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International development higher education: Looking from the past, looking to the future

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ABSTRACT

International development higher education is a distinct space in a vibrant and growing field of higher education studies. This paper examines international development higher education scholarship to highlight its thematic, disciplinary, methodological, and analytical eclecticism. At the heart of international development higher education is the assumption that the world can be made better by the human effort invested in higher education. This paper offers a novel conceptualisation of the ways in which higher education's contributions to development can be understood. The bulk of the existing literature essentialises higher education's role in the advancement of human capital and the modernisation of societies. In contrast, anti-essentialist understandings can include various conceptualisations of how higher education can contribute to the realisation of human rights and capabilities to pursue the freedoms people value. A holistic understanding of university contributions to development would encompass all of the essentialist and anti-essentialist, as well as post-foundationalist ways of looking at this important but empirically elusive link. The paper suggests to delink development from 'international' and reframe development as 'glonacal', thus allowing scholars and practitioners to be less bound by nation-state borders, and more conscious of the local nuance and the global connectedness.

KEYWORDS

higher education;
international development;
international development
higher education

Introduction

Throughout the history of humankind, institutions of higher learning have contributed to society by educating individuals and generating achievements in sciences and humanities. Long after the establishment of the first such institutions in Athens, Alexandria, ancient China and India, the first western-style universities emerged in medieval Europe. These were exclusive institutions that supported the creation and transmission of knowledge across Europe and beyond. The expansion of higher education since the nineteenth century, and in particular in the last few decades, has made the developmental potential of higher education more visible.

Higher education is a vibrant and growing field of studies that examines various aspects of educating 220 million students in 20,000 higher education institutions globally (WHED, 2021; World Bank, 2021). The literature in the field explains and explores teaching and

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learning practices within higher education as well as the ways in which higher education systems have been shaped and perpetuated by the socio-economic and political realities, the ways in which higher education has influenced development of societies, and the ways in which future transformations of higher education can be imagined.

Higher education scholarship is explicitly concerned with 'international'. When used in relation to higher education, the term 'international' can denote the following three distinct albeit interrelated phenomena: international development, globalisation of higher education, and internationalisation of higher education. This paper is concerned with the first phenomenon, i.e. the literature in international development higher education. This is the literature where higher education intersects with international development.

Starting from the mid twentieth century, a series of ideas and institutions emerged in the Global North on how the Global North could bring more development to the Global South. Very little attention used to be dedicated to education in the Global South up until the post-WWII period when United Nations institutions and multilateral development banks were established. That was the time when the field of international development emerged. The term 'international development' as such is a discursive product of that period.

A foundational assumption of the scholarship in international development higher education is that education generates clear benefits for society. Society is defined here as either the public (as in 'public good' or 'common good') or as a collection of individuals (as in 'private good'). Traditionally, international development higher education scholarship has focused on meliorism, sometimes with an implicit purpose of improving 'the other'.¹ By focusing on meliorism and being underpinned by the assumption that higher education can support development, international development higher education might have become one of the most normative spaces in higher education studies. It is also a space that is becoming broader at its base. In the last two decades or so, the number and range of research studies by authors from the Global South has been expanding (Davidson et al., 2020; Lovakov & Yudkevich, 2020).

This paper starts with an examination of international development higher education scholarship to highlight its thematic, disciplinary, methodological, and analytical eclecticism. This is followed by an overview of the historical trends of international development funding for higher education. Subsequently, the paper offers a conceptual delineation between foundationalist and post-foundationalist approaches to international development higher education. With the foundationalist approach, essentialist and anti-essentialist understandings are differentiated. The final section of the paper charts future directions of research and asks if the idea of international development has become obsolete.

Eclecticism of international development higher education

International development higher education revolves around explaining and exploring links between higher education and international development. The main assumption and the key argument of this body of literature is that higher education has been a catalyst for international development (Boni & Walker, 2016; Castells, 1994; Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021; Chankseliani et al., 2021; Howell et al., 2020; McCowan, 2016, 2019; Oketch et al., 2014; Owens, 2017). This is achieved through improving human capital and contributing to the following domains of human life: economic development, poverty alleviation, innovation/R&D, work/graduate employability, good health/well-being, gender equality, ecology/natural environment, political culture/democratisation, and peaceful and just societies/good

governance. Across these main themes, there are cross-cutting themes of higher education funding, capacity development, access, knowledge production/knowledge legitimisation/decolonisation/politics of knowledge, and decolonising/humanising pedagogies (Chankseliani, 2019).

