

# **Student Mobility in International Education: The Case in Ghana**

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## **Abstract**

International education has become an important export commodity and many nations are making every effort to attract students. Among developed countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Germany and France, universities generate high foreign exchange from student mobility in international education. Beneficiary students of international education acquire increasing knowledge in diverse academic and professional disciplines to supplement the developmental agenda of their countries.

In spite of the tremendous socio-economic benefits, it has been observed that many Southern States have failed to capitalize on this for their benefit. As a result of this, attracting international students into many Southern States faces a challenge. Among the challenging factors identified includes poor infrastructural facilities, weak marketing and recruitment efforts by institutions as well as harsh immigration procedures by host countries.

This study seeks to review the issue of student mobility in international education in Ghana, a Southern State, and identify the factors militating against student mobility in international education and suggest ways of addressing the issue.

## **Introduction**

International students form a critical element of the international dimension of higher education and are an important component of international education. In examining mobility trends, Project Atlas defines international student as “one who undertakes all or part of his/her higher education experience in a country other than the home country” (Project Atlas, 2004). The definition considers the motivation for changing countries to be for the purpose of formal education; hence, international students are not permanent residents in the host country.

In response to this, the UN in 1978 established the South-South co-operation as an opportunity for the exchange of resources, technology and knowledge among developing countries, known as countries of global South. Leaders of South-South co-operation hope that the co-operation will bring a new order and counter the existing

Western dominance social, educational, economic and political dominance. At the Marrakech Declaration on South-South co-operation in Morocco in December, 2003, the leaders re-affirmed their commitment to information and communication technology, trade, investment, finance, debt management, food, agriculture, water, energy, health, education and transit transport, among others.

The “market” for international students is one of the most dynamic of all world markets and in the last 10 years has seen such an unprecedented growth that governments from a range of countries now prioritize involvement in this market through their own Ministries of Education or dedicated international education promotional agencies (Kemp, 2007). The potential benefits of having international students are linked to skill migration, economic growth, public diplomacy and more importantly to research and innovation for a “knowledge society.”

Over the past decade, demand for international education has grown very significantly. Several studies have forecast continuous growth at least up to 2025.

In the world at large, International education has become an essential commodity and the competition for the international student market is dominated by the Northern States. However, the large and rapidly growing Southern states are also keen strong contenders. It is imperative for nations of the South to also consider internationalization of higher education as an export service which can yield foreign exchange within the protocol of South-South cooperation.

Traditionally, more than 90% of international students have enrolled in institutions in countries belonging to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with the main destinations (the US, the UK, Germany, France and Australia) recruiting over 70% of them.

In Africa, countries such as Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Mauritius, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, and Uganda have been the destination for most outgoing students.

In Ghana, a number of students migrate to other countries to further their education with most of their destination being the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Germany, Cuba, France and Australia. In recent time, it has been observed that some Ghanaian students prefer to further their education in China, Russia and Ukraine.

Records available show that Ghanaian universities have also been the destination for students from other African countries such as Nigeria, Gabon, Benin, Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Cameroun, Togo etc. Statistics show that over 3,000 international students enroll in the Ghanaian public Universities every academic year.

In the University of Mines and Technology, Tarkwa in the Western Region of Ghana, the University had been an attractive institution to students interested in the mining and its related

