



The homogenization of African Higher Education: The Association of African Universities (AAU), institutional partnerships and educational governance

Presenter: David Kyei-Nuamah (Ph.D. Candidate)

Affiliation: Department of Education, East China Normal University, Shanghai.

Date: July 16, 2024.

Presentation Outline

- Homogenization, Partnerships and Soft power in Higher Education
- The role of the Association of African Universities (AAU)
- Methodology
- Findings
- Criticisms and Way Forward
- Conclusion

“Competition for scarce resources causes institutions to become **more similar** because the **uniform environmental conditions** of competition bring forth similar responses. Consequently, there is a convergence of institutional function structures elsewhere. National higher education systems worldwide have been moving from **a specialized regime towards an integrative regime.**” Qian Zha 2009

What, then, is the Homogenization of Higher Education?

“Homogenization is attributed to three forms of institutional isomorphism **that lead organizations to resemble other organizations facing the same set of environmental**, and that produces a **decrease in system diversity**” DiMaggio and Powell 1983

1. Being controlled by the environment- *coercive*
2. Dependence on governments, social and cultural expectations- *coercive*
3. Imitating successful organizations- *mimetic*
4. Professional exchange and networking- *normative*

Partnerships and Soft Power

- Throughout history, universities have formed associations and partnerships to establish strong, enduring connections to safeguard their academic independence, autonomy, and freedom. Perkin and Court 2005
- The partnerships they form promote access to resources, quality control, global benchmarking, funding, and technical support. Kyei-Nuamah 2022; Rensimer, L., & Brooks, R. 2024
- These networks pivot ‘knowledgeable’ characters and selves with ‘the big policy ideas’ Ball, 2014: 107-108, in You, 2020
- The international and networking operations have been a soft power by Ball 2008
- In this case, many HEIs, through their governments and NGOs, bring on ideas and policies they depend on. This kind of dependence jeopardizes the sovereignty of these institutions because, through these policies and ideas, the hands of soft power are seen at play. Jurg 1994; Ball 2014



ASSOCIATION OF AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION DES UNIVERSITES AFRICAINES
اتحاد الجامعات الأفريقية



➤ Established on 12th November 1957, Rabat Morocco.

COREViP2023
 Conference of Rectors, Vice Chancellors & Presidents of African Universities

THEME: **ADVANCING EXCELLENCE IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

July 4-7, 2023 | Windhoek, Namibia
 Host: University of Namibia

AAU @ 56 YEARS

Join the crucial discussions and high-level events lined up to celebrate AAU at 56 years!

AFRICA UNIVERSITIES' DAY CELEBRATIONS 2023

THEME: **ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE IN AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

SAVE THE DATE: NOVEMBER 6 - 10, 2023
 MAIN CELEBRATION: NOVEMBER 9, 2023

For further enquiries, email us via info@aau.org / ndarko@aau.org

+233 26 4173153 / +233 54 7728975

AAU_67 | www.aau.org

Association of African Universities

➤ Started with 34 member universities

SAVE THE DATE 2024 AFRICA UNIVERSITIES DAY CELEBRATION

Theme: Celebrating the African Union Commission Year of Education

WEEKLONG CELEBRATIONS: 18th-19th November, 2024
 MAIN CELEBRATIONS: 12th November 2024

For further enquiries, email us via info@aaunigeria.org / info@aaunigeria.org

+233 26 4173153 / +233 54 7728975

AAU_67 | www.aau.org

Association of African Universities

Continental Workshop for Directors of ICT / Chief Information Technology Officers

Dates: 27-29 Feb 2024
 Venue: Accra, Ghana

Registration Link: <https://forms.office.com/r/x35b0UvyDJ>

Target Participants: Senior Leaders from African Universities responsible for the running and management of the ICT role and related infrastructure and systems. These include Directors of ICT, Chief Information Technology Officers, DVCS responsible for IT and Senior Project Officers responsible for high-level IT projects.

Participation Fees: **US\$800** for AAU Members in good standing and **US\$1,000** for AAU Members in bad standing / Non-AAU Members

For further enquiries, email us via ndilamini@aau.org / info@aau.org

+233 54 3099588 / +233 26 4173152

AAU_67 | www.aau.org

Association of African Universities

The First 2022 Virtual Meeting of the Higher Education Cluster of the Continental Education Strategy for Africa 2016-25

THEME: **THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN AFRICA: CRISIS AND RESILIENCE**

7TH FEBRUARY 2022

11:30 (GMT)
 14:30 (EAT)
 13:30 (SAST)

<https://bit.ly/3rdwRVQ>

➤ Now over 400 member institutions

The Role of AAU

“We provide **technical support in implementing the African Union Commission higher education agenda**, **coordinate and mobilize HEIs for collective action** towards realizing Africa’s development aspirations, and initiate and develop programs to continuously improve HE in Africa.**the leading advocate for higher education in Africa**, with the capacity to support its member institutions in meeting national, continental, and global needs.....**promote cooperation among African institutions** in curriculum development and determining equivalence of degrees. We also **collaborate with regional higher education bodies**. For example, in East Africa” AAU

