

The Intersection Between the Internationalization of Higher Education and Community–University Partnerships: A Case Study From Mozambique

Stephen James Thompson, Joel Bambamba,
Diane van Staden, and Marius Hedimbi

Abstract

Higher education strategies focusing on either internationalization or community–university partnerships are often regarded as distinct from each other and dichotomous. The former usually are concerned with international knowledge, the latter, with local knowledge. This article presents a case study to argue that the two approaches can intersect, presenting an opportunity to improve the process of learning and teaching in higher education. As part of its strategy to internationalize, Lurio University, Mozambique, is part of a partnership through the Consortium of New Southern African Medical Schools (CONSAMS). Lurio University also has an established community engagement program, One Student One Family. Drawing on relevant literature, we argue that universities can benefit from viewing these strategies as interconnected and complementary approaches that bolster knowledge processes and advance learning. When both approaches are used to inform curricula and improve pedagogy, synergetic and much improved higher education systems can be achieved.

Keywords: internationalization, community–university partnerships, knowledge production, Mozambique



Higher education internationalization has drawn much attention in recent times, with arguments for and against integrating an international dimension into the postsecondary education system (Brannelly et al., 2011; British Council, 2015; de Wit, 2011; de Wit et al., 2015; Knight, 2004, 2008, 2015; Ndaruhutse & Thompson, 2016; Power et al., 2015). In addition, a significant body of literature on university social responsibility and community–university partnerships describes the benefits and challenges of faculty and students working to develop mutually beneficial sustainable partnerships with local communities (Bhattacharrya et al., 2018; Chastonay et al., 2013; Garde Sánchez et al., 2013; Jorge & Andrades Peña, 2017; Kraft & Dwyer, 2010; McÍlrath et al., 2012; McIntosh et al., 2008; Pires et al., 2015; Tshishonga,

2020; Vasilescu et al., 2010). Such educational approaches involving students gaining hands-on learning experiences in communities are sometimes referred to as service-learning programs (Zlotkowski, 1998).

These two areas of focus (internationalization of higher education and community–university partnerships) are often presented as distinct from each other and analyzed in isolation. Some researchers have explored the intersection of international and community-based pedagogies; for example, Aramburuzabala et al. (2019) offered important insight into this relationship based on the European higher education context. However, internationalization of higher education and community–university partnerships are often regarded as entirely separate concepts and unrelated to each other in terms of the underlying phi-

losophies, objectives, and implementation strategies. We argue that the polarization of these approaches is unhelpful, and that when they are regarded as interconnected and complementary, the combined effect can enhance the production of knowledge and the learning and teaching process. This interconnection is achieved by improving and developing university practice and higher education systems and by promoting exchanges at both the global and local level.

It is important to recognize the broad extant literature on international service-learning, which is conceptually a form of community-university partnership undertaken internationally (Bringle & Hatcher, 2011). Although much of the literature on this topic focuses on endeavors by universities in North America and Europe, evidence suggests that institutions from a range of contexts and countries have historically supported international service-learning initiatives (Berry & Chisholm, 1999). International service-learning presents a number of challenges, including the potential for neocolonialism, power imbalances, and ineffective partnerships (Kahn, 2011). However, there are also arguments for its strengths. For example, Bringle and Hatcher (2011) observed that it “holds the potential and may be a pedagogy that is best suited to prepare college graduates to be active global citizens in the 21st century” (p. 3), and Alonso García and Longo (2013) argued that service-learning should be regarded as a vehicle to educate global citizens as part of an integrated curricular process.

In this article we consider the relationship between the internationalization of education through “high level” partnerships and “grassroots” community engagement, which are regarded as separate domains. The case study presented to explore these concepts does not involve international service-learning, but we recognize its importance and the relevance of debates around community development, international partnerships, and experiential education.

