

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

Curriculum Internationalisation in Nigerian Higher Education: A Strategic Approach to Global Practice

IBRAHEEM Lateef Onireti & OYEKULEHIN Ridwan Oyekulehin

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Abstract

The internationalisation of curricula in Nigerian higher education is essential for aligning academic programmes with global standards and equipping graduates with the skills needed to thrive in an interconnected world. However, challenges such as outdated curricula, limited international collaborations, and inadequate policy frameworks hinder this progress. This study examined the significance of curriculum internationalisation, focusing on key elements of internationalisation, such as global partnerships, student and faculty mobility, multilingual education, and the integration of international perspectives into teaching and research. To achieve its objectives, the study proposed a strategic framework that included policy reforms, curriculum development, transnational education programmes, and the adoption of digital and multilingual content. By implementing these strategies, Nigerian universities can enhance their global competitiveness, bridge the gap between local and international educational standards, and produce graduates who are well-equipped for diverse professional environments.

Keywords: Curriculum Internationalisation, Higher Education, Global Practice, Nigerian Universities.

Introduction

The 21st century has ushered in an era of unprecedented global interconnectedness, fundamentally reshaping the landscape of higher education worldwide. Within the dynamic and increasingly integrated global ecosystem that defines contemporary higher education, the internationalisation of curricula for Nigerian universities has transcended the status of a merely desirable aspiration. It has evolved into a critical and non-negotiable strategic imperative that is fundamental to ensuring sustained institutional relevance in a rapidly evolving global academic landscape. It is meant to achieve and maintain academic excellence by aligning with international standards and best

practices. It is also the desirable way of facilitating the production of graduates who are not only academically proficient but also possess the essential knowledge, skills, and global competencies required to effectively navigate, contribute meaningfully, and thrive ethically within a complex and interconnected globalized world. As higher education institutions across the globe actively adapt their academic offerings to respond to the multifaceted demands of globalisation, the ever-expanding knowledge economies, and the escalating prevalence of transnational academic exchanges and collaborations, the Nigerian higher education system must undergo a parallel and equally profound transformation. In this context, curriculum internationalisation is understood as the deliberate, systematic, and ongoing process of integrating international, intercultural, and global dimensions into the very fabric of academic programmes, encompassing their content, pedagogical approaches, assessment methodologies, learning outcomes, and the overall student experience (Knight, 2004).

This study examined the critical significance of curriculum internationalisation within the specific context of Nigerian higher education. It underscored the urgent and compelling need to strategically align local academic content, pedagogical practices, and institutional frameworks with prevailing global standards and best practices. Furthermore, it identified and analysed the key challenges and systemic obstacles that currently impede the widespread and effective implementation of curriculum internationalisation initiatives across Nigerian universities. Building upon this critical analysis, the study culminated in the proposition of a robust, multifaceted, and actionable strategic framework designed to facilitate transformative change within the sector. This framework encompasses the urgent need for comprehensive policy reforms at the national level, the implementation of targeted and sustained curriculum development initiatives designed to foster global pedagogical competence, the establishment and robust support of transnational education programmes that foster cross-border academic collaboration, and the judicious and effective adoption of digital technologies and multilingual learning resources to broaden access and enhance global engagement. Ultimately, this paper argued that the concerted and strategic implementation of these recommendations will not only enhance the global competitiveness and standing of Nigerian universities significantly, but will also play a crucial role in bridging the existing gap between local and international educational standards. This will thereby equip Nigerian graduates with the essential knowledge, skills, and global competencies required to

navigate and contribute meaningfully to diverse and dynamic global professional environments.

