

Globalization and Its Influence on the Future of the Universities

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Abstract

Globalization promotes free economic activities across territories of countries without any hindrances by State authorities. As a phenomenon, it has a ubiquitous effect on a spectrum of human activities spanning cultural, political, economic and even educational spheres. While globalization makes the world smaller by facilitating a collapse of State boundaries and increased open markets for exchange of goods and services, it brings in its wake novel pressures on higher education institutions to re-invent, re-engineer and re-align it to meet new demands in knowledge production and ensure international competitiveness of these institutions. This paper seeks to examine some of the effects of globalization on the future of universities. It presents a discourse on the pressures brought on by globalization and concludes that the reality is that with globalization, universities in their traditional form have been re-fabricated. The system of knowledge demand and production has changed and the traditional locus of research within universities may have also been predominantly relocated.

Keywords: Globalization; Higher Education; University; Research; Knowledge.

Introduction

Globalization broadly speaking means fully free economic operations across the borders of countries, without any impediments by governments of countries (Bhagirath, 2001). Palacio (2015) notes that globalization affects the life of people in contemporary societies and its effects extend horizontally to include more societies and also vertically by making its effects deeper in everyday life of the people. He however observes that this phenomenon has deeper effects in politics, culture, and integration of the markets and of consequence in the increased level of mobility of goods, services and peoples. Globalisation is a highly differentiated phenomenon involving domains of activity and interaction as diverse as the political, military, economic, cultural, migratory and environmental (Yang, 2003). Sklair, like several scholars believe that the concept of globalisation spans variously separate yet overlapping domains (1998). Each of these domains involves different patterns of relations and activities (Held *et al.*, 1999). Ultimately, it is a process spearheaded by multinational financial and industrial conglomerates (Burbach *et al.*, 1997).

Orr (1997) depicts globalization in terms of increasing marginalization of national boundaries in terms of trade, finance, firms, the labor market and knowledge. Cheru (1996) captures the pervasive nature of globalization in his outline of its salient features:

This rapid interpenetration of social relations - involving world factories, labor flows, lending facilities, communications, new knowledge and information technologies and cultural norms-is making national borders irrelevant... This process is also facilitated by the global drive for liberalization of markets and the rapid reduction of commanding role of the state in national planning... This new global order is spearheaded by a few hundred industrial and financial corporations with the technological means and strategic vision on global scale to burst old limits- of time, space, national boundaries and ideology. As a result, the balance of power in the world economy is shifting from territorially based governments to companies that can roam the world... At the same time, the economic power welded by the new dominant forces – finance and capital enterprises – has not

been matched by a shift in their political and social responsibility for global welfare.

To the question of state capacity in the face of globalization, authors argue that states have been relegated to the background instead of being drivers for change (Ohmae, 1999; Faulks, 2000). Modern states have taken the back seat and now have to compete for huge sums of transnational capital investment (Mok, 2003). In relation to universities, governments are pressured in the wake of rising unemployment, trade imbalances and inflation that know no boundaries of states, engendered by globalization, to cut expenditure and demand instead greater efficiencies from public sector institutions and enterprises of which traditional higher education institutions are part of (Orr, 1997). According to Martin (1993), the internationalization of capital and commerce is

‘forcing the pace and shaping the form of public sector change’. From the perspective of higher education, which comprise of colleges and universities, globalization raises a number of challenges. To a large extent, its effect depends on the locus of the higher education institution. Most agree that globalization has resulted in an acceleration of time, a collapse of space, flows of people, ideas, goods, information, images and money. However, there are differentials, uneven and unpredictable effects between and within nation states, between and within university systems and universities and for different populations. Globalization for some developing and developed nations has provided a reason for restructuring education to better address national economic needs. Reductions in public expenditure on education have led to a privatization of universities, and a shift to ‘user pays’ dispositions (Blackmore, 2002). In the field of higher education, globalization represents the sum of exogenous forces that press down on the higher education institutions (Cantwell & Maldonado-Maldonado, 2009). To Altbach and Knight (2006), globalization is the economic, political and societal force pushing twenty first century higher education toward greater international involvement. As a force, globalization has a multifaceted effect on the future of higher education as discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

As noted earlier, collapse of state boundaries, the opening up of markets and the increasing leverage of international capital to dictate economic policies of states in order to ensure competitiveness is one of the hallmarks of globalization. International capital in the form of transnational corporations, have been able to control and monopolize the development and provision of new technology and information systems (Orr, 2008). This makes knowledge critical in the provision of the new technology and information systems. NEPI (1992) asserts that knowledge as an informational commodity is indispensable for material and service production and as such it is becoming the major stake in the world-wide competition for power, transnational development, and domination. More so, the gaping difference in the knowledge and skills between industrialized and developing countries in addition to the disparity in the rate of knowledge acquisition and production between these countries has ricocheted on the higher education systems, as the knowledge society to steadily supply skilled, employable graduates as well as progressively produce cutting edge technology through research, especially in the field of science and technology (Orr, 2008).

