

# The Disjuncture Between Private Higher Education and Internationalisation

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## **Abstract**

This article examines how the inherent characteristics of private higher education institutions can impinge on the level and magnitude of their internationalisation efforts. It argues that although their current profiles may disadvantage them in the internationalisation process, which often favours strong institutions from the outset, private higher education institutions can become active players in the international arena by identifying their niche, augmenting their capacity and increasing their attractiveness. Government higher education policy should also be geared towards enhancing public and private higher education institutions' participation in the internationalisation process.

**Key words:** Internationalisation, private higher education institutions, private higher education, centre-periphery, symbolic capital

Cet article examine comment les caractéristiques inhérentes aux institutions privées d'enseignement supérieur peuvent empiéter sur le niveau et l'ampleur de leur efforts d'internationalisation. Il affirme que, bien que leur profil actuel puisse peut-être les désavantager dans le processus d'internationalisation, lequel privilégie souvent les grandes institutions au début, ces institutions peuvent devenir des acteurs actifs sur la scène internationale en identifiant leur niche, en augmentant leur capacité et leur attractivité. Les politiques de l'Enseignement supérieur des gouvernements devraient aussi être orientées vers l'amélioration de la participation des institutions publiques et privées d'Enseignement supérieur dans le processus d'internationalisation.

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### Introduction

Driven by a dynamic interplay of political, economic, and academic rationales, internationalisation continues to attract attention at global, national, and institutional levels (Altbach and Knight, 2007; de Wit, 2009; de Wit et al., 2015). The growing importance of internationalisation over the past few decades has been fuelled by a variety of factors that include globalisation of the labour market, increasing mobility of students across the globe, increased research and teaching cooperation among higher education institutions (HEIs), and the commercialisation of higher education (HE) (de Wit, 2009; Jiang, 2008; Kreber, 2009; Sorensen, 2009). Indeed, internationalisation has become such a key area of engagement for HEIs that its neglect could threaten institutional stature, credence, and even existence (Tamrat and Teferra, 2018). Such realities are not only prompting institutions to become part of the evolving global internationalisation movement but are also influencing the type and magnitude of internationalisation activities undertaken at various levels, in varying degrees and geographical contexts. Even in developing regions like Africa, internationalisation is assuming an indispensable role in addressing the overarching issues and challenges that HEIs are constantly grappling with.

As noted by Stensaker et al. (2008), research on internationalisation should move from treating it as a policy and strategic phenomenon to studying how HEIs perceive and adapt to initiatives, developments and policies. Analysing the impact of contexts and institutions in their internationalisation efforts is thus not only an important prerequisite for understanding, influencing, and supporting the process, but is also useful for future policy making that should be guided by the diverse needs of HE (Egron-Polak and Marmolejo, 2017; Lo, 2009; Stensaker et al., 2008). Furthermore, focusing on internationalisation at the institutional level offers advantages such as the opportunity to evaluate policy effectiveness and create a more holistic picture of this phenomenon (Stensaker et al., 2008), apart from providing an interesting array of observations that can inform the field beyond the general assumption of the need to internationalise. Despite overwhelming interest in internationalisation of higher education (IHE), there is a paucity of research on the salient features that facilitate or deter its course in the context of countries with disparate levels of economic development, particularly at the level of institutions that may have little to offer in terms of participating in the international arena (Gerhards et al., 2018).

Against the above backdrop, this article explores the disjuncture between private higher education (PHE) and internationalisation which is widely promoted as an important goal for HEIs.

The article is structured in three parts. Part I establishes the context by offering an overview of the nature of PHE while Part II outlines the benefits and demands of internationalisation. Part III explores whether and how the characteristic features of PHEIs can enhance or deter the process of institutional internationalisation and the implications thereof, followed by a conclusion.

### Context

Understanding the interface between PHE and internationalisation calls for an examination of the nature of each phenomenon and their areas of alignment and divergence.

The PHE sector comprises various types of institutions and is hence very difficult to generalise about. The three major types of PHEIs identified in the extant literature are usually labelled *identity*, *elite* and *semi-elite*, and *nonelite institutions* (Levy, 2009; Altbach et al., 2010).