We present a case study from Lurio University, a relatively new institution (established in 2007) based in the north of Mozambique. For context, Mozambique borders Tanzania, Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Eswatini. The national language is Portuguese. Mozambique’s population exceeds 30 million, with a higher education gross enrollment ratio of 7.3% in 2018 (UNESCO, 2021). There are seven

full universities in Mozambique (Africa Universities, 2021). Lurio University has in recent years been strengthened significantly by actively pursuing both community-university partnerships at the local level and internationalization through partnerships with other universities. The bodies of knowledge gained at both the grassroots and international levels are regarded as equally important and considered essential components to achieving synergistic progression for the university and its partner universities, improved health outcomes for the local communities, and better learning outcomes for the students.

Community–University Partnership

The term “university social responsibility” refers to a higher education sector-specific form of social responsibility. As universities do not exist in a vacuum, they have social dimensions and are increasingly playing an important role in society as educators of future leaders and policymakers. The need to integrate social responsibility into what universities do is thus greater than ever (Jorge & Andrades Peña, 2017). Garde Sánchez et al. (2013) defined university social responsibility as the university’s capacity to disseminate and implement a body of principles and general and specific values through actions involving management, teaching and research, and university extension. Its purpose is to respond to the needs of the university community and the country as a whole. University social responsibility works to strengthen civic commitment and active citizenship. It involves taking an ethical approach to developing a sense of civil citizenship by encouraging the students and the academic staff to provide social services to their local community to achieve local and/or global sustainable development (Vasilescu et al., 2010). Community engagement is an integral part of university social responsibility (Tshishonga, 2020).

The reasons for a university wanting to deliver or pursue social responsibility likely depend on whether it is a public or private institution, and the growth of the private higher education sector has complicated matters. However, research focused on public and private universities in America found a uniformity in the types of accountability activities both types of institutions were involved in (Garde Sánchez et al., 2013). As the private higher education

sector continues to grow, further research is needed to establish the different approaches and challenges that private and public universities face regarding social responsibility.

With careful attention to program design that includes space for reflection and feedback, community engagement through community–university partnerships can develop well-informed students who are fit for purpose and can analyze and solve community problems (Kraft & Dwyer, 2010). Since its inception in 2007, Lurio University has employed community-based learning strategies to achieve one of its fundamental objectives, local community development. Community-based learning strategies have been shown to both improve student competency in community-based care and facilitate long-term health impacts on participating communities (McIntosh et al., 2008). To develop successful students, training must be geared toward labor market demand (Thompson, 2016). The earlier an undergraduate student can be exposed to community work, the better their skills in community work are thought to be (Bhattacharya et al., 2018). Community immersion has been found particularly beneficial to students studying for health-focused degrees. Such approaches improve future health professionals' ability to respond to health problems of individuals in their complexity, as well as improving their capacity to work in partnership with communities to improve health outcomes (Chastonay et al., 2013). Such transformative learning is particularly important for health science students who, once they have graduated, will be working in low-resource settings (Pires et al., 2015).

At Lurio University, Community Health is a compulsory module in all semesters of all six degrees offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences (Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Nutrition, Optometry, and Nursing; Pires et al., 2015). The practical component of the Community Health module is a program called One Student One Family. It is a vehicle through which faculty members and students experience practical interaction with families living in neighborhoods surrounding the university. The majority of these families are living in extreme conditions of multidimensional poverty. Under the program, each student is assigned both a local family and a multidisciplinary group made up of students from all the disciplines delivered by the Faculty of Health Science.

Under supervision by a qualified professional from any of the six fields, the students carry out home visits, provide community-based public health education, offer advice on health problems where appropriate, and refer family members to the national health system as necessary. This community-based model facilitates multidirectional and transprofessional learning.

“Transprofessional learning and education” refers to learning skills from a wide range of actors, including those outside the immediate discipline of the student (Field et al., 2020). Transprofessional education is needed to develop health professionals who serve in an increasingly interconnected world. It helps to break health workers out of their silos while enhancing collaborative and nonhierarchical relationships in effective teams. It can contribute to the development of a common set of values around social accountability (Frenk et al., 2010). Under the One Student One Family program, the students from different disciplines learn from each other, as well as learning from the communities they are working with. This multidirectional and transprofessional learning is illustrated in Figure 1.