In like vein, research has also taken a somewhat different dimension. Since knowledge driven by research is viewed as a commodity in the globalization era, it is employed significantly for maximization of profit. Transnational Corporations, with immense capital and resources have welded their influence, shifting most cutting-edge re-search to industry-based centers, rather than the universities which traditionally had research as one of its major pillars. Thus, as a commodity to be bought and sold in the international market, knowledge ceases to be a social property and is now clothed with intellectual property rights protections. This in turn transforms the nature of the knowledge produced, who and where produced and the purpose for which it is produced (Orr, 2008). Orr (2008) also notes the transformation of the nature of the university into a ‘market university’. A critical feature of a market university is the commodification of knowledge for commercial purposes. The cutting of state funding of universities has also lent propulsion to this transformation. Geodegebuure *et al.*, (1994) assert that universities are pressured into formulating policies geared towards entrepreneurialism when he states that:

Privatization is being embraced as an ideology in its own right and as a reaction to what is perceived as 'public failure'. Behind many of the changes in the relationships between governments and higher educational institutions is the philosophy of "economic rationalism"- a belief that market forces, rather than state intervention, will make institutions more cost effective and better managed, as well as making higher education systems more fluid and responsive to client needs and demands. The market competition "is posed as the solution to good government, the condition for a healthy economy, and the chance for a better education."

Similarly, Scott (1995) avers that the changing role of government in the advent of globalization has its effect on the universities. To him;

Governments are now less likely to see their responsibility for higher education as an absolute duty... Instead they have begun to see themselves as the purchasers, on behalf of tax paying citizens, of a range of teaching, research and consultancy services... In the contractual state the emphasis shifts from the state as provider to the state as regulator, establishing the conditions under which various internal markets are allowed to operate, and the state as auditor, assessing their outcomes.

Buchbinder (1993) further reveals two models of universities in this era of globalization. The first he describes as the traditional university model, wherein knowledge and research is undertaken for the sake of transmitting it freely within the knowledge society. The other model refers to as the 'market or partnership model'. In this model, universities engage with industry albeit for a shorter period of time to research and develop marketable commodities, often in a climate of secrecy which impedes free transmission of knowledge as seen in the traditional model. He captures it as follows:

The combination of underfunded universities, high tech developments, corporate needs, and prevailing ideology lead to a basic transformation in the university: a transformation to a university oriented to the market place. This change affects the production and transmission of knowledge, which is the central function of the university and is stimulated by the demands of the information society. It also alters patterns of governance. These changes in turn affect academic autonomy and collegiality. In addition, there is a qualitative change in the form and transfer of knowledge.

Another effect of globalization on the future of universities is in the propulsion of universities to scale up and respond to the demands of industry in the production and supply of a wide range of cognitive, affective and competently skilled workforce necessary to easily adapt to the increasingly diversified, integrated and highly competitive world (Forest, 2010). In response, universities offer a wider range of international courses, with a robust set of curricular and experiential options geared at producing graduates with global competences (Forest 2010). As a correlation, universities are expanding in terms of establishing campuses in other countries where possible, establishing 24hour online virtual campuses and creating international partnerships, programs and synergies between the traditional universities and the more modern market or for-profit universities (Forest, 2010). Globalization has also brought on a surge in the number of student enrolments and participation in traditional and online programs. According to Pallacio (2015) Higher Education institutions face new scenarios in terms of demography. Demands from industry and society to universities grow and change and universities are constantly expected to readily produce and impart new knowledge. In the past the traditional age ranges of university students were between the ages of 17 – 25.

However, this is changing as there are more access to virtual classes and the pressing need of the global workplace to constantly upgrade knowledge and skills (Palacio, 2015).

There has also been an increase in the diversification and specialization of university curricular to align with the consistent pressure from the business community, as well as members of the academic community, to design more relevant curricular which ensures a steady supply of skilled workforce to the job market (Forest, 2010). Therefore, universities in order to ensure international competitiveness broaden the focus of curricula to adequately address the demands of increasing global interdependence (Forest, 2010). Curricula is no longer nationally delimited, international perspectives are factored in to ensure maintenance of competitive advantage. Globalization has also engendered a shift among researchers towards a more practical and development-oriented research as compared to basic research of the past (Palacio, 2015). This as a consequence transforms research as a platform for competition and cooperation, creating avenues of positive change especially in less developed countries where universities are availed the opportunity to network internationally and access more resources and knowledge to stay updated (Palacio, 2015). While globalization has led to the expansion of universities across the world and the specialization of curricula and programs, it can also affect the future human resource capital of universities particularly in developing countries. The essence of production of students is not only to supply industry with skilled work force but also to ensure the continuity of skilled academia for the sustenance of these institutions. Thus, the issue of 'brain drain' particularly affects the future of universities particularly in developing countries whereby graduates often seek profitable jobs outside of their countries (Palacio, 2015). For the universities in such countries, they produce graduates only to lose them after graduation resulting in the waste of qualified manpower (Palacio, 2015).