Identity institutions mainly comprise religious PHEIs that were the earliest types of the private HE enterprise, or gender/ethnic-based institutions. These are mostly non-profit organisations. Elite PHEIs are rare at global level, except in the United States (US) HE system which accommodates top tier universities known for their quality and reputation. The PHE sector is assumed to be better represented in the semi-elite group which is growing steadily in many parts of the world. Non-elite PHEIs comprise different groups of institutions that include large corporate run universities, a small number of family owned and operated PHEIs, and institutions in the Global North that have cross-border partnerships with the private sector in developing countries to operate as private enterprises (Altbach et al., 2010).

Non-elite or “demand absorbing PHEIs” constitute the fastest growing segment and the largest private sector across the world. While some of these institutions “carry the mantra of semi elite institutions”, the majority of them are considered to be of a dubious nature (Levy, 2006, 2009; Altbach et al., 2010). This article mainly considers demand absorbing PHEIs, although some of the observations might include other types. Among the many inherent characteristics of PHEIs that can enhance or deter their internationalisation efforts we examine the most common ones below.

### Novelty, Legitimacy and Public Policy

PHEIs confront a plethora of challenges that emanate from their novelty within the HE sector. It takes a considerable amount of time for any institution to

achieve improved status and academic reputation (Altbach, 2016). The acceptability of PHEIs is highly constrained in countries where the role of providing HE has been exclusively left to the public sector either for reasons of tradition or prescription (Levy, 2013). Often associated with business and profit, the very idea of private has been suspect in many contexts, and is sometimes regarded as anathema to national and public interests. The operational efficiency and acceptance of these institutions are also challenged by the excessive profit motive and illegal behaviour of rogue providers that earn the sector bad name.

Public policy on PHE also impacts the sector's image and growth. Government's posture on access to public funds, campus infrastructure, reduction or exemption from customs duties and assistance with planning requirements at the local level (Bjarnason et al., 2009) can enhance or hinder PHEIs' reputation and acceptability. In some cases, government authorities may mistrust private institutions whose controversial features can at times result in restrictive regulations (Levy, 2003; Bjarnason et al., 2009; Kinser, 2013; Shah and Nair, 2016). Partnering with such institutions will thus always be shrouded in suspicion, restricting the type and level of activities that they may wish to undertake.

### **Prestige and Quality of Teaching**

Prestige is an important consideration taken into account by students, families and employers in relation to institutional and programme choice (Marginson, 2006). With the exception of those in the US, Japan and some Latin American countries, most HE systems across the globe are not known for elite PHEIs that are defined by the prestige of their mission and operations (Altbach et al., 2010). Elite institutions face few challenges in terms of promoting their status which often facilitates institutional undertakings.

Despite their tremendous growth, PHEIs in most parts of the world have not achieved the kind of status that bolsters HEIs' bargaining power. Within their own national territories, PHEIs are often regarded less favourably than their public counterparts and the quality of their programmes, students and faculty, and support systems are questioned. Furthermore, it is assumed that their academic standards do not meet accepted criteria. Faculty are dominated by part-time employees with lower academic credentials; and their libraries and laboratories are meagre (Bernasconi, 2003; Wleugel et al., 2011; Altbach, 2016). In some systems, it is assumed that cooperating with PHEIs will extend their reputation for mediocrity to partner institutions and dilute the quality of HE (Bjarnesen et al., 2009).

### **Resources and Facilities**

At the level of individual institutions, global capacity and success may depend on the acquisition of infrastructure, financial and physical resources, and organisational and regulatory mechanisms, including the internal culture and

rhetoric, systems and policies of institutional and academic leaders (Marginson and Sawir, 2006).

In many countries, PHEIs are less resourced than government funded public institutions. Their major source of funding is tuition fees, with limited income from subsidies from sponsoring organisations, donations, gifts and endowments (Bjarnason et al., 2009; Levy, 2013; Altbach, 2016). In contexts where private providers operate without the backing of the government, a degree of financial uncertainty is always expected (Shah and Nair, 2016). Financial limitations usually manifest in inadequate infrastructure, inability to pay qualified personnel, and limited institutional growth which can hinder an institution's viability and internationalisation efforts. Challenges relating to resources and funding can negatively impact the execution of their strategic and operational goals and influence the operation and growth of the entire sector (Raanan, 2009; Pachuaashvili, 2011; Wleugel et al., 2011).

