

## UNIVERSITIES COLLABORATIONS IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: ISSUES AND PROSPECTS

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### ABSTRACT

This paper examined the need for collaborations among the universities in this digital age. The paper employed due consultation with the existing literature and therefore explored the attractive and compelling opportunities for collaborating internationally. It further explained the attributes of collaboration; and discussed issues on collaboration as: new orientation in teaching and learning, assumptions about the world are rapidly becoming obsolete, development of teachers' conventional pedagogical practices, education for global competence, comparing policies, programmes and practices among universities, and increasing the capacity of educators to teach about the world. The study also examined the prospects for universities collaborations, focusing: sharing of resources and preservation of world treasure resources, union of strength, librarians to collectively archive materials, globally conscious education, and universities competence. It was concluded that universities especially in developing nations cannot afford to face academic and research isolation in the face of financial difficulty, inadequate facilities, equipment, and inadequate incentive to personnel. The rate at which information and facts about education are becoming obsolete requires international collaborations, to catch up with developed nations in educational development. It was recommended that universities in developing nations should collaborate among themselves, and also with universities in developed nations, to attain greatness, remain strong and relevant.

**Key words:** Academic collaborations, digital age, and universities competence.

## 1. Introduction

University education in the 21<sup>st</sup> century desires greater attention. The quality of education, its content relevance, improvement in pedagogic knowledge, curriculum reforms and usage of adequate and relevant resources seem to receive the attention of researchers and educators. Information and communication technology (ICT) has enhanced globalisation, which has imparted greatly on the educational progress and development. University education is established across the world purposely for academic excellence, research and consultation, however it is being faced with challenges of meeting the needs and aspiration of the youths of this millennium. University education seems to be pre-occupied with strategies of meeting the challenges of the youths who are global citizens. The world has become a global village, the youths all over the world should have access to similar quality and relevant resources to make them relevant in global job market, and they should have capability for social and intellectual interaction.

Collaboration is a term that has been defined in numerous ways across diverse fields. Although there has been an emphasis on collaboration for the past fifty years (Elliot 2001), there is a lack of consensus as to its definition and a limited understanding of the process of collaboration (Jenni and Mauriel 2004). Mattessich, Murray-close and Monsey (2001) defined collaboration as “.....a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals. Wood and Gray (1991) defined collaboration as a process that occurs when a group of autonomous stakeholders of a problem domain engage in an interactive process, using shared rules, norms, and structures, to act or decide on issues related to that domain. In education, collaboration is intended to “promote the most effective teaching possible for the greatest number of students” (Pugach and Johnson 1995). Russell (2002) explained that collaboration is based on shared goals, shared vision, a climate of trust, respect, comprehensive planning, and shared risks. Various scholars and authors have identified series of attributes of collaboration as: reciprocity (crow 1998); information sharing, shared vision (Drucker 1999); Joint planning (Riordan 1995); complementarity of skills, efforts and roles (John-Steiner, Weber, and Minnis (1998); and partnerships (Austin 2000).

Collaboration is a trusting, working relationship between two or more equal participants involved in shared thinking, shared planning, and shared creation of integrated instruction. Through a shared vision opportunities are created that integrate subject content and information literacy by co-planning, co-implementing, and co-evaluating students’ progress throughout the instructional process in order to improve students learning in all areas of the curriculum (Monteiel Overall, 2005). Collaboration is the most formal inter-organizational relationship involving shared authority and responsibility for planning, implementation, and evaluation of a joint effort (Hord, 1986). Czajkowski (n.d) synthesized collaboration success factors from the review of literature and she came out with six, which include: trust and partner compatibility; common and unique purpose; shared governance and joint decisions making; clear understanding of roles and responsibilities; open and frequent communication; and adequate financial and human resources. Gray (1989) identified three stages of collaboration as: stage one: the precondition stage where collaborators come together to form the relation, stage two: the process stage where collaborators interact and make decisions, and stage three: the outcomes stage where collaborators assess the effectiveness of their efforts and adapt to change.

