

Intra-Africa student mobility: benefits for Africa and factors militating against it

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Abstract

Intra-Africa student mobility holds immense opportunities for students, institutions, nations and the African continent in general through the resourcefulness promoted by cross-border education and research capacity building. If well harnessed, the benefits of intra-Africa student mobility will enhance the visibility of Africa and its higher education institutions and serve as a vehicle through which the continent can profit from internationalisation. This paper argues that intra-Africa student mobility offers several benefits for both Africa and Africans and is a viable means for turning the tide of the brain drain in the continent. The paper addresses an important question: In what way is intra-Africa mobility beneficial to Africa? The paper was developed qualitatively through a review of relevant literature.

Keywords: Keywords: Africa, student mobility, higher education, internationalisation, development

Introduction

The search for knowledge and the exchange of academics has brought about an international dimension in higher education. Until the 1990s, this internationalisation was not of particular interest to researchers; recently, however, there has now been a shift in focus to higher education exchanges and international collaboration (Teichler, 1999). Students are constantly in search of quality higher education, both within and outside their countries of origin. Globally, the number of higher education students studying outside their countries of origin has been steadily rising, from two million in 2000 to over 5.3 million in 2017 (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2019), and the number is expected to rise to 5.8 million by 2025 (Adebisi & Agagu, 2017). Kigotho (2020) further expects this figure to rise to 22 million by 2027. The most popular destinations have been the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada and Australia, accounting for about 40% of the world's internationally mobile students (OECD, 2019). In addition, there is an increasing demand for higher education in Africa. Over the last few decades, there has been burgeoning growth in the

number of students seeking higher education enrolment on the continent, especially in sub-Saharan Africa (Adebisi & Agagu, 2017; Agbaje, 2020; Schoole & Lee, 2021). Unfortunately, most African higher education institutions (HEIs) are unable to accommodate the growing demand owing to a lack of space, as well as quality issues, unstable academic calendars and diminishing government funding for education in many African countries (Agbeniga, 2016; Badoo, 2021). The gross tertiary education enrolment rate in sub-Saharan Africa is around 9.4%, far below the average global rate of 38% (World Bank, 2020). These concerns, amongst others, constantly spur African students to seek better and more accessible higher education outside their countries of origin. Africans are among the most mobile people in the world, thereby contributing immensely to income generation in the receiving countries and to capital flight in the sending countries. This phenomenon further widens the gap in the standard of higher education between the West and Africa, which is evident in the global university ranking system, for example, and thus reaffirms the dominance of the West in higher education (Adebisi & Agagu, 2017).

Indeed, migration, from the perspective of a receiving country, is one of the crucial drivers of social and economic development in Africa. If well-harnessed, migration boosts productivity on different levels through the supply of skilled labour, the growth in per capita income and the acceleration of knowledge transfer. In 2018, the OECD and the International Labour Organization found that migration contributed to 19% of Cote d'Ivoire's GDP in 2008, 13% of Rwanda's in 2012 and 9% of South Africa's in 2011. There are projections that migration could boost Africa's per capital income from USD 2,008 in 2016 to USD 3,249 in 2030, based on the assumption of a 3.5% annual growth rate (Pailey, 2019). In addition, the share of African migrants within Africa is estimated at 53% (Pailey, 2019). Intra-Africa migration in general and intra-Africa student mobility in particular are catalysts for economic integration and continental growth. International education is associated with graduate employability in a global market, transferable skills and the training of global citizens (Albien & Mashatola, 2021). While there are copious studies on the vertical mobility of students around the world, studies reporting on the horizontal mobility of students are limited (Albien & Mashatola, 2021). Vertical mobility refers to the movement of students from developing countries to HEIs in developed countries, while horizontal movement is the movement of students from one country to another with the potential for the same economic advancement and educational quality (Prazeres, 2013). In the same vein, Altbach (2004) argues that most research reports on intra-European and inbound North American mobility, while Africa-related

mobility is often viewed from the negative perspective of a brain drain or as an effect of the poor state of HEIs in Africa. Moreover, very few studies exist on the mobility of students within the African continent (Agbaje, 2020; Agbeniga, 2016; Sehoole & Lee, 2021). Hence, this paper argues for the advancement of inbound mobility in Africa, claiming that intra-Africa student mobility holds immense benefits for the development of Africa and its people. To harness these benefits, there is a need to remove or minimise restrictions, especially immigration policies that inhibit meaningful mobility on the continent, as well as to address safety concerns and quality issues in African HEIs. Despite pessimistic views on inbound mobility in Africa, Knight and Woldegiorgis (2017) submit that considerable changes have taken place in intra-Africa mobility in terms of its expansion and recognition.