### **Research Engagement**

With the exception of elite and semi-elite PHEIs, which are comparatively few in number, most PHEIs focus on offering marketable programmes and have little interest in research. Research is often an expensive and time-consuming enterprise that is beyond the reach of small PHEIs. This prevents them from joining networks, and securing the financial gains and reputation that research offers.

### **Benefits and Demands of Internationalisation**

Given the surge in HE enrolment in emerging economies and low-income countries, the way the sector grows in these parts of the world is thought to have implications for the growth of internationalisation (Polak and Marmolejo, 2017). Universities in both the developed and developing worlds have shown keen interest in internationalisation and there are significant parallels in terms of internationalisation guiding HE (reform) discourses, and its influence on policy and planning (Singh, 2010; Teichler, 2004). However, while the demands of internationalisation can be applied to all HEIs, its benefits could differ from one context to another. The rhetoric of internationalisation presents global engagement as a two-way street premised on mutual cultural respect, but the reality is completely different (Marginson, 2006) as the global HE environment is not a level playing field (Marginson and Sawir, 2006).

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HEIs pursue internationalisation for a variety of reasons, including the quest for an international profile and reputation; quality enhancement; student and staff development; alternative income generation; networks and strategic alliances; research; and knowledge production (Knight, 2004, 2008; Teferra and Knight, 2008; Altbach and Knight, 2007; Stella, 2007). Related gains may

include cross-cultural linkages, transfer of knowledge and technology, effective systems of accountability, shared benchmarks, and standards for ethics and quality (Altbach et al., 2010; Tilak, 2007).

Camouflaged by the long list of advantages attributed to it, IHE is often presented, either naively or otherwise, as a neutral space that can be readily exploited and benefits all parties involved. However, responding to the incessant calls for internationalisation has not always been easy since such efforts are inextricably linked to a multitude of factors that include why, with who, how, at what expense and with what output internationalisation occurs (Tamrat, 2019). This brings us to the notion of the centre-periphery dichotomy which offers a useful framework within which to analyse internationalisation at the level of institutions.

The hierarchical ordering of the global academic system into centres and peripheries has become common discourse within HE in the past few decades. This classification could be crucial in examining how internationalisation should be conceived, especially in terms of realising its multifarious dimensions and benefits. Apart from unveiling the unequal and inequitable relationships that exist between countries and institutions, this concept is a useful framework to analyse how internationalisation can create winners and losers as a result of the vast differences in “the starting blocks, and the terrain on which it takes place” (Egroun-Polak and Marmolejo, 2017). The centre-periphery divide is most apparent in areas such as resources; reputation; geographic distribution of research and scientific publications; citation patterns; university rankings and the distribution of prestigious awards (Altbach et al., 2014).

At the level of motives for internationalisation, developing countries and their institutions are mainly driven by academic as opposed to the economic rationales that appear to dominate the developed world (Altbach and Knight, 2007; Knight, 2007; Knight and de Wit, 1997; Kreber, 2009; Stensaker et al., 2008). A related observation is the nature of internationalisation promoted by institutions in both worlds. Over the past few decades, the approach of most universities in the Global North has shifted from a cooperative to a more competitive stance, while those in the developing world have not yet

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abandoned their cooperative posture (de Wit, 2009). These differences have wider implications in terms of the internationalisation efforts envisaged or pursued at national and institutional levels.

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At times, the very act of internationalising in developing countries or their universities is fraught with the danger of perpetuating the long-standing asymmetries of power between the Global North and the Global South by

camouflaging deep inequalities and negative impacts (Altbach et al., 2010; Jiang, 2008; Singh, 2010; Stensaker et al., 2008).

**The Disjuncture Between PHE and Internationalisation** In many contexts, internationalisation has shifted from being a marginal activity to a mainstream operation requiring many HEIs not only to be attentive to national priorities and local needs, but also to adjust in order to operate in an international setting (Guri-Rosenblit, 2015).

In general, PHEIs have strong motivations for internationalising as compared to their public counterparts. Arguably, no other group of institutions may benefit from IHE more than the PHE sector. The benefits of internationalisation to this sector include opportunities such as knowledge and technology transfer, resource acquisition and income generation through international contacts, and partnerships and affiliations. Internationalisation enables domestic branding and marketing of institutions, and allows them to change or sharpen their academic stature and to develop new, extensive partnerships that can protect them from domestic and international competition (Stensaker et al., 2008, p. 8). Furthermore, PHEIs can achieve improved credibility and reputation through the internationalisation process, which is a critical component of the sector’s drive for legitimacy and sustainability. In this sense, IHE may provide more benefits to private than public HEIs that are assumed to have more legitimacy, capacity and resources.

