

The Imperatives of Academic Collaboration in Africa, Asia and Latin America

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Abstract

A multitude of intentions drives institutions to engage in academic collaborations, mainly dictated by necessity. The imperatives of academic collaboration are many and varied and include generating resources, developing academic capacity, exchanging experiences, and enhancing the institutional profile. Institutions also engage in collaboration to pursue mega initiatives (such as human genome projects) and tackle major global challenges (like climate change and diseases such as COVID-19). Such endeavours mainly take place within the framework of North-North and, to certain extent, North-South collaboration. South-South collaboration has been less evident, although this trend appears to be changing steadily with growing interest, focus and drive in these regions. For decades, academic collaboration has been touted as a positive force in knowledge creation and capacity building, particularly in the South. However, this conception has largely been framed in the context and perspective of the North. Given growing calls for a shift from traditional North-South collaborations, this article explores the imperatives of academic collaboration in the context of South-South partnerships and examines the critical factors that shape such collaboration in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It explores the intention, nature, scope and modalities of academic collaborations in the context of academic exchange, joint research/projects, joint programmes, capacity building and other relevant engagements on these continents in the post-COVID-19 era.

Résumé

Une multitude d'intentions poussent les établissements à s'engager dans des collaborations académiques, principalement sous l'effet de la nécessité. Les impératifs de la collaboration universitaire sont nombreux

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et variés et comprennent la génération de ressources, le développement des capacités universitaires, l'échange d'expériences et l'amélioration du profil institutionnel. Les institutions s'engagent également dans une collaboration pour poursuivre des méga-initiatives (telles que des projets sur le génome humain) et relever des défis mondiaux majeurs (comme le changement climatique et des maladies telles que la COVID-19). Ces efforts s'inscrivent principalement dans le cadre de la collaboration Nord-Nord et, dans une certaine mesure, Nord-Sud. La collaboration Sud-Sud a été moins évidente, bien que cette tendance semble changer régulièrement avec un intérêt, une concentration et un dynamisme croissants dans ces régions. Pendant des décennies, la collaboration universitaire a été présentée comme une force positive dans la création de connaissances et le renforcement des capacités, en particulier dans le Sud. Cependant, cette conception a été largement formulée dans le contexte et la perspective du Nord. Compte tenu des appels croissants à un changement des collaborations Nord-Sud traditionnelles, cet article explore les impératifs de la collaboration universitaire dans le contexte des partenariats Sud-Sud et examine les facteurs critiques qui façonnent une telle collaboration en Afrique, en Asie et en Amérique latine. Il explore l'intention, la nature, la portée et les modalités des collaborations universitaires dans le contexte des échanges universitaires, des recherches/projets conjoints, des programmes conjoints, du renforcement des capacités et d'autres engagements pertinents sur ces continents dans l'ère post-COVID-19.

Introduction

Academic collaboration is as old as academia itself. It has intensified across the world in the past two decades with the ushering in of what is known as a 'knowledge society' that rides on a knowledge economy. Kweik (2018) holds that international academic, particularly research, collaboration has captivated the imagination of the academic profession and informed governments' research policy across the world.

Academic collaboration has become fashionable—and even imperative—for institutions and individuals in their systematic drive to pursue excellence and distinction. Institutional status and ranking—which have grown in importance—are increasingly gauged by the extent and magnitude of academic and research collaboration that institutions develop and sustain.

Academic collaboration has witnessed massive growth as interest in tackling global issues and challenges has taken centre stage. There is a robust understanding and hence practice of massive multi-national, multi-institutional collaborative projects such as the human genome project and the Hadron collider, and efforts to confront mega challenges such as climate change and environmental degradation that are often unencumbered by national borders and artificial boundaries.

In this article we use the term academic cooperation somewhat broadly to encompass typical academic engagements and tasks such as teaching and learning, research, publication/communication and other academic exercises.

Rationale for and imperatives of academic collaboration

The rationale for and imperatives of academic collaboration and partnerships of countries and institutions, and for that matter continents, vary in their profile and intensity. This section examines the multiple manifestations of these tenets.