There is also the issue of massification of knowledge and the universities. There is a transformation in the way universities are now perceived. With the onset of globalization, universities and colleges are no longer considered a space for the elite but rather the masses. There is an open access to universities resulting in a surge in student numbers and programs most times mean that programs may have the same or slight variations in content and as a result may bring about the problem of ensuring quality of education provided (Palacio, 2015). With the opening up of the universities comes the production of more graduates with fewer job openings in the market to absorb the numbers. In terms of the future of universities, the issue of massification will further affect the way that these institutions are planned and budgeted for. It also goes to the issue of the quality of education given and the key role quality assurance should play. As noted earlier, the evolution of the market university has also signaled a change in the form of knowledge required by industry. There is more demand on universities to make knowledge available for commercial use so as to boost international competitiveness of the national economy (Orr, 2008). Thus, governments and industry request knowledge for profit making as against for social purposes. Gibbons (1992) keenly observes in this regard that expertise is now a commodity to be traded in the international markets. Gibbons *et al.*, (1994) highlighted the shift in trend thus:

Increasingly, both industry and government see the problem less as a need to generate more knowledge than of making use of what is already available; less in terms of supporting basic science than in terms of application of knowledge to wealth creation.

Gibbons *et al.*, (1994:86) further noted that pressure from both industry and government to utilize research for economic benefit is by far the critical change for universities. This is so because it draws these institutions in to the very core of business or commercial processes. Commercialization of available knowledge became paramount instead of the quest and production of new knowledge. Likewise, technology transfer that yields dividends become prioritized than research. Globalization has also impacted on the university's research and teaching structures. With more emphasis on industry-based research, there has emerged a dichotomization of teaching from research (Clark, 1991). Research is carried out more in some

industry's research and development centers rather than at the universities and is not focused on training of students rather on production of commodities for commercial purposes. Clark (1991) states:

The term 'R and D' has become so commonplace that we are likely to overlook its basic meanings: that research should lead to useful application; that in turn technological and other 'developments' spring from research... The R&D conception of reality ties research particularly to the economic sphere and to how research is understood by industrial and commercial firms. **Industry has preconceived goals; its bottom line is monetary profit...** In economic context, research is the hand maiden of the development of the individual firm and of the competitive progress of whole sectors of industry and commerce. [Emphasis added] (Clark, 1991:108).

In the light of demand for skilled human resources, universities are required particularly in knowledge-based economies to account for technical skills of the graduates in their fields, to encourage innovative and creative thinking as well as equip the graduates with critical thinking abilities. To this effect therefore, universities, both traditional and market universities are pressurized to rethink and re-calibrate their programs to accommodate these demands and produce critically thinking, problem-solving people who are sensitive to cultural and democratic values and are responsive to environmentally friendly agenda (Palacio, 2015). Globalization has not only influenced the curricular and the nature of modern universities, it has also made more complex the expectations from academic leaders (Zhu & Zayim-Kurtay, 2018). Zagaga (2006) recognizes that higher education governance is a multidimensional concept. It has the academic dimension with collegiality as its focus. There is also the governmental dimension with focus on the legal framework and also the market dimension with focus on the market forces in the environment. With pressures and requirements of globalization, academic leaders are pushed towards acquiring business competencies resulting in a shift away from academic to more business orientation (Zhu & Zayim-Kurtay, 2018). This shift away from collegiality of the academia coupled with high accountability challenge the core values of academic freedom and autonomy (Zhu & Zayim-Kurtay, 2018).

Alluding to economic pragmatism under the effects of globalization, Yang (2003) asserts that university achievements have been increasingly simplified. There is more emphasis on the number of publications, research grants, graduates; e.t.c. produced thereby relegating educational values. This he argues creates a widening gap between the elite research universities and the middle-class ones. Furthermore, universities are keener to partner with industry for commercial reasons (Yang, 2003). In this quest, the increasing interest of businesses in research is seen as a commercial opportunity instead of a threat. Universities are more willing to pander to industry as corporate economy prevails within universities (Yang, 2003). Courses are taught only if sufficient number of students is interested. Therefore, any vacuous course can be run as long as it attracts sufficient number of students (Yang, 2003). Globalization as a phenomenon has very deep and critical influence on the future of universities. The extent of impact or influence to a large extent depends on the location of the university. Globalization has not only faded state boundaries, it has also thinned-out the social aspect of Universities. With emphasis on cutting edge technologies, the physical and social experience offered by universities is gradually being replaced by virtual realities.

As a market-driven force, globalization is steadily transforming higher education priorities away from traditional academic values. Research, a fundamental arm of universities is increasingly domiciled outside of the university. The apparent danger here is that it is perceived as progress, instead of an erosion of a critical role of universities. Professors and other academics are more commercially inclined, with more focus on profit earning. Even competencies required for administration of these institutions tilt towards business. The universities of the future are more like a corporate entity, established for profit, almost bereft of social and collegial opportunities; tailored towards profit more than generation of new knowledge.

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