However, experience shows that internationalisation does not readily avail itself to all institutions that wish to pursue it. Fulfilling such ambitions depends on many factors, such as the nature of the institution, who it wishes to partner with, for what purpose and the resources at its disposal that often determine the level and magnitude of engagement. According to Altbach (2014), successful global engagement requires a careful assessment of the specific realities of an institution and the goals it seeks to achieve. Other scholars also argue that the level and magnitude of internationalisation exercised at institutional level is affected by a gamut of factors ranging from institutional characteristics, to geography, history, size, and tradition (Stensaker, 2008; Bartell, 2003). Hence, any form of internationalisation undertaken at institutional level can be

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influenced by the answers to many questions that need to be asked a priori. Klemencic (2017, p. 105) identifies the following critical questions that should be answered before institutions embark on any form of internationalisation:

- i. Why should we develop institutional cooperation and what can we gain from it? What can we offer our partners? What are the potential risks of such cooperative arrangements?
- ii. Who can be our preferred partners? Who can help us develop? Whom can we help develop? With whom do we have an affinity or common interests, mission and purposes?
- iii. What type of international cooperative arrangement in terms of scope and depth makes most sense for us?

- iv. How much will such an arrangement cost? What and how many resources will we need to invest in the cooperation?

### Resources and Infrastructure

As noted earlier, a lack of resources can slow down or derail institutional growth and ambition. The long-established wealth of institutions in the Global North enables them to maintain leadership in all aspects of academic work, form relationships with other institutions and to cement their centrality through a combination of wealth, resources, and position in ways that are difficult, if not impossible, for universities elsewhere to emulate (Altbach, 2003). Due to the comparative advantage of budget, resources, and talent, universities in the Global North continue to exert disproportionate influence and gain more from the many aspects of internationalisation (Altbach et al., 2009; Singh, 2010; Tilak, 2007). In contrast, countries in the peripheries have few selling points in terms of talent, international networks, and attraction as international destinations. As noted by Klemencic, while rich resources may not always be necessary for cooperation agreements, asymmetry in resources or reputation decisively impacts the purposes and the terms of planned partnerships (2017, p. 104).

### Student and Staff Mobility

The mobility of students and faculty is often affected by institutions' status and reputation. Not only do prestigious universities attract more students and talent, but they also award qualifications that are associated with high returns for those who can convert them into other forms of capital or advantages (Gerhards et al., 2018). Studies in different contexts show that university-specific or institutional social capital can have a significant impact on graduates' early labour market destination and success (Lee and Brinton, 1996; Gerber and Cheung, 2008). Findlay et al.'s (2011) research on UK international students found that students choose institutions based on the critical differentiating

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influence they might have later in life.

Given their limited resources and capacity, it is difficult to contemplate how PHEIs could participate in both inbound and outbound staff and student mobility. For example, few African PHEIs attract students and scholars from the region and fewer still from overseas (Teferra and Knight, 2008, p. 53). It would seem that, compared to profit-seeking small institutions, only non-profit religious private institutions demonstrate better participation in student and staff mobility which is considered as the most popular form of internationalisation.

### Institutional and Programme Mobility

Institutional and programme mobility from the developed to the developing world continues to attract research interest within the broader field of HE and internationalisation, while the movement of programmes and institutions within the developing world remains little studied (Tamrat, 2018).

Recent developments in many regions show that the growth of transnational higher education (TNHE) has been fostered by privatisation policies and tendencies. In this evolving process, the increasing role of PHEIs as vehicles of TNHE is becoming more evident. For instance, the selling points of TNHE institutions, including joint degree programmes, branch campuses, and international outposts in countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), are mainly aimed at attracting the best universities in the world. Government invitations to leading universities and the setting up of foundations and educational free zones dedicated to this purpose in the Arab world are typical examples that demonstrate the private sector's active involvement in TNHE provision (Tamrat, 2020).