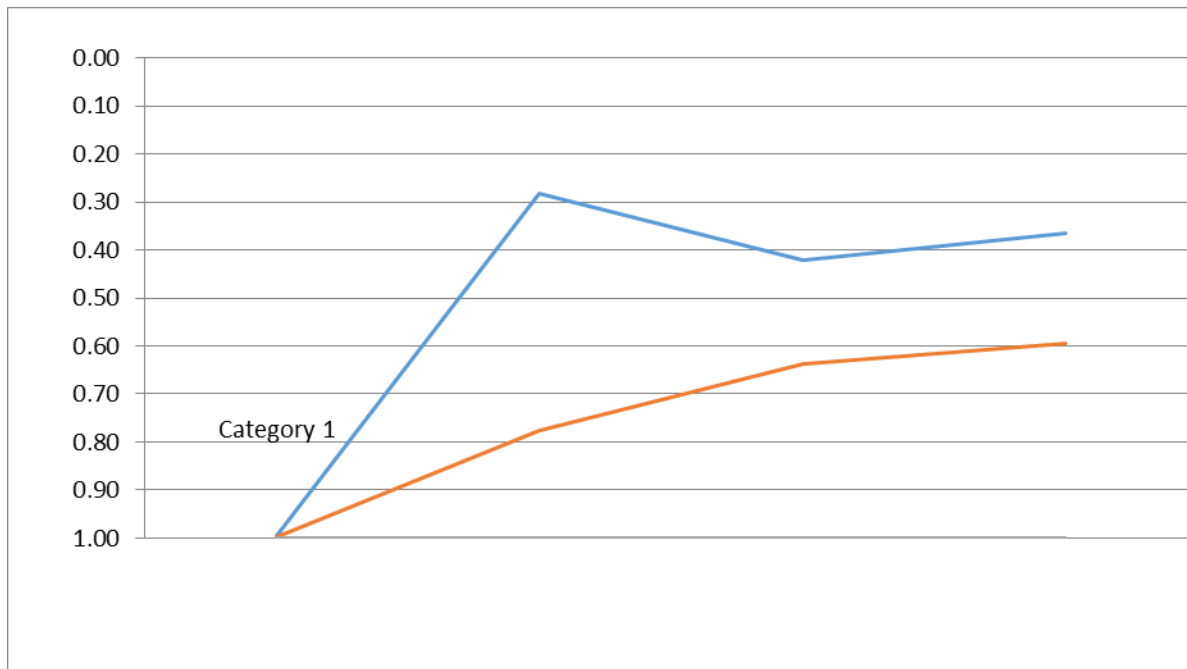
disciplines. The University's core mission statement is:

- To provide higher education with special references to mining and related fields,
- To promote knowledge through research , and
- To provide professional services to the national and international communities.

With a guiding philosophy aimed at guiding the students to develop their intellectual capabilities and appreciate good social and moral values, the University has attracted quite a number of international students from Nigeria, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, Mali, Togo, Cameroun, Congo Brazzaville and many more. Available records indicate that as at the 2009/2010 academic year, the University has 59 international students enrolled to pursue various mining and related programmes, as at the 2010/2011 academic year 73 international students had enrolled while 83 students enrolled for the 2011/2012 academic year. In the 2012/2013 academic year 100 students enrolled as foreign students in the University while 104 students enrolled in the 2013/2014 academic year. Majority of the international students enrolled in the University comes from countries such as Nigeria, Gabon, Benin, Congo, Mali, Chad, Equatorial Guinea and Ivory Coast.

## **2. INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY**

International student mobility is one of the cornerstones of growing internationalization of tertiary institutions. This involves students moving from one country to another, and has great impact on higher education and the society as a whole. One of the most significant features of global education market over the past decade has been the phenomenal growth in demand for international education. In 2000 there were an estimated 1.8 million international students in higher educational institutions around the world. A study undertaken by IDP Education Australia in association with the Centre for International Economics, Global Student Mobility, Agenda 2025 indicates that the global demand for international higher education is set to grow enormously. Demand is forecast to increase to 7.2 million in 2025. This is illustrated in Fig. 1.



**Fig. 1 Projected Global Demand for International Education (IDP Australia Ltd, 2002).**

More than half a million international students study in the United States and approximately 200,000 students study in Australian institutions. These institutions contribute over US\$11 billion to the US economy and over AUD\$4.2 billion to the Australian economy annually. International education represented Australia's 8<sup>th</sup> largest export sector (IDP Education, Australia Ltd, 2002). Universities generate almost £60bn a year for the UK economy - more than agriculture and pharmaceutical industry and higher education puts back into the economy per £1m spent than the NHS, as observed by researchers at Strathclyde University, Glasgow ([www.guardian.co.uk/education/Ztluv/Nov1041higher-education-economy](http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/Ztluv/Nov1041higher-education-economy)).