An overview of student mobility in Africa

Africa consists of 54 countries and is regarded as the fastest-growing continent; it is predicted to account for more than half of the world's population by the year 2050 (United Nations, 2020). Sadly, drop-out rates across all levels of education are at an all-time high compared to other regions of the world, largely owing to struggling economies, conflict, poor infrastructure and lack of social amenities (Sehoole & Lee, 2021). The demand for higher education in Africa exceeds the supply, with the number of higher education students in sub-Saharan Africa almost tripling over the last 15 years (Quacquarelli Symonds [QS], 2020) although the number of HEIs had not increased commensurately. This has resulted in an outflow of higher education students from most African countries to other countries within or outside Africa, especially outside Africa.

African countries serve as the largest market for international higher education study, with the top countries being Nigeria, Morocco, Cameroun, Algeria, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Senegal, Angola, Ghana and Sudan (Sehoole & Lee, 2021). Even today, colonial legacies continue to shape the pattern of student mobility. Mobility in Africa has always been tied to the language and cultural milieus of anglophone, francophone and lusophone Africa (Woldegiorgis & Doevenspeck, 2015), and African students are generally attracted to countries with which they have historical, linguistic and cultural ties. For example, students from francophone countries like Mali and the Republic of Congo are attracted to France, while students from English-speaking countries like Nigeria and Ghana are attracted to the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada.

The number of outbound African students and their destination countries differ from one country to another. However, the traditional destinations for most of the students from sub-Saharan Africa are the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Canada and Germany, while about 50% of students from Southern African Development Community (SADC) countries often choose to study in South Africa (Campus France, 2016). The large numbers of students from SADC countries who choose to study in South Africa show that intra-Africa student mobility is a very real phenomenon in Africa. Ghana is also making giant strides in hosting international students, especially from sub-Saharan Africa. Evidence also shows that a good number of Nigerian students choose to study in Ghana, thereby contributing up to \$1 billion in tuition fees and upkeep annually as of 2013 (Fatunde, 2014). The number of international students in Ghana leapt by 838% from 1,899 to 17,821 between 2015 and 2017, with students from Nigeria accounting for the majority (Badoo, 2021). The percentage of international students in Ghana's tertiary institutions is considered to be high and stood at 2.8% in 2017 (Kamran et al., 2019).

Although a common trend in African countries is an outbound flow of the youth, including students, the case of South Africa is different. South Africa is the most popular destination for inbound international students in Africa, but South African students rarely leave the country to study abroad. Only between 1 and 5% of South African youth migrate from the country, 28% desire to leave but never do so, while 67% prefers to remain in the country (Mataure, 2013). The popular destinations for those who leave are the United Kingdom, Australia and North America. Further, about 20,000 (13% of the total) Zimbabwean university students were studying abroad in 2020, with more than half of these students studying in South Africa, while the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia and Malaysia appear to be the most popular destinations outside Africa (Laakso, 2020). On the other hand, Zimbabwe only had 600 incoming international students from neighbouring countries, which again points to the skewed number of inbound and outbound international students in Africa. In the case of Cameroun, 26,000 students (9% of the total) studied abroad, mostly in France and Germany, while Belgium, Italy, Canada, the United States, Tunisia and South Africa are also popular destinations (Laakso, 2020). Conversely, Cameroun only hosts about 400 international students, with these students mostly coming from Chad. Botswana recorded 25,000 (5% of the total) university students studying abroad, mostly in South Africa, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. The number of inbound international students to Botswana was 1,200, mainly from Zimbabwe, but there were international students

from other African countries, the United States, India and Bangladesh (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2020b, cited in Laakso, 2020).