Although it is often assumed that a country needs a strong local HE sector to promote TNHE (Mohamedbhai, 2013), this new modality also appears to be growing in contexts that do not satisfy this requirement. Transnational higher education also appears to be found in areas where PHEIs are available, not because of their internal strength but rather due to their commercial intent and readiness to export and import TNHE for financial gain. South Africa is an example of TNHE providers opening branch campuses in collaboration with local private institutions, even though this has occurred within the context of the strict regulatory framework introduced at the end of the 1990s (Naidoo, 2009). Prior to such regulation, the number of institutions offering such programmes was growing at a tremendous rate.

There are also instances where PHEIs have become destinations for students who have few opportunities to study in their own country due to public universities' capacity limitations. For instance, like their public counterparts,

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Ghana's private universities accommodate tens of thousands of foreign students from African, Asian, European and North American countries (Daily Guide, 2013; Graphic Online, 2014). It is estimated that there are more than 70,000 Nigerian students in Ghana, making up two-thirds of international students. Kenya draws a substantial number of international students from more than 60 nations across the world through the participation of public and especially non-profit (religious) private institutions (PIE News, 2017). In Uganda, the number of international students rose from 3,000 in 2004 to about 16,000 in 2010. In addition to attracting a limited number of students from the foreign community residing in the capital, Ethiopian PHEIs are attracting thousands of self-financing refugees from Eritrea who live outside refugee camps (Tamrat and Dermas, 2019).

There are also instances where private institutions of limited stature have been involved in institutional and programme mobility outside their national territories to provide HE services. Somalia currently hosts PHEIs that have moved from neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia to provide tertiary education (Tamrat, 2019a). However, grave concerns have been expressed about the general quality of the education they offer and their excessive focus on commercialisation (Tamrat, 2019a).

### **International Cooperation and Research Engagement**

Traditionally, research has been regarded as a primary proxy for the quality of a HE system. Academic research also plays an important role in relation to the internationalisation efforts of many institutions (de Wit, 2009). While all HEIs may wish to engage in knowledge creation and dissemination, there is tremendous variety in the attention and priority given to this mission across institutions.

In most parts of the world outside the US and Japan, where non-profit private institutions have a higher profile, research is mainly undertaken at public and state supported institutions. Despite increasing interest in research in many developing countries, actual engagement has been very slow due to the resource intensive nature of this undertaking, the lack of facilities and talented professors and related factors. While a small number of non-profit private universities have succeeded in building research capacity to raise their status and contribute broadly to research, the lack of a research culture is one of the major weaknesses of PHEIs in many parts of the world (Bernasconi, 2003; Levy, 2003; Altbach and Levy, 2005; Altbach, 2016). Compared to public HEIs, PHEIs are less involved in knowledge creation, international knowledge networks and innovation. The majority of PHEIs provide training and credentials in their areas of expertise, but offer limited attraction in internationalisation activities such as research cooperation, research staff exchange and joint publications which do not produce quick profits (Altbach, 2009, 2016). Teaching is unequivocally the core business of these institutions, which do not have the resources to build a major research effort (Marginson, 2006). This tradition and inherent feature of PHEIs has implications in terms of exploiting research as one of the most common means of internationalising a HE system, possibly limiting their participation. As noted by Trondal (2008),

variation in internationalisation of university research can be systematically associated with the organisational and institutional traits of universities.

### **Symbolic Capital and Reputation**

Status and reputation can serve as the major selling points of an institution. As has been shown, universities in the Global North have an unshakable advantage over countries and institutions in the less developed world in terms of scientific publications; citation patterns and translations; university rankings; the distribution of prestigious awards; the flow of funds; and attracting international students and scholars (Altbach et al., 2014; Gerhard et al., 2018), all of which contribute to their prestige and reputation. This reality continues to be a source of polarity and distinction among institutions of different stature.

Based on Bourdeau's notion of economic, cultural, social and symbolic capital, Marginson (2006) identifies three tiers of HEIs on the basis of their status, namely, elite research universities, aspirant research universities, and teaching-focused universities (or other). Marginson (2008) further argues that the global polar of HE lies between top-tier universities at one end and institutions solely focused on revenue and market share at the other, with a range of institutions in intermediate positions.