Three countries (US, UK and Australia) lead in the international student market not only because of their advancement but also because they strategically target students in potentially high-yield countries. The leading markets are India and China; and these are Southern nations. In terms of the market exploits, the US, UK and Australia control about 45% of the student market. Considered as the Middle powers are Germany and France who control about 20% of the market. They are followed by Japan, Canada and New Zealand, known as the 'Evolving Destinations', who control about 13% of the international student market. The 'Emerging Contenders' are Malaysia, Singapore and China. They also control about 12% of the market. The remaining 10% of the global foreign students is shared by the rest of the world, the majority of whom are in the South.

The Northern nations have developed impressive marketing strategies to target potentially high-yield nations, particularly from India and China, and often offer substantial financial incentives and immigration concessions. Taking cognizance of the contribution that foreign students make to host- nation economies, both culturally and financially, the Northern states are making conscious efforts to internationalize their higher educational systems by implementing initiatives to facilitate the arrival and integration of overseas students including substantial amendments to immigration requirements and procedures.

In Ghana, records available from the National Council for Tertiary Education (NCTE) shows a total of 3,607 international students were pursuing higher education in the country's public Universities as at the 2009/2010 academic year, 2,606 international students for the 2010/2011 academic year. For the 2011/2012 academic year, a total of 3,356 international students enrolled in the Country's public Universities while a total of 2,507 enrolled for the 2012/2013 academic year. In the year 2013/2014 academic year, a total of 2,723 enrolled in the Country's public Universities. Records further indicate that most of these students come from Nigeria, Gabon, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Congo, USA etc. Table 1 shows the enrolment trend of foreign students in the 9 public Universities in Ghana.

**Table 1: Enrolment of International Students in the Publicly Funded Universities in Ghana**

Public Funded University	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
	No. of Students	No. of Students	No. of Students	No. of Students	No. of Students
KNUST	838	1,035	1,263	1445	1549
University of Cape Coast	189	226	245	245	283
University for Development Studies, Tamale	0	2	3	11	11
University of Education	1,214	9	733	22	12
University of Ghana	1,307	1,270	1035	684	732
University of Mines and Technology	59	73	83	101	121
University of Energy and Natural Resources	-	-	-	1	3
University for Health and Allied Sciences	-	-	-	-	-
University of Professional Studies, Accra	-	-	-	20	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>3607</b>	<b>2615</b>	<b>3362</b>	<b>2507</b>	<b>2723</b>

Source: NCTE, 2014

### **Determinants of Ghanaian International Student Mobility**

Among the notable factors influencing the movement of students out of Ghana are Post-Colonial Association, Propensity of tertiary students to study abroad, population size, per capita gross domestic product, home tertiary-training capacity etc

#### **Push Factors:**

- **Insufficient tertiary capacity to meet rising demands**

Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE) has resulted in significant growth in secondary education. As secondary education completion levels rise, so too do the numbers of students that qualify for tertiary admission increase every academic year. Meeting Africa's tertiary education demand, however, will not be easy given the region's overburdened education infrastructure, faculty shortages and competing demands for government revenues (Adepoju, 2002; World Bank, 2009). Records shows that the number of primary schools (public and Private) in Ghana as at the 2012/2013 academic year was 19,854 with a total student enrolment of 4,105,913. With regard to the Junior High Schools (Public and Private) in the country as at the 2012/2013 academic year, the number was 12,436 with a total enrolment of 1,452,585. With regard to the Senior High School (SHS) in the same year, the number of SHS institution (Private and Public) in the country stood at 828 with a total enrolment of 842,587. Even though the number of students' enrolment had been dwindling from the Basic School to the Secondary School, the Universities could not accommodate all students who complete the Secondary education successfully.

In the 2012/2013 academic year, the 9 public Universities could enrol 34,000 students out of the 842,587 students who completed SHS students showing a percentage enrolment of 4.03% even though 34% of the students qualify for secondary education.