Africa

Higher education in Africa has a long history that dates back a thousand years. While Africa can claim an ancient academic tradition, its traditional centres of higher learning all but disappeared or were destroyed by colonialism (Altbach and Selvaratnam, 1989). The most important colonial powers in Africa, Britain and France, had a lasting impact not only in terms of the organisation of academe and continuing links to the metropole, but on the language of instruction and communication (Teferra and Altbach, 2003). This historical legacy is instrumental in understanding the partnership and collaboration dynamics in contemporary African higher education.

Collaborations are paramount in advancing higher education and revitalising knowledge systems in Africa, with some 20 million students currently enrolled in this sector (Teferra, 2017). A multitude of factors drives interest in collaborations and partnerships as the sector is growing fast and its needs—and challenges—are mounting.

Collaborations require vital financial resources, academic and research competence, and enhanced intellectual capital and confidence. They help to address the academic isolation and marginalisation that are typical in

the Global South. Academic and research collaborations with researchers and academics in the Global North often generate publications in high-impact journals, making research institutions and their personnel more visible. This can lead to more grants, research and publications, faster promotion and more invitations to major conferences and meetings (Teferra, 2009). However, the implications of heavy reliance on resources and discourses generated or dominated by external entities have been the subject of numerous regional and global dialogues, contestations, and resolutions (Teferra, 2013).

African higher education depends heavily on external resources—both in monetary terms and its discourse. Due to critical funding shortages, for the most part, academic collaborations on the continent are driven by the desire for resource generation. The low level of research productivity in Africa—which accounts for 13.5% of the global population but less than 1% of global research output (Fonn et al., 2018)—is attributed to a systemic and critical scarcity of funds for research and academic cooperation.

Typically, resources to support African research and scholarship originate in rich industrialised countries through bilateral and multilateral arrangements and (to a lesser extent) foundations in the United States (US). It can thus be argued that one of the main driving forces for academic collaboration in Africa is soliciting funding from external resources that typically requires partnerships between institutions in Africa and the Global North.

The discourse-shaping dialogue regarding higher education's development is still dominated by external forces, either through their own internal think-tanks or by alliances with powerful players that influence local institutions to adopt a favoured policy track. For better or for worse, external forces will remain one of, if not the main, powerful forces of internationalisation on the continent through their financial and technical muscle, their backing of particular policies, and their promotion of the terms on which discourse can occur (Teferra, 2008).

A further key imperative of African interest in academic cooperation falls under what is typically referred to as capacity building. African academic institutions face critical shortages of well-trained and qualified academics with PhDs; and the massive expansion of the sector has exacerbated the situation. Even in a typical flagship university in Africa, PhD holders are in the minority although countries such as Kenya and

Nigeria are enacting legislation that restricts academic staff employment to those with PhDs.

As a result, academic institutions in Africa often seek to train their academic staff through international, and to some extent regional, academic partnerships. When such training is packaged in academic cooperation supported within a framework of bilateral and/or multilateral arrangements, it often extends to joint research, and publication. Therefore, African academic institutions draw on academic cooperation to train their academics, typically to PhD level, sealed by external resources.

Increasingly, however the destination of African students seeking postgraduate studies, particularly PhDs, has diversified through their own and government resources. While the US and Europe have been important markets for students from across the world, Africa, China and India are emerging as the new frontiers of foreign study for African students with considerable scholarship opportunities offered by some. Russia and the states of the former USSR are also attracting students from the continent after losing their market share following the end of the Cold War. While such government-sanctioned and individually-driven endeavours might not directly represent academic collaboration, they plant the seeds for future engagements and are a nucleus for soft power deployment.

A typical African university maintains a long list of partnerships mainly, if not exclusively, with institutions in the Global North. These are usually sealed by resources deployed from the Global North. For instance, only 20% of the University of Nigeria's more than 70 collaborations (broadly considered to range from students' study destinations to research) are within the global South, with most of them in Africa (<https://www.unn.edu.ng/collaborations/>). A study on partnerships in Kenyan universities found that more than 60% were unaware of any partnerships formed by their institutions and only three of the eight institutions had such a policy (Kombo and Mwangi, 2018).

In Ghana, the three most research productive organisations were found to be highly dependent on collaboration to sustain their levels of productivity. Indeed, in 2006 and 2013, respectively, 98% and 92% of research articles by government agencies and public universities would not have materialised without collaboration. Moreover, all the articles emanating from the Ghana Atomic Energy Commission and the Ghana Health Service during this period can be attributed to research

collaborations. About 97% of the articles from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology were as a result of collaboration, compared to 91% for the University of Ghana (Owusu-Nimo and Boshoff, 2017).