In 2020, the British Council commissioned a review of literature on the role of tertiary education in development in low- and lower-middle-income countries (LLMICs). This review, undertaken by Howell et al. (2020), includes 170 studies and offers the following conclusions. The main outcomes of tertiary education are economic growth and the enhanced earnings of graduates. While aggregate economic growth is not equitably distributed within nation-states and income benefits accrue to those groups that are privileged, the overall direction of economic development is positive. There exists a so-called ‘mismatch’ between the skills and knowledge of tertiary education graduates and labour market demand in LLMICs. Participation in tertiary education may increase the earnings or entrepreneurial activities of those who were born poor. However, poverty reduction has not been established as a direct outcome of tertiary education. Tertiary education contributes to the improvement of quality of life, both for those who participate in it and those who do not, via an indirect influence of graduates. At the same time, tertiary education can perpetuate existing inequalities. When it comes to the outcomes pertaining to the development of specific skills within professions, the review shows that tertiary education strengthens basic education through teacher education. Yet, what is learnt in teacher education programmes does not always translate into effective teacher practices in the classroom. More broadly, tertiary education is shown to develop professional capacities across various professions and also to transform institutions through collaborative relationships. Finally, tertiary education has an important role in strengthening civil society because of the skills and knowledge acquired at universities but also because of the institutional spaces that allow for relationship building and engagement (Howell et al., 2020).

Disciplinary diversity

International development higher education scholarship benefits from its location at the intersection of two well-established fields of study – higher education and international development. At the same time, the scholarship in international development higher education relies on knowledge, theories, and methodologies from across social sciences and humanities. This scholarship has been fluid and eclectic, bringing together intellectual contributions from social science and humanities disciplines, such as: anthropology, business and management studies, economics, education studies/pedagogy, geography/environmental science, history, international development, international relations, linguistics, philosophy, political science, psychology, and sociology. Moving forward, it is hoped that those working in international development higher education will continue to encourage the fluidity and breaking the boundaries with other fields/disciplines, instead of attempting to delineate this space and to develop it into an institutionalised field of study.

The disciplinary eclecticism is only partially reflected in the academic journals covering international development higher education. The journals listed in Table 1 regularly publish scholarship pertaining to international development higher education. These journals are concentrated within four disciplines/interdisciplinary fields of study: Education, International Development, Geography/Environmental Science, and Economics.

Table 1. Key academic journals covering international development higher education.

Discipline	Academic Journal Title
Education [Higher Education]	<i>Higher Education</i>
	<i>International Journal of Sustainability in Higher Education</i>
	<i>Minerva</i>
	<i>International Higher Education</i>
	<i>The Review of Higher Education</i>
	<i>Studies in Higher Education</i>
	<i>Higher Education Policy</i>
Education [Comparative & International Education]	<i>Journal of Higher Education in Africa</i>
	<i>Higher Education Review</i>
	<i>International Journal of Educational Development</i>
	<i>Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education</i>
	<i>Comparative Education Review</i>
	<i>Comparative Education</i>
	<i>Journal of Studies in International Education</i>
	<i>International Review of Education</i>
	<i>Policy Practice: A Development Education Review</i>
	<i>Journal of International Cooperation in Education</i>
	<i>International Journal of Educational Research</i>
Education [Other]	<i>Journal of Education Policy</i>
	<i>European Journal of Education</i>
	<i>Gender and Education</i>
	<i>Environmental Education Research</i>
	<i>The International Journal of Management Education</i>
	<i>The Journal of Development Studies</i>
	<i>International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology</i>
International Development	<i>Forum for Development Studies</i>
	<i>World Development</i>
	<i>Journal of Human Development and Capabilities</i>
	<i>African Development Review</i>
	<i>Sustainability</i>
	<i>Geoforum</i>
	<i>Journal of Environmental Policy & Planning</i>
Geography/ Environmental Science	<i>Journal of Cleaner Production</i>
	<i>Economics of Education Review</i>
	<i>Oxford Review of Economic Policy</i>
	<i>Education Economics</i>
	<i>Journal of Comparative Economics</i>
Economics	

