

# Internationalization of Higher Education in Nigeria through CSU-CCECC-ABU Double Degree Collaboration

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**Abstract:** Universities are striving to increase their internationalization in order to strengthen their international presence. There is therefore the need to operate beyond the immediate environment and this may be achieved through interaction with international practices which forms the main thrust of internationalization. Internationalization of higher education offer the possibility of internationalizing the curriculum, enhancing intercultural skills for both staff and students and enhancing global job opportunities. This paper reviewed the recent literatures on the internationalization of higher education in Nigeria through CSU-CCECC-ABU Double Degree Collaboration. This paper discussed the overview of higher education internationalization in Nigeria, demand for internationalization and initiative, outlined the description of the CSU/ABU joint program and discussed national, University and student benefits to this cooperation.

**Keywords:** internationalization, higher education, joint/double degree, internationalization of higher education.

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## I. Introduction

Education has a significant role in countries' development and growth. While every stage of education has significant importance, higher education has distinct importance in training qualified labor force, producing and spreading knowledge, meeting individual and meeting social expectation (Ubogu & Orighofori, 2020). Internationalization is one of the forces that is having a profound effect on higher education at the beginning of the twenty-first century and it is a multifaceted process that is integrating an international dimension into the purpose, goals, functions and delivery of higher education. Academic mobility/cross-border education is one of the key elements of internationalization. It is no doubt that academic mobility across borders has been a central feature of higher education for centuries. The fact that the notion of 'universality' is key to the concept of university demonstrates the existence of an international dimension since the very founding of universities as institutions of higher education and research (Jane Knight, 2010). Internationalization process is a long and demanding process and it takes both resources and management models to succeed. Many internationalization process of small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) has been stopped after some time, because they have not committed enough resources to their operations. Possible reasons for this could be a lack of resources and knowledge. Another reason could be that they lack distinctive management models of how to run the business on an international level (Laine & Kock, 2000). The internationalization of higher education is a fast growing phenomenon. Evidence of this growth abounds: over the past decade, the number of students studying outside their home countries has been growing dramatically, as has global competition for those students. Universities all around the world are now moving quickly to develop new international collaborations and exchanges. While traditional study abroad programs or direct enrolment in foreign institutions remain by far the predominant option for students wishing to have an international experience, more higher education institutions are seeking ways to firmly embed international experience in their study programs, and thus, the number of joint-degree and double-degree programs has been significantly on the increase in recent years. This development, which largely started in Europe in the 1990s, has become an important global trend prompting higher education institutions, governments, and funding and accreditation agencies worldwide to consider strategies and policies with regard to cross-border collaborative degree programs (Korbukova, 2013; Obst & Kuder, 2012).

The rapid advancement in technology and accessibility to internet has introduced a lot of changes in the world and has brought so many countries and cultures closer to each other. Technology has made time and space separation almost irrelevant. Individuals work in a global economy where businesses operate around the world and around the clock. Most practicing engineers can count on working with foreign nationals or on international

projects at sometime in their career. As a result of these changes and globalization, universities in general and engineering disciplines specifically feel a lot of pressure acting on them. To respond to these pressures engineering profession and education are undergoing a lot of re-evaluation and changes. To adapt to this new habitat, engineers have to retool, starting with their understanding of engineering education. Today, technological change is something that happens to engineers as much as to anyone else". In addition to curricula changes in engineering, new degrees and programs are created which would cover more interdisciplinary filed of studies, add more diversity, and possibly integrating an international dimension into the curriculum(Mirarefi, 2003).One of the more prominent recent developments involves the emergence of transatlantic degree programs, such as dual diplomas, joint degrees, consortia, and other forms of curriculum arrangements(Asgary& Robbert, 2010). This type of internationalization has become popular as a way to broaden educational offerings and strengthen research collaboration, advance the internationalization of the campus, and raise the international visibility and prestige of the institution. The number and types of international joint, double and consecutive degree programs have skyrocketed in the last five years, demonstrating that they clearly have a role in the current landscape of higher education. As an internationalization strategy, they address the heartland of academia that is the teaching/learning process and the production of new knowledge between and among countries. These programs are built on the principle of international academic collaboration and can bring important benefits to individuals, institutions and national and regional education systems(Jane Knight, 2011a). Institutions needs to develop the ability not only to respond quickly to global changes, but also to anticipate and drive them due to the rise in competition in the Higher Education (HE) sector. In a global context, Higher Education Institutions cope with the global environment developing novel internationalization strategies, enhancing the internationalization of curricula, and fostering the mobility of staff and students. Mobility is an especially pragmatic way for valuing multiculturalism and transnational education (Siora G, Baig H, Dickinson P, Hooper E, 2016). Furthermore, it facilitates reflection on global citizenship as a key educational value relevant not only for personal development, but also for professional practice. In this view, collaborative degree programs can facilitate transnational education by complementing provisions at equivalent levels in different countries(Gallicchio PhD, Dp, 2007). International Dual Degree (IDD) programs recently emerged as an especially effective transnational education opportunity for both prospective students and higher education institutions.

