Ndjaye (2007:52) argued that ‘African inter-academic cooperation can be boosted if it is inspired by cooperation models existing in the European academic space’. Delegates to the Accra, Ghana Validation Meeting for African Quality Rating Mechanism were up on their feet when ‘... participants recommended that higher education in Africa would benefit from the adoption of the Bologna Process, especially in fostering regional collaboration’ (African Union 2008:55; see also Shabani 2004). It is worth noting that although the African Union

acknowledges the cultural and material differences between the African and the European continents, the organization does however believe ‘... it is advisable for the African Union to pursue its own African harmonization process, drawing on the lessons learned in Europe...’ (African Union 2008:56).

To me, Africa can not afford to turn a blind eye to these global educational cooperative developments; if she does, it could affect Africa’s educational relationships with the rest of the world in more ways than one. I am aware of various moves at the continental level, for instance, the mandate to the Association of African Universities (AAU) to work out the modalities for, and as well as launching the move toward the establishment of the African Higher Education Area (AHEA), see for example, United Nations (2001); AU/NEPAD (2008); Yavaprabhas & Nopraenue (2008); AAU (2009). It is however doubtful how the enormous task of establishing the AHEA could be achieved given the present incompatible, highly divisive and uncompromising national educational policies amongst African nation-states. The task is made even more complex given that the African Union exists more on paper than in reality, so that unlike the European Union, it has failed to create any genuine framework aimed at ‘the promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement’ (Sheppard & Bellis 2008:3).

It must, however, be noted that prior to the launching the BP, the EU zone comprising 26 countries was already in place (Bishop 2006), with full implications for classified EU students in relation to geographical mobility and fee status. By the year 2010, it is expected that the full principles of the Bologna Process would be practically and operationally in place (Papatsiba 2006). Having said that, I want to see an attractive African higher education capable of competing within a speedily globalizing world, through some laid down mechanism of progressive structural harmonization of African higher education systems; a mechanism that would guarantee a comprehensive and unified policy for the mobility of African citizens wherever they may wish to study within Africa. This is imperative because as Papatsiba (2006:100) noted ‘...integration can not operate in a vacuum, but would depend on the existence of people having capacities to operate beyond the national and cultural borders’. However, it is important to mention at this point that no call has been made in this paper for Africa to adopt the BP principles as blueprint for the reformation of African higher education. African higher education must necessarily be reformed from within Africa, a view equally shared by Mokadi (2004). That notwithstanding, it must be said that if Africa fails to respond genuinely to these global inevitabilities, all efforts particularly toward the harmonization of higher education programmes (see for instance Hahn 2005; African Union 2007; 2008); and

that of African quality rating mechanism (see also African Union, 2008; AAU, 2009), will be unproductive.

It must be noted that at the London Summit in 2007, European student mobility was designated as a key priority for the Bologna Process (Sheppard & Bellis 2008). Earlier, Bishop (2006:10) suggested that a 'probable outcome of the Bologna Process is that the costs to students of international mobility within Europe will be reduced relative to those studying outside Europe...' Generally, the benefits of mobility as embedded in the Bologna Process for European students are many and they include but are not limited to the following:

- the acquisition of international competences such as a good command of language;
- a certain level of intercultural competence;
- personal competences such as autonomy, initiative, and resilience;
- mobility represents a form of secondary socialization that relies on individuals. Being mobile implies experiences of changing environments, even one's sense of belonging, and increases the possibilities of benefiting from variety;
- mobility involves encounters and confrontation with differences, requiring a broad range of individual adaptive responses, and also encouraging their renewal, and
- hence, mobility would maintain individuals in a state of awakening akin to the acquisition of new competences and new knowledge (Papatsiba 2006:99).

I do not think anything is wrong with individuals or nations developing the habit of borrowing from good practice wherever such practice is found to be working. Mokadi (2004:1) agrees that 'we need to share good practice and practical examples of what has worked'. But I think a good start is for African institutions and policy-makers, and even politicians to abhor and reject the habit of sloganeering which appear to be clogging the wheels of positive intent. For example, African higher education summits are always climaxed with such slogans as 'harmonization, borderless education, transnational education, cross-border education and quality assurance', without any real commitment either at the institutional or governmental levels. Africa can benefit from her numerous diversities and colonial past because as argued by Papatsiba (2006:93) '...reforms do not take place in a vacuum, but against the background of diverse inherited systems'. The rest of this paper will try to demonstrate how differential fee policies within African higher education have continued to serve as serious constraints to true Africanisation of Africa's higher education sector.

Implications for the Africanisation project

African universities operate a tuition policy that seeks to distinguish between local and international students – a legacy of colonial education policies in Africa. Whereas across the Atlantic, say in Europe, the phrase ‘international student’ is used to differentiate between the student from within the EU and others from outside of the EU (note that the BP has laid the framework for harmonizing existing differences between members of the EU zone and other European countries by 2010). The African conception of the phrase appears to be different. A student who is classified an ‘international student’ at an African university, is one who does not hold any of the elements of citizenship as defined by the immigration law of the country where the university is located. Such is not peculiar to any one country or region within Africa, but appear to be an unquestioned practice throughout the entire continent.