Scientific research productivity has been closely linked to high levels of collaboration (Lee and Bozeman, 2005; de Solla Price and Beaver, 1966 in Lewis, Ross and Holden, 2012) and consequently, many developed countries seek to stimulate collaboration through a mix of research grants and grant criteria, a luxury African institutions generally cannot afford.

Africa successfully transitioned from the ‘Hopeless Continent’ in 2000 to ‘Africa Rising – The hopeful continent’ in 2011, graduating to ‘Aspiring Africa – The world’s fastest-growing continent’ in 2013, according to *The Economist*, one of the most influential magazines in the world. Since then, the continent has witnessed a plethora of high-level meetings including Africa-Canada; China-Africa; Africa-France; Germany-Africa; India-Africa; Japan-Africa; Korea-Africa, Russia-Africa and Turkey-Africa summits, conferences and compacts (Teferra, 2019). Similar patterns are evident at a multilateral level including the European Union (EU)-African Union (AU) Summit in February 2022. These conventions invariably narrate the multiple areas of partnerships and collaborations, including higher education.

In analysing the declarations of the different summits and conferences, their ‘linearity’—i.e., engagements narrowly conceived as a one-to-one rendezvous—becomes starkly evident. This linear pattern has implications for the ‘polygamous’ partner as it strives to accommodate the multiple and typically discrete partnership and collaboration schemes that tend to lack coherence and compete with one another. Ultimately, the burden of managing these partnership schemes lies with African institutions who often lack the human and technical resources and support to do so (Teferra, 2022).

While it is true that the initiatives of multiple external players increasingly employ consultative approaches to align policies and jointly run programmes and activities, this largely depends on the good will of the respective entities. For instance, in Ethiopia the Development Partners Group (DPG) was established in 2001, initially as the Development Assistance Group (DAG), and comprises 30 bilateral and multilateral partners. It “was established to foster and catalyse policy dialogue and

to coordinate and harmonize development partners’ support for the Government of Ethiopia’s preparation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the national development plan and the SDGs” (UNDP).

The 2005 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and the 2008 Accra Agenda for Action which emerged from two key conventions are founded on five core principles, born out of decades of experience of what works for development, and what doesn’t. These have gained support across the development community, changing development cooperation paradigms, presumably for the better. The principles include ownership, alignment, harmonisation, results-focused and mutual accountability (Teferra, 2019). The 2015 Addis Ababa Action Agenda also calls for “providers of ODA [overseas development assistance] and South-South cooperation to further increase the effectiveness of their development cooperation and to share knowledge about their respective efforts”. Notably, it anticipates South-South cooperation through the interventions of the Global North (ODA).

Fellessen and Mählck’s (2017) study on ‘Modes and Premises of Transnational Mobility and Collaboration at the Intersection of International Development Aid and Global Science Regimes – The Case of Mozambique and Tanzania’, which analysed North-South partnership dynamics in the context of Swedish International Development Agency support, observed the frequently unclear and inferior role of participation in international collaboration and “token presence” of Africans in Global North research projects. Access to and knowledge of funding opportunities became an early determinant of the ‘pecking order’ of the partners involved in the collaboration. The authors concluded that African researchers’ lack of insight and access to funding opportunities in the Global North significantly reduced their ability to influence and shape collaborative research projects.

The lofty conventions and summits, etc. and the frequency with which they take place underscore the need for Africa to carve its own path as it engages with a multitude of new as well as historical partners in light of its changing status.

It can be concluded that the primary reason for African universities to seek partnerships lies in their quest for financial, material, infrastructural, and human resources. Therefore, the drive for collaboration—a key aspect of internationalisation—on the continent is fraught with scarcity and driven by coercion (Teferra, 2020). The imperatives of equitable

collaboration may only become a reality if the need for compliance and interest in genuine co-creation take deeper root.

The resource-constrained environment has meant that African institutions are least likely to collaborate with other institutions in a similar situation which happen to be in the Global South of Asia and Latin America.