## II. Overview of higher education internationalization in Nigeria

What do we mean by the internationalization of higher education? First of all, we need to recognize that there have always been many different terms used in relation to the internationalization of higher education (Adeoye et al., 2012; J Knight, 2008; Wit, 2001). The IAU adopts this: Internationalization of Higher Education is the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions and delivery of postsecondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society("International Association of Universities (IAU)," 2003).Internationalization of higher education is becoming one of the most essential elements in the world. According to Harman(Harman, 2005), internationalization of higher education is 'the process of integrating internationalization or intercultural dimensions into teaching, research and service functions of higher education institutions (HEIs)'. HEIs have various forms of international dimensions such as student mobility, research and knowledge transfer(Altbach, 1998) They are incorporating different activities in their education system including sending students abroad, faculty exchanges, and developing shared programs and policies.

The internationalization of higher education is considered to be a response to, and even a product of, globalization(Altbach& Knight, 2007; Jane Knight, 2008b; Stearns, 2019) resulting in an intensification of the global/local flows of people, ideas, and capital in higher education institutions, particularly in wealthier countries. Internationalization has become a key institutional strategy for universities (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada 2007) seeking to brand and position themselves in a competitive market("Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (2007) Internationalizing Canadian Campuses: Report on Findings of the 2006 Survey on Internationalization," n.d.). The growth of transnational production characteristic of economic globalization has precipitated intensification of the linkages between the purposes of economic globalization ('the market') and higher education, supporting the argument that the economic dimensions of globalization are leaving their mark on education(Bartell, 2003; Burbules & Torres, 2000; Edwards, R., & Usher, 2000; Jane Knight, 2011b; Marginson, 2006, 2007; Smith, 2006; Unterhalter, E., & Carpentier, 2010). Many of the scholars above have argued that universities are becoming more corporate and less collegial, more consumer and market oriented and that higher education is becoming more aligned with serving economic globalization rather than subverting or countering its more harmful impacts. This predominant focus on the economic sustainability of higher educational institutions, often hidden behind the rhetoric of maintaining and even encouraging academic and educational goals and purposes, has led, in our view, to some

unintended consequences such as limited attention to the values of learning and teaching in international and intercultural contexts(Beck K, Ilieva R, Scholefield A, 2007).

The concept of internationalization is not new and had been in practice in the areas of Political Science and government relations for centuries. Its popularity in education soared since the early 1980s when the Japanese Government tried to improve upon their education to have international linkages considering it as a key factor to face the challenges of globalization. Internationalization is a word amenable to multi-dimensional interpretations as a multi-vocal symbol. If internationalization is influenced by globalization of economies, societies, increased importance of knowledge driven by dynamic, flexible and constantly developing synergies of political, economic, socio-cultural and academic justifications, then internationalization of education in Nigeria would mean a process of complementing, harmonizing and extending the education curriculum and practices beyond local to international dimensions, upholding the cross- cultural contents. The development and application of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in all facets of life transforms the world into a global village. In this 21st century, the increasing level of globalization generally regarded as internationalization presents the need for mutual understating, encouragement of global research collaboration, cross fertilization of ideas, knowledge and best practices. With the foregoing, education services can be regarded as an export commodity and much sought for by its developmental roles in the society.

