

International Mobility Programs in Higher Education: A Resolution to the Brain Drain in Africa.

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For this project, I researched the different international mobility programs striving to help African students pursue higher education outside of their home countries. I argue that these programs could be fundamental in helping to reduce the “brain drain” on the continent, and are a far superior method of recruitment for higher education institutions than employing individual educational agents.

First, I synthesized literature about internationalization in higher education, distinguishing it from globalization and discussing its different interpretations and manifestations. Next, I explored the opportunities, risks, and implications this phenomenon has in Africa specifically, considering the economic, political, social, and historical challenges it faces, while being careful not to homogenize this vast and diverse continent. This provided essential background for researching the “brain drain” (broadly defined as the migration of highly educated individuals from a developing country to a developed one), one of the biggest challenges for African higher education and country development. I illustrated the nuances of the issue, and scrutinized the proposed mitigation policies, ultimately claiming that ensuring students return to their home countries after graduation could be more successful than some scholars suggest if international mobility programs are strengthened and expanded.

After determining trends in students’ decision-making about studying internationally, it became clear that the lack of information available to them about opportunities abroad (and how to navigate the complicated application process) was the most significant factor in discouraging them. This leads to many students seeking help from individual educational agents, but their experiences were often disturbing. Considerable evidence highlighted agents’ corrupt and unethical practices that financially and emotionally exploit their student clients, while also charging universities extortionate fees for their services. I contacted admissions counsellors at several small private undergraduate colleges in the northeast of the United States to understand their recruitment strategies, and found that the HALI (High Achieving, Low Income) Access Network is the primary source of admitted students.

The HALI Access Network consists of 34 international mobility programs across Africa, and I researched each of them in depth to create a framework of the different types based on their mission, structure, and organization. I provided detailed case studies of programs within the “Bridge Programs” and “Day & Boarding School” categories, which I argued were the most effective for: (a) preparing students for an international higher education; (b) the return on investment and potential to scale up; (c) ability to ensure students return to their home countries and contribute to their development as part of a successful cohort.

Lastly, using data from the World Bank, I analyzed international mobility rates across Africa in relation to student populations, GDP, etc., before making recommendations on which countries are most suited for greater outbound mobility and thus the expansion of international mobility programs. I argue that in the short-term this will allow countries to acquire the human capital necessary to strengthen domestic political and educational institutions that in the long-term will allow for international outbound mobility in Africa to be reduced.

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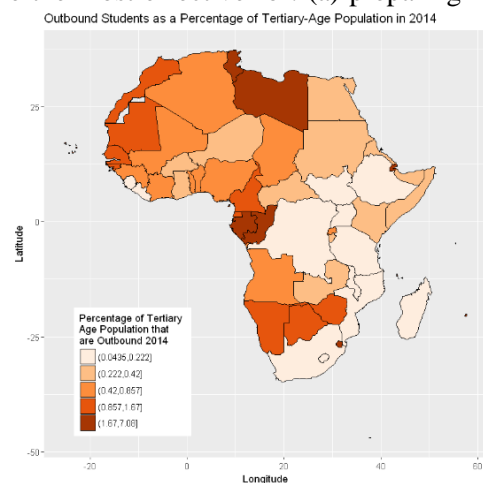


Figure 2: Heat map of Outbound Students as a Percentage of Tertiary-Age Population in 2014. Data available for all 54 African countries.