The Imperative of Curriculum Internationalisation for Nigerian Higher Education in a Globalised World

The rationale for prioritising the comprehensive internationalisation of curricula within Nigerian higher education is multifaceted and deeply rooted in the evolving dynamics of the global landscape. Firstly, in an era defined by intricately interconnected economies, thriving transnational collaborations across diverse sectors, and the increasing fluidity of global talent, graduates emerging from Nigerian universities must possess a well-developed global mind-set, a deep understanding of intercultural competence, and the demonstrable ability to effectively navigate and contribute within diverse cultural and professional environments. An intentionally internationalised curriculum serves as a powerful catalyst in fostering these crucial attributes by systematically exposing students to a broad spectrum of diverse perspectives, fostering critical engagement with complex global issues, and cultivating essential cross-cultural communication and collaboration skills (Leask, 2015). This, in turn, enhances their adaptability, employability, and capacity to contribute effectively to a globalised workforce.

Secondly, curriculum internationalisation functions as a vital and dynamic mechanism for the continuous enhancement of the quality, relevance, and overall rigour of academic programmes offered by Nigerian universities. By strategically benchmarking against internationally recognised standards of academic excellence and proactively incorporating globally recognised best practices in curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, and assessment methodologies, Nigerian universities can ensure that their academic offerings remain current, intellectually stimulating, and directly aligned with the evolving demands of the global knowledge economy. This strategic alignment is not merely an academic exercise; it is a crucial determinant in significantly improving the employability prospects of Nigerian graduates, both within the domestic job market and in the increasingly competitive international arena (British Council, 2016).

Thirdly, the process of internationalisation can serve as a potent catalyst for stimulating innovation, fostering cutting-edge research, and cultivating a vibrant intellectual environment within Nigerian universities. Increased

exposure to international research trends, the establishment of collaborative research projects with esteemed foreign institutions, and the strategic integration of global case studies and perspectives into research agendas can significantly enrich the academic landscape and foster a robust culture of intellectual inquiry that is capable of addressing both pressing local challenges and complex global issues. Furthermore, a commitment to internationalisation can enhance the attractiveness of Nigerian universities to international students, visiting scholars, and globally recognised faculty, thereby contributing to a more diverse, intellectually stimulating, and globally connected academic community.

Finally, curriculum internationalization plays a pivotal role in significantly enhancing the global standing, international reputation, and overall visibility of Nigerian universities within the global academic community. Institutions that actively and strategically engage in meaningful international collaborations, offer academic programmes that are recognised and respected internationally, and consistently produce graduates who demonstrate global competence and ethical engagement, are far more likely to attract valuable international partnerships, secure competitive international research funding opportunities, and reap increased recognition and prestige within the global higher education landscape (Altbach & Knight, 2007). This enhanced global standing can, in turn, attract further international collaborations and opportunities, creating a virtuous cycle of growth and development.

Challenges Impeding the Advancement of Curriculum Internationalisation in Nigerian Higher Education

Despite the compelling arguments for and the evident benefits of curriculum internationalisation, the effective and widespread implementation of such initiatives within Nigerian higher education continues to be hampered by a constellation of significant and often deeply entrenched challenges:

- **Persistence of Outdated Curricula:** A significant number of academic programmes across Nigerian universities still operate with curricula that have not undergone adequate and timely revisions to reflect the rapid advancements in global knowledge, the transformative impact of emerging technologies, and the evolution of contemporary pedagogical approaches. This inertia can result in graduates who are ill-equipped with the cutting-edge skills, contemporary knowledge, and global

perspectives that are increasingly demanded by the dynamic global marketplace. The lack of regular curriculum reviews, and the often-cumbersome bureaucratic processes involved in curriculum reform, contribute to this stagnation.