Asia

Asia is a highly diverse geographical entity with various cultural, religious, historical and colonial legacies, which shape the foundations of higher education in its different countries. The “Asian 21st Century” (Mahbubani, 2021) focussing on the dominant role of China and India in the global economy, Khanna’s (2019) “The Future is Asian”, which underpinned the role of the wider Asian region and Nayyar’s (2019) Asia as a “global economic powerhouse” could be regarded as the philosophy and ideology that have pushed and continue to push Asia’s dramatic transformation.

In the context of this transformation, numerous forces have determined and continue to determine and shape the character of contemporary higher education systems and patterns of academic collaborations in various regions in Asia. They include existing formal and informal traditional learning arrangements, past colonial domination and influences and various programmes undertaken by international governmental organisations and development partners in collaboration with national governments.

Asia is generally categorised as East Asia, Southeast Asia, South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia. While an overview of the patterns of academic collaboration can be easily discerned and presented from the perspective of inter-regional and particularly South-South collaborations, based on the Scopus database, important salient features have characterised Asia’s collaboration with Latin America and Africa. In order to tease out these features, the narratives on intra-regional collaborations within Asia, and those that are primarily inter-regional in character with Latin America and Africa need to be examined at three levels, namely, (1) between Asia, Africa and Latin America, (2) intra-regional or South-South collaborations among countries/groups of countries within Asia, and (3) intra-regional or North-South academic collaborations such as between the more developed higher education systems in East Asia and Southeast Asian countries that

display the characteristics of developing higher education systems. Intra-regional collaborations involving East Asia which is considered as North-South collaboration are well documented (ADB, 2012; Postiglione, 2020).

At this juncture, it is important to understand the development of higher education systems in Asian countries, which will facilitate understanding of the need for cross-border and cross-continent academic collaborations. Most politically independent, modernised countries have adopted hybrid higher education systems which reflect the interplay between cross-fertilisation with cultural/religious and political systems, the reality and impact of globalisation and the internationalisation of higher education. Arguably, the “Western Impact” (Altbach, 1998), and the “Traditional Context and Western Contact” (Hawkins, 2013) aptly described the emergence and subsequent development of hybrid systems in Asia. For instance, in the case of East Asia, the hybrid higher education system that emerged reflected the interface of the teachings of Confucius and Buddhist traditions with Anglo-Saxon/Christian influences; the latter being a consequence of political domination, colonisation and integration in the global economy (Chan et al., 2017).

Similarly, in South and Southeast Asia, the colonial imprints in the current higher education systems have stood the test of time. A significant feature of Southeast Asia in particular is that many Western countries were involved in colonisation. Furthermore, according to Downing (2011), Chan et al. (2017), and Molly et al. (2017), as a result of the internationalisation of higher education and the currency of discourses such as world class universities, global university rankings, and neoliberalism in higher education, the influence of the interplay of the North American, European and British systems is more discernible in the current higher education systems of several countries in these parts of Asia.

In West Asia, Anglo-Saxon/UK-US influences are now interfaced with the higher education systems which are traditionally rooted in Islam. For example, Gray et al. (2016) note that the establishment of an education hub in the Gulf region pitted the traditional education system against the systems developed for international campuses and the provision of transnational education modelled on the West. With university provision taking a business outlook, the growth of the universities in the Gulf has, according to Gray et al. (2016), further altered the traditional role of the university in the region, with course offerings more closely aligned with market demand.

Central Asia is unique in that the organisation and governance of its higher education space in 1991 was similar to that of the other former republics of the now collapsed Soviet Union (Putz, 2020). Prior to the collapse, all republics of Central Asia followed the centralised Soviet system (Clark, 2015). This influence is gradually diminishing and in many of these former republics, strategic policy directions favour the adoption of the European/Bologna system. For instance, in May 2015, it was reported that, “47 ministers responsible for higher education meeting in Yerevan, the capital of Armenia discussed the influence – and indeed membership – of the Bologna process in many countries of the former Soviet Union” (Clark, 2015). It was also reported that, “Kazakhstan is one of five countries that make up the Central Asian region which is a formal member of the Bologna Accords” (Clark, 2015).

Central Asian countries such as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have made significant reforms to their higher education systems over the past decade that align them closely with the Bologna model. The other two countries in the region – Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – maintain Soviet-style systems, yet are involved in a nascent project to align their higher education systems under the proposed Central Asian Higher Education Area (TuCAHEA) modelled on Bologna’s European Higher Education Area (Clark, 2015).