The disciplinary eclecticism underpins the diversity of methodological approaches in international development higher education. We encounter scholarship identifying patterns through statistical analysis and scholarship exploring discourses, systematic reviews and ethnographies, bibliometric analyses and practitioner research, programme/policy evaluations and critical enquiries, phenomenological and interpretative studies, historical analyses and content analyses, econometric and participatory designs.

Levels and scales of analysis

Studies use different levels and units of analysis. We normally differentiate between macro (nation-state), meso (institutional), and micro (individual) levels of analysis. There are also diverse units of analysis used, including but not limited to: nation-states, places, institutions, systems, time, individuals, culture, policies, and pedagogies. Scholarship in

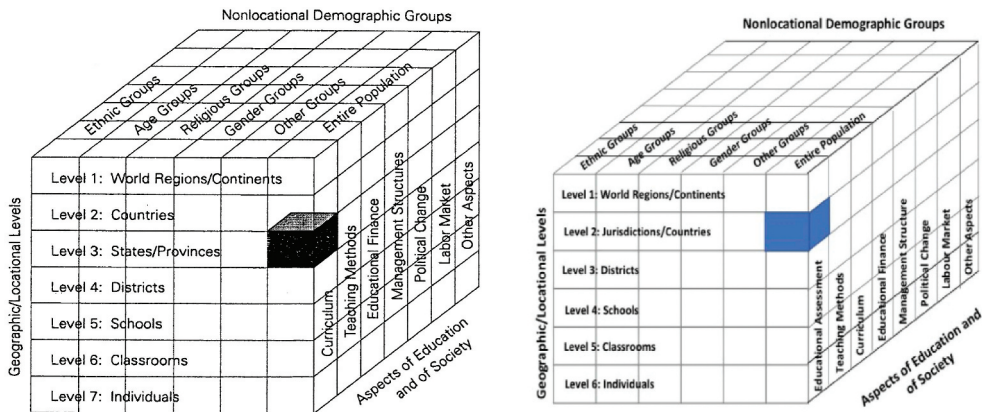


Figure 1. The Bray and Thomas Cube. Original (left-hand side) and Adapted (right-hand side). Sources: Bray and Thomas (1995, p. 475); Opposs et al. (2020)

international development higher education have also utilised a multi-level approach, conceptualised by Bray and Thomas (1995) in the form of a well-known Bray and Thomas Cube which has been adapted to the needs of different studies, one example of which is offered in Figure 1.

Studies in international development higher education also focus on different scales, such as supranational (global), supranational (regional), national, subnational, local. Studies focusing on the supranational (global) scale in international development higher education are rare. These studies mostly examine international aid for higher education; some examples include Collins and Rhoads' (2010) research on the World Bank's work with universities in Thailand and Uganda or Molla's (2014) work on the World Bank's assistance to Ethiopian higher education. Supranational (regional) scale pertains to international development at the regional level, e.g. higher education capacity building in sub-saharan Africa (Wood, 1993) or the development of research capacity across Africa (Skupien & Rüffin, 2020).

Such diversity makes it difficult to pin down the identity of this space and to identify the limits of the method and data used in international development higher education. Each of these disciplines/interdisciplinary fields of study has its own traditions and geopolitics of knowledge creation. As noted by a Beninese philosopher Paulin Hountondji (1997), colonialism facilitated the creation of intellectual division of labour with global peripheries serving as data mines for the growth of knowledge and the advancement of theory in the Global North. This happened across social and natural sciences. Scholars more recently have been paying increasing attention to the epistemological legacy of colonialism, writing about the traditions of knowledge legitimation, the politics of knowledge creation, marginalised knowledge, southern theory, among other dimensions. Yet, this has not happened across all disciplines that feed into international development higher education.