- **Limited Engagement in International Collaborations:** The level of sustained, mutually beneficial, and impactful collaboration between Nigerian universities and their counterparts in other parts of the world remains comparatively low. This limited engagement restricts opportunities for collaborative research endeavours, valuable faculty and student exchange programmes that foster intercultural understanding, and the crucial sharing of best practices in innovative curriculum design and effective delivery methodologies. Factors contributing to this include funding limitations, a lack of established networks, and at times, a perceived lack of institutional support for pursuing international partnerships.
- **Inadequate and Fragmented Policy Frameworks:** A well-articulated, strategically focused, and adequately resourced national policy framework that explicitly supports, incentivises, and provides clear guidelines for curriculum internationalisation across all disciplines within Nigerian higher education, is often lacking. This absence can lead to a fragmented, inconsistent, and often ad-hoc approach to internationalisation efforts across different institutions, hindering systemic progress and preventing the development of a cohesive national strategy.
- **Significant Faculty Development Deficiencies:** Many academics within Nigerian universities may lack the specialised training, relevant international exposure, and pedagogical expertise required to effectively integrate diverse international perspectives, complex global issues, and crucial intercultural dimensions into their teaching practices and research endeavours. Opportunities for targeted professional development, specifically focused on the principles and practices of curriculum internationalisation, are often limited in scope, availability, and relevance to the specific needs of Nigerian academics.
- **Language Barriers and Insufficient Emphasis on Multilingualism:** While English serves as the official language of instruction within

Nigerian higher education, the rich linguistic diversity of Nigeria itself, and the increasing global recognition of the strategic importance of multilingualism in fostering effective international communication and collaboration, pose a significant challenge. The relative lack of emphasis on the strategic integration of multilingual education within academic curricula can inadvertently disadvantage Nigerian graduates as they navigate increasingly multilingual and multicultural international settings. Furthermore, the potential of leveraging Nigeria's indigenous languages in fostering intercultural understanding within the national context is often under-explored.

- **Constrained Resource Allocation and Inadequate Infrastructure:** Persistent financial limitations and the presence of inadequate physical and technological infrastructure within many Nigerian universities can severely hinder the effective implementation of meaningful internationalisation initiatives. This includes challenges in developing high-quality internationalised course materials, providing adequate support for student and faculty mobility programmes, and strategically adopting digital learning technologies that can facilitate global connectivity and access to international resources. The lack of consistent funding for internationalisation efforts makes long-term planning and implementation difficult.
- **Challenges in Ensuring Quality Assurance of Internationalised Curricula:** Guaranteeing the academic rigour, relevance, and overall quality of internationalised curricula necessitates the establishment and effective implementation of robust quality assurance mechanisms. Existing quality assurance frameworks within Nigeria may require significant adaptation and enhancement to effectively evaluate the specific international dimensions of academic programmes, ensuring that they meet both national and internationally recognised standards. The lack of specific metrics and evaluation criteria for internationalisation can lead to inconsistent quality and a lack of accountability.

A Comprehensive Strategic Framework for Advancing Curriculum Internationalisation in Nigerian Higher Education

To effectively address the multifaceted challenges outlined above and to foster a deep and meaningful integration of global perspectives into the fabric of Nigerian higher education curricula, a comprehensive, multi-pronged, and strategically aligned framework is urgently required:

- 1. Formulation and Implementation of Robust National Policies and Guidelines:** The National Universities Commission (NUC), in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Education and other relevant stakeholders, must take a proactive and leading role in formulating clear, comprehensive, and strategically focused national policies and overarching guidelines that explicitly prioritise, promote, and provide robust support for curriculum internationalisation across all academic disciplines within Nigerian higher education. These policies should articulate a clear vision for internationalisation, define measurable goals and objectives, and provide a roadmap for implementation at the institutional level. Furthermore, these national policies should incorporate tangible incentives for universities to actively engage in meaningful international collaborations, develop innovative joint degree programmes with international partners, and systematically integrate diverse global perspectives and intercultural competencies into the design and delivery of their curricula. The government, at both federal and state levels, should commit to allocating dedicated and sustainable financial resources to directly support curriculum internationalisation initiatives, including the provision of funding for targeted faculty development programmes, the facilitation of increased student and faculty mobility opportunities, and the development and acquisition of high-quality internationalised learning resources and digital infrastructure.
- 2. Strategic and Sustained Investment in Faculty Development for Global Pedagogical Competence:** Nigerian universities must prioritise and invest significantly in the design and delivery of comprehensive and sustained faculty development programmes specifically focused on the principles, practices, and effective implementation of curriculum internationalisation. These programmes should equip academics across all disciplines with the essential skills, relevant knowledge, and

innovative pedagogical approaches. The skills and innovative pedagogical advantage of such programmes enable academics to:

- critically analyse and effectively integrate diverse international case studies, global examples, and comparative perspectives into their teaching and learning materials;
- develop advanced intercultural communication skills and cultivate inclusive and supportive cross-cultural learning environments within their classrooms;
- strategically utilize digital technologies and online platforms to connect with international peers, access global learning resources, and facilitate collaborative online learning experiences for their students; and
- design, develop, and deliver academic courses and programmes that are explicitly framed within a global context and that actively promote the development of global competencies among students.

Universities should actively promote and provide robust support for faculty exchange programmes with international partner institutions, as well as facilitate and fund participation in relevant international conferences, workshops, and seminars focused on curriculum internationalisation and global education. Mentorship programmes, pairing experienced internationalised faculty with those new to the process, can also be highly beneficial.

3. Cultivating Strategic Global Partnerships and Fostering Transnational Education Initiatives: Nigerian universities should adopt a proactive and strategic approach to identifying, cultivating, and sustaining meaningful and mutually beneficial partnerships with reputable international universities, leading research institutions, and relevant global organisations. These strategic partnerships should be designed to facilitate a range of collaborative activities, including:

- joint research projects that address global challenges, reciprocal faculty and student exchange programmes that promote intercultural understanding and academic enrichment;

- the collaborative development and delivery of joint degree programmes (transnational education initiatives) that enhance global recognition and provide students with international learning experiences; and
- the effective sharing of best practices in innovative curriculum design, pedagogical methodologies, and quality assurance processes.

Formal Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) should be meticulously developed with clearly defined objectives, specific responsibilities for each partner institution, and robust mechanisms for ongoing monitoring, regular evaluation, and mutual accountability to ensure the success and sustainability of these collaborations. Exploring opportunities for joint supervision of postgraduate students and the co-publication of research findings can further strengthen these partnerships.

4. **Strategic Integration of Multilingual Education and Intercultural Competence Development:** Recognising the increasing importance of multilingualism in the globalised world and leveraging Nigeria's rich linguistic diversity, universities should strategically explore and implement effective strategies to promote multilingualism and the development of deep intercultural understanding among their students and faculty. This could involve offering a diverse range of elective courses in strategically important international languages, intentionally incorporating multilingual resources and perspectives into core course materials across various disciplines, and actively encouraging student engagement with diverse linguistic and cultural contexts through study abroad programmes, virtual exchange initiatives, and collaborative projects with international students. Universities should also recognise and strategically leverage the rich tapestry of indigenous languages within Nigeria itself as a valuable resource for fostering intercultural understanding and promoting a more inclusive and globally aware learning environment. Integrating cultural exchange activities, international film screenings, and guest lectures from international scholars can further enhance intercultural competence.
5. **Judicious Adoption and Effective Utilization of Digital and Multilingual Learning Content and Platforms:** Nigerian universities must strategically embrace and effectively leverage the transformative potential of digital technologies to significantly enhance curriculum internationalisation efforts. This includes:

investing in the development and robust utilization of user-friendly online learning platforms that provide seamless access to a wide array of high-quality global learning resources and facilitate meaningful connections and collaborative learning opportunities with international peers and experts;

- actively incorporating openly licensed educational resources (OERs) and other freely accessible internationalised learning content into academic curricula, ensuring their quality and relevance to the Nigerian context;
- providing adequate support and resources for the development and effective use of multilingual learning materials and resources that cater to diverse linguistic backgrounds and promote multilingual competence; and
- strategically implementing virtual exchange programmes and collaborative online international learning (COIL) initiatives to provide students with valuable international and intercultural experiences without the significant costs and logistical complexities associated with physical travel.