### III. Demand for internationalization and initiative

The internationalization of education is the process of including various international aspects in the research, teaching and administrative activities of educational institutions of different levels(Maudarbekova& Kashkinbayeva, 2014)Internationalization could also be seen as a process of change directed toward meeting the individual and collective educational needs and interest. In effect, it means that internationalization is dynamic, with varying models and strategies since every country is unique and would want to develop its own approach to internationalization based on its principles, rationales, goals and the envisaged outcome(Antiabong& Ekong, 2014). “While the growth of African universities has been phenomenal since independence in the 1960s, scholars have argued that African higher education needs to expand more rapidly if the continent is to catch up with developed regions and also meet national goals and aspirations (Gravenir, 2005; Olukoshi&Zezeza, 2005)”(Odejide et al., 2006). Although Nigeria as a nation came into being in 1914, it was not until 1934 that the first form of higher education institution, Yaba Higher College, was established in the country(Ejiogu& Sule, 1986). “The Human Development Index is 0.453 making it 158th out of 177 countries (UNDP, 2005) while the Human Poverty Index is 38.8%, ranking 75th out of 103 developing countries. This is an anomaly in view of its vast forest and mineral resources, including petroleum for which Nigeria is one of the leading world exporters. A deliberate policy of widening access to higher education was adopted in the 1980s to ensure poverty reduction and inclusiveness, especially for those from ‘educationally less developed states (ELDS)’ who had been excluded by virtue of their geographical location, late access to western education and religious and cultural beliefs. Over a twenty-year period, 1975 to 1996, student enrolment expanded rapidly doubling every 4 to 5 years in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s and standing at 900,000 by 2003 (Jibril, 2003:492)”(Odejide et al., 2006).

It cannot be disputed that Nigeria is in need of internationalization of higher education. The impact of the Nigerian Universities has not been felt at the international scene, as regards the practice of higher education. Many countries such as United States of America, Japan, Malaysia, Columbia, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia, Poland, and Romania and so on, recognize the importance of internationalization of their education. Their governments are reforming their education system to meet international perspectives. The universities are modifying their curriculum and administrative systems and style, to meet the demand of more globally minded graduates(Antiabong& Ekong, 2014); Nigeria is yet to find her due place in the internationalization of higher education. The value of higher education system lies in its ability to meet up with its mandate in terms of knowledge production and manpower development. This can only be achieved when we exploit better ways of teaching, learning and technology which is impossible without collaboration with other institutions around the world(Ubogun& Orighofori, 2020). Nigeria as the African giant should become a center of attraction of mutual international relations educationally as a major civilization instrument, need to be fully internationalized. It becomes imperative that Nigeria education should be made internationally interconnected and interdependence of people and institutions, student’s mobility, synergistic networking and global awareness of the benefits of international exposure to international foreign languages and intercultural skills for participation in global setting. Nigeria as a country should necessarily be upgraded status-wise in the comity of progressive nations. The first step is to double the emphasis, accord more recognition to the importance of internalizing education and of course implementing the process of internationalization with all commitment.

#### IV. Description of the CSU/ABU joint program

The CSU/ABU joint program which started in 2018, is the first of any kind of joint/double degree collaboration mode Nigerian bachelor and above cooperation programs, the joint program between Central South University (CSU), China, and Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria (ABU), Nigeria, is characterized by providing its offshore students with comprehensive English language training which is delivered by the language teachers of CSU and which is invested with a number of learning objectives. To better prepare students for their overseas study and help them keep up with their daily activity in and outside the campus, the program provides several hours of traditional Chinese language course which was delivered by a Chinese teacher, the program provides 4 hours of traditional Chinese language classes each week in study period and, although various less traditionally Chinese teaching methods are adopted by the teachers. Besides, a mass of different materials and academic skills are integrated into the language teaching of the joint program. The language and academic skills development contribute to the students' success in their study period. The CSU/ABU joint program is taught by Chinese teachers in English, the discipline subjects were taught and delivered in English by Chinese teachers, also the semester and exam assessment were marked by the Chinese teachers.

##### 4.1 Benefits of the program

In order to respond to changing environment, organizations are requested to expand their capacities. Yet, this is a difficult task for many organizations, as they are limited in their resources. Due to these circumstances, organizations turn to inter-organization collaborations (Eckel & Hartley, 2008). Partnership accompanies collaborative advantage: significant resources, transformative dialogues, and learning from the experience and practice of the partner (Kanter, 1994). Recognizing the economic benefit of partnerships, universities partner with corporations, nongovernmental organizations, community groups, and other educational institutions to better serve students, enhance research, and meet public needs. Institutions undertake new activities or extend their current ones by combining resources; cooperation enables universities to accomplish with others what they could not do alone (Hudzik, 2014). Collaborative-degree programs have had a significant impact, resulting in a stronger and longer-lasting relationship than many other internationalization strategies, as well as academic benefits such as curriculum innovation, professor and researcher exchange, and increased access to expertise and research networks.