The Scopus database shows that the shape and pattern of academic collaboration in the recent past were based on historical ties; however, emerging ties in contemporary times are driven by the internationalisation of higher education, positioning and image-making in the context of global university rankings, and soft power diplomacy. In this respect, in Central Asian republics where Soviet influence persists, starting with Tempus and then Erasmus, the EU has been and continues to be instrumental in creating various links between emerging higher education systems in Central Asia and European and other universities (Isaacs and Marat, 2021).

Notably, universities in politically insular or inward-looking countries are increasingly working with research partners from around the world as a result of the efforts of governmental organisations such as UNESCO and its regional offices. In the case of the EU and ASEAN, the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (EU-SHARE) is the platform for EU universities to develop robust knowledge networks

for capacity building between themselves and ASEAN universities, and for intra-ASEAN collaboration (EU-SHARE, 2021). These networks, which involve intermediaries (Morshidi, 2017), have strengthened and continue to strengthen ties between ASEAN universities and have promoted EU-ASEAN university partnerships. Such knowledge domains driven by governmental organisations value scientific exchange and diverse international student bodies and research teams (World Economic Forum, 2022). As manifestations of soft power diplomacy, knowledge networks are explained as both horizontal collaboration between universities in different countries with similar status and vertical collaboration between flagship universities in the Global South and top-ranking universities in the Global North.

Bibliographic analyses are a relevant tool to quantify collaboration in academic publications as they are also the product of collaborations among researchers and institutions, and provide an overview of the structure and dynamics of research networks and collaboration (Dangles et al., 2016). An examination of the Scopus database for the periods 2000 to 2010 and 2011 to 2021 revealed the following patterns and trends with respect to academic collaborations between Asia and Africa and Latin America, and within Asia.

South Africa and Nigeria are among the top 20 countries in terms of collaboration with academics/researchers in South, and Southeast Asian countries. The number of academic collaborations manifested by the number of joint publications involving post-graduate students from Nigeria and their supervisors in Malaysia could explain the pattern of collaboration between academics/researchers in Nigeria and Malaysia in the Scopus database. Other Asian countries with a high proportion of postgraduate students from Africa are expected to display similar tendencies. The common Arabic language may explain the tendency for researchers and academics in West Asia to collaborate with countries in North Africa.

There are very few South-South collaborations involving researchers in East Asia, South-East Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, and South Asia and their counterparts in Latin America. An analysis of the Scopus data revealed that, except for Brazil, Mexico and to a lesser extent Colombia, no other Latin American country appears in the list of top 20 collaborators with these Asian countries. Even then Brazil, Mexico and Colombia appear at the bottom of this list as the numbers are very small.

The internationalisation policies of countries in the Global South, particularly Southeast Asia, are premised on the belief that a positive image of their higher education institutions (HEIs) and outstanding performance attract international students (Hazelkorn, 2016; Malaysia, 2015). The analysis of the Scopus database revealed an expected trend among Asian universities, namely, a tendency to jointly publish with authors/universities in English-speaking countries even though they have no historical connection with Britain or the US. In addition, countries in Central Asia are looking to Europe/the Bologna Process rather than the Asia-Pacific network.

While the number of intra-regional academic collaborations, for instance between Southeast Asia and Central Asia, has grown, these are attributable to academic collaboration between Southeast Asia and West and Central Asia through links with postgraduate students and supervisors in the southeast. Similarly, researchers in South Asia and Central Asia, especially Pakistan and India, are developing collaborations with neighbouring countries. Again, these are attributed to links between postgraduate students and their supervisors in South Asia.

Otherwise, the most visible forms of academic collaboration are among flagship universities in Southeast Asia that prioritise the UK, the US and Europe but not, as highlighted earlier, intra-ASEAN collaboration or that within Southeast Asia (Morshidi, 2017). In 2020, the coronavirus pandemic upended (higher) education systems around the world (Putz, 2020), and this is most evident in higher education systems that have internationalised. International staff and student mobility has been severely curtailed and this has negatively impacted the financial sustainability of universities that are dependent on inflows of international students. That noted, arguments that the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increased consciousness of South-South collaboration are yet to be proven as the Scopus database is yet to indicate this trend for 2020 and 2021.