Ensuring equitable access to technology and providing adequate training for both faculty and students in the use of these digital tools are crucial for successful implementation.

6. **Systematic Curriculum Review and Fostering a Culture of Pedagogical Innovation:** Nigerian universities must establish robust and regular cycles of comprehensive curriculum review, specifically designed to identify strategic opportunities for meaningful internationalisation across all academic programmes. This review process should actively involve input and feedback from a diverse range of stakeholders, including international experts in relevant disciplines, successful alumni with significant international experience, and representatives from industries and organisations operating within the global marketplace. Universities should actively encourage and reward innovative approaches to curriculum design and pedagogical practices that explicitly embed global perspectives, cultivate essential intercultural competencies, and provide students with meaningful opportunities for international engagement and experiential learning. This could include the development of internationally focused case studies, simulations of global challenges, and collaborative projects with international student teams.

7. **Enhancing Opportunities for Meaningful Student and Faculty Mobility:** Nigerian universities should proactively promote and provide

robust support for both inbound and outbound student and faculty mobility programmes, recognising their crucial role in fostering intercultural understanding, academic enrichment, and the development of global networks. This includes providing adequate financial assistance in the form of scholarships and grants, streamlining administrative processes related to visa applications and academic recognition, and establishing clear and transparent credit transfer mechanisms to facilitate seamless academic integration. Concerted efforts should be made to cultivate a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive campus environment for international students and faculty members, providing them with the necessary academic, social, and cultural integration support. Establishing dedicated international student and scholar offices with well-trained staff is essential for providing effective support services.

8. **Strengthening and Adapting Quality Assurance Mechanisms for Internationalised Curricula:** Existing national and institutional quality assurance frameworks must be critically reviewed and strategically adapted to explicitly address and effectively evaluate the international dimensions of academic programmes. This includes developing specific indicators and benchmarks related to the quality and impact of international collaborations, the effective integration of diverse global perspectives into teaching and research activities, and the demonstrated international employability and global competence of graduates. External review processes should incorporate the expertise of individuals with significant international experience in curriculum development, quality assurance in international education, and the assessment of global learning outcomes. Regular monitoring and evaluation of internationalisation initiatives are crucial for ensuring their effectiveness and identifying areas for improvement.

Conclusion

The comprehensive internationalisation of curricula within Nigerian higher education is no longer a peripheral consideration, but a fundamental strategic imperative for universities aspiring to achieve and sustain global relevance, enhance their academic standing, and contribute meaningfully to the sustainable development of Nigeria in an increasingly interconnected world. While the Nigerian higher education sector faces a unique set of persistent

challenges in this endeavour, the potential benefits of cultivating globally competent and ethically engaged graduates, significantly enhancing institutional quality and international reputation, and fostering impactful international collaborations, are undeniably transformative. The comprehensive and multifaceted strategic framework articulated in this paper provides a detailed and actionable roadmap for Nigerian universities to effectively embrace the principles and practices of curriculum internationalization. The framework encompasses robust policy reforms, targeted faculty development, cultivation of strategic transnational partnerships, integration of multilingualism, effective adoption of digital technologies, systematic curriculum innovation, enhancement of mobility opportunities, and strengthening of quality assurance mechanisms. By proactively and strategically implementing these recommendations, the Nigerian higher education system can effectively bridge the existing gap between local and international academic standards, contribute significantly to the global knowledge economy, advancement of research. Most importantly, the recommendations will also empower the Nigerian higher education's graduates with the essential knowledge, sophisticated skills, ethical values, and crucial global competencies necessary to navigate the dynamic global landscape. They will also be able to contribute meaningfully, and thrive ethically, in an increasingly interconnected, complex, and dynamic global landscape, ultimately fostering sustainable development and progress for the nation and its people.

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