Contrary to the popular narrative of a brain drain in Africa, countries like South Africa, Egypt and Senegal record a higher number of incoming international students than domestic students studying abroad (Schoole & Lee, 2021). According to the UNESCO Institute of Statistics (2020b, cited in Laakso, 2020), only 8,068 South African students were studying abroad while the country hosted 45,334 international students. Similarly, Egypt had 34,992 studying abroad and hosted 51,162 international students, while Senegal recorded 12,815 of its students undertaking international study and 14,437 incoming international students. South Africa, in particular, is a regional hub for international students from Africa, competing with most top destinations in the Global North, and is also ahead of some popular destination countries in the Global North in hosting African mobile students. As of 2013, South Africa had the highest share of African mobile students in the world (9.3%); a higher percentage than those of popular destination countries like the UK (9.3%) and the US (9.3%) (UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), 2012).

Continentially, South Africa hosts the highest number of international students from other African countries (48%). This is followed by Ghana (14%), Morocco (10%) and Tunisia (7%) (Campus France, 2016). Additionally, a good number of internationally mobile students across Africa – Lesotho (93%), Swaziland (89%), Namibia (83%), Zimbabwe (74%), the Democratic Republic of Congo (57%) – now find it suitable to study in another African country and at an African university, rather than traditional study destinations in the Global North (Campus France, 2016). The choice of some African countries as popular international study destinations is largely informed by the affordable tuition fees of their HEIs compared to HEIs in the Global North. African students who desire international education but who cannot afford the tuition fees of universities in the Global North often settle for South Africa and other African countries, finding the quality of education to be relatively high. Data from UNESCO (2020b, cited in Laakso, 2020) estimates that there are 250,000 international students in Africa – 137,892 in sub-Saharan Africa and 86,199 in North Africa. Notwithstanding, the lack of availability of accurate data poses a challenge to ascertaining the actual figures on intra-Africa student mobility. Important figures on inbound and outbound international students in Africa are not available, which makes it difficult to understand the extent of mobility taking place on the continent. This has also largely excluded Africa from mobility research in spite of its enormous size (Schoole & Lee, 2021).

The benefits of intra-Africa student mobility for Africa

As with global student mobility, intra-Africa student mobility is driven, inter alia, by the desire to acquire the quality education that might not be available in one's home country. In Africa, this is further exacerbated by the issue of inadequate facilities and the disproportionate lecturer-to-student ratio – 50% more students per lecturer in sub-Saharan Africa – among other issues (British Council, 2014). For example, many Nigerian students study outside their country of origin owing to the incessant strike action that interrupts the higher education calendar in the country, making Nigeria one of the highest senders of international students abroad. African students therefore cross the borders to study in another country to avoid such disruptions and to acquire or reinforce necessary educational skills. The establishment of bilateral and multilateral agreements, including academic collaboration between countries and HEIs, informs the choice of study destinations for international students.

Accordingly, African students study in other African countries because of the opportunities it presents in the form of scholarships, flexible immigration policies or even job preferences following graduation. Most governments of African countries are aware that higher education and research are fundamental to social and economic development and that pan-African cooperation, otherwise referred to as 'regional internationalisation', holds the potential for advancing internationalisation in Africa. It is believed that intra-Africa student mobility has the capability of ushering in a new set of African leaders who are competent to make the best use of African human and material resources for the promotion of a peaceful, prosperous and integrated Africa. Further, intra-Africa student mobility enhances the quality of national education systems and builds capacity for research and development (Cabegin & Alba, 2014). Intra-Africa mobility is an effort geared towards higher education cooperation amongst African countries for the promotion of sustainable development on the continent that will not only bring about quality education but also eventually reduce poverty. This shifting pattern in African mobility strengthens collaborations between African HEIs, while also improving the skills and competencies of students and faculty. Intra-Africa mobility encourages increased regional movement for African students who would have studied outside the continent, with many undertaking graduate and postgraduate studies within Africa itself. Campus France (2016) reports that nearly one in five (19.9%) mobile African students studied in another African country in 2013, an increase from 14.7% in 2012. Some African countries have become regional hubs for international students while also strengthening their universities to rank with the world's best.