Academic collaborations in the form of joint publications exhibits a robust North-South trend. Joint publications based on collaborative research with high-ranking universities in the Global North are strongly influenced by the need to improve institutional reputation/image and positioning. Furthermore, in many countries in the Global South, national governments actively encourage universities to expand academic collaborations with universities in the Global North and to improve the

performance (and thus rating) of their national higher education systems.

The ADB (2011) reported that higher education systems across Asia experienced sharp growth in demand for access in 2011. In Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, private universities enrol the majority of students - in some cases up to 80%. Consequently, higher education systems have grown outwards with the construction of new campuses to enrol more undergraduate students. At the same time, they are reaching upwards with the introduction of more graduate programmes to ensure a steady supply of qualified professors and researchers—with significance for academic collaboration (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014). Underlying such economic dynamism, population trends and demographic changes will drive much of this growth, with a number of important shifts from region to region in Asia. Arguably, in the post-pandemic era, China and India will continue to be important sources of international students for countries in Southeast Asia, which will influence intra-Asian collaboration. However, China in particular will be attractive for students from Africa (ICEF, 2021).

Latin America

In the past 20 years, higher education in Latin America has expanded at a remarkable rate, growing from 11 million students in 2000 to almost 29 million in 2020 (UIS, 2021). This massive growth coincides with persistent past problems and new challenges emerging from the current context. Among the former, inequality is a central and constant feature which, in comparison with other regions, is expressed in lower income distribution indices and the magnitude of poverty that often present independent of the economic situation.

In this context of inequality, in recent years, enrolment in higher education has expanded as a result of the adoption of compulsory secondary education in almost all countries in the region, which has impacted the volume of students accessing HEIs. Furthermore, in the past decade, the proportion of students enrolling in private HEIs has increased, with the enrolment ratio between public and private HEIs now standing at 45.17% to 54.83%, respectively (OEI-OCTS, 2021). The concentration of enrolment in private HEIs enables higher education systems in the region to be characterised as “hyper-privatised” (Saforcada et al., 2019). However, socio-economic inequalities persist that are reflected in students’

difficulty in sustaining their educational trajectories, despite the support mechanisms available to them.

Over the past decade, the financial resources allocated to higher education have reflected changes in economic growth in each of the Latin American countries and the evolution of demographic and educational variables in terms of the degree of massification of higher education (García de Fanelli, 2019). The difficulties of financing higher education systems and the socio-economic problems confronting students' families characterise the first decades of this century.

The structural challenges described above coexist with the economic challenges that have emerged in the past two years. The COVID-19 pandemic had the immediate effect of reducing GDP across the region by more than seven percentage points, as well as household income (ECLAC, 2020).

Given these scenarios within the region, it is important to analyse how its universities are linked to those in different contexts. In terms of internationalisation, Latin America presents low and insufficient results in relation to established indicators. There is no explicit recognition of internationalisation in institutional missions, as the sector lacks strong leadership and suffers from poor communication and a lack of broad dialogue within the higher education community. Only 46% of HEIs that participated in a recent study reported that internationalisation is "very important" for institutional authorities (Gacel-Ávila and Vázquez-Niño, 2021), against 69% globally (Marinoni, 2019), suggesting a lack of interest in the process and the phenomenon.

According to the 5th IAU Survey (Marinoni, 2019), only 45% of Latin American and Caribbean HEIs reported having a formal internationalisation policy explicitly expressed as part of the overall institutional strategy, positioning the region below the Middle East (63%); Asia-Pacific (54%); and Africa (52%).

Latin America is also the region with the lowest percentage (16%) of HEIs that have included a set of global competences in graduate learning outcomes, below Africa (22%), Asia-Pacific (33%) and the Middle East (36%) (Marinoni, 2019). It is also the region where the fewest collaborative academic programmes (joint and double degrees) are offered, with only 40% of HEIs offering such programmes, in contrast to Africa (46%); the Middle East (59%); and Asia-Pacific (60%) (Marinoni, 2019).

In terms of outgoing student mobility, Latin America has the lowest percentage in the world in relation to its enrolment (1.26%), lagging behind other regions such as West and South Asia (1.55%), and sub-Saharan Africa (4.65%) (UNESCO, 2021). It also has one of the lowest inflows of foreign students (0.67% against sub-Saharan Africa at 1.68%) (UNESCO, 2021).