- **Old Infrastructure with Limited sitting Capacities.**

Another major factor resulting in students in Ghana migrating to other Countries in pursuant for higher education is the fact that most of these Universities have old and inadequate infrastructure coupled with smaller sitting capacities. In some instances, students stand outside lecture rooms to listen to what is being taught due to the limited sitting capacities of the lecture rooms.

- **Post-Colonial Association**

Southern and Eastern Africa tended to have a British colonial influence, and West Africa was largely under the influence of France, while Central and North Africa were a scramble between France and Germany. According to Maringe and Carter (2007), African students tend to migrate to countries formerly included as colonies of the same European power as their own, largely because of derived cultural capital, language facility, and a somewhat shared history. Thus, post-colonial associations are a significant influence on international student mobility.

There are, of course exceptions to the colonial pattern, such as Cameroon, Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia. But France, the region's single most important host country, and Belgium are the preferred destinations for Francophone students from Benin, Gabon, Comoros, Congo, DRC, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and Senegal. Each of these countries sends more than 2,000 students abroad every year. Students from Lusophone countries, such as Angola, Cape Verde, and Mozambique, tend to go to Portugal. In

Ghana, records available shows that majority of Ghanaian students prefer to study in the UK and the US.

- **Propensity of tertiary students to study abroad**

Difficulties in obtaining admission into universities at home, combined with perceptions that education quality is better in tertiary institutions abroad, have encouraged many African families that can afford the costs to send their children to Europe, North America or elsewhere for tertiary studies (Kritz, 2011).

Besides, most African Countries value international certificates in the market compared to the domestic certificates that are issued to graduates after completion of programmes in the home countries. Most graduates believe that acquiring the foreign certificate makes job seeking much more easier compared to the domestic certificate.

Another factor resulting in students leaving to study abroad are that these students are exposed to different cultures and environment.

- **Absence of Research Policy**

In Ghana, curriculum and skills taught at Universities are in many cases focusing on traditional –teacher centred learning with an emphasis on passive learning, examinations, recalling facts and rote learning. This is in sharp contrast to the Western style of teaching which is learner centred and aimed at building a student’s independence, analytical skills, debating skills and questioning. In the advance countries, most Universities focus on research which involves the students. As a result of the research based studies and learner centred approach adopted in the advance countries’ universities, most Ghanaian students prefer to enrol in such institutions to increase their knowledge.

- **Obsolete Study Programmes**

Another major factor resulting in students moving to other countries to pursue higher education is the obsolete study programmes that are not adapted to the needs of society or developments in science and technology. In instances where the programme is tailored towards the developmental need of the country or engineering programmes, medicine etc, fewer people are enrolled and majority of students with good grades are denied admission to pursue such programmes.

### **Factors influencing the movement of International students into Ghana**

The main factors that influence the mobility of international students into the Country include:

- Relatively lower cost of education,
- Flexibility of curricula of home institutions,
- Parity of admission requirements,
- Socio-cultural similarity, and



➤ Relatively friendly Immigration requirement/procedures.

- **Relatively lower cost of education**

Cost is increasingly likely to motivate students to a particular destination and deter others from applying to others. Cost of living and tuition fees are generally lower in most African countries than in the Northern ones. It is therefore relatively cheaper to study in institutions in Ghana than in other developed countries universities. Whereas public Universities in Ghana charge fees between US\$6,000.00 and US\$8,000.00 per academic year (including accommodation, tuition fees, medicals etc), developed countries like the United Kingdom charges fees between £8,000 and £9,000 per academic year while the United States of America charges the fees ranging from US\$8,000 to US\$9,000 per academic year.

- **Parity of admission requirements**

The flexibility of admission requirements to tertiary institutions in Ghana is also a significant factor. Already there are regional regulatory bodies like the West Africa Examinations Council (WAEC), which ensure quality standard of the appropriate level of education in its area of jurisdiction. Similarity of programmes and medium of instruction between Ghana and other Anglophone countries could be a great opportunity that will allow for easy mobility of students into Ghana. Countries like Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Gambia, Liberia and Ghana have the same examination known as West African Secondary School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) regulated by WAEC. As a result of this, students from any of these countries can enroll in any of these countries on condition that the student had passed and met the entry requirement of the University.