Speaking at the African Summit held in Senegal in 2015, Prof Neil Turok of the African Institute for Mathematical Sciences maintained that ‘this will be Africa’s century if the continent’s youths can reach their full potential’. He went further to say that Africa has the largest number of young people in the world; 50% of Africa’s population is less than 20 years of age and, by 2050, one-third of the world’s youth will be Africans. Hence, there is a dire need for African higher education to be ready for this massive increase. This is corroborated by a statement in the UNESCO report of 1998₂, which focuses on higher education in the twenty-first century. The report comments on the role of African universities in assisting to address the lack of support systems confronting government, businesses and industries.

Although Africa’s tertiary enrolment is expected to catch up with the rest of the world by 2050, it is doubtful that this can be achieved without strengthening internationalisation efforts on the continent. Internationalisation holds many benefits for students and institutions through the resourcefulness promoted by cross-border education and research capacity building. These activities bring about development for individual students, institutions and the nation concerned at large. This is not in any way to say that the international dimension of higher education is not without its risks and consequences, including compromised quality, excessive focus on revenue generation, diminishing cultural heritage and the brain drain which is often associated with Africa. However, developing new policies and strengthening existing policies on intra-Africa student mobility will help address this phenomenon.

Student mobility in Africa has not been beneficial to the region in that Africa has been on the sending end rather than the receiving end. African students are among the most mobile students in the world – nearly 5% of the total 8.1 million higher education students from sub-Saharan Africa study abroad, compared to an average of 2.4% from the rest of the world (African Students & Alumni Forum [ASAF], 2020). These students seek higher education in the developed world to gain different perspectives and develop global skills and languages that will prepare them to be global citizens and become a part of the global workforce (Deardorff, 2014). Deardorff believes that international education enhances capacity building for the reconstruction of the political and socioeconomic milieu of the continent. As much as this line of thought is true, its realisation is uncertain given the fact many of these students do not return home upon graduation, hence putting the region at risk of continuing brain drain. As of 2002, the World Bank estimated the number of highly qualified scholars and professionals who leave Africa annually to be 70,000.

Obtaining international education gives students an edge when contributing to a knowledge-based economy. There has been a wide debate about the employability skills of African graduates (Trust Africa, 2015). Graduate employability skills have often been decried by employers, as very few graduates have gained the skills required by the workplace. In other words, African graduates have been criticised for not being able to apply their university education to the demands and realities of the workplace. International education goes a long way in exposing students to different realities that apply to the world of work – and such international education can be obtained in Africa. Promoting intra-Africa student mobility for education in Africa will also strengthen cultural identity. Some scholars of internationalisation have lamented the fast erosion of Africa's identity brought about by globalisation and aided by internationalisation. Hence, the choice of African students to study in Africa would be beneficial for preserving the African heritage. Moreover, the creation of wider opportunities for students and academics to take on intellectual risks, develop ideas and engage in critical thinking is undoubtedly one of the benefits of the internationalisation of higher education. Needless to say, this is the income-generation benefit of the internationalisation of higher education, as international students are regarded as customers of higher education and the money they spend on school fees, housing and other general expenses at their institutions goes a long way to relieving the problem of underfunding in these institutions. Money realised from the recruitment of international students adds to the coffers at the institutional level as well as translating to financial empowerment at the national level.

One could perhaps also argue for Africanisation as one of the rationales driving intra-Africa student mobility. Africanisation is described as a process through which an African university retains its unique African character to achieve certain academic, cultural and political goals (Botha, 2010). In other words, the movement of African students within Africa could serve as a means of liberating Africa from the influence of Western supremacy. Global student mobility could also easily assist in building resistance to direct and indirect influences from the West.