In general, a mobility deficit can be considered indicative of a system that is not sufficiently attractive to international students and academics for various reasons (academic, economic or social); and, in addition (or for the same reason), this causes students to move to other countries. The first obstacle to student mobility reported in Latin America is, unsurprisingly, the "lack of language proficiency among students"; followed by "administrative or bureaucratic difficulties, students' family and/or job commitments, low level of interest or participation among students and curricular inflexibility" (Gacel-Ávila and Rodrigues-Rodrigues, 2019). With respect to English language proficiency, a recent ranking by Education First (EF), which compares English language proficiency in 19 countries, ranked Latin America below Europe, Asia, and Africa (EF, 2020). Poor proficiency in English is among the "greatest obstacles to internationalisation" (Marinoni, 2019). These different findings highlight the region's marked backwardness in terms of training graduates in the professional and social skills that are important in today's global context.

An interesting finding is that, Latin America is the region with the third highest rate (42%) of intraregional mobility, after North America and Western Europe, and Central Asia and Eastern Europe. For all other regions, intraregional mobility represents only a third of the total, and has been reduced by almost 9% in favour of interregional mobility. However, in Latin America intraregional mobility has continued to grow (IESALC, 2019), driven by the fact that Spanish is the common language.

Latin America's efforts to promote outbound student mobility have not produced the expected results compared with other regions such as Asia. Furthermore, there is a need for national and regional strategies to attract more international students from outside the region (Gacel-Ávila and Rodrigues-Rodrigues, 2019). In terms of strategic partnerships and collaboration, the majority of agreements are with HEIs from within the region, followed by Western Europe, North America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Oceania. The fewest agreements are with African and Middle Eastern institutions.

Latin American universities have uncritically incorporated the hegemonic concept of internationalisation, which is reproduced in asymmetrical North-South cooperation dynamics based on research agendas that are exogenous to the Latin American region. This calls for the development of alternatives based on South-South cooperation policies guided by endogenous agendas (Oregioni, 2021). Such cooperation is at an early stage for the region in general, but there are some developments in particular countries.

There are educational agreements between Africa, Latin America and Asia which, although not sustained, constitute a scenario for dialogue with a future perspective. The Institute of Political Studies for Latin America and Africa (IEPALA) was created more than 50 years ago with the aim of promoting international study, solidarity and cooperation with the peoples of the developing world. The alliances between the Council for the Development of Social Research in Africa (CODESRIA), the Asian Political and International Studies Association (APISA) and the Latin American Council of Social Sciences (CLACSO) also promote South-South dialogue.

In terms of inter-country relations, Brazil has launched a major higher education cooperation programme with Portuguese-speaking Africa (Angola, Cape Verde, Equatorial Guinea, Mozambique and São Tomé and Príncipe). It focusses on training teachers, curriculum development, educational management, digital education and professional education as well as on strengthening institutional capacity and assessing HEIs' performance.

Rationale for South-South academic collaboration

The dominant form of academic collaboration in the Global South tends to be vertical in nature, i.e., North-South, except for Latin America where inter-regional collaborations are prominent. Mainly driven by resource flows and further consolidated by intense pressure and lofty ambition as well as interest in collaborating with institutions in the North, institutions in the South often overlook collaboration among equals in the South. The narrative and discourse around quality, rankings and prestige—some of the driving forces of collaboration—are important factors in seeking a stronger and more prominent partner which happens to be based in the North.

On the other hand, horizontal, i.e., South-South, collaborations are few and far between and where they exist, they lack visibility, sustainability and impact. And yet, South-South partnerships date back to the 1970s with the adoption of the Buenos Aires Plan of Action for Promoting and Implementing Technical Cooperation among Developing Countries (BAPA) by 138 UN Member States in Argentina on 18 September 1978. During this time, when the global socio-economic climate was entangled in Cold War politics, developing countries began to seek ways to chart the course of their own development as an alternative to the existing economic and political order (UN, 2019).

Arguably, there are South-South collaborative arrangements that go beyond the need to improve the image and reputation of those involved via vertical integration. For example, South-South cooperation is conceived as horizontal partnerships, where activities are based on trust, mutual learning and equity and conceived to establish long-term relationships (OECD, 2011). On this basis, South-South academic collaborations may not be purely based on or primarily driven by the need for HEIs to improve their institutional image/reputation and for the higher education system to improve its rating.