So why are African universities charging different fees to students who study for, same degree, as for instance, in BSc Engineering, to mention just one? Is there any justification for such a fee structure in a university, which has same academic staff, same course content, same assessment, and same infrastructure for students of different African nationals? More so, is there truly anything an African university stands to lose if a unified tuition policy is established for both foreign and local students? It must be noted that although the African Union developed in response to the EU, in practice no such thing as AU does exist for African students. This suggests that it is not always true to argue as did Nekwhevha (2000:20) that ‘... current African educational policies have been coined along European lines...’ since one may ask what is it that has prevented tuition fee policies in Africa to be framed along the EU fee policy frames.

It has been suggested that ‘Africa should look towards the Bologna Process as a model to adopt in seeking to harmonize higher education in the region...’ (African Union 2008:55). However, I think it would be inappropriate to apply the developmental processes of the advanced West as a yardstick to assess the badly underdeveloped educational economy of the African continent. That notwithstanding, I want to argue that all efforts towards harmonization of African higher education would be futile if African universities and governments refuse to develop the habit of good practice. We could still be Africans while adopting the good practices of other regions of the world in an attempt to forge a compatible approach towards the positioning of Africa’s higher education to be able to compete with other continents within a rapidly globalizing world. Moreover, the reason why we share the concern for our badly managed higher education, is because we are Africans, so we do not require of anyone to remind us all of this inalienable truth about our Africanness. What is required of Africa therefore, is for her institutions of higher learning to show more commitment toward finding solutions to the educational problems that beset

Africa; and ‘the reality of our situation is that as African universities ... we are expected to provide solutions: we have been empowered through our hard-earned education to be able to do so’ (Mokadi 2004:2).

The above point to me appears to be at the heart of recent efforts including various seminars, symposia, conferences aimed at the harmonization of Africa’s higher education. But it would be unhelpful if Africans are selective in their handling of various issues that beset Africa’s higher education. What affects African students could have direct implications on issues such as harmonization and quality assurance. More over, how African students source funds for their higher education enterprise, would invariably impact on the issues of quality assurance. It would appear very difficult, too, for African higher education to guarantee quality in the face of differential access and control over funding. African universities would certainly lose nothing by adopting a unified fee policy for every African studying within a given African geographical entity. In my few years as a university lecturer, I do not recall offering any foreign student in my class lectures different from that which I offered to the locals in terms of content, depth, attention, or assessment, neither do I recall being overburdened by any student by the simple reason that he/she is classified ‘international student’.

So from a personal perspective, it would be very tedious to differentiate my academic and pastoral services to the different categories of students that I encounter in my everyday dealings with the students, as no such difference exists to start with. Institutions in Africa would equally lose nothing if they decide as a matter of policy to introduce a unified tuition and other fees structure for all Africans. Collectively therefore, African universities have no justifiable rationale for the differential fee regimes for Africans studying within African universities. Such policy segregates Africans within their own institutions; it is a continuation of aspect of the colonial legacies our forefathers fought very hard to uproot. Most importantly, such practice negates all principles of the African philosophy in ‘...welfare concern, where the basis of communalism is giving priority to the community and respect for the person. It also involves sharing with and helping persons’ (Higgs 2003:14); such practice also contradicts the spirit of Ubuntu and Africanisation.

My paper aims to sensitize debates around the much-neglected issue of African International Fee Status within African institutions of higher learning. Leaving aside such an important issue would inescapably thwart the objectives of the supposedly progressive wheels of efforts as the Harmonization of Higher Education Programme in Africa: A strategy for the African Union (African Union 2007); Validation Meeting for African Quality Rating Mechanism and Harmonization Strategy for Higher Education (African Union 2008); the AU/NEPAD African Action Plan: 10th Africa Partnership Forum (AU/NEPAD 2008);

or the Dodowa Declaration on African Quality Assurance Network (AAU 2009). As it is, none of the above mentioned forum has ever had on its agenda for consideration the issue of African international tuition fees. Such a blatant omission of an important issue as the fee status of Africans studying in African higher institutions located outside of their geographical region, raises fundamental questions on the whole project of Africanisation.

Conclusion

The issue discussed in this paper is not an idle one; it calls for urgent and decisive action from every patriotic African. According to Waghid (2004:132) 'what makes dialogue a conversation is that people are willing to listen to what they have to say to one another without ... dismissing their subjective views as not worthy of consideration'. It is therefore my argument that until Africans begin to pay attention to the issue discussed in this paper, the journey towards a true Africanised, even decolonized and all inclusive education curricula may remain a mirage. While suggestion is made in this paper for Africans to develop the habit of adopting good practice wherever it is demonstrated to be working, by which the betterment of Africa is made a priority, this author is however not in support of any call for Africans to seek solutions to Africa's problems from outside of the shores of Africa.

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