Continental moves towards intra-Africa student mobility

The increasing demand for higher education and the urgent need to boost human capital in Africa has necessitated the creation of various intra-Africa initiatives, with many being created at both the regional and continental level. Some of these initiatives are modelled on Europe's Bologna Process and include the development of quality assurance and credit transfer systems within Africa, as well as with international partners (Jowi, 2018). In addition, these initiatives

are aimed at strengthening Africa's higher education research space, while also promoting sustainable development on the continent by reducing poverty and boosting the number of highly trained African professionals (Laakso, 2020; Schoole & Lee, 2021). So far, there have been concerted and commendable regional and continental efforts to promote the mobility of students and talent within Africa. One such example is the 2004 Accra Declaration, which emanated from the meeting held by the Association of African Universities (AAU) in conjunction with UNESCO and the South African Council on Higher Education. At the meeting, the commitment to provide access to higher international education in the region was reiterated, and a couple of academic programmes aimed at facilitating student mobility were established. Similarly, the African Union (AU) instituted the Nwalim Nyerere African Union Scholarship Scheme in 2007 to offer opportunities for African students to study at recognised HEIs within Africa, particularly in the areas of Science and Technology. On graduation, students who participate in the scholarship scheme are required to remain and work in Africa for a minimum of two years, as a way of enhancing Africa's human capital (Bruneforth & Wallet, 2010).

The establishment of African Centres of Excellence (ACE) by the World Bank in 2015, in collaboration with the governments of participating African countries, is another laudable initiative operating in many African countries. The ACE targets and supports disciplines in the area of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), Environmental Sciences, Agriculture, Applied Social Science, Education and Health (Schoole & Lee, 2021). The major objective of the ACE is to encourage regional integration among participating universities to address common regional problems and boost capacity building. The first phase of the ACE initiative (ACE I) was launched in 2014 with the establishment of 22 Centres of Excellence in West and Central Africa, namely, Nigeria, Ghana, Gambia, Cote d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Senegal, Togo and Benin. The second phase of the project (ACE II) was initiated in 2016 across 24 Centres in East and Southern Africa, namely, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Tanzania, Mozambique, Rwanda, Zambia and Ethiopia.

The Pan African University (PAU) was established in 2008 as the culmination of the continental initiatives of the AU to encourage collaborations within specialised areas of study in African countries to promote excellent research and enhance quality postgraduate education. This took place under the auspices of the Second Decade of Education for Africa and the consolidated Plan of Action for Science and Technology for Africa. Specifically, the PAU was founded to revitalise higher education and research in Africa; boost the attractiveness and

global competitiveness of African higher education; and position African universities at the core of Africa's development. Its strategic mission is to develop institutions of excellence in the five focus areas of science, technology, innovation, social sciences and governance, which form the foundation for an African pool of higher education and research. The PAU is operated as an academic network of existing African institutions and is currently hosted by five universities in five African countries, one representing each region in Africa. Since its creation, the PAU, which is relevant to Africa's needs, has become globally competitive. The Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme was set up under the Pan African Programme (Development Co-operation Instrument) and aims to (i) improve higher education by promoting the internationalisation and harmonisation of curricula and programmes; and (ii) enable students and staff to benefit culturally, professionally and linguistically from the experience gained through mobility to another African country. Furthermore, this scheme operates under different programmes and projects, one of which is termed 'ARISE II'. This project builds on the Intra-ACP Africa Regional International Staff/Student Exchange: Food Security and Sustainable Human Wellbeing. The project, which is funded by the European Commission, is in partnership with HEIs in three African regions, as well as an associate partner in South Africa and a technical partner in the European Union. The project also offers 46 mobility opportunities in six thematic fields. In South Africa, Stellenbosch University drives the intra-Africa mobility scheme, having entered into bilateral partnerships with 12 universities in ten African countries, namely, Botswana, Cameroun, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe. The scheme offers grants to postgraduate students, postdoctoral fellows and Stellenbosch University staff as a way of facilitating cooperation between countries in Africa.

At the regional level is the creation of the African and Malagasy Council for Higher Education. This involves 19 francophone countries and the establishment of the Inter-University Council of Eastern Africa in 2009, which serves five countries, namely, Rwanda, Tanzania, Burundi, Kenya and Uganda. In the same vein, the Quality Assurance Network was established in 2007 in a bid to assist universities to enhance their quality assurance systems. Also in 2007, the African Quality Rating Mechanism was developed by the African Union Commission as part of its commitment to revitalisation and harmonisation strategies for putting Africa's higher education on a pedestal with its global counterparts. Intra-Africa student mobility has also taken on a regional dimension such as in the East African Community (EAC) and SADC. These regional dimensions are reflected in the agenda of regional university

organisations, including the Inter-University Council for East Africa and the Southern Africa Regional Universities Association (SARUA) (Jowi, 2018).