Methodology

- Qualitative Inquiry through in depth-interviews and Document Analysis Bowen 2009
- Institutional Isomorphism- DiMaggio and Powell 1983
- Neo-Institutional Theory- John Meyer, Rowan and Bromley
- *Elites in Educational Research-*
- *9 participants*
- *Vice Chancellors- AAU Secretariate- Former Minister of Education*

Table I -Biodata of Participants

Gender	Age Range	Institution	Educational Level	Position	Length In Position
Males / Female	50-65	Institution A	Post-Graduate/ Doctorate	Top Officials	Two years
Male	60 above	University 1	Doctorate	President / Former Minster of Higher Education	10 years
Male	60 above	University 2	Doctorate	President / Vice Chancellor	22 years
Male	60 above	University 3	Doctorate	Vice Chancellor	3.5 years
Male	50-60	University 4	Doctorate	Vice Chancellor	2 years
Male	50	University 5	Doctorate	Vice Chancellor	2 years
Male	60	University 6	Doctorate	Vice Chancellor	One year
Male	40	University 7	Doctorate	Vice President (Administration and Finance)	2 years

Table 2. Documents analysed and identified codes

Title of Document	Name of Signee / Author	Identified Codes
Vision Document (Making Great Impact)	Secretary-General	Higher Education, internationalization, quality assurance, science, technology, innovation, globalization, higher education policy, leadership, management
Overview of Current AAU Interventions and Lessons Learned	AAU	Africa, Higher Education, science, harmonization of higher education, jobs, board, project, researchers, innovations, teaching platforms, monitoring, local traditional knowledge, technical, proper coordination, excellence, infrastructure, entrepreneurs, project development, funding, World Bank, indicators, students, practical internships, publications, programmes, networks, digital learning, digital development, investments, procurement, centres, education stakeholders, co-workers, co-develop, collaborate, platforms,
Emerging Trends and Status of Higher Education Environment 1	AAU and Secretary General	Creativity, staff, we, quality education, soft skills, practical, theory, knowledge economy, human resource, AI, robotics, emerging, basic skills, curriculum, trends, financial, pedagogy, research, discovery.
Overview of Past and Current AAU Interventions/ Programmes: Lessons Learned	Felicia Kuagbedzi and Adeline Addy	Technical support, emerging issues, higher education, access and mobility, projects, policy framework, research, university, collaboration, joint ventures, regional representatives, initiatives, plan, sustainability.
The Current AAU Plan 2020-2025	Ms. Nodumo Dhlamini	Leading advocate, socioeconomic, development, higher education, education, Africa, quality, coordinate, mobilize, advocate, dialogues, broker and facilitate, manage database, resources, provide, strategic, initiate, implement, create awareness, technical guidance, urgency, reform, ICT, deploy, internet, online, STEM, science and technology.

Findings

Promotion of quality Governance, Partnerships, and Cooperation

“Here is an eye-opener. We have been able to make contacts with many universities alike. We agreed to work together with a shared vision and cooperation. We also have learned from them how they do their things and their best practices. We also shared with them what African universities could offer them. What fascinates us is how their government is poised to assist their work.” Vc

“...during such meetings, we facilitate partnership Collaboration among the universities that are in attendance during the conference.” Vc

Building Research Hub

“One thing that brings us together is that we work with the European Union Commission, which connects us to these other regional bodies. For example, we are the regional coordinating body for the World Bank project on the Centres of Excellence in Africa. We coordinate 53 centres of excellence in West and Central Africa for the World Bank. We have worked with various development partners and our track records; we then convince them of what we can do. We look for research programs in different regions of Africa that can contribute to development, and while doing that, we also encourage research networks across the continent.” Vc

Pursuing Quality and Modernization

“AAU specifies that before you can become a member, you must have graduated at least one course of degree students. We also introduce rigorous monitoring and evaluating processes.” AAU

Research Funding

“...they do not go forward but support them on how to get research funding and the research process, where the details of what they do depend on should be their different specialties.” Vc

Homogenization and Diversity to Promote Local Innovations

“...look at your brand themselves so that they know the areas of their strength to strength. We know universities are firmly committed to promoting entrepreneurship, so we are building up or recognizing entrepreneurial universities. We also have specialized universities for different fields and technical universities for agriculture education. We are trying to network them among the same within the African continent so that they can contribute to African Development.” AAU

Implementing Favorable Policies

“When you look at the strategic plan concentrating on higher education, today's world is interested in development. The goal of AAU is to see that universities are empowered to be able to contribute to the development of their community and in talking of their community development of Africa and for them to be able to do that, you will need to build the capacity of the students. You also need to build the capacity of the personnel in the various universities.” AAU

“Promotion de la Recherche, de l’Innovation et de la Culture Numerique en Afrique Centrale (PRICNAC)-2021-2024, The Africa Higher Education Centres of Excellence for Development Impact (ACE Impact)-2019-2025, African Jobs Board-2020-2023, Demographics of African Faculty Project (DAF)-2021-2023, AAU-eLearn Africa LMS (5-years), Harmonisation of African Higher Education, Quality Assurance And Accreditation Initiative (HAQAA I, II, III Initiative)-2019-2028, Science Granting Councils Initiatives related project- 2015-2025 and the Universal Acceptance Project- 2023-2025.” AAU Docs.