It is important not to underestimate the efforts made by many publicly-funded universities in the more developed higher education systems in the Global South to initiate research and publication activities with other countries in the less developed South based on common goals and mutual learning, and universities' broader societal purpose. In this respect, the agenda for inclusive and socially responsible universities (GUNI, 2022) in an inter-regional context underpins South-South academic collaboration.

These South-South academic collaborations are primarily driven by individual universities' sense of commitment to improving collaboration with universities in the South. However, they are often facilitated by government-to-government MoUs on academic collaboration and cooperation. These are facilitated through intra-regional associations comprising countries of the Global South such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and Association of African Universities, among others. Inter-regional governmental arrangements also exist with regard to collaboration and cooperation in the higher education and cultural spheres. For instance, UNESCO has always promoted

partnerships and exchange among countries of the Global South based on common goals and objectives.

While South-South academic collaboration is being actively promoted and pursued, intermediaries from the Global North would normally dominate the space in facilitating it (Morshidi 2017; Teferra, 2016; 2022). Admittedly, South-South academic collaboration is more practical and effective at the institutional level based on broader agreement at the inter-regional or inter-governmental level. But even then, there are discernible patterns in these collaborations.

Historical and language ties are still important in influencing the direction and nature of collaboration. This is particularly true for Southeast Asian countries with a British colonial legacy or influence where Africa and in particular Nigeria are recorded as important in terms of joint publications. In Latin America, Brazil and Colombia top the list of important collaborators with Southeast Asian countries. Once again, it appears that English is the language of collaboration. However, the numbers are small compared to collaborations involving Nigeria. For Central Asia, Nigeria and to some extent Ghana are important; in Latin America, Brazil was the single important collaborator in publications. For South Asia, Egypt and South Africa in Africa, and Brazil in Latin America came top as important collaborators. In so far as West Asia is concerned, Egypt, other Arab countries in North Africa, and Nigeria are the major collaborators, while in Latin America, Brazil and Mexico came up very often as collaborators. -

Pattern/experience of rationale across the three continents

In the majority of the countries in Southeast Asia, South Asia, Latin America and Africa patterns of collaborations follow historical ties. This is evident where former colonial powers continue as custodians of reputable centres of higher education where they anchor numerous key collaborations with those in the South.

Historical ties are slowly being deemphasised in the case of Central Asia, where alignment with Europe is seen as the future for the region's higher education. Even opportunities to align with Asia-Pacific are not being explored seriously by Central Asian countries. Arguably, in the case of Central Asia, governments have played an important role in determining the direction of alignment.

In many other countries however, institutions can, to some extent, determine collaborative partnerships. Arguably, if such partnerships are to be determined solely by institutions, Global North-Global South arrangements will dominate. These partnerships are based on vertical alignments in line with the need to enhance image and reputation, resource mobilisation and capacity building. In view of this, intermediaries such as UNESCO, the EU and even regional associations such as ASEAN need to play an important role in consolidating South-South collaborative arrangements and partnerships.

Latin American universities' pattern of links follows the colonial past with Europe and the influence of North America, and is limited by the inability of a large part of the academic community to manage in another language (other than Spanish or Portuguese), which leaves international relations to an endogenous and intra-regional scenario. The potential of South-South cooperation is evident, but it has not developed sufficiently to establish strong links that would allow it to transcend hegemonic cooperation schemes.

Conclusion

Institutions in the Global North are manifestly dominant in partnerships—leading, managing, and coordinating them—often exclusively. This has been one of the most chronicled and criticised aspects of academic partnerships attributed to the Global North's (often sole) ownership, closer proximity and implicit entitlement to resources (Teferra, 2016). These attributes are deeply manifested and embedded in the imperatives of collaboration, with massive implications.

South-South and South-South-North partnerships are growing in importance as their significance is gaining traction. However, they are often financially augmented by resources generated from the North, and often steered by them in Africa. In Asia, at least four types of academic collaborations are evident.

It is important to note that the imperative, and hence trend, of collaboration between and among the three regions vary as they are dictated and constrained by resources, objectives, history and languages. A new era of partnership and sense of collaboration has dawned in the post-COVID-19 world; it remains to be seen if this promising trend and spirit will continue in more equitable and sustained manner.

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