It can be seen that, based on the polar field of global HE with the nine stages of institutional profile he proposes, Marginson (2008) places PHEIs at the bottom of his classification. Gerhards et al. (2018) similarly argue that the reputation hierarchy of the global academic system, which manifests in the distribution of symbolic capital across countries and universities, influences doctoral students' international mobility opportunities. Gerhards et al. (2018) assert that the global academic system is hierarchically structured, with a centre, a semi-periphery and a periphery. They state that doctoral applicants from the centre receive more positive and personal feedback than other applicants, pointing to the impact of national scientific reputation or symbolic capital. Naidoo's (2004) hierarchical classification of the South African HE system consists of three strata, namely, dominant (white English-medium universities that were set up during the colonial era), intermediate (Afrikaans-medium universities, also designated white, set up by the Afrikaans community during the Anglo Boer War) and subordinate (poorly-resourced universities that offer low levels of study and have almost no research infrastructure).

Type	Description	Example Institutions/Nations
<b>1. The 'Global Super league':</b>	Much of the American doctoral sector and a few high prestige universities in the UK. Prestige derived from stellar research reputation and global power of degrees.	Harvard U. Cambridge, etc.
<b>2a Less global doctoral universities</b>	Global prestige and some research. Marginal foreign engagements and cross-border students.	Some US state universities
<b>2b Elite non-US national research universities with strong cross-border roles, prestige-driven non-profit research universities at national level.</b>	Global presence in research. Cross-border students, some on for-profit basis.	U Sydney, U of Warwick
<b>3. Elite and globally focused for-profit</b>	Prestigious full for-profit institutions operating globally. Largely teaching focused with some research. National exclusivity and global power create autonomy. Very small group.	Indian IITx, IMs
<b>4a Nationally-bound elite research universities</b>	Prestigious providers in one nation. Research intensive, varying global research roles. Inward looking. Nationally competitive with segment 2b not 1.	U Buenos Aires, many in Europe and Japan
<b>4b Teaching-focused export universities</b>	Lesser status non-profit universities. Commercial players in global market. Lower cost/quality foreign education at scale. May have a minor research role.	Oxford Brookes, U Central Queensland
<b>5 Teaching-focused national universities</b>	Largely teaching-focused institutions. Marginally global in research and/or crossborder teaching.	Most Malaysian public universities, some Canadian community colleges, etc.
<b>6 Less prestigious teaching only global forprofit</b>	Fully commercial operators actively building export markets. Low cost mass production. No research.	U Phoenix, DeVry Various global e-Us
<b>7 Non-profit without global agendas</b>	Teaching-focused, local demand orientation. No cross-border role.	Largest group, especially in importing nations
<b>8 For-profit with minor global functions</b>	Commercial operators focused on local market with some cross-border students.	Some private industry training in Australia

9 For-profit without global agendas	Local degree mill, no cross-border students. Large category in some nations.	Brazil, Philippines
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Institutions' status can have a circular effect in forging valuable partnerships along the lines of various internationalisation activities such as academic mobility, student attraction, research engagement, TNHE and the like. Klemencic notes that,

Attracting foreign students, researchers and teaching staff increases selectivity and contributes to the quality of teaching and research. Such concentration of talent lends prestige to the institutions, national systems and communities where they are located. It also helps to reproduce prestige, because talent attracts more talent and, in turn financial resources (2017, p. 100).

Such distinctions have implications in terms of maximising or hindering the benefits of internationalisation at the level of both nations and institutions. While PHEIs may wish to become part of the IHE arena and develop strategies towards this end, their inherent characteristics can hold them back or at least pose a formidable challenge. Taking advantage of internationalisation will thus be an uphill battle, if not an impossible task, for many of these institutions since they are often shunned by the best teachers and students, let alone by foreign partners and networks.

#### Where PHE Fares Better

The foregoing discussion seems to paint a grim picture of the PHE reality that disadvantages institutions in terms of harnessing the benefits of internationalisation. However, elite and semi-elite PHEIs have been actively involved in various internationalisation undertakings and even small and resource strained PHEIs have characteristics that could enhance their participation in the international arena.

Big or small, successful PHEIs exhibit unique institutional qualities that offer them some advantage over public institutions. Private institutions are generally considered to be nimbler than their public counterparts as a result of their internal culture and aspirations (Bjarnason et al., 2009). Logically, there is a social and economic compulsion for PHEIs to perform better since without such drivers, they may be doomed to failure. While public institutions are known to be rigid and bureaucratic in handling their affairs and addressing student needs, successful PHEIs are associated with dynamism, operational efficiency and flexibility. Efforts such as minimising institutional spending; strategic planning and marketing; vigorous contact with employers; better job-placement efforts; student counselling; remediation opportunities; and increased accountability of staff are PHEIs' major responses to these social and economic compulsions (Levy, 2003; Varghese, 2006). These characteristics could serve as major sources of strength or niches in any form of engagement the PHE sector desires, including internationalisation.