Criticisms and Way Forward

✓ AAU has become more powerful in the region- the use of soft power

“AAU is being power-played by African governments and funding agencies, Including AU, about allocating resources for higher education.” Vc

✓ AAU’s promotion of ‘sustainable partnerships’, is homogenizing higher education policy provision across Africa despite a commitment to diversity and local innovation.

✓ Seemingly clash of different Environments/ Language and Governance systems

“HEIs are poorly informed and find reaching the AAU very difficult due to proximity, especially their activities, which they cited are mainly fixed to the West and South Africa.” Vc

AAU membership fees

“...others do not pay and stand the chance of missing some opportunities that the AAU introduces.” AAU

“...the fee is too much and should be charged in African currencies, not USD. I think the issue of the dollarization of the membership subscription is something and is not the dollar per se, but the fact that whether you are young or old, you are still tagged with dollars.” Vc

Regional Competition and neglect by some Elite universities

“The AAU is being competed by many regional NGOs in Higher Education and clearly must up their game.” AAU

“For example, we just had a conference of Vice Chancellors in Namibia. Over 50 vice chancellors from Country A attended; in Country B, where we are, we have just about 6.” AAU

Educational Research Network in Eastern and Southern Africa (ERNESA)

African Research Universities Alliance (ARUA)

Southern African Regional Consortium (SAREC)

Association of Development of Education in Africa (ADEA)

Cont'd

✓ Could AAU propose a streamlined HE governance system for all HEIs

✓ Labelling of African cannon as inferior, is AAU aware? Yes! What are they doing?

building up Africa's researchers' hub for collaborations, giving visibility to researcher work for funding opportunities, and consciously creating online and offline training programs for education quality assurance. AAU docs

✓ Is AAU for government Universities only?

"The AAU does not involve private universities much as public universities." Vc

"... private universities tend to be less research-intensive. So, when we think about research partnerships, I think we are much less likely to have a research partnership with a private university." AAU

✓ The existence of power-play: Do governments influence AAU to channel their resources to some institutions?

"AAU is being power-played by African governments and funding agencies, including AU, about allocating resources for higher education." Vc

✓ Pursuing internal funding for Africa's HEI development

Conclusion

- Africa's HE future is strengthening Indigenous or local educational systems and institutions to produce and use knowledge by supporting and encouraging long-term public support with a keen focus on academic research capacity.
- In most African countries, research conditions have been severely compromised, as manifested by generally poor remuneration, heavy teaching loads, the inability to mentor young faculty, and inadequate infrastructure.
- AAU should charge their annual fees according to the HEI country's currency, enrollment size, and income (if possible). Again, the AAU should pay attention to private universities and share their favorable policies equally.
- The AAU could establish moving or piloted offices on the campuses of its member universities to increase awareness for HEI students.
- Strengthen its AAU Online TV coverage

Selected References

1. Dimaggio, P.J. & Powell, W.W. (1983). The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields, *American Review* 48:147–160.
2. Hrubos, I. (2002). Differentiation, diversification, and homogenization in higher education. *European Education*, 34(4), 56-69.
3. Meyer, J. W., & Bromley, P. (2013). The worldwide expansion of “organisation”. *Sociological Theory*, 31(4), 366-389.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0735275113513264>
4. Kyei-Nuamah, D. (April 2022). *The power of ideas and norms to the governance of the Association of African Universities* (Poster Presentation). Comparative International Education Society (CIES) Conference Online Hub.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.13140/RG.2.2.16942.79684>
5. Rensimer, L., & Brooks, R. (2024). The European universities initiative: further stratification in the pursuit of European cooperation? *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1-19
6. Zha, Q (2009). Diversification or Homogenization in Higher Education: A Global Allomorphism Perspective, *Higher Education in Europe*, 34: 3, 459 — 479 DOI: 10.1080/03797720903356628

Cordial Invitation

- All comments, critiques, and contributions are humbly welcome!

- Research collaborations in;
 - ✓ Education governance
 - ✓ Educational Leadership
 - ✓ Philosophy of education
 - ✓ Specifically, meta-organisation, vested interests and minoritised philosophies

- ✓ Email: daidi.kyei@gmail.com