This community-oriented educational experience provides critical training and orientation for future generations of Mozambican healthcare workers. Importantly, students and faculty members also learn from indigenous knowledge. In higher education, the knowledge of urban dwellers is often prioritized at the expense of rural dwellers (who are often the most marginalized). The location of most universities in urban centers can reinforce and reproduce dominant urban discourses. Students and staff from universities may be considered “outsiders” to local community cultures and societies. Chambers (1983) argued that many outsiders may be hindered in learning from rural poor communities by many forces (real or perceived), including power, professionalism, prestige, a lack of contact, language barriers, prejudice, and cultural difference. Modern, scientific, or medical knowledge can be regarded as universal in that it is taught all over the world and is available through widely distributed publications. It is in general supported and propagated by states. In contrast, local knowledge is often inaccessible. To learn about it, you must interact with the local people themselves. Grassroots knowledge exists in many forms—but hardly any of it is written down.

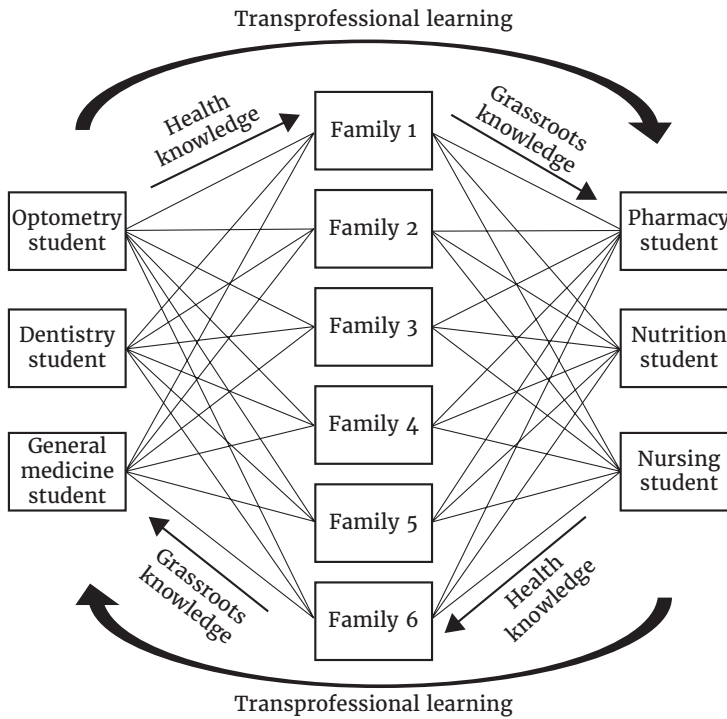


Figure 1. One Student One Family—Lurio University’s Multidirectional and Transprofessional Community-Based Learning Model. Adapted from *One Student One Family and the Mozambique Eyecare Project*, by S. Thompson, 2011, paper presented at the African Regional Conference on Community University Partnerships and Community Based Research, Dakar, Senegal (<https://doi.org/10.21427/nwvb-h868>).

To benefit from local knowledge, staff and students must regard themselves as learners, and appreciate that local communities have something to teach them (Chambers, 1983).

According to Chambers (2017), the need to understand the realities of marginalized people has never been more pressing. Staff and students need to be aware and knowledgeable of the local environments where they will ultimately work. Local realities must be understood in order for staff and students to “know better.” However, knowing on its own is not enough. Staff and students must take their newly found knowledge and act upon it. Face-to-face interactions facilitate listening and learning from people (particularly those who are marginalized) in their living environments and enable staff and students to be in touch and stay up to date with ground realities of the local communities (Chambers, 2017).

Interaction between students and staff from Lurio University and people from a wide range of social, cultural, and ethnic back-

grounds in the local communities results in multidirectional flows of knowledge. The program allows the university to engage in a creative way with the community and enables students and staff to learn about people’s lived realities at a grassroots level. As well as providing a service to the community that is integrated with the health system, the experience bolsters the students’ theoretical understanding of health problems. They gain a real understanding of the everyday challenges people face when trying to access health services. The community members involved are treated with respect, and their knowledge is valued.