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The entrepreneurial nature of PHEIs, their innovative and business orientation and the manner in which they organise themselves could be another source of attraction that might contribute to internationalisation efforts and internal strategies towards this end. PHEIs have the potential to infuse a competitive element in a given system due to their dynamic and entrepreneurial features (Fehnel, 2006). Despite being perceived to the contrary, successful PHEIs are known for their strong commitment to community outreach programmes that include providing free professional services, contributions to charities, participation in local infrastructural projects, etc. (Omuta, 2010) which could also contribute to the furtherance of their internationalisation activities.

In general, the fact that PHEIs are flexible, less bureaucratic and fast decision-makers is an area of strength that can easily be exploited. Apart from helping them to operate efficiently, these positive attributes could be the major sources of attraction in any form of institutional engagement, including internationalisation.

#### Conclusion: Towards Improved Internationalisation

There is increasing acknowledgement that internationalisation should be comprehensive and inclusive (Hans et al., 2015). The recent literature on the subject similarly argues that internationalisation should not always emanate

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from the same cluster of countries or the same type of institutions but should accommodate the perspectives and voices of various players that have received limited or no attention in the internationalisation arena thus far (Egroun-Polak and Marmolejo, 2017). This may appear to be easier said than done since inequalities and the asymmetrical nature of relationships among partnering institutions will remain serious challenges in the types and magnitude of internationalisation efforts.

It is evident that institutional engagement in internationalisation is mediated by a variety of factors. For instance, infrastructural limitations, a poor reputation, a lack of qualified staff, hyper commercialism and poor research performance can render PHEIs less attractive when it comes to engaging in the various forms of internationalisation. This is despite the fact that this route partly holds the key to addressing the deficiencies of PHEIs, building their capacity and improving their image. It calls for a fundamental shift in the operation of HE systems, as well as individual HEIs that need to examine their goals and efforts in the specific context of the structure and contextual setting of their operations (Guri-Rosenbolt, 2015).

In light of the above, it can be argued that private institutions' effective engagement at the global level can only come about through a thorough examination of themselves, their identity, capacity and unique features. PHEIs need to explore their relative strengths and weaknesses, clearly define their



goals in relation to internationalisation, identify their niche and marshal their efforts towards areas where they feel they can be successful. Building an acceptable level of legitimacy by demonstrating effectiveness through institutional outcomes and activities could enable PHEIs to gain greater public recognition and reputation, which would, in turn, enhance their internationalisation efforts. They should also be aware that their efforts to internationalise are heavily influenced not only by how much they improve their institutional stature but also by the extent to which they deliver on their promises and meet partner expectations as they engage in the internationalisation process.

In order to achieve these goals, PHEIs should direct their efforts towards addressing the lack of coherent and balanced policies and towards institutional development and internationalisation (Tamrat, 2017; Tamrat and Teferra, 2018). Pursuing internationalisation requires an integrated approach that seeks to address both its benefits and challenges on a long-term basis. This would not only help PHEIs to address their major weaknesses but also to plan for the future and take advantage of the specific benefits they can harness by actively engaging in the internationalisation process.

It should also be noted that the limitations of the PHE sector cannot be solely explained by the immense challenges these institutions are facing. Unlike public institutions, surmounting the multitude of challenges they confront, retaining credibility, and sustaining growth in the required direction requires government assistance (Tamrat, 2017; Tamrat and Teferra 2018). Governments should support the development of the PHE sector through an enabling legislative environment and by embracing this sector as a complementary partner in the overall IHE scheme envisaged at national level. This would enable PHEIs to become viable partners that attract foreign partners as is the case with public institutions. It requires a review of the roles and responsibilities of HEIs within national borders and beyond in terms of their participation in international collaborative ventures (Guri-Rosenbolt, 2015). While PHEIs are urged to play their part, governments should not overlook the participation of the PHE sector at a time when the focus is on encouraging the increasing involvement of public institutions in internationalisation efforts.

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