The invention of educational cooperation which brings about the practice of CSU-CCECC-ABU is a great development and innovation. The host institutions (CSU) is one of the best universities in China equipped with high-level education quality particularly in engineering such as railway and transportation engineering. This cooperation will create an avenue to train engineers equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skills required for effective operation and management of the transportation industry, a key sector for the rapid diversification of the Nigerian economy and Africa at large. Also, it will foster global recognition to the institution and help to speed up development in the area of the railway research area (Shakirudeen et al., 2021).

##### 4.1.1 Student benefits

Collaborative-degree programs can lead to a deeper and more sustainable relationship than many internationalization strategies and create such academic benefits as innovation of curriculum, exchange of professors and researchers, and increased access to expertise and research networks. Students are attracted to double degrees for enhanced career opportunities, an international study and life experience, and the perception that "two degrees for one" means decreased workload and tuition fees (Jane Knight, 2009). In some countries, students who have completed a professional program such as Engineering also receive accreditation from the professional body in each country thereby enhancing job opportunities. Potential employers will place a high value on international experience, not just in terms of business but also in terms of life skills. Students have a more international classroom experience, which provides them with a more diverse learning experience. Educational collaboration encourages students to be more conscious of cultural diversity, embrace it, and build their cultural capital. Students also get the opportunity to go to different countries, study and master the local language, develop self-confidence, and prepare for diversity.

Some students believe that a collaborative program is of higher quality given that the expertise of two universities has shaped the academic program. This is especially true for joint degrees. Other students are not as interested in enhanced quality but the opportunity to get two degrees 'for the price of one' so to speak. They argue that the duration is shorter for a double or combined degree program, the workload is definitely less than for two single degrees, and often there is less of a financial burden as well. There is a certain sense of elitism attached to having academic credentials from universities in different countries, even if the student never studied abroad but benefited from distance education and visiting foreign professors (Jane Knight, 2008a). The positive aspects of internationalization include improved academic quality, internationally oriented students and staff, and national and international citizenship for students and staff from underdeveloped countries. For developed

countries, revenue generation and brain gain are potential benefits. It also has the potential to change the lives of international students as it helps in producing graduates who are internationally knowledgeable and cross culturally sensitive (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). The most important benefits in internationalization identified by higher education institutions is that staff/students are more oriented and improved academic quality (Jane Knight, 2015b). Students not only acquire knowledge from joint degree program, but institutional affinity and pride that, in many cases, students identify with long after graduation. To the extent that students can attribute their education to two distinct institutions, they have the opportunity to invoke their pride in these institutions. Joint degree programs offered by two different institutions provide this opportunity to the graduates of these program (Michael Steve O, Leela, 2010).

#### 4.1.2 University benefits

“From a global perspective, economic and social development are increasingly driven by the advancement and application of knowledge. Education in general, and higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations (WORLD BANK 1999)” (Saint et al., 2003). The long-standing problems of finance, efficiency, equity, quality and governance of higher education systems in developing countries continues to be an impending factors to fulfill the above responsibilities. These challenges have been magnified by new challenges linked to the growing role of knowledge in economic development, rapid changes in telecommunications technology, and the globalization of trade and labor markets (Salmi, 2001). Collaborative degree programs requires extensive discussion and reworking of program design, content, organization, outcomes and requirements for completion. These leads to a deeper level and more sustainable type of relationship than many other internationalization strategies and thus bringing important academic benefits. Academic benefits in terms of innovation of curriculum, exchange of professors and researchers, and access to expertise at the partner university and its research networks make joint degrees especially attractive. Combined degrees allow institutions to work with partners that may offer a Master’s or Doctoral level program or specialty that is not available at their own university (Jane Knight, 2008a). Jane Knight stated that the more international a university is—in terms of students, faculty, curriculum, research, agreements, and network memberships—the better its reputation (Jane Knight, 2015a) is one of the myth about internationalization.