Universities collaborations is a process of engaging a number of universities in interactive endeavour, with shared vision and strategies, intended to promote and enhance the relevance and quality of education. The universities collaboration seems to be long over due, most especially in the developing nations. The scarcity of resources especially financial resources, seem to make it too difficult for universities in developing countries to survive and meet the expectations of this digital age and globalisation. The need to collaborate to share physical, financial and human resources and also knowledge and information dissemination coupled, with knowledge sharing have come of age. In this digital age no university could

stand alone as far as knowledge possession is concerned. Information is rapidly disseminated and knowledge become obsolete within a short period. Universities collaborations however, in the developed nations have been in practice to some extent. The collaboration has taken the form of consortium which has enhanced their working together not only in research. A consortium of 12 research universities is a good example of universities collaboration.. There was a case of 12 nation consortium that came together for the purpose of sharing resources, information, academic, and research knowledge.

This paper examined the status of universities collaborations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It further identified and discussed the challenging issues, and the need to meet the challenges, to bring out the best in universities collaborations. The study also examined the prospects of universities collaborations. In order to accomplish the purpose of the study, an intensive review of related literature was employed.

## **2. Issues in Universities Collaboration.**

The dynamic nature of education coupled with its pedagogical knowledge and impact of information and communication technology (ICT), requires collaboration in universities in this digital age. The pedagogy is constantly undergoing transition. Universities collaborations in this digital age is taken a greater dimension and focusing: academic interaction, researches, and library services. The strategies for collaboration is to focus the academic interaction and research activities. Academic collaborations needs to focus: curriculum innovation and reforms, personnel development, pedagogical relevance, and facilities sharing. Research needs to focus on collaboration in methodology, research design relevance, approach to research, knowledge in problem identification, enhancing research relevance information and quality. The globalization and technology have greatly impacted on development and progress in education. There is no gain- saying that information and communication technology has been useful tool to enhance dissemination of information across the world.

### **2.1 New orientation in teaching and learning**

The new technology in this age requires that universities imbibe the use of technology in teaching and learning. E-learning is required in teaching and learning today. E-learning changes the approach from teacher-centred to student centred. The old pedagogy consisted of compulsory, teacher centred and minimal learner control, training for life, convergent thinking, rote learning, depends on educators learning, and imparting information. However new pedagogy is focusing: voluntary, learned – centered, education as freedom, assimilation of learning with life experiences, divergent thinking, active learning, depends on learners needs for learning and open vista for continuous learning (Otubelu 2011). Globalization has really encouraged collaborations. Today's world demands a global outlook in every discipline. The task of educators is to help giving students the skills, tools and perspectives to become fulfilled human beings, responsible global citizens and effective stewards of a sustainable future. The framework of global sustainability advances educational objectives by making all subjects/disciplines more engaging, relevant, and solution-oriented.

### **2.2 Assumptions about the world are rapidly becoming obsolete**

Twenty century assumptions about the world are rapidly becoming obsolete. Globalization, the digital revolution, mass migration, and the prospect of climate instability are triggering new concerns and demanding a new kind of graduate (Mansilla and Jackson, n.d). At the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century the world is recasting our understanding of economics, communication security, cultural identity, citizenship and the environment. University education is therefore has to meet the challenges of the century. No single university could claim monopoly of knowledge.

### 2.3 Development of teachers' conventional pedagogical practices

University teaching is said to have a special task to en-acculturate students into the practices of academic disciplinary communities, not just to exploit and assimilate generally to receive knowledge (Geisler, 1994; Gellin, 2003). In reality, university students are often supposed to master such skills without actually being expressly guided in them. There is the need to help university teachers develop their conventional pedagogical practices, simultaneous taking into account curricular constraints and limited resources in university teaching (Lakkala, Muukkonen, Paavola and Hakkarainen 2008). Current learning theories and pedagogic models emphasise social and cultural dimension of learning as well as the skills of collaboration (Bruner, 1997). Instructors in higher education must create pedagogical situation in which learners are able to utilize their own experiences and knowledge to explore and critically analyze such situations (Haggis, 2006). Students should not be viewed as being solely responsible for their learning, instructors need to focus on making key idea recognizable to students and aid them in understanding the interconnection between said ideas (Donald, 1983).