Funding for international development higher education

Many empirical studies in international development higher education have been funded by multilateral and bilateral donors. However, the engagement of multilateral and bilateral donors with the higher education sector has been considerably less extensive than their engagement with school-level and technical education. Furthermore, there exist few studies examining the role of international funding in developing higher education systems and institutions in low- and lower-middle-income countries.

International development assistance to higher education started in the post WWII period and can be linked with the Cold War. During the Cold War, the USA and European countries provided support for the development of higher education in poor countries. The USA was mostly investing in Latin America and later in Africa and Asia, to counter the Soviet influence. Western European countries mostly focused on their former colonies. The Northern European countries had more altruistic considerations. Most of this funding was framed as oriented towards higher education capacity development, understood broadly as covering three levels – individuals, institutions, and the policy environment (Hydén, 2017).

Hydén (2017) describes the first wave, the reversal, and the second wave of the donor support to international higher education. The first wave in the 1960s to 1970s encompassed three components: (a) funding the construction of buildings for higher education teaching and research, including labs. For instance, Norway supported the creation of a forestry school at the Sokoine University of Agriculture in Tanzania, Germany supported the establishment of the College of Engineering and Technology at the University of Dar es Salaam, and Switzerland supported the infrastructure development and maintenance at the same institution. The Ford Foundation was involved in funding the construction of buildings at, for example, Makerere University in Uganda and the University of Ibadan in Nigeria; (b) technical assistance delivered by academic staff. A number of academics at these new universities in Africa were expatriates from the USA, UK and France, but also Nordic countries; (c) a number of African students received scholarships to pursue doctoral studies in American and European universities. The Ford and Rockefeller Foundations were major funders, with a focus on agriculture and the social sciences. German funding was oriented on more technical fields such as engineering. The funding also came from socialist countries such as the USSR, Bulgaria and East Germany. Many academics still teaching in African and Asian universities, especially in the hard sciences, received their initial doctoral education in these socialist countries (Hydén, 2017).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the World Bank promoted the view that higher education was elitist and low income countries could not afford it. Hydén (2017) refers to this period as the reversal when the donor community and African governments discontinued higher education funding. It was argued that higher education costed much and benefitted a small group of the privileged population. Therefore, the costs of higher education should have been incurred by families and not by the state. The public money spent on higher education was expected to be channelled into primary education, to benefit larger groups of low income individuals. Psacharopoulos et al.'s (1986) report was decisive in this regard. This report estimated that in low-income countries the social rate of return for an additional year of higher education was significantly lower than for basic education. The rate of return

argument influenced the outcomes of the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 when the global education community agreed to continue focusing on primary education. This decision was reflected in the MDGs and had terrible implications for higher education in low income countries. The provision of quality primary education depends on higher education as teachers and school leaders are trained at higher education institutions. All parts of society benefit from higher education, not only those who are parts of the higher education system. It became apparent in the 1990s that the investment in higher education was leading to rapid development in East Asia, and that the World Bank position on de-investing in higher education in low income countries was mistaken.

'The World Bank often sets the pace for other donors, but like a large ship, it takes a very long time to turn around' (Hydén, 2017, p. 5). In mid-1995, the World Bank started rebranding itself as a 'knowledge bank' and its 1998 World Development Report focused on *Knowledge for Development*. Subsequently, the World Bank & the Task Force on Higher Education and Society (World Bank & The Task Force on Higher Education and Society, 2000) published the report *Higher Education in Developing Countries: Peril and Promise* which argued that development would not be possible without investing in higher education. This led to the second wave. Nowadays donors and governments recognise the importance of investing in higher education. A significant portion of the donor funding goes to the development of capacity in hard sciences and medical research. India's Institutes of Technology, which received significant funding during the first wave, is used as an example that funding pays off. As countries develop their higher education and research infrastructure, they also attract back home a proportion of academics in the diaspora. Examples of this are institutions in China and India. Singular examples are also in Africa, e.g. the Network of Ethiopian Scholars encourages Ethiopian scientists in the diaspora and at home to exchange knowledge on local issues. Ghana and Nigeria have similar networks (Hydén, 2017).