The African Virtual University (AVU) is another initiative that has made significant contributions to higher education in the continent. Launched originally in 1997 by the World Bank in partnership with the African Development Bank (AfDB), the AVU is a pan-African effort aimed at providing open and affordable distance and e-learning education to higher education students in Africa. So far, the AVU has established large e-learning and distance learning networks in more than 27 countries in sub-Saharan Africa, offering 219 open educational modules, and has produced over 4,000 graduates (AfDB, 2013). The AVU facilitates learning in English, French and Portuguese to provide inclusive education for African students of different linguistic backgrounds. The AVU continues to gain international recognition and its interactive portal is accessed beyond Africa in 142 countries, especially Brazil and the USA.

In promoting intra-Africa mobility further, many international universities have established branch campuses in various African countries. For example, Lancaster University has a branch campus in Accra, Ghana, while the Limkokwing University of Malaysia also operates branch campuses in Lesotho, Swaziland and Botswana (Adebisi & Agagu, 2017).

The aforementioned initiatives are commendable moves toward promoting student mobility in Africa; however, they are not without challenges. For example, the AU, a continental organisation, has not succeeded in bringing the disjointed sub-regional higher education initiatives together. The AU Commission, which is also in charge of harmonisation processes, is underfunded and the implementation of most of the harmonisation strategies depends on external funding. Similarly, the Arusha Convention, now referred to as the Addis Ababa Convention, which serves as the legal framework for harmonisation processes, has neither been ratified nor implemented by member states (Woldegiorgis & Scherer, 2019). Moreover, the AAU, whose mission is to enhance the quality and relevance of higher education in Africa and strengthen its contribution to Africa's development, has not fully succeeded in fulfilling its mission. Other enablers of quality higher education in Africa and intra-Africa student mobility, such as credit transfer systems, unified visa regulations, harmonised tuition policies and qualification recognition frameworks, have not been implemented (Woldegiorgis & Scherer, 2019).

Challenges confronting inbound student mobility in Africa

Peace, safety and stability are some of the factors that inform the choice of a study destination, while xenophobia and terrorism are some of the ills that pose a threat to the rate of inbound international students in Africa. Adebisi and Agagu (2017) argue that xenophobia and terrorism could inhibit the development of transborder higher education and sustainable development in Africa if not quickly nipped in the bud. In the case of South Africa, racial discrimination entrenched in society by the apartheid system has made the country one of the most hostile to foreign nationals (Adebisi & Agagu, 2017; Albien & Mashatola, 2021). It is important to sensitise the citizens of South Africa to the positive contributions of foreigners to the economy, and the social and cultural milieu of the nation. In addition, in her article on the pull factors that attract international students to Nigeria despite safety concerns, Agbaje (2021) submits that the actions of the Boko Haram insurgent group in the north-eastern part of the country have meant that the whole of Nigeria is deemed unsafe by international students. In Kenya, attacks by the Somalia-based Islamist terrorist group, Al-Shabaab, have likewise raised security concerns for international students. In particular, the attack on the Garissa University College in April 2015 that killed 148 people, left 79 injured and resulted in 700 students being taken hostage has left a stain on the safety profile of Kenya. The worst aspect of conflict in a country is the way the media portrays it, as it cut across the entire country when in fact it only takes place in some parts of the country. For example, even though Boko Haram mainly operates in north-east Nigeria and xenophobia is centred in South Africa's informal settlements, intra-Africa student mobility is still greatly affected by these and other similar issues.

Safety and security concerns serve as deterrents to internationally mobile students who would have chosen to study in Africa. This in turn hampers socioeconomic development in African countries. Conversely, the political stability and peaceful atmosphere in Ghana have been hailed as the major drivers of international students into the country (Badoo, 2021).