- **Socio-Cultural Similarity**

Socio-cultural similarity of the international students' home countries and that of Ghana always make the student feel at ease. The degree of home-sickness of the international student is minimal due to similar socio-cultural factors among these West African nations. Linguistic, dietary, and cultural identities such as food, music, religion, dance etc are quite similar making the student feel more at home.

- **Immigration requirements/procedures**

Immigration requirements and procedures influence the mobility of international students and definitely control their preferred destinations. There are already regional bodies like the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), which can be used to ease the movement of international students among West African countries. Through this collaboration, movement of citizens to and from West African countries had been made easier without the citizen applying for visas. Persons from neighboring countries are given up to 90 days of

stay after which they will need to produce resident permits.

### 3.2 Challenges to International Student Mobility

International student mobility could be brain drain. In providing the necessary motivating infrastructures and financial support to enhance internationalisation of higher educational institutions, there is the issue of students failing to return to their home countries. The international student should be encouraged to return to his/her home nation by putting appropriate clauses in Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs). The students should be adequately bonded with guarantors who should pay the 'cost-recovery' fees in the event that they break the bond. Within the protocol of South-South cooperation of which Ghana is a member,

appropriate immigration procedures should be put in place to compel every international student to return to his/her home nation on completion of his/her programme. While there are no readily available statistics, it is common knowledge that a good number of students sent abroad by Ghanaian universities have not returned after the completion of their programmes.

The infrastructural capacities of the tertiary institutions in Ghana should be improved. Mobility of international students within the South-South could be increased at the expense of the South-North if tertiary institutions of the South would make pragmatic efforts to improve upon their physical infrastructure. A study done on the five foreign students in the Mining Engineering Department, UMaT, to find out the factors that motivated them to come to Ghana for their study, provides some interesting revelations. The results are shown in Table 1 in order of priority.

**Table 1: Responses from students on motivating factors for studying in Ghana**

SN	FACTOR	ORDER OF PRIORITY
1	Immigration procedure	1
2	Proximity to home country	2
3	Socio-cultural similarity	3
4	Fees (low)	4
5	Infrastructural capacity	5

Sources: Study/Field Data, 2013

## **CONCLUSIONS**

- One of the reasons for the low level of mobility of students to the South-South countries is due to weak marketing and recruitment efforts by states and institutions.
- Some students go to some foreign institutions because of socio-cultural or historical links. The Southern states are definitely socio-culturally more related and this comparative advantage can be exploited.
- Language may be a 'mobility barrier'. Southern states may consider providing tuition in more than one official language of instruction.
- Inadequate infra structural capacity constitutes one factor that drives international student to the Northern states
- Mobility of students across borders is affected by recognition of qualifications (issues on equivalences of qualification)
- International student mobility within the South-South can be intensified if financial packages are made available (in the form of scholarships, bursaries, etc) to foreign students.
- Hash immigration procedures seriously impede the movement of international students. Southern states can utilize their regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the African Union (AU) to accelerate this process.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- There should be vigorous and conscious efforts by individual states and institutions to inform member states of the South-South Cooperation of their tertiary educational facilities and capacities.
- The Southern states will have to develop an action strategy to successfully market their advantages.
- Admission requirements in host institutions should be flexible, with the possibility of providing top-up courses when necessary.
- There should be effective cooperation between accreditation authorities of Southern states to facilitate the determination of equivalences of qualifications.
- Problems related to parity of entry qualifications can be minimized by strong linkages of certification authorities within the South-South relationship. This can be done possibly by some conventions similar to the Lisbon Recognition Convention that was developed by the Council of Europe together with the UNESCO. It is the key legal instrument for recognition of qualifications across Europe
- Southern nations should consider internationalization of higher education as 'export service' that can yield substantial foreign

exchange within the protocol of South-South Cooperation.

- Institutions should collaborate under pragmatic Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) that will promote student exchange programmes.
- Southern states should endeavor to provide more funding for infrastructural development in higher education to attract students from within the South-South cooperation.

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