International development funding for higher education has not been systematically studied. One area of further studies is the factors that impact the size and concentration of aid to higher education and how various geopolitical interests may be driving the size and concentration of aid. It is known that bilateral aid sometimes tries to promote commercial and political interests of bilateral donors, serving the purposes of expanding the market and supporting foreign policy which can reinforce the existing power structures and disparities between donors and recipients (Chankseliani, 2021; Ishengoma, 2017). It is also evidenced that the bulk of international aid for post-secondary education is spent on scholarships to study in donor countries. In 2015, scholarships constituted 70% of all aid for post-secondary education (UNESCO, 2015). In 2018, the share dropped to around 50% (UNESCO, 2020). While scholarships offer important opportunities to individuals to study abroad and contribute to their home countries (Campbell et al., 2020; Chankseliani, 2018; Jamison & Madden, 2021), investment in higher education within low- and low-middle income countries is needed. The following sections focus on two specific domains of higher education systems – university models and pedagogy.

Different conceptual approaches

Different developmental orthodoxies have been adopted to explain the role of higher education in international development. Key theoretical approaches are based on the normative ends of what a developed society looks like. Higher education's contributions to development can be conceptualised within foundationalist and post-foundationalist approaches in social sciences. Normally, what is meant by foundationalist is the embeddedness in the traditional foundations of 'Western ideas of modernity, society and development' (CIES, n.d.). In contrast, post-foundationalist approaches foster 'exploration and exchange, and stretching the conventional means by which these topics have been studied such as through disciplinary bodies, regional divisions and cross-national comparisons' (CIES, n.d.).

Essentialist understanding

Within the foundationalist approach, essentialist and anti-essentialist understandings can be distinguished (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Essentialism assumes that some properties of a phenomenon are essential and others are accidental, i.e. the difference between essence and accident (Ellis, 2002; Yablo, 2016). According to the essentialist understanding, the essence of development is in the advancement of human capital and the modernisation of societies. Hence, the essentialist understanding of the links between higher education and international development essentialises higher education's role in the advancement of human capital and the modernisation of societies. Human capital theory establishes a causal link between educational investment and development. This can be at the level of an individual or family as well as at the macro level of a nation-state. Econometric methods are normally used to calculate rates of return on investment in education. Teaching and research within higher education develops skills and knowledge base which lead to higher earnings and overall economic growth. Along similar lines, modernisation theory explains how communities develop into societies and promotes the idea of cultivating modern values as opposed to traditional values. This theory underpins international development as an idea and a field of study. At the same time, many scholars and practitioners recognise it as a failed theory not only because of its Eurocentric, unilinear, universalist nature, but also because of:

its capacity to produce social policies that would prove the predictions of the theory to have been correct. On the one side, we could simply say that modernization theory could not win the race against corporate greed, climatic disaster, the outsourcing of the state, and the double death of nationalism by global forces on the one hand and pathological xenophobia on the other. And neither could the policy instruments of modernization theory (such as international aid, technology transfer, and agricultural revolution) keep pace with global depredation. Nor, finally, could the hope that modernization theory placed in universal education (at the true core of the Enlightenment values of modernization theory) keep pace with changes in the very nature of basic knowledge itself, represented by the growth of machine languages, cyber-technologies for communication, and new technical possibilities for vision and translation. Above all, modernization theory did not understand that education and information would come radically apart in the world of "the web" and "the net," making it possible for messages of hate and suspicion to circulate at vastly greater speeds than those of hope and compassion. (Appadurai, 2013, p. 220)

The essentialist orthodoxy thrives on the neoliberal ideals of limited state and free market; it opposes culture to development and treats culture as an impediment on the evolutionary path of international development (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

Anti-essentialist understanding

In contrast to the essentialist understanding, the anti-essentialist associations between higher education and international development are ‘amoeba-like’ (Ziai, 2004), not attempting to pin down the essence of development. What I refer to as anti-essentialist understanding can include various conceptualisations of how universities can support individuals and societies. Higher education can contribute to the realisation of human rights and capabilities to pursue the freedoms people value. Rights-based and capability theories critically engage with human capital and modernisation theories. Anti-essentialist understanding assumes that higher education can offer more than skills, knowledge, and credentials. University education can develop individuals’ agency freedom to pursue big ideals and pragmatic choices that they value, irrespective of their social and ethnic background, gender and sexuality. All in all, anti-essentialism is about the freedom to choose valuable domains of human development, avoiding the essentialisation of any particular aspect of development.

