

The Internationalisation Mission in Jamaican Higher Education System

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Internationalisation of higher education in Jamaica is not an immediate aim within itself, but rather, an economic necessity to meet the commercial and administrative expenses of these institutions, while enhancing their visibility and competitiveness. Jamaica is home to 17 public universities and colleges which fall within the remit of the Tertiary Unit under the Ministry of Education (MoE). However, the financial capacity of the MoE to finance the operations of higher education institutions is being stymied by an attenuating Jamaican economy which sees the budgetary allocation for education being reduced annually. For example, in the 2010/2011 fiscal year, the Jamaican government reduced the overall education subsidy to 13% with the portion for higher education further reduced to 17% in the same year (PIOJ, 2010) and 11% in 2012/2013 (Thwaites, 2013). Correspondingly, the Ministry's shift in financial support to enhance education at the early childhood, primary and secondary levels, and vocational training institutions, has further affected the economic capacity of these institutions to operate effectively and efficiently. In response, senior administrators of some tertiary institutions have sought alternate means of funding their operational expenses while maintaining institutional effectiveness. A popular method employed, particularly among universities and some colleges, is the introduction of internationalising activities.

Van der Wande (1997) describes internationalisation as "any systematic, sustained efforts aimed at making higher education responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalization of societies, economy, and labour markets" (p. 19). Two challenges being experienced in Jamaica are (1) competition from offshore institutions operating in Jamaica as facilitated by the General Agreement on Trades and Services (GATS) to which Jamaica is a signatory and (2) funding for higher education caused in part by debt servicing to loan agents such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In spotlighting the initiatives implemented by some higher education institutions in response to these challenges, the various elements of Qiang's (2003) *activities approach* to internationalisation is most evident, especially the deliberate attempt to attract more full-fee paying international students. Accommodations such as an international students' office staffed by trained personnel are usually put in place in an attempt to better facilitate individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Likewise, some tertiary institutions offer exchange and study abroad programmes for both faculty and students as a means of becoming more visible and competitive.

The author does not believe Jamaica is optimizing the profits that can be accrued from being a signatory to GATS, an agreement which enables higher education to be treated as a tradable commodity. One of the primary reasons is that Jamaica does not have an education policy for higher learning (Foster-Allen, 2007). Were a policy to be implemented to guide the national enactment of an internationalisation agenda, the opportunities presented by being a signatory to this trans-national trade in educational service could be enhanced on a national scale. Therefore, rather than the ad hoc implementation of internationalising activities by individual institutions, as is the current practice, a national policy would create equal opportunities for all post-secondary institutions to become internationalised while facilitating the commercial viability of most, if not all, tertiary institutions in the island. A national policy would also enable Jamaica to take advantage of the provisions of GATS and optimize the visibility and competitiveness of its higher education institutions primarily through increasing their capacity – infrastructure (online presence and physical facility), institutional cultures, faculty and staff, services, and programmes – to attract and retain local, regional, and international students.

While the internationalising activities are not the only significant developments taking place in Jamaican higher education institutions, the author believes internationalisation is an important subject which is worth further exploration in an effort to have a more sustained and formal approach which will enable the country to take advantage of the opportunities presented at this time.

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