The last 25 years have witnessed a massive increase in demand for and delivery of postsecondary education (Thompson, 2020). With increasing numbers of students completing basic and secondary education, it is likely that the demand for higher education will continue to grow, although the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in significant uncertainty for the sector. The pandemic has reinforced the demand for well-trained health professionals. In countries with limited

resources, the challenge will be increasing both the coverage and the quality of education at a lower cost (Thompson, 2016).

With the necessary investment and support, community–university partnerships can offer an innovative way for universities to deliver cost-effective higher education, by strengthening their learning architecture and improving the delivery of effective learning strategies for their students. The One Student One Family program provides an example of this approach. Some of the perceived successes of this program include strengthening transprofessional learning toward more effective health care teams; promoting economic and national development; providing services to the community through engagement and outreach; promoting ethical approaches to research and learning; developing social cohesion and a sense of citizenship and belonging by strengthening local communities; and, perhaps most importantly, expanding knowledge by providing a mechanism for people who normally do not get a platform to make their voices heard.

However, the program also has some perceived disadvantages and has experienced challenges. These include significant variability of learning experiences across different community sites and different supervisors; the significant time required to travel to community sites; the logistics required to group students and arrange travel; the difficulties of scheduling for an entire year; a shortage of tutors and facilitators; the unfamiliarity of faculty with teaching within this type of program; and language barriers. In addition, some students have had negative attitudes about the experience, based on perceptions about quality (Ferrão & Fernandes, 2014). Further research is needed to evaluate and substantiate these perceived advantages and disadvantages. The findings of such research could inform mitigation strategies to address the disadvantages of both this program and similar programs from other contexts.

Internationalization of Higher Education Through Partnerships

Simultaneously with looking “inward” to learn from local communities, Lurio University is looking “outward” to learn from other higher education institutions located in different countries and operating in different settings. These partner-

ships represent Lurio’s involvement in the internationalization of higher education—a theme that has come to dominate much of the discourse relating to the higher education sector in recent years.

The concept of internationalization of higher education is both broad and varied. Knight (2004) argued that internationalization could be divided into two different streams of activities. One includes internationalization activities that occur on the home campus; the other relates to activities that happen abroad. Knight (2008) went on to define internationalization of higher education as “the process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of post-secondary education” (p. 21). This definition was expanded on by de Wit (2011), who emphasized the importance of regarding internationalization as a process to improve the goals, functions, and delivery of higher education, rather than regarding it as a specific goal. De Wit et al. (2015) elaborated further by arguing that the process has to be intentional “in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (p. 29). An integral part of internationalization of higher education is international linkages, partnerships, and projects, as well as international academic programs and research initiatives (Knight, 2004).

Such partnerships can improve the quality and relevance of higher education and can exist on many levels (Ndaruhutse & Thompson, 2016). To be successful, partnerships must overcome imbalances in resources, funding to initiate but not sustain the partnership, poor monitoring and evaluation, cultural differences, and weak research capacity of some universities (Power et al., 2015). This point is particularly pertinent when considering universities in low-income settings. Higher education is a fiercely competitive environment heavily dominated by universities in North America and Europe. Partnerships can be pathways that can allow smaller, less established universities to expand their research capacity (Brannelly et al., 2011).

As well as competition with other universities, other interlinking factors such as globalization and market processes encourage universities to develop strategic partnerships (de Wit, 2011). When looking to internationalize, some universities make the

mistake of believing that a high number of international agreements or network memberships helps make them prestigious and attractive. Success will be determined instead by the university's capacity to deliver effectively on each partnership it develops. In general, a smaller number of fruitful and active partnerships is better than a larger number of partnerships that are not much more than paper-based agreements. International agreements between universities should reflect functioning academic collaborations, rather than being used as a status symbol (Knight, 2015).

Partnerships for development in higher education aim to accelerate poverty reduction through developing the capacity of higher education institutions in low-income countries. By doing so, such partnerships can promote sustainable development. Many such partnerships focus on developing and integrating strategies to increase access to tertiary education, introduce new degree courses, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and enhance research outputs. Many of these partnerships are funded by overseas development aid (British Council, 2015).