Individuals, collectives of individuals, universities, and nation-states are potential agents of development. They require freedoms to support development. The majority of low- and lower-middle-income countries, their institutions, and populations have limited traditions of personal, political, or academic freedoms to pursue what they value. In other words, they have limited capacity to act. At the same time, it has been shown that higher education systems, institutions, and individuals at universities require freedoms to realise the benefits that higher education can bring (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

Realisation of freedoms is linked with the capabilities and resources available to individuals and universities, and the socio-political arrangements in which agents of development are embedded. Sen (1992) calls this concept ‘effective freedom’. Generating change also requires agency and this is where agency freedom comes into play. Agency freedom denotes the active human will to achieve freedom for oneself and others. As I explained in a study of how universities in former Soviet countries see their contributions to development (Chankseliani et al., 2021), one important type of freedom is the freedom to imagine. To what extent do universities and academics nurture the freedom to imagine university contributions to development that go beyond the essentialist understanding? Jean-Paul Sartre (2004) argued that ‘for consciousness to be able to imagine, it must be able to escape from the world by its very nature, it must be able to stand back from the world by its own efforts. In a word, it must be free’ (p. 184).

Thus, higher education’s contributions to international development can be explained in different ways. While there are exceptions (Boni & Walker, 2016; Chankseliani, 2018), the bulk of the existing scholarship on this topic is normally underpinned by essentialist assumptions of human capital and modernisation. The essentialist and anti-essentialist conceptualisations complement each other.

A holistic understanding of university contributions to development would encompass all of the essentialist and anti-essentialist ways of looking at this important but empirically elusive link (Chankseliani et al., 2021).

Post-foundationalist approach

There has been some discursive interest in post-foundationalist exploration in higher education scholarship and in social sciences more broadly. Inspired by the works of Ivan Illich and Michael Foucault, a number of scholars started to question the development paradigm already in the 1980s-1990s, in the period of post-everything. Among these were Gustavo Esteva, Wolfgang Sachs, Arturo Escobar, and Majid Rahnema. 'The time is ripe to write its obituary', noted Sachs in 1992 in the introduction of *The Development Dictionary* (p. 1). In the same volume, Escobar indicates that 'the practices that still survive in the Third World despite development thus point the way to moving beyond social change and, in the long run, to entering a post-development, post-economic era' (p. 144). For more than three decades, post-development thinkers have engaged in a fundamental critique of development, questioning the idea of development as such. Post-development thinking is opposed to universalising a certain model of society and engages critically with the logic of development that assumes the belief in endless progress, modernisation, economic growth, and unlimited accumulation. Post-development rejects all assumptions of the development paradigm.

Post-development turns to alternatives. Alternatives to the existing models of development, politics, the economy and knowledge. *Buen vivir* ('good living') is one alternative to the idea of 'development' which emerged in indigenous cultures in Latin America. *Buen vivir* focuses on living in harmony with nature, following principles of reciprocity, complementarity, solidarity, and non-violence; it rejects the idea of indefinite economic growth, encouraging inward contemplation and living in the world but not off it (Brown & McCowan, 2018). *Buen vivir's* broad principles relevant to higher education include: epistemological pluralism; porosity of boundaries when classifying educational spaces, disciplines, and professionals; learning that brings together the abstract, technical, aesthetic, spiritual, and practical; cooperativism instead of competition; compassion and non-violence; collectivism that allows for learning collectively with humans and non-humans; cultivating meaningful livelihoods as opposed to alienating employability; and living in the present and seeing education as a state of being rather than for exchange value of qualifications (Brown & McCowan, 2018). The idea of *buen vivir* is aligned with other post-developmental philosophies from around the world, such as African *ubuntu* which focuses on interconnectedness, belonging to a greater whole, valuing ecological health of the community as well as the individual; it nurtures principles of empathy, sharing and cooperation in human efforts to resolve common problems (Assié-Lumumba, 2016; Brock-Utne, 2016; Murove, 2012; Tutu, 2000).