Higher education institutions often adopt strategies to respond to enrollment challenges. Joint degree programs are part of institutional strategies to attract a group of students who might be attracted by the prospect of completing their educational programs with two degrees. A broad-based education provides a more solid background for flexibility in career path. Some higher education institutions embark on joint degree programs to enhance the specialization nature of a particular profession (Michael Steve O, Leela, 2010).

Institutions deliberately collaborate with other universities with the primary goal of increasing their reputation and ranking as an international university. For instance, institutions in developing countries seek double degree programs with developed country partners as it indirectly verifies the quality of their program given that courses are judged to be equivalent in order to count towards a double (or multiple) degree(s). Examples exist of institutions that believe that a collaborative program with an institution of ‘greater status’ will also help their national accreditation process. Also, collaborative program are perceived by some universities as a way to attract talented students who may want to stay for a work experience after graduation and perhaps immigrate permanently (Jane Knight, 2008a).

#### 4.1.3 National benefits

Higher education collaboration has the ability to boost the national economy significantly. Internationalization have many positive aspects which include improved academic quality, internationally oriented students and staff, and national and international citizenship for students and staff from underdeveloped countries (Jibeen & Khan, 2015). The potential benefits gain from internationalization in developed countries are revenue generation and brain gain (International Associations of Universities, 2012). In every respect including ratio of international students, franchiser of academic programs to foreign providers or quality guarantors, Western developed countries gain the main financial benefits. This partnership was purely for the purpose of developing Nigeria's and Africa's infrastructure systems (Shakirudeen et al., 2021). According to Mark Hallett “International students bring global points of view, cultural diversity and shared purpose to U.S. campuses,” that these student exchange practice, helps to connect students in order to foster cooperation and development on the transnational challenges facing the world - economic, environmental and international relations. Aims and the objectives why country choose internationalizing of their higher education may include attracting skilled workers, generating revenue, fostering exchange and co-operation, and providing cost-effective alternatives to domestic education opportunities (Santiago Paulo, Tremblay Karine, Basri Ester, 2008).

“Higher education provides economic, social and political benefits, both to individuals and the public, produces qualified human capital and professional development, adapts and generates knowledge through

research and innovation, brings about equitable opportunities and access provisions, supports other levels of education (through training and development), promotes international cooperation and improves competitiveness in the global knowledge-based economy (Uche&Ahunanya, 2013). There is competition the world over, therefore, among institutions of higher education to enhance their internationalism. This would be a real advantage not only for these institutions but for their home country. Nigeria should not be left behind for there is need for her to work together with other parts of the world to address global challenges such as sustainable development, renewable energy, climate changes and security or migration issues. One way this can be achieved is through internationalization for research and teaching capacity and knowledge transfer” (D, 2014). Therefore Nigerian higher institutions should embrace internationalization as a strategic model which involves having a critical corporate perception of our institutions with a perfect conceptual key for doing business abroad in order to survive at home.

## V. Conclusion

Universities are striving to increase their internationalization in order to strengthen their international presence. The world is said to have moved from being a global village to a ‘global sitting room’. There is therefore the need to operate beyond the immediate environment and this may be achieved through interaction with international practices which forms the main thrust of internationalization.

The impact of Nigeria Universities has not been felt at the international level as regards the practice of higher education and one of the ways to gain recognition is through internationalization of education. Many countries has recognized the importance and impact of internationalization. Hence, the education systems of these countries are being reformed by their government to meet the international perspectives. The value of higher education system lies in its ability to meet up with its mandate in terms of knowledge production and manpower development. This can only be achieved when we exploit better ways of teaching, learning and technology which is impossible without collaboration with other institutions around the world.

A collaboration between CSU/ABU could foster internationalization of higher education and hence increase the status of ABU and Nigeria at large. CSU being among the few Universities in the world with a solid reputation and provides high-quality education in engineering, notably in the areas of railway and transportation engineering. Numerous scholarship programs to fund overseas students, teachers, and intellectuals to study and do research in Chinese institutions to foster mutual understanding, cooperation, and exchanges in different disciplines between China and other countries by the Chinese government. The inclusion of foreign exchange students in a university classroom increases classroom diversity and student contact with people from various cultures, allowing students to build their intercultural competences and become global citizens. Scholarships awarded by the Chinese government to international students have absolutely attracted a large number of international students, resulting in a significant growth in the number of foreign students in China.

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