Pedagogical skills in teaching and learning are required to bring out the best in students and consequently achievement of educational goals. There is need for collaboration in acquiring more skills in pedagogy. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is a phrase thrown around, particular in teacher education programmes. The emergence of the construct of (PCK) is commonly attributed to Shulman (1986); it reflects the notion that teaching goes beyond attaining in-depth knowledge of a given area of content. Pedagogical content knowledge reflects individuals abilities at effectively communicating content knowledge to others in ways that are understandable (Patel and Herick 2010). The constructivist view point is that constructivism are of varying perspectives, and that there is a notion that individuals do not merely take in information to which they are exposed and puts it into long-term memory (Patel and Herick 2010), instead they construct knowledge based on their individual experiences and prior knowledge (Gordon, 2009). PCK represents the skills that individuals have to facilitate other's construction of knowledge in in-depth and meaningful ways (Patel & Herick 2010)

### 2.4 Educating for global competence

The issue of educating for global competence, focusing on youth seems to receive attention of researchers and educators. Global competence is the capacity and disposition to understand and act on issues of global significance. Globalization, the accelerating traffic of goods, ideas, people and capital around the world, has leveled the playing field for workers all over. And increasingly, employers are looking for competent, reliable individuals who will work at attractive costs, regardless of location (Mansilla & Jackson, n.d). Competence in global term refer to students' dynamic learning about, with, and for a complex and interconnected world. To be competitive, ethical, and effective workers, today's students must understand key topics of global significance in areas like engineering, business, science, history, ecology, and other documents that may constitute their future work. There is a growing movement to ensure that today's students are successful in the global economic and civic environments of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Individual teachers, and schools are creatively introducing ways for students to analyze globally significant issues from a variety of perspective, using international sources, and collaborating across cultures to produce evidence-based arguments and solutions.

### 2.5 Comparison of policies, programmes and practices among universities

There is much universities can learn from comparing policies, programmes and practices among themselves. Mansilla and Jackson (n.d) were of the view that bench marking education policies and approaches to reform, provides valuable lessons on what other countries are doing to ensure their students know about the world.

## **2.6 Increasing the capacity of educators to teach about the world**

Increasing the capacity of educators to teach about the world, deserves attention. According to Mansilla and Jackson (n.d) high performing nations build their human resource systems by focusing energy upfront in recruiting, preparing, and supporting good teachers. Regular effective professional development is available and focused on the challenges, teachers face, which in a system geared to nurturing global competence include developing students capacity for success in an interdependent world. Opportunities for teachers to increase their own knowledge and to kindle their excitement about other cultures must be expanded so that they can foster the same curiosity in their students.

## **2.7 Collaboration Leadership**

To harness the great scholarly resource that universities command worldwide will require thoughtful engaged, and collaboration leadership, and recognition of the need for sophisticated mechanisms to manage, measure and sustain such efforts. It is argued that it is virtually impossible to engage globally without partnership. There are many attractive and compelling opportunities for collaborating internationally (Mc Fadden Allen 2009). There is opportunity for building shared digital repositories that aggregate scholarly works, co-investments in large scale scientific equipment or laboratory that can be shared. There is opportunity for collaboration to the shared development of courses and scholarly resources among scholars across the globe.

## **2.8 Prioritizing The Development Of Global Competence.**

Universities collaboration for global competence focusing preparing globally competent graduates who understand the world and are ready to participate critically and creatively in it through their chosen fields of work and study. Retooling teacher preparation programmes to integrate international learning opportunities and substantially strengthen requirements and support for developing the capacity among prospective teachers to teach for global competence. Prioritizing the development of global competence as part of the mission and institutional practice of higher education to ensure that learning how to investigate, communicate, and act within a global economy and interdependent world becomes an essential element of what it means to be a well educated person in the 21st century.

## **2.9 Collaboration And Challenges**

Collaboration and challenges have become inseparable. The independent nature of scholarship and indolent competition across higher education exist as natural hurdles to sharing assets and accomplishment. Universities do not always share the same priorities, timelines, or strategic vision. All these seem to constitute hindrances on collaboration.

## **3. PROSPECTS OF UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION**

Collaboration in academic endeavor is desirable at this age of new technology. The world has become a global Village, Africa as a continent has to seize the opportunity to partner with other universities not only within Africa but also with other continents of the world. Curriculum innovation and reforms, to meet the challenges of the digital age is imperative. Personnel development to meet the demand, yearnings, expectation and relevance of this age is desirable. Pedagogical relevance and facilities sharing in the face of economic depreciation, scarce resources and poverty especially in developing nations of the world are pointers to the need to join issues with advanced and wealthy nation, to tap the resources, knowledge and meet the need for success.