Within the field of higher education, the post-foundationalist, post-development paradigm remains marginal. Post-development is also far from achieving an agenda-setting role within global communities of academics and practitioners working in international development higher education.

Where to from here?

Reinvigoration of international development higher education

The majority of scholarship in international development higher education falls within one of the two epistemological strands: broad-brush, big picture, quantitatively oriented scholarship or more nuanced, context-specific, and qualitatively oriented research. Both of these strands have had one characteristic in common – their gaze which has been largely focused on all things outside the lecture halls, outside the seminar rooms, outside teaching and learning. A large body of literature on higher education in low- and lower-middle-income countries focuses on access to higher education, specifically disparities in access by socio-economic status, geographic location, race/ethnicity and other characteristics (ADB, 2012; Chankseliani, 2013b, 2013a, 2016; Chankseliani et al., 2020; Dudley-Jenkins & Moses, 2014; Meyer et al., 2013). The paper will now discuss two possible ways forward in the field.

Perhaps the reinvigoration of research in international development higher education can come from more attention to pedagogy (i.e. teaching and learning). Imagine how much more could be learnt on how higher education contributes to what we call development in various contexts by having a better understanding of how teaching and learning work at different types of institutions in different places. Research in higher education pedagogies has been largely concentrated within the national space of higher education scholarship. The understanding of self-formation within universities at home (for example, for Uzbek students at home, in Uzbekistan) and abroad (for Uzbek students abroad, in Britain or Russia) would be much more effective through the research exploring teaching and learning practices in these diverse geographic and institutional contexts. By further embedding research in psychology, higher education scholarship would be better able to tackle a number of important empirical puzzles when it comes to the understanding of how the process of learning within higher education shapes individuals – their mindset, their civic consciousness, or professional expertise – across different global contexts.

For the purposes of improving the understanding of links between higher education and development, it would be useful to have more and better knowledge of what happens at developmental universities. Higher education literature recognises the existence of various models of university. One of these is a developmental university which assumes a close connection of university with local needs and focus on the short term. Developmental universities, most of them in Africa and Latin America, are oriented on equipping students with skills and knowledge immediately relevant to the local/national context. An example of a developmental university is the University of Development Studies in Ghana. Developmental universities are normally located outside capital cities. They conduct mostly applied research to find solutions to local challenges and engage with local communities in areas such as health clinics, adult education, and agro-tourism (McCowan, 2019). Their impact is mostly non-academic and they focus on the short term. What matters to the developmental university is relevance to the immediate needs of society and the economy. The roots of contemporary developmental universities are found in the US land-grant universities, Japanese national university, and Soviet university (Coleman, 1986). According to McCowan (2019), this model corresponds most closely to the ideal vision of higher education outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. It has also been argued

that developmental universities can ‘democratise knowledge’ (Arocena et al., 2015). But what kind of knowledge can they democratise? Might the democratisation of purely instrumental knowledge support the perpetuation of disadvantage?

McCowan (2019) also outlines an idea of post-development university. Deinstitutionalisation and support for the ecology of knowledges are two characteristics of post-development university. Following Illich’s ideas, McCowan explains that deinstitutionalisation serves the removal of major impediments that obstruct knowledge and disempower individuals, such as: educational professionals who can discredit other sources of learning; diplomas which can encourage obsessive thirst for qualifications and teaching to the test; hidden curriculum which can make specific norms more attractive than others (competition vs collaboration); and the self-reproductive cycle which projects the education system into the future (McCowan, 2019, p. 289). The post-development university model builds on and goes beyond the ideas of Paulo Freire (1972) and Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2014). Examples of post-development universities would include Unitierra in Mexico or the Rio Negro Institute of Indigenous Knowledge and Research in Brazil (McCowan, 2019).

The two types of new evidence on what happens in the classroom – on student self-formation and on developmental (and perhaps post-development) universities – would also help us understand how the curriculum, the ways in which it is taught, and the ways students learn within higher education can impact higher education’s approaches and contributions to development.

Has the idea of international development become obsolete?