Promoting intra-Africa student mobility and curbing the brain drain in Africa

The majority of those who emigrate from Africa are in the productive age range – between 20 and 64 years. Additionally, Africans are highly mobile (ASAF, 2020), with North Africa accounting for 24% of African migrants, West Africa for 39% and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa 29% (Schoole & Lee, 2021). A considerable number of these migrants are skilled and possess the wherewithal needed for the growth and development of their nations. Thus, policies targeted at movement within the continent should be at the heart of strategies needed to stem

the brain drain in Africa. There is a need for policymakers to make African countries desirable as study destinations. As Pailey (2019) argues, African immigration policies should enable Africans to study on the continent because they want to, not because they are prohibited from migrating elsewhere. She further proposes the establishment of knowledge transfer programmes that would enable skilled Africans in the diaspora to return home to contribute their knowledge to the development of the continent. Promoting intra-African movement through open visa policies for African nationals would also facilitate freer movement, knowledge circulation and better trade on the continent. The Africa Visa Openness Index (AVOI) was flagged by the AfDB and aligns with the AU's agenda; this was done because having a protocol on the free movement of people is a vital initiative toward the facilitation of intra-African movement and the integration of Africa. Published annually since 2016, the AVOI measures the openness of African countries to travellers from the continent, be they students, researchers, workers, entrepreneurs, visitors or tourists. Namibia, Morocco and Tunisia have reportedly made the most progress in visa openness (African Union, 2021). Seychelles, Benin and the Gambia have proposed the most welcoming policies in the continent by offering visa-free access to all African visitors in 2021, thereby leading the AVOI for that year (Faria, 2022), while Senegal has given visa-free access to 42 African countries as of 2019 (Pailey, 2019). Djibouti, Guinea and South Sudan, on the other hand, had restrictive visa policies in place in 2021. Overall, however, the AVOI can be said to be achieving remarkable success. As of 2021, 25% of African countries did not require visas from some or all of their visitors, 24% allowed the purchase of visas on arrival for some or all of their visitors, while 54% required visas before departure from some or all of their visitors (Faria, 2022). It would be beneficial for African countries to extend their open visa policies, or at least offer less restrictive and less cumbersome visa application processes to international students in the continent. However, despite the open visa policies prompted partly by the AVOI, Africa remains restrictive to intra-African mobility and is also the least integrated region in the world; hence, achieving a borderless Africa remains a mirage for now.

Regional skills matching programmes could be another initiative toward curtailing the brain drain in Africa. Skills matching, otherwise referred to as 'skills portability' by Pailey (2019, p. 28), implies matching the skills acquired in one African country to job opportunities in another, which aligns with the AU's regional skills pooling efforts. The Joint Labour Migration programme of 2015 and the Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Degrees, Diplomas and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in

Africa (2014) are efforts made to integrate academic qualifications and the workforce in Africa. Some of these initiatives have proven successful. For example, the Economic Community of West African States operates a platform that connects jobseekers from Benin, Senegal, Ghana, Mali, Cape Verde and Mauritania with available job opportunities both nationally and continentally. Skills matching and portability hold the potential to turn the brain drain into brain circulation in Africa. Policymakers could enhance skills and qualifications in the continent by formulating and implementing policies that would enable African youths to obtain internationally recognised skills and qualifications from African HEIs to the benefit of Africa as a whole (Pailey, 2019).

Conclusion

Globally, there is increasing recognition of the important role played by higher education in economic and social development. Without the acquisition of quality education by the citizenry, failure (or at least the threat of failure) looms over any nation (Archer, 2017). For the 54 developing countries of Africa, intra-Africa student mobility is one of the viable strategies for obtaining quality education. If well-harnessed, intra-Africa student mobility may promote the visibility of African universities, providing an open channel through which Africa can profit from the world's knowledge, which may then translate to the development of the continent. In Africa, we have reached a point where international education should no longer be undertaken merely for the sake of international education. There is an urgent need to make a shift away from the status quo and to concentrate on how the process of student mobility can be utilised to attain local and regional development. When developing internationalisation programmes, research role players in intra-Africa mobility should bear in mind local socioeconomic needs that will be beneficial to Africa and Africans. These will contribute to the advancement of not only individual countries, but also the continent at large, as the internationalisation of higher education in Africa undoubtedly holds enormous benefits for students, universities, individual countries and the whole continent.

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