### **3.1 Sharing of resources and preservation of world printed treasures**

The issue of Universities collaboration is receiving more attention of academic and stakeholders in University education world wide. Universities in developed countries have taken the lead in collaboration. The 12-university committee on institutional cooperation was established almost 50 years ago as a means to aggregate resources as well as to enhance opportunities for teaching and learning. Among other activities, Committee of institutional cooperation (CIC) member universities share study abroad opportunities, develop joint language offerings, and coordinate large scale collaborative projects and purchases. The form of collaboration has taken the form of consortium which has enhanced their working together not only in research. A consortium of 12 research universities is a good example of universities collaboration. The national 12-University consortiums called the committee of Institutional cooperation (CIC) agreed and have a collective will to share resources and work together to preserve the worlds printed treasures (Mc Fadden Allen 2009).

### **3.2 Union of strength and relevance**

The coming together of universities for collaboration enhances union of strengths. Mc Fadden Allen (2009) was of the view that in today's networked world; no university can expect to achieve greatness while standing alone. Universities with collaboration give them a competitive advantage as attractive and sophisticated partners in emerging international research collaborations. Mc Robbies (n.d) opined that the cooperation form of collaboration is necessary to make higher education remain strong and relevant in the future. Leading universities will leverage assets collectively even as core individual competencies is continued to be built and the consortium must operate effectively in a common virtual environment.

### **3.3 Librarians to collectively archive materials**

The share repository will give faculty and students convenient access to a large and diverse online library before housed in separate locations and connected only by online catalogs inter-library loan policies and reciprocal borrowing agreements. The collaboration will enable librarians to collectively archive materials over time and allow scholars to access a vast array of material with searches customized for scholarly activity.

### **3.4 Building partnership**

The importance of technology in building partnership and collaboration among university cannot be over stressed. Collaboration creates opportunities on how universities can foster outside partnerships to accomplish even the most complex and costly shared goals (Mc Fadden Allen, 2009) Developing nations in particular is seizing the opportunity of technology. Google's position in partnership with Rwanda has been described by Albert Butare as opportunity for Rwandan Academic Institutions to collaborate in their learning activities. Google's partnership with Kenya Government has been extended to 150,000 Kenyan students at universities across the country.

### **3.5 A globally conscious education**

Students in this era need a globally conscious education for what is assuredly a global era. Young people need to understand the worldwide circulation of ideas, products, fashions, media, ideologies, and human beings. These phenomena are real, powerful, and ubiquitous. By the same token, those growing up in the world of today and tomorrow need preparation to tackle the range of pervasive problems: human conflict, climate change, poverty, the spread of diseases, the control of nuclear energy. (Mansilla and Jackson n.d )

### 3.6 Universities competence

Competence in all spheres of university activities is enhanced, if collaboration is allowed to stay and be part of university life. Productive collaboration has helped member school navigate such complex issues as how best to preserve and provide open digital content in a virtual environment. Enhancing how universities can have core competence while sharing collective assets. (Mc Fadden Allen, 2009)

#### 4. Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the discussion in this study.

1. Universities in developing world should form committee of institutions purposely to share resources and work together.
2. Universities in developing world should collaborate with those in developed world to share repository, to enable students have access to a large and diverse online library. It is also important to enhance core competencies of individuals and university at large, while sharing collective assets. They should learn on strategies of building their human resources across universities.
3. Universities in both developed and developing nations should collaborate to share ideas on policies, programmes, and practices. They should also collaborate for research to enhance cross breeding of ideas, most especially in areas where there are differences in culture, environment, and practices.
4. Universities across the world should collaborate to advance pedagogical practice to meet universities competence and global competence, to prepare globally competent graduates who understand the world.

#### 5. Conclusion

Universities Collaboration has come of age and desirable in this era of new technology. The world in this digital age demands a global outlook in every discipline. The pedagogical content knowledge is transitional in nature therefore there is need to follow the world trend, 21<sup>st</sup> century assumptions about the world are rapidly becoming obsolete and hence demanding a new kind of graduate. The use of international resources and collaborations across cultures, are desirable due to the impact of information and communication technology, and its effects on globalization. Universities can learn from comparing policies, programmes and practices among themselves, ensuring the students know about the world and global challenges. Universities can also learn from universities in other nations, for instance in building their human resource systems by focusing energy upfront: in recruiting, preparing and supporting good teachers.

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