‘International development’ is a discursive product of the post-WWII period. The concepts of ‘third world’ or ‘underdevelopment’ did not exist before that period. The well-established concept of international development is underpinned by modernisation theory and rests on modernist assumptions about the inevitability of progress, objectivity of knowledge, the existence of expert knowledge and the hierarchy of evidence, disciplines, and knowledges, and the linearity of development.

The concept of international development is also neo-colonial, perpetuating uneven power relations and the epistemological legacy of the post-colonial period. International development literature has solidified the dependency upon and the supremacy of the Western knowledge and expertise. International development is all about the development of the national contexts that are not our own national contexts. International development is all about the development of ‘the other’, treating the patient, rather than developing oneself, the agent. Considering the modernist assumptions and the neo-colonial nature, international development cannot escape ethnocentrism – viewing other cultures from the perspective of one’s own culture; the belief in the superiority of one’s own culture.

Knowledge is a product of time. Language is a product of time. The modernist, neo-colonial, and ethnocentric assumptions constrain the broader use of the international development lens to allow for the realisation of anti-essentialist understanding of development and, therefore, these assumptions make the lens obsolete for knowledge creation in this day and age. If we strip out international development of the modernist, neo-colonial, and ethnocentric assumptions, we would be left with the basal idea of ‘development’ that has equivalents in many languages and means broadly: change, growth, transformation, or improvement over a period of time. Development in this sense

encompasses sub-national/local, national, regional, and global scales – it is not only about the other, it is not only about linearity. Development and its synonyms listed above can also refer to different domains of human life, including but not limited to the economic, social, educational, artistic, agricultural, environmental, emotional, and cultural.

In other words, development as such is multi-dimensional and glonacal, bringing together various domains and various scales – local, national, and global. These three are distinct but interconnected scales and deserve to be treated as distinct. The glonacal heuristic developed by Marginson and Rhoades (2002) offers a non-normative framing of global/national/local development. The United Nations Declaration on the Right to Development defined development as:

a comprehensive economic, social, cultural and political process, which aims at the constant improvement of the well-being of the entire population and of all individuals on the basis of their active, free and meaningful participation in development and in the fair distribution of benefits resulting therefrom. (United Nations, 1986)

Building on this definition, glonacal development can be seen an agency-based process of self-realisation of individuals, collectives of individuals, and nation-states that expands individual and collective freedoms and ultimately leads to development, understood broadly (Chankseliani et al., 2021). Higher education institutions operate within these three dimensions which are ‘heterogeneous in form and purpose. In the national dimension the purpose is the nation as an end in itself. The global dimension has no purpose. There the university is its own purpose’ (Marginson, 2011, p. 412).

In order to be effective in supporting glonacal development, research on higher education in LLMICs needs to explore the ways in which universities can practice their freedoms and resist being exclusively tied to the immediate interests of the nation-state; the ways in which universities can educate individuals, following high standards, not only in a narrow human-capital understanding but also more holistically, developing humanistic values in critically thinking, environment-friendly, and politically active citizens. Therefore, perhaps any future scholarly discussions need to start with the consideration of core expectations when it comes to higher education’s developmental mission, and of conditions that would be conducive to the achievement of these expectations. A holistic approach to university contributions to glonacal development would encompass essentialist outcomes and anti-essentialist imaginaries. And the foundational condition for this holistic approach would be for the agents – individuals, collectives of individuals, and nation-states – to nurture freedoms.

Moving the field forward, perhaps thinking about development as embedded within these three distinct scales, and delinking development from ‘international’, will allow us as scholars and practitioners to become less bound by nation-state borders, and more conscious of the local nuance and the global connectedness. Glonacal development would be a more inclusive concept that can substitute ‘international development’, by neither rejecting the development paradigm nor entirely focusing on the discursive problematisation. I expect the future scholarship to build on the substantial plurality of views that exists within the international (development) space in higher education and to move in two directions – a foundationalist direction of reframing ‘international’ into global, national and local developments, and a post-foundationalist direction of post-development. One characteristic that brings these two directions together is a strong interest in the local dimension.

Note

1. In this journal, Gundara (1990) defined 'the other' as 'an outsider who does not belong' (p. 101).

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