As part of its strategy to introduce and benefit from the internationalization of higher education, since 2012 Lurio University has been a member of the Consortium of New Southern African Medical Schools (CONSAMS). This is a partnership of new medical schools in Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Mozambique, and Lesotho, working in conjunction with two facilitating northern partners in the United States (Vanderbilt University) and Finland (University of Oulu). The aim is for the universities to support each other through sharing of knowledge, faculty, resources, and innovative approaches. CONSAMS promotes health-worker capacity building through interprofessional and transprofessional training programs that operate at an international level (Eichbaum et al., 2014).

The CONSAMS partners have worked to establish an interdependent network that offers functional support. In practice, this support is in part provided by working groups with representatives from all partners to strengthen medical education, training, and research. Partners exchange knowledge on university–community partnerships, strengthening curriculum reviews and exploring pedagogical approaches; de-

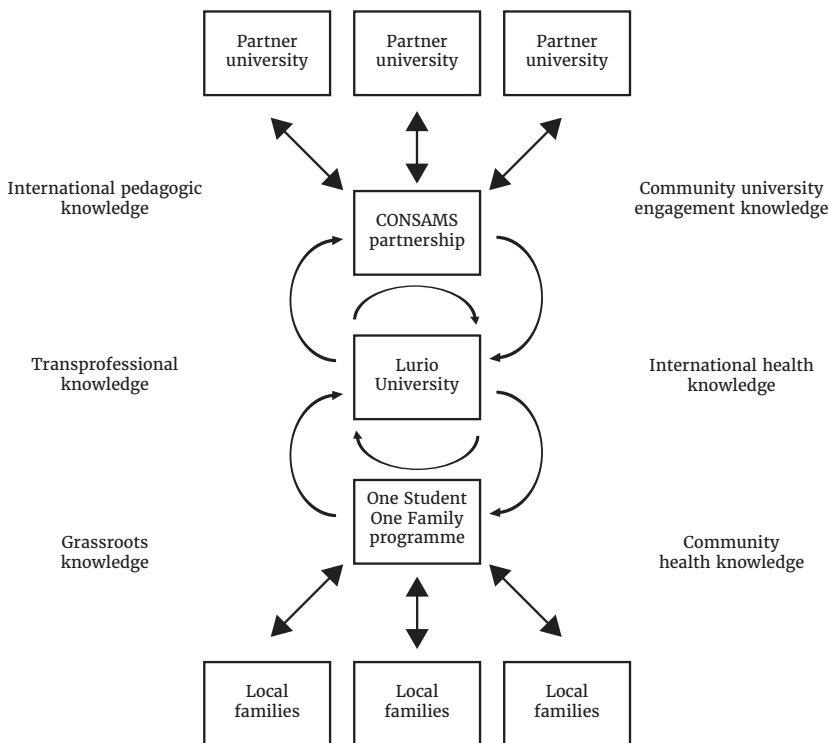


Figure 2. Interconnected and Complementary Flows of Knowledge Associated With Internationalization of Higher Education and Community–University Partnerships

velop interprofessional training programs and bolster postgraduate training programs; and work together to improve the recruitment of clinical faculty. The main roles of the northern partners have been to assist with recruitment of faculty, provide funding, and prepare grant applications (Eichbaum et al., 2014).

Under the partnership, a number of relationships between partner universities have flourished. For example, the University of Oulu in Finland has for several years been supporting interprofessional programs with the University of Namibia and Lurio University, which involves students of medicine, nursing, pharmacology, and optometry. In this multidirectional and transprofessional learning process, Lurio University has been able to share with the international partners grassroots knowledge relating to public health gained from the One Student One Family program. In turn, Lurio University has also benefited from the knowledge shared by the partner institutions. For example, the University of Namibia School of Medicine has shared learnings from their university–community program in which students relocate for a period of months to a rural area where they work in a local clinic and live among local families, learning about people’s lifestyles, diets, and medical issues. These placements facilitate understandings of the socioeconomic and cultural determinants of health. Grassroots knowledge is respected and valued, and is shared via the international partnership, feeding into the higher education strategy of partners to inform curricula and improve pedagogy.

The new medical schools that have committed to work together under CONSAMS have strengthened their ability to face challenges and succeeded at educational innovation. The CONSAMS partnership has been instrumental for newer medical schools in their efforts toward strengthening health-care provision by enhancing training, facilitating relevant and locally based research (Eichbaum et al., 2015). Further research is needed to analyze power dynamics of the program and to develop an understanding of the systems and strategies in place to address power imbalances.

Internationalization strategies that involve partnerships, networks, alliances, and consortia between higher education institutions are thus regarded as an effective strategy for strengthening knowledge and developing

higher education capacity. When such partnerships intersect with knowledge gained from community–university partnerships, we argue that universities can start to realize their potential to deliver highly educated, socially aware professionals—future leaders and policymakers. Future research is needed to illustrate these arguments with empirical evidence.

Another observation is that international partnerships are usually centered on specific individuals (local contact persons) who might not share the intended outcome(s) set out in the university strategic plans. Consequently, partnerships centered on individuals are likely to collapse the moment that the key individual leaves the university, is transferred, or is taken out of the program. For example, the collaboration between CONSAMS and Oulu University decreased significantly when Oulu University’s local contact person moved to Turku University, Finland. To continue to benefit from the collaboration with Finland, CONSAMS had to amend its constitution to include Turku University as a full member of the association. This experience demonstrates that international partnerships must be part of university strategic goals and must be supported by top management of the university to avoid the partnership being based on one individual. Universities are also encouraged to look for alternative financial support, in advance, to ensure the continued sustainability of international partnership beyond the initial funding used to establish the partnership. Universities in a consortium are better positioned to look for further funding because of international relationships they have established, and they can leverage the success stories in the initial program for more funding. These learnings are also relevant for community–university partnerships.

Flows of Knowledge

The success of these models’ intersecting to bring about positive change rests on two key factors. First is acceptance that universities and their staff are on a journey to improve, rather than having already reached a point of excellence. This approach can be linked to de Wit’s (2011) position that internationalization should be regarded as a process rather than a goal. This case study suggests that Lurio University recognizes that it is on a journey and continues to seek improvement through both international

partnerships and grassroots community engagement. The university engages with both of these strategic areas simultaneously in an interconnected way to gain maximum benefits for its staff, students, partners, and the local community.

Second, it must be realized that all sources of knowledge are important and can play their part. From grassroots knowledge to international knowledge, all should be respected and be used for the betterment of higher education and the community environment. This approach can be linked to Chambers's (1983) argument about the importance of university staff and students valuing indigenous technical knowledge—a concept he expanded on later by stating, "Only people themselves have expert knowledge of the complexities they experience" (Chambers, 2017, p. 191). If staff and students are to understand the realities of the local communities and learn from their experiences, they need to interact with local families and value the grassroots knowledge they possess. As illustrated in Figure 2, flows of knowledge happen at different levels, but all are important to strengthen the university as an institution.

Local people who are part of the One Student One Family program impart their knowledge of local customs and lived realities to the students. The students, in turn, share their knowledge of community health to

the community. The students share cadre-specific knowledge with each other within their groups. The university then shares knowledge and experience of community-university engagement with partner universities through a partnership. The partner universities in turn share their knowledge of community-university engagement relating to the context and community where they are situated. The cycle repeats itself, with all stakeholders enriched by the mutual benefit of knowledge exchange and learning from experience. This process creates an authentic, integrated learning cycle for all parties, based on lived experiences.

Conclusion

To conclude, if universities want their staff and students to "know better," they must question whose knowledge counts for them. Grassroots knowledge must be valued equally alongside international knowledge. Strategies that focus on either the internationalization of higher education or community-university partnerships should be regarded as complementary and intersecting, rather than competing or contrasting. The case study of Lurio University shows that both strategies and processes can produce knowledge at different levels that can achieve synergetic and much improved higher education systems.



About the Authors

Stephen James Thompson is a research fellow in the Participation, Inclusion and Social Change Cluster at the Institute of Development Studies (UK).

Joel Bambamba is a lecturer and researcher in the Department of Optometry at Lurio University (Mozambique).

Diane van Staden is the academic leader for teaching and learning in the School of Health Sciences at University of KwaZulu-Natal (South Africa).

Marius Hedimbi is the director of the International University of Management (Namibia).

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